



Clive Barker's *Sacrament* and the Future of Queer Lives during the AIDS Crisis

Anthony Salazar

Florida A&M University

Corresponding Author: Anthony Salazar

E-mail:

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ABSTRACT

While Clive Barker's *Sacrament* received the Lambda Literary Award in 1997, it nonetheless remains overlooked by both scholars and horror enthusiasts. Encompassing themes such as disease, death, gender and sexual identities, the novel represents the ways characters such as Jacob and Rosa (a demon soul split into two humanlike characters) negotiate their Otherness within heteronormative environments. These two characters, however, are not the only ones who feel marginalized. Will Rabjohns, the protagonist of the novel, undergoes ostracization for being gay and suffers loneliness as one of the last to survive among his friends during the AIDS crisis. As a child, Will encounters Jacob/Rosa once and, from there, spends his whole life trying to recreate that moment. Through Will's investigation of Jacob/Rosa's mysterious origin, two opposing responses to the existential crisis of the AIDS epidemic emerge. Jacob (whose destructive personality finds pleasure in killing) can be read as embodying Lee Edelman's theory of the death drive while Rosa (whose lustful drive fuels her desire to procreate) can be read as embodying José Esteban Muñoz's theory of queer futurity. Will's journey to understanding Jacob/Rosa ultimately implies that a future for queer individuals during the AIDS epidemic requires envisioning Muñoz's theory of queer futurity. Through this examination, I therefore argue that novels such as *Sacrament* should be central to the canon of queer literature, for they wrestle with significant historical challenges to queer identities.

Keywords: AIDS, Fantasy, Futurity, Horror, Queer, *Sacrament*.

1. Introduction

In 1997, Clive Barker won the Lambda Literary Award for his fantasy/horror novel *Sacrament*, and yet it remains overlooked by both scholars and fantasy/horror enthusiasts. Encompassing themes such as death, disease, gender, and identity, the novel, which spans roughly forty years, follows Will Rabjohns' mainstream popularity as a gay photographer. With a reputation for capturing photographs of endangered species, Will and his ruthless and visually despairing aesthetic poses an alarming effect for many of his friends and critics. Such fascination with death, however, secretly stems from an encounter with two mysterious creatures when he was a child. During this encounter, the two human-like creatures, Jacob and Rosa, influence Will into killing moths, for, as they believe, "Everything is consumed. Living and dying, we feed the fire" (Barker 75). To enact such expression entails annihilating endangered species and hoping that each death will make the world more pure. From this experience, Will has since spent his entire life work photographing endangered species and hoping to one day reunite with Jacob and Rosa. As a novel written during and set in the AIDS epidemic, *Sacrament* entices readers into interpreting Will's fascination with endangered species in relation to the many deaths and fears pertaining to the extinction of queer individuals, specifically homosexuals, during the 1980s and 1990s.

Because little hope or explanation about the virus was offered during the epidemic, readers can interpret Will as a member of a dying species, struggling to survive. Barker explains, "There would be no offspring to carry this face into futurity. [Will] was in a race of one" (234). The notion of the future therefore is relevant throughout the novel—specifically a future for Will's generation, "a generation that knows only numbness" (Clum 218).

Through Will's investigation of Jacob's and Rosa's mysterious origin, two opposing responses to the existential crisis of the AIDS epidemic emerge. Jacob (whose destructive personality finds pleasure in killing) can be read as embodying Lee Edelman's theory of the death drive while Rosa (whose lust fuels her desire to procreate her own kind) can be read as embodying José Esteban Muñoz's theory of queer futurity. As the novel progresses and as Will learns that Jacob and Rosa stem from one Nilotic soul that was separated many years ago, readers can understand these characters as embodiments of different views of queer futurity. By analyzing Will's position in heteronormative environments, I argue that Jacob and Rosa represent two opposing responses to the AIDS crisis and ultimately suggest that a queer future, implied by Barker's ending, can only succeed when queer communities collectively work together.

2. Envisioning a Queer Future

As a representation of fertility and lust, Rosa seeks a bright, inclusively queer future. And though her sexuality—along with Jacob's sexuality—resides within heterosexual bounds, her character embodies queerness, for her past and present selves contrasts heteronormativity. In terms of Rosa's overall persona, Will observes that "There was no use judging her by human standards" (Barker 376). Though she resembles a female human and projects societal expectations of womanhood, Will discovers that her mannerisms and attire were learned from observing others. When conversing with Will, Rosa mentions that most of her assimilation to human culture occurred when watching drag queens. As a firm advocate for drag performance, she believes that "for a man to deny his own sex, and corset himself and paint himself, and be something that he isn't because it touches a place in his heart ... that has a kind of poetry about it, to my mind" (Barker 377). Drag, according to Rosa, therefore embodies a set of performances that paradoxically abides in yet deviates from social expectations of gender. This paradox, as she claims, creates a form of poetry—a form of art that speaks to one's gender deviation and self-identity. By observing drag and understanding that gender "performativity is a matter of reiterating or repeating the norms by which one is constituted" (Butler 22), Rosa then enacts the gendered expectations suitable within heteronormative environments. That is, Rosa "had to learn the ways of women. None of it came naturally" (Barker 378). While those who prize gender binaries can unintentionally abide by these expectations, Rosa—like many queer individuals—must compromise her Otherness within these environments by performing and passing.

Though deviating from the norm holds no disadvantage to a powerful entity such as Rosa, understanding gendered expectations allows her to perform her own type of drag, through sadomasochism. During Will's first encounter with Jacob and Rosa, Will's parents assumed he was lost and rallied a search party. When two men in the search party, Delbert and Geoffrey, find Rosa in an abandoned barn, she assures her privacy by viewing the two men as potential threats. Instead of using her strength to instantly kill them, she utilizes her gender and chooses seduction as a weapon for murder. With grace and charm, "her breasts, which had a gloss of sweat upon them, were bared, and she'd hoisted up her skirt high enough that her hand could roam between her legs, a smile spreading across her face as she pleased herself" (Barker 125). She then straddles Delbert and slowly ties a rope around his neck. The faster she thrusts, the tighter she wraps the rope. Geoffrey, whose loyalty resides solely with his wife, resists Rosa's seduction and attempts to save Delbert's life by pushing her off him.

As Delbert also falls to the ground, Rosa then reclaims her balance and ties another rope around Delbert's erect penis. Eventually, the tightness of the ropes causes him to bleed to death. By inverting gendered assumptions of dominance, Rosa therefore crosses the boundaries of her assigned gender. According to Barbara Mennel, "masochistic desire manifests itself in a performance of domination purchased by and ultimately controlled by a male subject" (2). Because Delbert submitted to Rosa's lustrous luring, Rosa then performs outside the bounds of her gender by taking on the role typically assigned to dominant men. In disbelief of the whole situation, Geoffrey utters, "He's not done any harm to you. He's a good family man" (Barker 129). Because Delbert's lust for Rosa led him into her sadistic trap, Geoffrey's statement contradicts Delbert's actions and reveals the hypocrisy surrounding the meaning of "family man." Like gender, encompassing "family man" qualities relies merely on performance. After exposing the flaws and hypocrisy within heteronormative ideologies through performed lust and seduction, Rosa allows Geoffrey to escape. Even though she instigated the situation, however, her position as a queer outsider is far from ideal. As Muñoz argues, "we must insist on a queer futurity because the present is so poisonous and insolvent" (30). Though Rosa has a grasp on survival, her present situation encourages toxic encounters and therefore requires change by envisioning a queer future.

To achieve a queer future, Rosa advocates for reproduction within her own species. The purpose of sex, as Rosa claims, centers solely on procreation. When speaking to Jacob, she questions, "If we're not out to make children, then what's the use of it" (Barker 71). Though Jacob opposes reproductive futurity, Rosa continues having

sex with Jacob, hoping to one day birth an uprising species. Though Jacob impregnates her every few years, he kills the newborn babies in secrecy and tells her that they died of deformation. Rosa naively believes Jacob and hopes that the next child they conceive will be healthy, for her ideal future entails a utopia with her kind, rather than humans. She argues, “from our love a new race of perfect people would come, to have the world the way God intended it” (215). In terms of her queerness, Rosa therefore seeks a new form of normativity, one that expands the bounds of heteronormativity.

In a way, Rosa’s attention, critiques, and deviations from gender performance—as well as her optimism for a bright, queer future—embody Muñoz’s theory on queer futurity. According to Muñoz, “Queerness is not yet here. Queerness is an ideality” (1). That is, “Queerness is essentially about the rejection of a here and now and an insistence on potentiality or concrete possibility for another world” (Muñoz 1). To Rosa, this ideality and potential entails a future where her kind dominates and exposes the hypocrisy in human heteronormative environments. Muñoz claims that for a queer future to exist, the present body of queer lives must critique the past, for the past can remind one of the flaws that persist into present day. With this knowledge, one can then learn and prevent such mistakes from reoccurring in the future. For Rosa, this theory entails exploring her current and past position as an alienated entity so that she can one day change her position from an Othered being to an accepted queer being. Because she knows very little about her past, her objective throughout the novel centers on finding an even more mysterious entity, named Rukenau, who might hold information about her origin. When Will finally encounters Rosa as an adult, she claims that her earliest memories were of her living with Rukenau and that being back with him should make her happy once again. Rosa’s memories, however, are vague and clouded with questions. “We were never children,” Rosa recalls, “At least not that I remember” (Barker 377). Her quest therefore centers on looking at the past in hopes for a brighter future—a future where she can understand her lineage and surround herself among others like her.

While one may argue that Rosa’s vision of the future encompasses heteronormative values, such as normalcy and reproductive futurity, her position as an outsider prevents her from acclimating to human normalcy. And while theorists such as Michael Warner argue that “everyone deviates from the norm in some way” (Warner 54), Rosa’s queerness exceeds her ability to live comfortably. According to Muñoz, “The present is not enough. It is impoverished and toxic for queers and other people who do not feel the privilege of majoritarian belonging, normative tastes, and ‘rational’ expectations” (27). As an outsider, Rosa seeks a future where her kind—where the queer outcasts—welcomes her with acceptance. In this utopic future, she would then no longer need to perform a gender and its expectations. She could instead embrace her queerness and live in a world where queer outlets, such as drag and sadomasochism, exist within the bounds of “normalcy.”

3. Eradicating a Heteronormative Future

Jacob, in contrast to Rosa’s drive for fertility and gender deviations, seeks death and destruction. And while he also knows very little about his origin, he blindly assumes killing endangered species will purify the world and provide him with gratification from a higher, divine being. Regardless of one’s ideologies, Jacob believes that everyone, in the end, will die and feed the cycle of life. He claims, “Everything is *consumed* sooner or later. Living and dying we feed the fire” (Barker 75). He contradicts himself, however, by assuming he will outlive everyone. Simply, he envisions a world where “darkness will come ... such as we can none of us imagine. It won’t be the darkness of death, because death is not utter” (Barker 78). The darkness he envisions parallels slightly to Rosa’s future, a future where only he exists—where species such as humans no longer procreate, tame, and constrain queer lives.

Because Jacob’s task to eradicate endangered animals poses many difficulties, such as the number of species that he has to kill, he influences Will into joining his cause and shows him how to properly kill moths. Once Will accomplishes this elementary task, Jacob then asks Will to kill two birds who are peacefully sleeping in a nest. Before Will approaches the birds, however, Jacob informs Will that the two peaceful birds are the last of their species. With hesitation, Will ultimately kills the birds, “Looked down at his guilty hands, and [saw] the blood [that] seemed to throb on them, as though the memory of the bird’s pulse was still in it” (Barker 122). At first, Will’s adjected actions horrify him, for he realizes that the two birds are the last of their species, “the last that would ever hop that way, sing that way, court and mate and make more birds who hopped and sung and courted that way” (Barker 122). At this moment, Will finally understands the magnitude of exterminating species. Not only are the birds physically absent from this world, but their habits, mannerisms, traditions, and performances are as well forever absent. As Will considers what the world loses from such killings, he then feels empowered and in control. “I changed the world a little bit, didn’t I,” Will asks Jacob (Barker 122). Although Jacob takes pride in Will’s overall reaction, he admits that the birds Will killed were not the last two birds of their species and that he did not annihilate their last chance for survival. Slightly conflicted by Jacob’s admittance, Will ultimately believes in Jacob’s mission to purify through destruction. To Will, Jacob laments, “Your hands tell you you’ve done something wonderful, but you look around and nothing much seems to have changed” (Barker 123). No matter how much killing Jacob accomplishes, his quest to exterminate will never end, for too much life exists in the world.

Not only does Jacob envision a dark future, but also a cleansed future. When Will finally confronts him many years later, Will digs deeper into Jacob's motives for killing, claiming, "You can't kill the world" (Barker 352). But Jacob does not envision an empty world. Instead, he envisions a cleansed world. Jacob, similar to Rosa, also seeks a queer future. By considering the eradication of species as an act of cleansing, Jacob ultimately strives for a future of just him. Accomplishing such cleansing therefore requires removing heteronormativity and all that currently exists.

As a representation of death and destruction, Jacob's personality can be read in relation to Edelman's theory of the death drive. For queerness to prosper, Edelman proposes that queer lives must kill the metaphorical Child, for "That figural Child alone embodies the citizen as an ideal, entitled to claim full rights to its future share in the nation's good, though always at the cost of limiting the rights 'real' citizens are allowed" (11). In other words, Edelman exposes heteronormative societies' obsession with the Child and with transferring conservative ideologies to children who, in turn, pass the same ideologies to their children. By "feeding the fire," older generations "purify" their offspring, but at the cost of ostracizing and oppressing queer lives. As a response, Edelman advocates for sinthomosexuality and a push towards the death drive. As sinthomosexuals, "we must accept that we will be vilified as the agents of that threat. But 'they,' the defenders of futurity, buzzed by negating our negativity, are themselves, however unknowingly, its secret agents too, reacting, in the name of the future, in the name of humanity, in the name of life" (Edelman 153). As a character that can be read as embodying sinthomosexuality, Jacob kills dying species in order to eradicate the "they," the heteronormative citizens who depict queer lives as threats and perversities. By embracing death, Jacob therefore seeks a cleansed world absent of reproductive futurity.

Similar to Edelman's push against the metaphorical Child, Jacob's literal acts of killing "the Child" contrasts with Rosa's—and, by extension, Muñoz's—envisioned future. When Rosa confronts Jacob at the end of the novel, she mentions, "I've thought so often if we'd had healthy children, perhaps we'd have grown kinder over the years instead of more cruel" (Barker 407). Jacob then admits that all the children Rosa birthed were actually healthy. He claims, "I fertilized you to keep you happy; then I killed them so they wouldn't get underfoot" (Barker 407). While Rosa seeks a future of queer unity, Jacob seeks a future of death and purification. That is, Jacob's idea of the (no) future can be read in relation to Edelman's theory of the death drive. Edelman argues, "Fuck the social order and the Child in whose name we're collectively terrorized; fuck Annie; fuck the waif from *Les Mis*; fuck the poor, innocent kid on the Net; fuck laws both with capital Is and with small; fuck the whole network of Symbolic relations and the future that serves as its prop" (29). By killing Rosa's innocent children and many other vulnerable species on the brink of extinction, Jacob's destruction prevents all possibilities of a bright future.

4. Archiving Home for Future Queers

As Rosa discovers her origins and as Jacob purifies with destruction, Will exerts his energy trying to understand his purpose in life. When his older teenage brother dies, Will's parents alienate Will, wishing he had died rather than his brother. And though they are oblivious to Will's sexual orientation, they still sense something abnormal about him. Maynard, a police officer among the search party for Will, mentions to Will's father that "if I had you for a father I'd be suicidal" (Barker 115). Will's neglectful parents exhibit abusive traits that parallel other parents who also have queer children. When talking to Frannie about the AIDS deaths in San Francisco, Will theorizes the origins of homosexuals. He argues, "We're not going anywhere, because we don't come from anywhere. We're spontaneous events. We just appear in the middle of families. And we'll keep appearing. Even if the plague killed every homosexual on the planet, it wouldn't be extinction, because there's queer babies being born every minute. It's like magic" (Barker 373). Without considering the neglect and abuse inflicted on young queer lives, Will's understanding of homosexuals and their origin provides a positive outlook on futurity. Unlike Rosa, Will does not worry about the extinction of his kind, for homosexuals will always appear in families. This type of futurity, however, compromises one's ability to fully embrace their sexuality. For Will, identity exploration occurred in his bedroom, in privacy. It was "the site of his sexual coming of age" (Barker 280). Though private bedrooms provide a coming of age environment for most adolescents regardless of their positions in societies, encompassing queer identities expands adolescents' barrier between queer self and heteronormative family—thus transforming the *bedroom* into the *closet*. To appear magically therefore entails a closeted exploration of queer identity, isolated from the family.

The AIDS epidemic further exposes queer lives' identities to their families by forcefully outing their sexuality after death. As articulated by Will's ex-lover, Patrick, many homosexuals flee their heteronormative homes in pursuit of a more accepting environment. Without revealing their sexuality to their families, they are then outed after dying from AIDS. That is, when homosexuals who escaped their conflicting families died of AIDS, their families arrived at these queer communities to retrieve their belongings, only to discover their children's rejected lifestyles. Patrick notes, "the last thing [his sister] wanted to be doing was going through her cute fag brother's belongings. God knows what she found under the bed" (Barker 190). This moment of exposure thus unintentionally outs closeted homosexuals without their consent by exposing the queerness from within the closeted bedroom. When Will asks for clarification, Patrick claims, "You were the only queer in Burnt Yarley, right? And you left as soon as you could.

We all leave. We could so we can feel at home” (Barker 190). In this sense, “home” does not refer to the childhood bedroom where one discovers their identity. Home instead means the place where one feels accepted and a part of a community.

As Barker suggests, feeling at home requires homosexuals to gravitate towards areas, such as San Francisco, for these areas are like a “faggot’s paradise” (Barker 182). During Will’s first visit to California, he recalls wanting “deeper experiences and found them in the beds and embraces of a dozen men, none of whom had his heart, but all of whom excited him in their various ways” (Barker 183). During the time when “the plague was not yet upon them” (Barker 183), Will recalls various sexual encounters with sugar daddies, insurance men, marines, and others of various backgrounds. But once the epidemic emerged, Will’s lifestyle—as did those of others who resided in “faggot paradises”—changed. “Soon, though he didn’t know it, death would come and start to lay its fatal fingers on many of the men he photographed, an arbitrary culling of beauties and intellects and loving souls” (Barker 184). The uprising in deaths further pushed homosexuals away from heteronormativity as they “were not considered part of the general American public; they, rather than HIV, were sometimes even seen as a threat to ‘us’” (Jakobsen and Pellegrini 51). Heterosexuals distancing themselves from homosexuals, however, created an even larger divide between homosexuals who were positive and homosexuals who were negative. According to Christopher Disman, “Fear of AIDS contributed to a very sharp slump in business at San Francisco’s baths” (78). With AIDS casting its shadow is highly populated homosexual communities, sex transformed from a public and accepting act to a private and risky act, one that Barker depicts as provoking skepticism among those who typically engage in sexual encounters. In turn, such skepticism dissipated many queer communities. When Will has sex with his ex-lover, Drew, his face slumbers into fatigue and he uncontrollably vomits all over the bathroom. In response, Drew grows a “look of disgust [that] disfigured his face, the ugliness of his expression troubling to Will. [Will] didn’t want to see that look on his savior’s face. He wanted compassion, tenderness” (Barker 240). Out of fear, Drew abandons Will in result to the growing skepticism surrounding sexual encounters. Though Will’s fatigue and vomiting was not associated with AIDS, Drew was too afraid to calmly assess the situation— therefore feeding into the already dismantling community.

As AIDS spreads, death appears on every queer individual’s mind in the novel. These once-paradises have become graveyards, as many friends, neighbors and lovers die. “I’m certainly over this fucking town” Will’s friend mentions. “The truth is, I’m sick of sick people. I know how that sounds, but you know me, I call it the way I see it. And I’ve got more scratched-out addresses in my little book than I care to count” (Barker 202). The AIDS epidemic has put queer lives in a state of turmoil and lost hope. As a photographer shooting endangered animals, Will then represents the artist capturing and preserving the extinction of queer lives. Patrick, who dislikes Will’s aesthetic and artistic interests, argues, “You’d come back with your pictures and I’d think, Well, fuck it, I don’t want to see the world if it’s like that. I don’t want to know about fucking extinction. It’s depressing. Everybody agrees: Death’s depressing” (Barker 206). However gruesome and alarming it may appear to viewers, Will’s photography signifies much more than mere representations of extinction.

After Jacob and Rosa abandon Will during their first encounter with each other, Will’s fixation on death and endangered species linger. While he informs critics that his photographs were shot for artistic sake, his fascination for Jacob and Rosa provides a different rationale as to why he photographs endangered species. On the one hand, photographing these dying species can bring him closer to Jacob and Rosa. The more he photographs, the closer he feels to them. On the other hand, his photographs capture and will one day serve as an archive for the “habits, mannerisms, and performances” of dying species. In this sense, Will’s photography preserves species, rather than exploits their death. Interestingly enough, his anticipated reunion with Jacob and Rosa does not occur until AIDS emerges. By reading Will’s photography as a form of archiving, readers can then understand his reunion with the two as queer lives’ last chance of survival, the moment between being classified as endangered and extinct. Because Will believes homosexuals will always appear magically in heterosexual families, the AIDS extinction does not include all homosexuals, but rather Will’s generation of post-Stonewall queers. As homosexuals die, Patrick attempts to bring meaning to their lives by collecting their abandoned possessions. He utters, “I inherited some heirlooms from dead queens. Though most of it doesn’t mean much if you don’t know the story that goes with it, which is kind of sad, because when I’m gone, nobody will know” (Barker 189). Because Patrick is slowly dying from AIDS, the possessions he accumulates will one day mean nothing, for others will not understand their significance. As a famous mainstream photographer, Will therefore has the potential to preserve the meaning of these dead queens’ belongings. According to Gina Watts, collecting work, such as what Will spends his profession capturing on camera, provides “a means of reclaiming existence as a whole and of creating a more inclusive world” (105). Thus, the photographs that Will captures validate a space in the world for Will’s dying generation as well as protest against ostracizing queers. As a part of a dying generation, Will loses his sense of a home and his sense of a future. His determination to reunite with Jacob and Rosa can therefore be read as an exploration for a queer future, one in which his generation can feel at home.

5. Conclusion

Representing polar opposites, Rosa pursues a queer future similar to that theorized by Muñoz (a utopic future of queerness and without restrictions enforced by gender) whereas Jacob pursues no future similar to that theorized by Edelman (a revolutionized present day without the Child in mind). The past that Rosa finally understands, however, invokes an unexpected future. Barker writes:

Jacob and Rosa weren't separate creatures; they were each a part of the Nilotic, divided and grown forgetful of who they were. Living in the world with stolen names, learning the cruel assumptions of their gender from what they saw about them, unable to live apart, though it was a torment to be so close to the other, yet never close enough. (429)

By understanding that their past has no divine purpose—that they are merely an experiment performed by an average man—Jacob and Rosa thus decide to abandon their roles as “men and women” (Barker 431), for they no longer believe that their purpose in the world has divine significance.

Though Jacob and Rosa (transformed as one Nilotic soul) abandons civilization and, by extension, Will, Will no longer finds the two fascinating, for he now understands that no one entity controls the fate of humanity. To accomplish such an arduous task as changing the future requires one to do it oneself, rather than rely on a higher power. With the knowledge to negotiate his Otherness in the face of a crisis, Will now has the option to either seek a utopic future or dismantle heteronormativity and reproductive futurism. While the novel ambiguously concludes with Will understanding and accepting his role in society as an artist who must archive the present, perhaps readers can interpret Will's determination to go back into the world as an eager attempt to spread new knowledge. When Will approaches Rukenau, Rukenau mentions, “The world doesn't care for love. It goes on its way, indifferent to our feelings” (Barker 415). Though Will protests, Rukenau reiterates his observations of the world, claiming, “Oh would [love] make the world kind? Would that make the sea bear me up if I was drowning? Would a plague rat elect not to bite me, because I professed my love? Will, don't be so childish. The world doesn't care ... that is the bitter truth” (Barker 415). Although Rukenau's claim provokes negativity and lost hope, Will refuses to believe that the world is incapable of feeling compassion, love, and kindness. Such positivity therefore suggests that Will strives for a future where queer lives thrive. Visualizing this future can therefore entail Will using his alarming and “depressing” photography to critique the past in hopes for a queer future. Unlike Edelman, Muñoz refuses to “give up on concepts such as politics, hope, and a future that is not kid stuff” (92). For Muñoz, and for Will, the present in crisis then leans towards understanding how to unite queer communities for sociopolitical change. As the novel concludes, Barker mentions that Will “take[s] his wisdom back to the tribe. To tell what he'd seen and felt. To celebrate what he knew, and turn it to its healing purpose” (446). The healing Barker alludes to, however, excludes a cure for AIDS. Instead, the healing resides within queer communities' potential to thrive in a future without sociopolitical and heteronormative oppression.

The healing, in other words, leads towards a rebuttal against ostracizing queer lives. Warner asserts, “the best work in HIV prevention begins by acknowledging the unpredictability of sexual variance and working toward a world in which people could live sexual lives as part of a shared world” (218). The problem with such preventative measures—as Warner argues in *The Trouble with Normal*—centers on the lack of a collective community. Uniting communities, however, requires a critique of the past. Muñoz recommends that a part of the past that queer lives must critique is the assumption that the past was perfect. Early in the novel, Will recalls that, before AIDS, his sexual encounters were utopic. In opposition, Will's friend argues, “I don't know where you think all this nostalgia's going to get you! It's the future that matters” (Barker 158). In the novel, Will realizes that the past was not as perfect as he previously remembered. He claims, “I don't think queers are very good to one another and we should be. I mean, we're all in this together, aren't we? But fuck, the way you hear people talk in a bar it's *I hate blacks* or *I hate drag-queens* or *I hate muscle-boys* 'cause they're all brainless lunks, and I think: Well fuck, the *whole world* hates us” (Barker 236). When one oppressed group ostracizes others who face similar forms of oppression, the cycle continues, forcing queer lives to “feed the fire.” In other words, the past was not perfect; AIDS did not destroy “faggot paradises,” for these communities were falsely and imaginatively remembered. Barker further calls attention to the fallacy that the past was utopic, claiming, “in the old days there had been certain tribal divisions in the Castro: leather men had their watering holes, drug aficionados, theirs; the preppie boys had gathered in a different spot; the hustlers, seen in a black bar, or vice versa” (194). Given these divided and marginalized groups, building a collective community therefore entails seeing each other as a part of the same community, struggling for survival.

Barker's argument, however, is not new. According to Robert McRuer, “Contemporary gay fiction that deals with ‘family’ and ‘community’ often exposes the ways those concepts cover over difference: the group achieves a cohesive identity through disavowal of ‘aberrant’ individual identities” (70). By calling attention to the diversity present within queer communities, Barker therefore proposes capturing diverse photographs, belongings, and narratives as an outlet for representative attention and unity. Barker's mobilized ending mirrors other fiction writers during the epidemic, as well. “In the early year of AIDS,” Judith Pastore claims, “gay writers combated the epidemic

through a variety of innovative and exciting literary contexts" (27). As a text that negotiates the future of queer lives, *Sacrament* therefore uses a combination of fantasy and horror to depict routes that lead to healing.

By understanding the two opposing outlooks on a future, Will thus decides that a sense of community, home, and belonging will unite queer lives and lead to change by critiquing the fallacies of a perfect past through photographic archiving. According to Muñoz, "Heteronormative culture makes queers think that both the past and the future do not belong to them. All we are allowed to imagine is barely surviving the present" (112). Thus, to break free from such forms of oppression, queer individuals should not envision a future of consistency and past experiences, but rather a future that dismantles heteronormativity and queer oppression—inflicted by those from both outside and inside queer communities. Finding oneself in the past and future then requires one, as suggested by Barker's novel, to find one's home. To Will, to his generation, and to the many other queer lives, home should not consist of small "faggot paradises" in places like San Francisco, but rather the world.

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