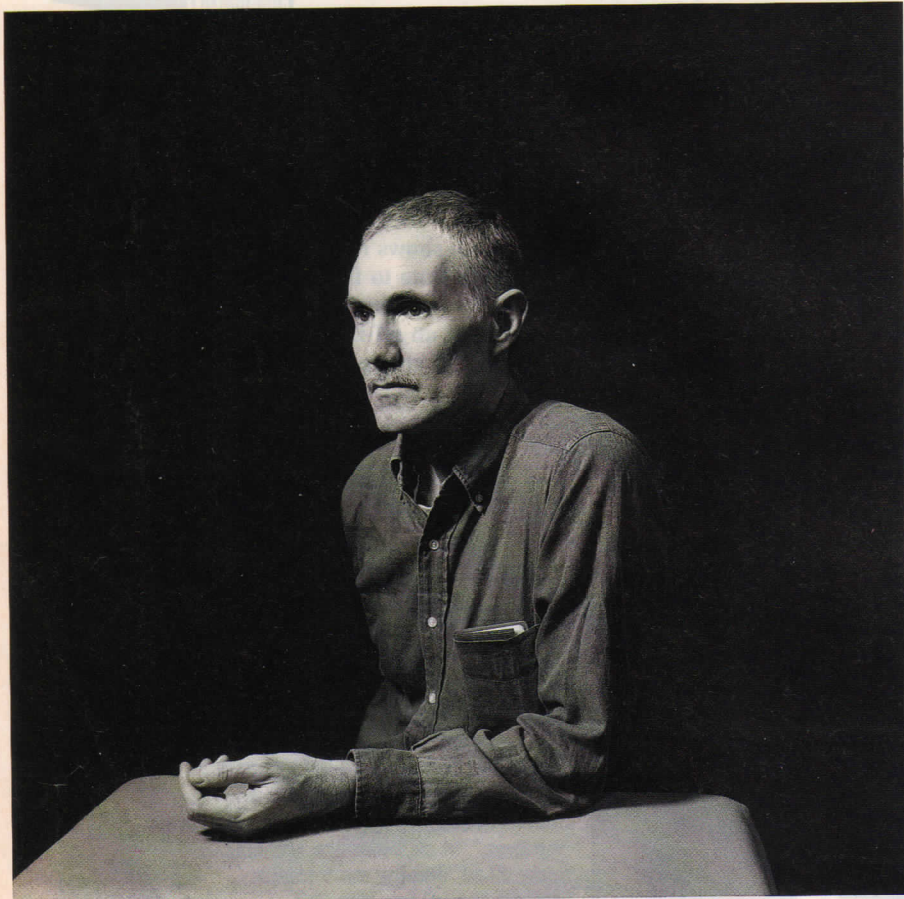


"Well, you know, I'm dying," said a friend. "What are you going to do?"

Books

And the Dance Goes On



MUSING ON BEAUTY:

Novelist
Holleran
returns.

IN *DANCER FROM THE DANCE*, his seductive and scary novel about gay life in 1970s New York, Andrew Holleran defined the sensibility of the generation that flowered after Stonewall. "Nobody knew at the time that a culture was being formed or that a lifestyle was being created," says Holleran, looking back at the party-circuit years that followed gay liberation. Soon after the publication of Holleran's breakthrough novel in 1978, graffiti asserting that Malone, the book's beautiful but doomed central character, was still alive began popping up all over Greenwich Village. *Dancer* became a gay classic overnight, selling hundreds of thousands of copies since.

Four years later, Holleran published *Nights in Aruba*, a novel about childhood, then all but

disappeared from the literary scene. "AIDS just stumped me," says Holleran, 51, speaking from Florida, where he's been living since 1983. During his 14-year hiatus from writing fiction—a gloomy period when many of his friends (and those beautiful young men he wrote about in *Dancer*) were dying—Holleran wrote essays for the gay journal *Christopher Street*, many of which were published in the collection *Ground Zero*. Now he has written a new novel, and once again his subject is the generation he first described in *Dancer*. But in the new book, *The Beauty of Men* (William Morrow), many of the men whose lives seemed like one endless party in his celebrated first novel are dead; the survivors are confronting old age.

"One day I was moaning and groaning on the phone to a friend in New York about how everything was getting bleaker and bleaker," Holleran says, describing the novel's genesis. "My friend agreed with me, and then he said, 'Well, you know, I'm dying. What are you going to do?'" Holleran says he began writing *The Beauty of Men* in a "sense of anger and real horror." And although the finished book is a work of fiction, Holleran originally intended to report verbatim everything he had seen and felt in the intervening years. "No one can make up anything that matches AIDS. Every story is unique, incredible, and horrible."

Observing the lives of his contemporaries nearly two decades after *Dancer*, Holleran gives voice to the concerns and anxieties of a hitherto silent majority—the graying baby-boom generation of gay men. Holleran says, "As gay writers age, I think we will be seeing more about these lives, and in a way that is not *Death in Venice*."

In *The Beauty of Men*, Holleran juxtaposes the AIDS deaths of several young men with the slow deterioration and death of the protagonist's quadriplegic mother. Writing about a seronegative middle-aged gay man obsessed with losing his hair and his looks at a time when others are dying is like "dancing on eggshells," observes Holleran. But he doesn't shy away from controversy. "There is this illusion that if you don't get AIDS, you have somehow escaped death. Of course you haven't. You are going to go on and have the normal tragedies of life."

—GERARD RAYMOND

Gerard Raymond has written for Harper's Bazaar and The Village Voice.