

Understanding Edmund White (Understanding Contemporary American Literature)

Nicholas F. Radel



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Understanding Edmund White (Understanding Contemporary American Literature) Nicholas F. Radel Nicholas F. Radel's Understanding Edmund White, the first book-length critical study of White's work, examines America's best-known gay novelist within the changing social contexts of the past half-century, when gay and lesbian people moved from being seen as psychologically deviant to being increasingly accepted as productive members of society. Radel explores the ways White documents this cultural transition, in both his fiction and his nonfiction, and contributes to it by making gay writing a source for new knowledge of sexuality.

Taking into account recent scholarship on White, Radel provides insightful analysis of the author's autobiographical novels and short stories, from A Boy's Own Story through The Married Man and Chaos. Understanding Edmund White makes White's early experimental novels, Forgetting Elena, Nocturnes for the King of Naples, and Caracole, as well as his later historical fiction, Fanny and Hotel de Dream, accessible by showing how their emphasis on sexuality and social change connects them to the autobiographical fictions. Radel also shows how White's most recent novel, Jack Holmes and His Friend, deftly combines historical and autobiographical narratives to become one of the author's most nuanced explorations of American sexuality. Understanding Edmund White additionally contains a new, previously unpublished interview with White that provides revealing information about the impact his work as a biographer has had on his later fiction.

Grounded in ongoing critical debates in social and literary theory central to understanding contemporary gay literature, Radel's introduction to White's complex literary vision portrays the writer's evolving perceptions of the issues confronting his gay characters and narrators, boys and men who struggle in the early autobiographical novels to achieve a sense of self-worth but assume in the later novels and nonfiction confident voices that speak for and about American culture and sexualities of all types.

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