Gays & AIDS

September 1, 2001

When Charles Ludlam died in 1987, one of the hard things I felt was fear. His coffin was placed before us at the memorial service, and his friends told stories. I expected the great actor and playwright to leap from his sarcophagus in a ridiculous *coup de théâtre*, and, cradling all the offered roses in his arms, take a bow filled with phony modesty. But he didn't.

If Charles Ludlam could not overcome death, no one can.

I have made a rationalization for AIDS, as people do when facing death. If gays and AIDS have anything in common, it's not that we are sick, and so deserve to get sick, but that we are closer to immortality. We, like the gods who last forever, prefer love and desire to generation -- unlike straights, who are obsessed with the extension of their flesh into the future. The gods adore our parade of love today, and when we cruise or hold hands and kiss on the street -- not because they are spiritual but because their bodies are more beautiful than our own. And their purpose is to desire us for the fleeting moment when we are beautiful like them.

So with AIDS, we come closer to death, as older people do with such dignity, and we are transformed, but too soon.

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