

“But I am a Man!”

Masculinity and Homosexuality in *The City and the Pillar* and
Giovanni's Room

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Abstract

This thesis seeks to explore the concepts of masculinity and homosexuality as literary themes in Gore Vidal's *The City and the Pillar* (1948) and James Baldwin's *Giovanni's Room* (1956). In both novels we meet protagonists who are struggling with how they are to understand themselves as men in the American post-World War II era. This is primarily based on how their homosexual orientation separates them from the concept of an ideal masculine manhood. Both men are in danger of being categorized as "abnormal" by society on basis of their "otherness" as men. The complicating factor, however, is that they as gendered masculine men also are considered something "other" inside the homosexual community, i.e. both Jim Willard and David are in essence "abnormal" "abnormalities." I will argue that this paradox opens up for an understanding of the concepts of manhood and masculinity as something fluent rather than fixed, and furthermore that it also suggest an understanding of a possible reinvention of the categories of gender and sexuality inside the two works. Even though much has been written on the two novels in a general aspect, an analysis focused primarily on the protagonists' status as men has not been done before.

Through a textual analysis in a comparative aspect, this thesis will focus mainly on the two protagonists, Jim Willard and David respectively, and analyze how they function inside this gender/sexuality paradigm in the novels. There will also some focus on the most prominent supporting characters, as these are important both in representations of the issues at hand in their communication and interaction with the protagonists.

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Introduction

The American ideal, then, of sexuality, appears to be rooted in the ideal of masculinity. This idea has created cowboys and Indians, good guys and bad guys, punks and studs, tough guys and softies, butch and faggot, black and white. It is an ideal so paralytically infantile that it is virtually forbidden – as an unpatriotic act – that the American boy evolve into the complexity of manhood.

James Baldwin, “Freaks,” p. 815

The discussion between David’s father and Aunt Ellen in *Giovanni’s Room*, where the first states that he wants his son to “grow up to be a man [...] I don’t mean a Sunday school teacher,” (14) and Aunt Ellen replies that “A man [...] is not the same thing as a bull” (14), suggests the complexity in the concepts of manhood and masculinity. A man is not the same thing as a bull; yet, a man is, in most societies, a fixed idea to which certain traits attach themselves. Chris Beasley asserts that “masculinity is seen as a socially, historically and culturally variable and as constituted in relation to, or more accurately as against, that which is deemed non-masculine” (178).

James Gilbert states that the notion of non-masculinity would in the United States of the 1950s most often be represented by the homosexual, who functioned as “the character against whom normal masculinity could be defined” (75). Even though the homosexual “was seen as the mirror for contemporary masculinity [...] this mirror reflected both ways” (75). In other words, the ideas of the masculine and the non-masculine relied on each other in order to exist, due to the concepts’ contrasting qualities. Because of precisely this dependent relationship, the concepts were constantly re-establishing themselves in relation to each other. The line between the masculine and the non-masculine was perceived to be a constant factor, but it was in essence subject to a de-stabilization every time it sought to be reaffirmed.

Both *The City and the Pillar* (1948) and *Giovanni’s Room* (1956) are novels in which this conflict between the masculine ideal and a homosexual orientation is explored. The two protagonists, Jim Willard and David respectively, both struggle with how they are to identify themselves within the concept of the ideal masculine male. This is in large part based on their attraction to members of the same sex. Previous to the publishing of these two novels, books containing elements of homoerotic desire had entered the American market, e.g. Henry Blake Fuller’s *Bertram Cope’s Year* (1919) and Ernest Hemingway’s *The Sun Also Rises* (1926). However, with the two novels’ candid literary portrayal of the homosexual man, *The City and the Pillar* and *Giovanni’s Room* were seen as revolutionary at the time. Whereas earlier works

within what one could call the gay literary tradition had depicted the homosexual as a doomed individual, these two works distanced themselves from this established practice. This suggests that both novels are highly relevant when seeking to explore the concepts of manhood and masculinity in a literary context.

As main characters in works depicting homosexuality, Jim and David are radically different from previous gay protagonists. They are something “other” as men of homosexual orientation; but perhaps more importantly, they are something “other” *within* the category of homosexual men itself. This contradiction opens up for an understanding of masculinity as something fluent rather than fixed, and of the idea of masculinity as something which can alter as well as be altered. My main argument is that both novels complicate and seek to destabilize the notions of manhood and masculinity, as well as the concepts of hetero- and homosexuality. They do so by arguing for an understanding of the categories as something that is created by society and thus can also be changed by society. Furthermore, the two novels also contest literary conventions that are found in earlier works depicting homosexually oriented characters, resulting in their uniqueness inside the gay literary tradition. As protagonists of the novels the main focus will be on Jim and David, but because the main characters can be argued to understand themselves only in interaction with others the most important supporting characters will also be discussed.

“I am the man; I suffered; I was there”; thus goes the epigraph of *Giovanni’s Room*. These words by Walt Whitman in many ways capture the essence of James Baldwin’s novel, where themes such as love, loss, desire, suffering, self-denial, innocence, and redemption are key elements. As a young man struggling to get a grasp on his identity, David leaves his home in the United States to go to France to “find himself” (18), but things do not turn out quite the way he expected them to. We meet him at the beginning of the novel in a villa in the south of France, where he recounts the events that led up to him being left by his fiancé, and then finding himself responsible for the coming execution of his lover, Giovanni. Through this narrative, Baldwin explores the question of what it means to be “different” in the modern world and more specifically, what it means to be a “different” man.

Gore Vidal’s *The City and the Pillar* also bases itself on this tension between “normalcy” and “abnormality,” as seen through the eyes of Jim Willard. A fellow American of David, Jim goes on a quest in his own country in an attempt to follow his high school crush Bob Ford, and live out his vision of their future together. He cruises the underworld of the sailors and soldiers, the movie star and the writer, awaiting the moment when he once more

will be reunited with Bob. Still, it all ends in tragedy with Jim killing Bob when he understands that the romantic image he has created around Bob is nothing but a dream.

When Gore Vidal published *The City and the Pillar* in 1948, one of few to review the novel was the young James Baldwin. To say that the story had a profound impact on the young artist would be an understatement: only eight years later Baldwin published *Giovanni's Room*, which can be said to be inspired by, if not also based on, Vidal's novel. The similarities between the two novels, both in the narratives themselves and in the themes they portray, are easily recognizable. The two books are often grouped together as important works in the gay literary tradition, especially on the basis of how the protagonists themselves are non-stereotypical portrayals of men who are attracted to other men. The fact that the protagonists are depicted as masculine in terms of both appearance and behavior separates them from the image of the stereotypical effeminate homosexual in the forties and fifties. The two protagonists also defy the image of the homosexual as a "depressed, dejected person" (Cory 94), further challenging the then current views on the homosexual individual. This provides an ample opportunity to read the novels as works of special significance not only from a general literary perspective, but also as unique works within the gay literary tradition.

Vidal himself states in the afterword to the revised edition, published in 1965, that his goal with the novel was "to examine the homosexual underworld (which I knew rather less well than I pretended), and in the process show the 'naturalness' of homosexual relations, as well as making the point that there is, of course, no such thing as a homosexual. Despite current usage, the word is an adjective describing a sexual action, not a noun describing a recognizable type" (qtd. in Altman 127). In other words, Vidal's project was to show that the ruling idea at the time, that the homosexual was "a species" (Foucault 43), defined by his presupposed gender inversion and sodomical acts, did not present a valid understanding of the concept. It was not only too narrow an understanding of the term "homosexuality" and its implications, it was also an understanding based on the wrong premises.

Baldwin's project with *Giovanni's Room* differs somewhat from the project outlined by Vidal. Whereas Vidal's focus in the novel rests mostly on how Jim cannot relate to the homoerotic subculture, and consequently refuses to see himself as a homosexual man, Baldwin's David can be argued to struggle with the question of his identity as a human being. Baldwin himself states that the novel is about David's dilemma in terms of his "crucial lack of sexual authority" (Eckman 134), and not so much the question of "sexual ambivalence" (134). Whereas one might be tempted to understand *Giovanni's Room* as a "classic" homosexual novel, where the main homosexual character often encounters gender

inversion, i.e. the effeminate man or the butch woman, this is not the case with David. Neither is it the case with Jim, for that matter. Instead, David's main issue can be argued to lie with how he as a homosexual man is unable to identify himself as a masculine man because of how he perceives to be caged by a sexual patriarchy dictating the homosexual's "abnormality." To him, a masculine homosexual identity is not possible.

As young men living in the United States in the 1940s and 50s, both Jim and David live in a society which seeks to alienate individuals from the concept of manhood on the basis of "otherness," that is, on the basis of what is seen as gender abnormality in appearance and behavior. Usually, such a categorization would rest on the sexual orientation of the individual, because up until this point in time, the homosexual man was usually perceived to inhabit qualities associated with the other sex. However, Fred Fejes states that by the forties, the rules of categorization had come to change: "effeminacy was not a reliable marker of homosexuality" (14-15). Consequently, the "abnormal" man could be anyone; it could even be the masculine working-class man who lived a domestic life together with his wife and children. The "hidden homosexual" was seen as even more dangerous than the visible fairy, because when *anyone* could be "abnormal," the "normal" man could no longer rely on the visible homosexual for protection and reassurance.

Neither Jim nor David can be considered non-masculine on basis of their sexuality; their ordinariness and masculine conduct protect them. Still, to the outside world they are not in the clear. To be a man means to be recognized as a man, and to be so one must follow the established norms in society. One must prove oneself as a man amongst men; one must prove that one is "not-woman" (Beasley 12). To be able to do this, both Jim and David rely on other characters in the novels; Jim on his manly love interests, as well as the one woman whom he is willing to let in; David on his fiancée, Hella Lincoln. These minor characters all help emphasize Jim and David's masculine qualities, and function as figures that reaffirm the two protagonists' "normality."

In *Giovanni's Room*, David's sexual identity is challenged by his relationship with Hella. Inside their union, which is based more on mutual usefulness than on love and attraction, David acquires acceptance as a "normal" man on the basis of him passing as a heterosexual individual. He needs Hella to reaffirm his status as a man. Judith Butler claims that a performance of heterosexual identity "requires to be instituted again and again, which is to say that it runs the risk of being de-instituted at every interval" ("Imitation" 315). When Hella has left for Spain, and David enters into a relationship with Giovanni, the Italian bartender, he clings to the hope that a heterosexual "performance" with "any girl at all" (84)

will secure him in his position as a masculine man. For David, the idea of living a life with Giovanni seems impossible, not because Giovanni is a man, but because *David* is; “But I am a man, [...] a man!” (126). On the other hand, a life spent with Hella in a *faux* heterosexual relationship seems equally impossible. After Giovanni has been imprisoned and the couple has gone back to Nice, David flees from Hella in order to roam the bars (143). Even though Hella and Giovanni meet only once, they are linked together by their relationship with David in what one can argue is a version of what Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick calls the “erotic triangle” (21). I will argue that this connection of power functions both as a help and hindrance for David, and in addition that it exemplifies how the supporting characters in *Giovanni’s Room* are, more so than the characters in *The City and the Pillar*, complicating factors in the protagonists’ journey toward self-discovery.

The focus in both novels rests on the two protagonists: the narratives are shaped around their stories and motivations; the thematic issues of masculinity and sexuality are centered on their individual experiences. It is also in the two protagonists that the “solution” is to be found. Therefore, my main objective is to focus on Jim and David and how they relate to the concept of the masculine man through an analysis based on comparing and contrasting the two characters on a textual level. Still, one cannot rule out the impact of the supporting characters in either of the novels. It is precisely in the communication with others, and through experiences shared with others, that Jim and David can be said to develop throughout the stories. Moreover, the supporting characters actively interact with the protagonists, and play on their sexuality and masculine qualities in order to acquire their own kind of protection. In the interaction between the protagonist and minor character, there will always be hidden or underlying motivations going both ways. For this reason, an analysis of the minor characters will also be of great importance when discussing what it means to be a man in these novels.

In addition to the focus on the man as a “not-woman,” the two novels also emphasize the man as a “not-boy.” Michael Kimmel asserts that “being a man meant also not being a boy” (18), yet Leslie Fiedler states that “The mythic America is boyhood” (“Come Back to the Raft” 530). The complex notion of boyhood versus manhood is a significant theme in both novels. Jim and David both experience a transition into the world of manhood through a profound homosocial experience when they in their teens, have a sexual encounter with another boy. The way they react to these experiences differ and their implications will follow the characters throughout the remainder of the stories. I will argue that this merging of past and present, of the mythic world and the real world, rather than functioning as a

hindrance is actually what gives the characters hope for a “solution” to their individual dilemmas.

This thesis, because of its relatively brevity, will not be separated into traditional chapters, but rather be divided into sections under one main heading. I believe this will present a more organic text, as well as secure the desired structure. The first section of the thesis, “Motivations and the Question of Manhood,” will concern itself with how the narratives build up under an understanding of the masculine ideal, which the two men are subject to. I will then move on to a section which concentrates on the boys’ initiation into the world of men (“Initiation Into the World of Men”), and look at how these episodes come to change and influence the characters. The third section, “Masculinity and a “Different” Sexuality,” will deal with how the protagonists upon entering manhood deal with the expectations to conform to the ruling norms of gender and sexuality. In “Reinventing the Categories of Manhood,” the tension between the categories of “normal” and “abnormal,” as well as the notions of performativity and illusions will be discussed. In the penultimate section (“Female Influence and Power Structures”), the discussion centers on how the women of the novels influence the development of both narratives and characters. Finally, the section named “Death Transgressed” focuses on how one can understand the rather unconventional endings of the two novels as emphasizing the issue of manhood and masculinity.

Neither *Giovanni’s Room* nor *The City and the Pillar* are forgotten works in the American literary tradition; many critics have set out to interpret them, either individually or in a comparative analysis. The problem is that these comparative analyses have often focused more on the thematic issues of homosexuality in the two novels than on the main characters and their issues with themselves as men. Granted, there has been some focus on the similarities and dissimilarities between Jim and David, yet I will argue that this has most often been done on a superficial level. Their “otherness” as masculine homosexual men is often what is focused on, but few explore how this “otherness” functions in relation to the concepts of masculinity and manhood. Claude J. Summers, for instance, sees *The City and the Pillar* as a Bildungsroman, where Jim goes on a quest to figure out his gay identity. Summers does so in light of the novel belonging inside what he calls “gay fiction” (112), and his focus rests solely on the novel as taking on the issue of homosexuality and same-sex desire. The same can be said about Stephen Adam’s take on the two novels, where he sees the two protagonists as heroes within the gay literary tradition and has less focus on them simply as men. There is, all in all, little focus on how the two men see themselves as

masculine “abnormalities,” or how they understand themselves within the reigning view of manhood through a focus on the manly sphere. Despite the fact that much has been written about these two novels in a general aspect, an analysis focused primarily on the protagonists’ status as men has not been done before. I will therefore argue that a critical study which deals particularly with this concept of masculinity presents a new way of reading the two novels.

For historical insight into the gay culture in America, I will rely on George Chauncey and his classical work *Gay New York*. Even though this volume concentrates mainly on the time period between 1890 and 1940, its discussion of gay life in the big cities is highly relevant to certain sections of this thesis. Furthermore, I will also depend on Dr. George Weinberg and his theory of homophobia, as well as Adrienne Rich and her theory of what she calls “compulsory heterosexuality.” Being a thesis which discusses masculinity on the basis of homosexuality, some queer theory will also be implemented. In this respect it is specifically Judith Butler’s theories on performativity and gender inversion which be applied where appropriate, but also Sedgwick’s concept of “erotic triangles” will be discussed.

Although my analysis of the two works is not primarily an historical analysis, it is important to note that the works were published within roughly the same period; that is, in the late forties and the mid-fifties. In order to maintain this quality of contemporaneity and a focus on masculinity and manhood in the post-World War II era, I have chosen to base my analysis on the original version of *The City and the Pillar* from 1948, though critics argue that this is not the preferred version of the novel because of its ending. Whereas the original ending describes how Jim kills Bob, the revised edition from 1956 ends with a rape.

“‘But I am a man!’”

Motivations and the Question of Manhood

James Baldwin argues in his essay “Freaks and the American Ideal Manhood” that the ideal masculine male is a concept developed around the idea that manhood asserts itself through sexuality. In order to be perceived as a man one must be a male in the image of that ideal, otherwise one is something “other.” The question to ask is then: what about those individuals who do not fit into either the category of “normal” or “abnormal”? This is a question which is at the forefront of both *The City and the Pillar* and *Giovanni’s Room*. Neither Jim Willard nor David knows how they are to position themselves against this ideal, since they are both “normal” on the outside, yet “abnormal” on the inside. As a starting point for this discussion, a look at the narratives and the narrative voices in the two novels might be fruitful means of investigating the basic motivations and values of the characters. Not only will this lay out a basic understanding of the novels, it will also provide an insight into the main characters that might help shed light on some of the aspects which are discussed later on in the thesis.

In both *The City and the Pillar* and *Giovanni’s Room*, the narratives are focused on the protagonists Jim and David respectively. In *The City and the Pillar*, the story is told through a third-person narrator with a limited point of view focused on Jim, whereas we in *Giovanni’s Room* meet an embodied narrator in the character of David. David is thus not only a character in the novel, he also functions as the first-person narrator of the story. Frank K. Stanzel uses the term “existential motivation” to describe the first-person narrator’s “existential compulsion to narrate” (93), i.e. the first-person narrator has certain reasons for narrating the story. By understanding the first-person narrator as an “existential unity of the experiencing self and the narrative self” (93), the act of narrating becomes an act of self-realization, and to some extent also an act of self-creation. In David’s case, the motivation behind the narrative seems to be based on guilt and redemption, and the story in one respect might be argued to function as an act of atonement. The narrative bears resemblance to a confession, where David as a sinner confesses his faults and wrongdoings, and by doing so hopes to gain salvation. This religious aspect also explicitly colors the ending of the novel, where David in

a vision sees Giovanni in his cell praying to the Virgin Mary, and then again as he himself contemplates the salvation of the soul (148-149).

Because the stories in the two novels are influenced by the protagonists and how they function as narrative voices, the story in *Giovanni's Room* more so than the story in *The City and the Pillar*, the notion of narrative subjectivity becomes an issue. Both narratives are based on incidents in the protagonists' lives and on how they are remembered by the protagonists themselves. Despite the narratives presenting themselves as "truth," based on historic events that have occurred in the character's past, the influence of the protagonists on the narrative itself creates a tension between what *is* real and what is *presented* as real. This is particularly an issue in *Giovanni's Room*, where David through the state of being an embodied narrator has, as stated previously, an existential motivation to narrate. Consequently, this influences how we can accept both the narrators and the narratives to be trustworthy.

On the first page of the novel, we meet David as he is watching his reflection in the gleam of the window pane, suggesting a promise of a narrative based on self-reflection and objectified truth. Even though the narrator through the novel divulges traits that are not particularly flattering to him as a character, implying an interest in relaying a story based on honesty, there are elements in the narrative to indicate that the narrator cannot be trusted. For instance, David claims to be "one of those people who pride themselves on their willpower, on their ability to make a decision and carry it through" (18). Still, it is not more than two sentences further along he then asserts that those who harbor this character trait are often "specialists in self-deception" (18). In other words, David insinuates that he himself might also be in a state of denial. This obviously has impact on his credibility as a narrator.

When concentrating the narrative around the subjective quality of memory, as is the case in *Giovanni's Room*, it becomes especially important for the narrator to appear knowledgeable and trustworthy in the accounts given. Yet, David as the narrator expresses uncertainty about certain episodes in the course of the narration, for instance when he says how he "perhaps" began "to be lonely that summer" (9), or "perhaps *I* didn't know it then" (145). These markers of insecurity suggest that David's memory of events might be somewhat unclear. They can also be argued to indicate that David, now in the clarity of hindsight, understands previous events differently. Consequently this might indicate that the David we meet in the flashbacks is not the same David that we meet in the present-time, a fact which might have implications for how we understand the narrative voice as telling *the* "truth" rather than *a* "truth."

Another important factor when discussing David as a narrator comes when one looks at how the narrative is structured. Organized as a story within a story, where an introduction and an ending in the present tense function as framework for the flashback as recounted in the past tense, the structure of the novel itself is very much influenced by David and his motivations. The novel develops in a chronological order, that is it develops from past to present both in flashbacks and in the framing story. It also contains several ellipses. Most of the ellipses leave out a time span of nothing more than a few days at the most, and they function primarily as narrative conventions which help move the story along. Nevertheless, there are some ellipses which can be argued to be directly influenced by David as the narrator. For instance, when the second chapter opens with “I met Giovanni during my second year in Paris” (20), we are pushed forward in time to a moment two years after the previous flashback, creating a gap of two years in which we are told very little about David and his doings. This ellipsis in particular shows how David’s motivations to tell his story influence the narrative structure, since he as a narrator through this time jump focuses the story on the meeting with Giovanni, and consequently also states its importance to him.

In addition to this notion of ellipsis as influencing the narrative in terms of removal of elements, we also see the opposite when David imagines the scene where Giovanni kills the bar owner Guillaume. By his authority as the storyteller, David incorporates this fantasy into the story, claiming it to be a reality and a conversation which “I could hear” (136). Consequently, one has to question David’s reliability in regards to what he chooses to include in the story, and what he chooses to leave out. The most evident signs that David as the narrator cannot be trusted comes first when he explicitly states how he is “too various to be trusted” (5) in the opening of the novel, and then when he says that he has been lying to himself (144). These utterances, the first uttered in present time in France to the readers or himself, and the other made to Hella in the past, explicitly affirms the conflict between the motivation of the embodied narrator and his narrative responsibility.

Unlike *Giovanni’s Room*, the narrator in *The City and the Pillar* is, as stated previously, not an embodied narrator. However, as the protagonist of the story and the character on which the narrative is focused, Jim does possess some power when it comes to how the story develops. As opposed to David as the narrator, this narrator’s motivations for telling the story are somewhat unclear. Jim does not function as a first-person narrator, and does not interact with anyone on an existential level outside of his literary world. The concept of “existential motivation” is therefore not present in the same respect as it is in *Giovanni’s Room*. One can still argue that the narrative divulges what might be considered possible

motivations for such a story. Several times in the opening of the novel, when he finds himself in the bar, he expresses a need to forget the past and remain “without memory” (20), indicating unwillingness to go back and re-live the events that have led him into the bar. This unwillingness seems to be based less on guilt for the crime he has just committed and more on an aversion for things that are unpleasant and which could have the effect of making him uncomfortable. After having given his account, he states how he now feels “no sorrow [...] nor was he afraid” (308), suggesting that the act of relating the story has had a reassuring effect on him, and also to some extent has been cleansing. Despite the fact that Jim is not an embodied narrator like David, the story itself has value for him as a character, and through the authority of being the protagonist in a third-person limited point of view he to some extent also controls the story. If one considers how both protagonists have authority over the stories that are told, albeit this authority establishes itself somewhat differently by the two narratives, one must be aware of how a subjective reality might present itself as an objectified “truth.”

Written in the style of flat prose, a style Vidal himself said he tried to copy from the Irish author James T. Farrell (Clarke), *The City and the Pillar* bases itself on a matter-of-fact style of realistic writing, which seeks to emphasize the normalcy of the story and the characters within. Jim Willard is an ordinary American boy, with an ordinary American name, from an equally ordinary American middle-class family, who lives his life in an ordinary fashion. Described as being a “tall, handsome” (27) boy, with blonde hair and “regular and ordinary features” (33), Jim is characterized in terms of looks as a traditional American boy. This fact pleases him, because in his mind that marks him as “not unusual” (33). The importance of being “natural” or “normal” is in large part connected to the notions of masculinity in the novel, a concept which to Jim is essential in his understanding of himself as a man in society.

Summers argues that even though Jim as a character is “bland and ordinary” (121), he nevertheless is “at once a representative figure” (121) of coming out literature, as well as being “a highly individualized” (121) individual. The style of the novel emphasizes this individualist character of Jim. His analysis of both himself and other characters is delivered with a frank air, without the element of doubt and restriction that we find in *Giovanni’s Room*. As a character in the literary history of gay writing, Jim’s ordinariness stands in stark contrast to the stereotypical literary homosexual, a fact which marks him as a character who is both ordinary and, at the same time, not. The same can be said about David in terms of outward appearance as the all-American boy, still the style in which *Giovanni’s Room* is written

emphasizes him as a character in which there is a great amount of uncertainty and unease. For him, the notion of ordinariness has taken on an existential value.

As this discussion of the narratives illustrates, both novels are preoccupied with the tension between what is considered normal/abnormal, ordinary/unusual, and also natural/unnatural. For Jim in particular, these different categories are important to his own self-image and understanding of himself as a masculine man. He uses the terms frequently throughout the narrative to signal both to himself and others how he sees himself as a “normal” man, and at the same time to signal a distance between himself and the notion of anything “abnormal.”

For Jim, staying “normal” means largely not being associated with the general homosexual subculture, which he sees as consisting of effeminate and emasculated men. Although Jim is an “ordinary” American boy, and masculine to boot, the “abnormality” of the homosexual underworld is still a threatening concept. To Jim, the notion of being perceived as anything other than masculine is not an option. For this reason one can say that the novel does not only focus on what it means to be a homosexual man in the late 1950s America, it also seeks to establish an understanding of the masculine homosexual man as an outsider inside the homosexual subculture. As Robert F. Kiernan asserts, Jim is “Everyman, and yet he is *l'étranger*” (42).

Unlike in *The City and the Pillar*, there are no explicit references to the notions of normality or abnormality in *Giovanni's Room*. That does not mean, however, that David is not equally preoccupied as Jim with the notion of gaining acceptance as a “normal” man. While Jim finds himself in, or close to, the United States during the entire duration of the story, David travels to Europe in what he describes is an attempt to “find himself” (18). More so than a voyage motivated by the prospect of self-discovery, this movement is a flight from the norms which have him pegged as a nonconforming man in the puritan society in America. It can also be argued to be a flight from himself. Even though he too is a masculine boy in every aspect, and “as American as pork and beans” (81), he cannot relate to the norms of masculinity which exist inside his community. In order to stay “normal” he chooses to extract himself from the critical sphere, in order to seek freedom someplace else.

For both Jim and David the concept of manhood is first introduced by other characters in their close family. For David the notion of what it means to be a man is mainly influenced by his father, who as his sole living parent lives together with Jim and his sister in the city of New York. David once overhears an argument between the aunt and the father over what kind of father he is to his son, to which he proclaims that “all I want for David is

to grow up to be a man. And when I say a man, Ellen, I don't mean a Sunday school teacher" (14). For the father, the notion of what it means to be a man seems to be captured by the stereotypical image of the strong, powerful, and macho male, the red-blooded American male, an image which he positions as a contrast to what he sarcastically describes as a "Sunday school teacher." Inside this term there exists an underlying indication of something "un-manly," something which has the power to remove the individual from male identification. Later, he also uses the word "butch" (81) as a greeting in a letter to David, further signaling what type of man he wishes David to become.

In the binary understanding of gender which the father presents, where the sexes in a patriarchal regime stand in opposition to each other in terms of contrasting gender traits, his concept of masculinity thus becomes an understanding of something which is not weak or soft, i.e. that is perceived as feminine. Boys are expected to grow up to become men, and in this process they must conform to the idea of what it means to be a masculine male. David's father implies that the binary sexes are definite, and that if you are male you must grow up to become a man in every sense of the word. In other words: "to be a man is to be a not-woman" (Beasley 12).

The sister, however, touches on the complexity in the notion of manhood when she answers to the father's outburst that "A man [...] is not the same thing as a bull" (14). Unlike the father, who contrasts the notion of manhood to an aspect of femininity, she does not include the notion of effeminacy in her comeback. What she wishes to relay, and also accomplishes by the utterance, is to say that masculinity is not something one can measure. She also seeks to point out that even through his masculine parade, which David remembers as consisting of entertaining women and being for the most part absent, the father cannot expect to connect with his son, because he understands neither his son nor the concept of manhood itself. She also insinuates that she does not want David to grow up to be the type of man that the father idolizes, because this image might largely rest on how he sees himself: in her eyes that is a childish, immature man who is wasting his life.

The relationship between the father and son is not the best when David leaves for Europe. Nevertheless, it is quite obvious from the flashbacks that he did in fact admire his father and the masculinity he represented when David was a child. One of the episodes which is particularly emphasized by the narrator in this respect, and can be argued to have made quite an impression on the young boy, is when the father and sister are entertaining guests at their house one night. In this flashback, the narrator describes how the father plays the role of the attractive and confident man, who seeks to impress both women and men with his charm

and charisma: “There my father was at his best, boyish and expansive, moving about through the crowded room with a glass in his hand, refilling people’s drinks, laughing a lot, handling all the men as though they were his brothers, and flirting with the women. Or no, not flirting with them, strutting like a cock before them” (11). Not only does the father here flirt with the women, creating the image of himself as quite the ladies’ man, he also emphasizes his own masculinity through the “boyish” (11) camaraderie he includes the men in.

Michel Sarotte claims “the ideal man must be a ‘man’s man,’ a man who is at ease among other men who admire him” (188). That is to say, a man is not a man unless his fellow-men recognize him as one. For the father the social scene is not only a space in which he must confirm his masculinity in relation to women, it also becomes a space in which he must establish himself as a man in the communication with other men. Only through this manly recognition can he understand himself to be a masculine man. What proves to be a paradox with this notion that men need recognition from other men is that the men they require recognition from are also the ones who they must prove themselves against. Consequently, there is created a tension between the different goals the individuals might have in the manly communication. This concept is explicitly illustrated in the relationship between Jim and the father in *The City and the Pillar*, where the father’s insecurity about his own manhood has created a mean and bitter man who positions himself in constant battle with his children and wife in order to regain control and authority.

The main issue for Mr. Willard is that he does not feel safe in his masculinity around his oldest son. On a superficial level, he explains this dislike as being due to Jim’s good looks, which he insinuates makes his son lazy and without ambition. Jim, on the other hand, sees his father as an authoritarian, bitter and angry man, who does nothing more than to make his and his family’s life miserable. It might just be that the two simply do not like each other, and that this mutual dislike stems from personalities that do not match, or even from a parent-teenager feud. However, the constant show of passive-aggressive behavior from the father seems to challenge this idea, and instead suggests a relationship based on male competition and jealousy, at least from the father’s side.

Described as being a “small gray man who tried to appear tall and commanding” (26), the father differs quite a lot from his son, who the narrator says is “tall and handsome and not at all the sort of son Mr Willard would like to have had” (27). This difference in appearance obviously irks the father, because on a basic level he understands this difference to be of advantage to his son and consequently a disadvantage to himself in terms of masculine superiority. Furthermore, being seventeen at the time, Jim is only one year away from

graduation and is on the brink of becoming a man, a fact which the father is acutely aware of. Having stagnated in a job as a clerk at the courthouse, arrogantly proclaiming that he allowed “lesser men to go to Richmond” (26), the father enters a mode of bitterness and self-preservation when he is challenged in his manhood in the family sphere. This feeling of lack of youth and young manhood is further emphasized when Mrs. Willard receives the letter from Jim after several years away from home, and Mr. Willard asks how old “the boy” (216) is now. When Mrs. Willard answers twenty-two, he replies “gloomily” (216) with “he’s grown” (216). The contrast between him, lying on his deathbed, and his young, “handsome” (27) son, travelling around the country, is stark.

In addition to Jim being so different from his father in terms of life situation, the two men also are different when it comes to how they understand the world. For Mr. Willard, as a man with no education and who has worked his way up in society, Jim’s going away to college becomes extremely important. Despite feeling threatened by his son it is important that Jim values what he as the provider has accomplished for the family. It is also of paramount importance that Jim in the future keeps the family’s “place in society” (29) as “respectable people” (29). Mr. Willard “had made it clear to him that he would go to college” (31). However, Jim is not so keen on the idea and expresses a more relaxed view on the idea of education: “He was going to go to college and be a lawyer or perhaps he would go into business and make a lot of money” (31). As opposed to his brother, who wants to go into politics and become a Congressman, elevating himself up from the standing of a middle class man and becoming the face of masculine accomplishment in society, Jim has no motivations to educate himself other than to earn money. He has no burning wish to rise from the middle-class and to prove himself in any field of work, instead he wants to get free of his family and experience the world as it lies open for a seventeen year old boy. In his mind, college can wait and the dysfunctional family can be left behind. For Jim, the father represents values that are not compatible with how he wants to live his life, and when Bob Ford offers a solution where he gets to rebel against these values and at the same time follow after Bob, he cannot let the opportunity escape him.

Similarly to Jim, David has certain complicating factors in his relationship with his father. While the relationship issues between Jim and Mr. Willard are based on the father’s fear of his son surpassing him in terms of masculinity, it takes on a different aspect for David. Besides the fact that the relationship between the two resembles that of two buddies more than it does a parent-child relationship, David cannot get past the fact that his father has set a pretty specific standard for what kind of man he should grow up to be. When David then finds

himself on the brink of manhood and has a sexual encounter with his best friend, Joey, he sees himself as being something “other” than the type of man his father has said he should be. And this “other” is not a category which he can fit into his vision of what manhood is supposed to be. With this experience, the innocence of the childhood is gone and the young boy is propelled into the sexualized world.

Initiation into the World of Men

Both boys’ initiation into the world of men comes with their mutual sexual encounters with their childhood friends. Continuing in the literary tradition of initiation into manhood through a profound homosocial experience, as depicted in earlier works such as for instance *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, both novels seek to explore the concept of young sexuality at a point of “sexual uncertainty” (Sarotte 54). Yet, this transition into manhood manifests itself in different ways for the two protagonists. One can argue that whereas for David the incident is mostly concerned with the sexual act itself, the experience takes on a deeper meaning for Jim. For him, the experience becomes an act of consummation.

David explains how “it began in the shower” (6), where he and his best friend, Joey, “were horsing around in that small, steamy room, stinging each other with wet towels” (6). This mentality of the locker room, where boys are allowed, even expected, to play around and behave like boisterous animals, oozes of homoeroticism and emphasizes the sexual current of the situation. The idyllic nature of the water gives the setting also an innocent feature, suggesting the naturalness of such behavior in the adolescent. This duality not only can be said to explicitly reflect the tension within David, it can also be argued to signify the actual transition from the innocence of childhood into the sexualized world of men.

Several critics, among them Yasmin DeGout, George E. Kent, and Stephen Adams, are particularly preoccupied with this notion of innocence in the encounter. Adams describes the affair between the two boys as taking place on an “idyllic summer weekend” (40), and Kent further asserts that by “falling into a romantic homosexual experience with a fellow adolescent, [...] [David] experiences the escape from isolation and the heightened spiritual awareness that love is supposed to bring” (25). Though there is some validity in the claim that David through the experience can be said to be introduced to a “heightened spiritual awareness,” the assertion that there should be a “*romantic homosexual experience*” [emphasis added] seems a bit naïve. Certainly, the experience has a profound impact on David. There is

an intimacy in the relationship between the two boys which manifests itself in the sexual act, yet one can also argue for an understanding of the so-called “romance” as nothing more than plain, hormonal lust. That is not to argue, however, that the experience is nothing more than a result of sexual curiosity, it clearly is more than that. Nevertheless, an understanding of the experience as based on a different concept of intimacy than the proclaimed romantic relationship with Giovanni, seems to be a constructive approach.

Despite the experience in itself is described as something positive, where the accidental first kiss leads to a union of mutual “joy” (7), David awakens the next morning with a fear in his body for what the incident might mean to him as a human being in terms of both reputation and identity. He particularly focuses on the negative feelings as centered on the body itself, and proclaims a fear of what Joey’s body might signify to him, since it now “suddenly seemed the black opening of a cavern in which I would be tortured till madness came, in which I would lose my manhood” (2). This explicit focus on the body might argue for an understanding of David as perceiving his manhood to be questioned on the basis of the sexual act itself, where the complicating factor lies with the fact that the body he desired is that of another male. For this reason one can assert that his problem with the situation does not stem from an emotional connection with Joey per se, it stems more from an understanding of an “unnatural” sexual act, which in his mind has the capacity to remove him from the category of the man. It has the power to mark him as a “not-man.”

Unlike David, Jim does not feel either shame or fear after the incident with Bob. Rather, the experience is described as something akin to a dream come true. In his mind, it becomes a consummation of the intimate relationship which he understands the two to have, and thus, he does not perceive the incident to be identity-making in any way. That is not to say that the incident does not have some kind of power over him. Not only does he constantly compare Bob and their encounter with the other men he meets later in his life, he also keeps Bob a secret from everyone until he finally tells Sullivan that he now knows what he wants and that is Bob (254). Both these elements illustrate how Bob remains in Jim’s life as a powerful dream-figure throughout the story, and they further help explain to some degree why the two protagonists react so differently to a fairly similar situation.

Starting out in a somewhat similar manner as in *Giovanni’s Room*, with the boys playfully wrestling by the river, Jim notes how “half-forgotten dreams began to come alive, began to seek a consummation in reality” (47). Similar to the shower scene in *Giovanni’s Room*, the ritual of wrestling takes on a homoerotic current, where the physical violent contact between the boys, albeit in a playful manner, suggests a likeness to the actual sexual act. As

preceding the sexual act in *The City and the Pillar*, the wrestling also imitates an element of foreplay, where the continuing contests between the two boys lead them increasingly closer to each other physically, as well as closer to the act of consummation. This notion of a homoerotic tension in the act of wrestling is not a foreign concept in the gay literary tradition. As Summers states, this is a powerful motif which has been used in literary works depicting homosexuality ever since the Greek classics (119). By including this myth, the novels not only position themselves inside the gay literary tradition, they also introduce the notion of repressed sexuality inside the homosocial environment.

Jim does not have any qualms about what he and Bob have done together, he even goes as far as to claim that he “knew what he was doing” (47) by initiating the act. Bob, on the other hand, as “the object” (48) of Jim’s “embrace” (48), cannot rid himself of the idea that what they are doing is “not natural” (49). In an effort to distance himself from the act, which he says is something that “guys aren’t supposed to do” (49), he marks the incident as “kid’s stuff” (49). This is to say that what they are doing is not something which they can do as men; it has no place in the adult masculine world. Even when he remembers the event years later when he reunites with Jim, he says how “kids always do that, I guess” (306), signaling that what can be seen as acceptable in childhood takes on a another meaning when one reaches a certain age.

The initiation scenes capture both boys at a significant moment in their lives, where they face not only the transition from boyhood into manhood, but also come face to face with the concept of sexuality as irrevocably connected to the notion of identity. For David, the experience in itself is a positive one: he encounters a sexual awakening through a bond to another person, Joey, whom he describes as a “nearly doomed bird” (7) which he was determined to save. However, when morning comes and they meet the world with all its rumors and “dirty words” (8), David panics because of how he understands the notion of manhood to be connected to sexual behavior. Gregory Woods uses the term “internalized homophobia” (293) to describe David’s attitude towards the notion of same-sex desire. The term bases itself on Weinberg’s invented word “homophobia” from 1967, which he claims denotes “the dread of being in close quarters with homosexuals – and in the case of homosexuals themselves, self loathing” (4). Kimmel asserts that homophobia cannot be reduced only to the fear of homosexuals; it denotes a general fear of other men, “that other men will unmask us, emasculate us, reveal to us and the world that we do not measure up, are not real men” (8). For David such a term comes particularly to denote the psychological resistance he harbors towards a stereotypical homosexual identity. For him, the true panic lies

in being recognized as a homosexual for the wrong reasons, i.e. that he through the categorization loses his identity as a man.

In David's eyes, this threat of loss of manhood stands as a valid fear. Not only because he is familiar with the mechanics of policing gender and sexuality as a means of regulating sexuality (Butler, *Bodies* 238). It is also because he himself actively *uses* these tactics to distance himself from a sexual identity which he perceives to belong to failed men. On the basis of this homophobia, which William J. Spurlin rightfully claims "assigns failed or abject gender to homosexuals" (104), David describes *les folles*, the men who "always called each other she" (24) and generally play on the gender traits of women, as something other, something "grotesque" (24). Likewise, when it comes to his acquaintances Jacques and Guillaume, he cannot think of them as men like himself, instead he seeks to portray them as nothing but "old theatrical sisters" (28). David's fear of the effeminate, of the notion of "non-men," has become an integral part of his being, because, as his father says: to be a man is not to be a woman.

For Jim, on the other hand, such a way of thinking is not an option. This is because, to him, there is nothing in the initiation scene with Bob which has the power to mark him in any way. As stated previously, the incident is purely about the consummation of an intimate relationship. Jim does not understand it to pose any threat to his masculinity, or to his self-image. Despite Bob operating on the idea that what happens at the cabin stays at the cabin, and then goes out into the world with the memory of their intimate exploration as nothing more than kid's play, Jim is of the understanding that what happened at the cabin in no way has to be removed from their relationship in the real world.

This understanding of the erotic nature of the trip to the cabin as nothing more than an innocent act of love, nurtures an understanding of Jim as a somewhat naïve character. It further also explains to some degree why he is so surprised, as well as intrigued and frightened when he comes to Los Angeles and learns that "there were men who liked other men" (91). Jim says of himself that he was "severe and masculine and quite unnerved" (91) by the more overt homosexual men, who he claims are easily identified by their looks and voices specifically. This approach to the cabin-incident might also rest on the notion of an idealized manhood, where "the tie between male and male is not only considered innocent, it is taken for the very symbol of innocence itself: [...] for it is imagined as the only institutional bond in a paradisaal world in which there are no (heterosexual) marriages or giving in marriage" (Fiedler, *Love and Death* 350). It is in the homosocial sphere of the cabin, where men go to be men together with other men, the notion of manhood is not threatened, because

of an established myth of manhood as asserting itself through comradeship and intimate relations. In this masculine sphere there are no institutions to contradict such manly companionship, i.e. marriage and a domestic ideal. Even though Jim can be argued to overstep the boundaries of male camaraderie in the eyes of society, there is no society present to pass judgment or instigate repercussions. Inside the idealized manhood, Jim is safe.

What seems to be a bit ironic about these scenes of initiation, is that whereas David, the big city boy, reacts to the incident with fear and shame, the boy from rural Virginia does not. In fact, where one would expect Jim to be the one to shy away from the experience, and damn it on the basis of an upbringing in a pietistic small town, it is rather the other way around. When John E. Horrocks asserts that “The adolescent is a product of his culture because he has spent the years of his childhood as a participant in that culture” (4), the paradox of this situation seems to further prove the uniqueness of the characters.

Masculinity and a “Different” Sexuality

The scenes of initiation lead Jim and David away from the innocence of boyhood and into the sexualized world of adulthood. As they set out to leave the confinement of the home in order to go out and experience the world, there is introduced an understanding of young men’s virility and the adolescent boy’s opportunity to explore. This connection between sexuality and gendered behavior of young boys is commented on by Jim’s mother when she receives the letter he writes after having ended up in the hospital and decides to once again establish contact with people from the past. After relaying to the father how old Jim has gotten and generally how he fares, she suggests that travelling and exploring the country is good for Jim and then hints at “what they say about the wild oats” (216). With this utterance Mrs. Willard effectively conjures up the image of the young, potent boy, who under the guise of self-discovery travels the country to spread his seed, away from the domestic sphere of the home. The main idea is that the man who returns after such explorations will be ready to enter domestic life and settle down with wife and children. This is clearly what is expected of Jim when he returns home after six years on the road, because the topic of marriage, and the question of “when are you going to get married” comes up in conversation with more or less everyone he talks to.

This is also the case with David, who cannot escape the notion of marriage and the domestic lifestyle, even though he finds himself many thousand miles away from the place he

calls home. In a letter from his father, he is pointedly made aware of the fact that he is “*getting a little old for studying*” now that he is “*pushing thirty*” (81). In the same letter, David also reads between the lines the speculations on whether or not David has found himself a woman yet, because if that was to be the case he should “*bring her home and I’ll help you get started up*” (81). This preoccupation with his social status is not a focus which David is particularly keen on, because it accentuates an issue which he is not yet ready to confront. David therefore does the one thing he is good at: he ignores the letter and its requests.

However much he would like it, David cannot escape this interest in his personal life forever. When he finds himself alone in the south of France after the imprisonment of Giovanni and the departure of Hella, the landlady of the house he rents comments on how it is not right for David to be staying alone in the big house; he should share it with a woman. Unlike the judgmental current which David feels infiltrating his father’s letter, he interprets (or maybe *chooses* to interpret) her statement as one made out of sympathy. David chooses not to contradict her when she says that he will be happy again, because what he ought to do – or rather *must* do – is to “find yourself another woman, a good woman, and get married, and have babies” (60). The initiation into manhood is not complete until the young man has settled down.

To return to the idea of young virility, one can say that it is further emphasized when the young Jim is stationed on the passenger ship and strikes up a friendship with Collins. A “short square young man of twenty” with “dark curly hair and blue eyes” (54), Collins has been around and is eager to include Jim in his escapades. When one night he brings up the subject of women and realizes that Jim is a virgin, he exclaims “I’ll be damned [...] I never thought I’d find a guy who was” (64), and then proceeds to ask for the reason as to why he has never been with a girl. Jim becomes embarrassed and “cursed himself for not having lied as all of them did about their affairs” (64). Inside the young, all-male environment of the ship, the idea of what constitutes manhood is based on the notion of virility and sexual experience, and to Jim this becomes extremely important. Inside what he calls the “beautiful comradeship” (62) which exists on board the ship, he is eager to show that he is one of them. When Collins offers to take Jim out and show him the ropes, he therefore agrees to come along. As a consequence of this desperate need to fit in, Jim feels like a failure when he cannot perform with the girl Collins has picked out for him. One thing is that he cannot be seen as one of the other men, because he could not take Collins lead and make “primitive noises and [writhe] according to the ritual of the sexes” (81), but more importantly his idea of

himself as a virile man becomes an issue. After having been stationed on a passenger boat where the talk has been mainly concentrated around women, the fact that he cannot perform his manhood, an act which he says feels both “dirty” and “unnatural” (81), makes him both ashamed and confused. The position the two words take on in this situation, proclaiming that what is seen as “natural” by society is experienced as the complete opposite for the young man in question, explicitly illustrates the narrative’s preoccupation with presenting the conflicting conventions around the notion of sexuality.

For David, the question of virility is not based on a platform of manly companionship per se, it is rather directed inwards in himself. Having left home in order to “find himself” (18), he becomes a “tourist” of *le milieu* in Paris, “intent on proving, to them and myself, that I was not of their company” (20). For David, the question of manhood is essentially grounded in the importance of not being taken for a woman, which in Paris takes on a gendered meaning as well as a sexual one. However, instead of shying away from the homosexual milieu in the French city, effectively removing himself from what could be considered a suspicious environment by the public, David deliberately seeks it out. In his own words, he does this in order to put up a front of toleration, which will place him “above suspicion” (20) from those in the milieu.

Chauncey reflects on this possibility of emphasizing one’s masculinity inside a homosexual milieu in his classic work *Gay New York*. Here he asserts that there are societies in which “fairies” would be tolerated even by the most masculine of the working-class men, because the “fairies” reassured the other men’s masculinities rather than threatened it (80). One can certainly see the connection between Chauncey’s assessment and David’s actions: by associating with the “others” of Paris, David is effectively marked as “normal,” because he does not resemble them in terms of looks and behavior. What is ultimately different about David’s relationship with those in the milieu, and that between the masculine working-class men and the fairies is that whereas the latter is mainly a relationship developed on the basis of coincidental encounters, David’s is not. Despite David’s possibility of ignoring the milieu, he chooses not to, because for him the need for approval and reaffirmation of his masculinity is stronger than his fear of being recognized. At this point of the story he will, quite ironically, risk his own manhood in a quest for affirmation.

Nevertheless, this all changes when David finds himself in the bar with the Belgian-born businessman Jacques, where he realizes that he has taken a liking to the “dark and leonine” (25) Italian barkeeper. The security which he found in the milieu can no longer protect him, because now the threat is not the society in itself, it is rather the individual, here

represented by Giovanni. For that reason, David, in a desperate attempt to secure his masculinity, adamantly denies any interest in the barman both to himself and his friend Jacques: “Well, you might find this hard to believe, but, actually, I’m sort of queer for girls myself. If that was his sister looking so good, I’d invite *her* over to have a drink with us. I don’t spend money on men” (26).

What is interesting to note about this last utterance is that David, by bringing in the notion of a sister, can be said to introduce what Axel Nissen refers to as the “sister motif” (*Manly Love* 44). What this term denotes is a continued romantic friendship between two men on the basis of a marriage with a sister, continuing the relationship into a sealing marriage, albeit not their own. Although David believes that the utterance will function as a deflecting move on his part, on the basis of the implication that a woman would be the more desirable option, it actually strengthens his connection to Giovanni. On the basis of David’s motivations behind this utterance, one cannot argue that David is not aware of this notion of a “sister motif,” nor can he be accused of having considered this a possible interpretation of such a seemingly innocent comment. Yet one cannot completely rule out the possibility either on the basis of David’s authority as the narrator. Even so, such an understanding does make an interesting comment on the relationship between David and Giovanni, as well as on the notion of a domestic, home-based future. As is implicated in the theme of the young man’s virility and his quest to “find himself” (18), there comes a time when he must return home and establish a future based on domesticity and marriage. The utterance, then, does not only imply that David even inside a society based on a heterosexual ideal could have a future together with Giovanni, it also sees a resolution based on a heterosexual marriage. Although this marriage would essentially be a sham, David would on a basic level conform to society’s expectations of the married family man.

Jim is much more accepting in terms of his homosexual orientation, at least by the end of the novel, but he too goes through a stage of denial and self-doubt where the need to insist on his masculinity becomes paramount. After he has come to realize that there are men who like other men (91), he is introduced to the movie star Ronald Shaw, who immediately takes a liking to the young boy and invites him to come live with him. When Jim is mocked by one of the bellhops about his instant hit, the narrator’s re-telling of the response is quite telling: “‘What are you talking about?’ [...] he knew what Winston was talking about and he was afraid” (98). The refusal to see himself as anything other than a “unique” (100) masculine man is continuously challenged throughout the narrative. When Maria Verlaine, a friend of Paul Sullivan’s ex-wife, joins him and Jim on their trip to Yucatan, she in a moment of

misunderstanding mentions the “difference” in Jim and forces him to acknowledge it: “And do you mind it very much, being different?” It was the first time she had ever mentioned this, the difference of their relationship. He hated her for having said it. He was ashamed to be marked. He was cold and she sensed her mistake but it was too late. ‘I’m not as different as you think [...] Everything is pretty complicated.’” (155). He too tries to deny any similarity with those he sees as “womanish creatures” (101), until at the end of the trip with Sullivan and Maria when he cannot deny his homosexual orientation anymore and accepts “himself as a member of the submerged world of the homosexual” (171).

To return to *Giovanni’s Room* and David’s deflecting utterance, it also says something about the lengths to which David will go to in order to avoid any unpleasantness and the notion of being perceived as something “other.” Jacques’ response to David’s utterance is a mocking reply in which David’s understanding of what it means to be a man is attacked: “‘I was not suggesting that you jeopardize, even for a moment, that’ – he paused – ‘that immaculate manhood which is your pride and joy.’” (27). According to Summers, Jacques here points to David’s imagined heterosexual superiority, which he gains by condescending his companions and establishing himself as something other (179). David’s strong belief in manhood as something which needs to be proven, eventually asserts itself in a complex image of manly identity as based on heterosexual sex acts. David several times in the story says how he wants to find himself a girl, “any girl at all” (84), in a desperate attempt to claim masculinity by a mock sexual identity. Even on the first meeting with Giovanni, he wishes that he “had been able to find in myself the force to turn and walk out – to have gone over to Montparnasse perhaps and picked up a girl” (37). Eventually, as the relationship with Giovanni gets more and more serious and consequently more and more complicated for David, he goes out and finds Sue, an American girl whom he sees as suitable for his “performance” (89).

The idea of masculinity as asserting itself through a show of sexual acts and heterosexual performances is also described in *The City and the Pillar*. Yet there is a distinct difference between these incidents in the two novels and what they represent. Whereas David goes through with the performance and has sex with Sue, Jim cannot find it in himself to do so. That is the case both with Anne, the girl Collins sets him up with in the beginning of the novel, and with Maria Verlaine. Whereas the incident with Anne is colored by Jim’s disgust with the female body as well as the coldness of the encounter, the trouble with Maria is exactly the opposite, namely that she makes him feel too much. With Anne, Jim notes how he feels defenseless and vulnerable under her “devouring look” (80), expressing a fear of her

sexuality and what it might imply for him. One can therefore say that with Anne Jim is cornered both by the expectations and the limitations of his own masculine sexual identity. At this stage of the novel, Bob still has a strong presence in Jim's being, and he instinctively compares Anne with Bob, and states that with Bob "he knew it was not like this; it was not dirty like this; it was not unnatural like this" (81). This is not to say that Jim does not have sexual intercourse with other people than Bob. It is in fact clearly indicated that he has sexual relationships with both Shaw and Sullivan. Yet for him there simply is no appeal in the female body and he cannot fool himself into thinking that there is.

One can to a certain degree agree with Summers, then, when he argues for an understanding of Jim's dismissal of Anne as an "important step in Jim's growth towards self-knowledge, his recognition that what might be natural for others is unnatural for him" (122). One can agree with this because the incident does in fact make him acknowledge to himself that he is "different" (81), and makes him to some degree face the question of what his sexuality means to his status as a masculine man. However, there is no immediate acceptance of what this refusal of Anne might imply, because instead of understanding the incidents as something profound, he makes a promise that he will "never see Collins again" (81) and then goes to bed to sleep and forget. Here we see that although the incident might be argued to be important in his evolution towards self-awareness and acceptance, it does not immediately take on this meaning for the young man.

When Jim meets Maria Verlaine, the situation is a bit different. Jim has by this point in the story been in a relationship with two other masculine men, Shaw and Sullivan, and has come to see himself as a "unique" (100) male individual on the basis of his homosexual desires. The fear he harbored earlier about his manhood being questioned on the basis of his sexual preferences can now be argued to be more or less gone. Whereas Jim needed Anne as an object onto whom he could project a performed heterosexual desire, Maria does not serve the same role. Instead, Maria becomes one of Jim's most trusted friends, and eventually their relationship evolves into that of "a love affair" (165). When Jim says how "he had failed; he could not perform the act; he was inadequate" (165), it might be argued to reflect more on the fact that Jim was not able to consummate their love, rather than a notion of failure in terms of proving his masculinity. Considering this it seems that whereas the incident with Anne focused on the masculine aspect of his identity, the encounter with Maria takes on a deeper meaning for Jim. As with Bob, this encounter represents an act of consummation.

When talking about the notions of young virility and man's sexual sphere, as it were, it also seems prudent to direct the focus toward the locations and situations where we

specifically encounter all-male environments in the novels. In *The City and the Pillar*, for instance, Jim leaves home in order to be a cabin boy on a passenger ship, where he enters the world of seamen and gets acquainted with a life at sea. In terms of metaphors and motifs, this move signals an entry into a homosocial world which becomes almost too cliché with regards to the obvious play on hidden eroticism and the sexual myths surrounding the sailor. It also fits very well into the discussion which the novel presents on the notions of gender and sexuality. Not only does the sea represent a sphere of refuge for the young, lost boy, where he, in the absence of the domesticated home, has the opportunity to grow up and join the forces of manhood. It also is a world where the absence of women forces men to live together in an enclosed environment over longer periods of time, creating a sphere of masculine intimacy. Now, because Jim is on a passenger ship, he obviously will not be separated from women during his time at sea, yet by joining the other seamen he has entered into a sphere which is dominated by a masculine manner and conduct.

To Jim the time at sea is just a phase in his journey towards the final goal, namely the reunion with Bob. It is also a time which plays a part his process of self-discovery. During the time on the ship, Jim becomes a part of a “beautiful comradeship” (62), and he experiences what he describes as “a feeling of affection for them that was large and encompassing” (61), “them” referring to the other male crew members. In this male environment, Jim is accepted because of his masculine qualities, despite that he on the inside acknowledges that he cannot fully relate to the others. He also seems to understand that what makes him different also has the power to be potentially threatening to the position he has acquired as one of the boys. That is why he plays along when the discussion is on the topic of women, or when Collins asks him to tag along in his search for girls. This also indicates that Jim through the time at sea has gained a greater understanding of how the mechanisms of gender and sexuality work, and that the naïve innocence of the boy at the cabin has been confronted and to some extent re-evaluated.

In addition to this experience of the masculine environment at sea, Jim also spends some time in the army at a later stage in life. As in the masculine world of the seamen, the army is a place where boys grow up to be men, although the conditions of this growth are radically different. Where the sea presents a place of freedom, the army is a place for restriction and extreme conformity; here, nonconformity can have severe repercussions for the individual. In *Giovanni's Room*, David illustrates this when he tells of how there was an episode when he was in the army, which “involved a fairy who was later court-martialed out” (18). To the army, nonconformity represents a threat to the ideal of the “man's world,” and

therefore has to be dealt with. It seems a bit ironic, then, that it is precisely in the army that Jim says he “would not pretend to be just like everybody else” (179) in order to fit in with the other men. It is in the army that he remarks how he is “curious [...] to know more of himself and of others like him” (194); it is here that he can finally let himself contemplate his identity. Obviously, Jim cannot “unmask himself” (179) inside this environment, but he does emphasize the need for the individual to be one’s self and keep one’s individuality. One can argue that the army becomes a representation of the homophobic society of the outside-world, brought to the extreme in some ways, and that Jim’s character becomes a silent voice for homosexual rights in some way. The army in its rigidity also becomes a place where Jim can be himself, whoever that might be.

In contrast to these all-male environments of the sea and the army, the protagonists also find themselves drawn to the heterogeneous environment of the big city; for Jim this means Los Angeles and New York, and for David it is Paris. One could imagine that the possibility of being anonymous would be what attracted the characters to the cities; instead they end up inside the well-developed, easily recognizable gay subcultures, effectively putting themselves in the limelight. This seemingly ironic twist does not damage the characters’ story in any way; it more than anything builds up under the issues that the characters have about manhood and the idea of masculinity. Because of their “normal” looks and behavior, the two characters can pass as “normal men,” i.e. heterosexual men, to the outside onlookers. Subject to the act of policing gender, the two men are in fact free of suspicion on the basis of their masculinity, and are free to roam the subculture, concealed by the “abnormal” men. Their masculinity also protect them inside the subcultures themselves; seeing as Jim and David are impossible to categorize, they have the opportunity to choose whether they want to be noticed and recognized as homosexual men or not. They can, in theory, pass off their masculinity as a trait which secures them in a performed heterosexuality, or they can acknowledge their sexual orientation and be seen as members of the culture. Where one could expect that the homosexual subculture would be the most dangerous place for the two protagonists, it instead proves to be a place in which they have the freedom to influence how they are to be seen. One can also argue that this freedom of choice, as it were, rather than operating as an aspect of liberation to Jim and David more than anything comes to emphasize their status as “in-betweeners.” Both novels can be said to play on the stereotypes of gay literature and culture in an attempt to distance themselves from them, as well as the stereotypes they produce.

Finding themselves in this unique position, as men who both belong and at the same time do not, Jim and David are allowed entrance into the homosexual subculture, where they

more than anything get to experience for themselves what being a homosexual man might entail. In his life in the “underworld” (94) of Los Angeles, Jim comes to learn that there are several ways of understanding a homosexual orientation, also when it comes to language. He learns that there are both people who proudly declare themselves as homosexuals, and at the same time that there are those who fancy homosexual encounters, yet do not take on a homosexual identity. The latter sexual orientation includes what is referred to by Jim as “trade” (312), and Chauncey asserts in his historic survey that the term in the 1940s signaled a separation of a homosexual identity by the men who only were interested in a homosexual experience, i.e. that the term meant a man who was willing to have sexual encounter(s) with men who were perceived to be homosexual individuals (22). It might be tempting to categorize Jim Willard as “trade” on basis of his willingness to have sex with other men despite his reluctance to accept an homosexual identity. However, this term denotes a detachment between the engaged individuals, and often might come to denote a “business relationship” in the forms of prostitution. Jim is very much attached both to Bob and Sullivan and therefore referring to him as “trade” not only represents a misunderstanding of the category itself, but also of Jim’s identity.

Jim himself does in fact touch on this term himself, when he has come to New York and starts to frequent the gay community there. Inside the “well-organized homosexual world” (245), he learns of and observes the city-life:

The words “fairy” and “pansy” were considered to be in bad taste. It was fashionable to say that a person was “gay.” A person who was quite effeminate, like Rolloson, was called a “queen.” A man who could not be had, who was normal, was called “jam.” The rough young men who offered themselves for seduction but who did not practice were known as “trade”; sometimes they prostituted themselves for money; more often, however, they were homosexuals who had yet not realized it themselves. (246)

Chauncey recognizes these terms from the society of the thirties and forties, and states that by assigning different meanings to each of the appellations there is established an understanding of diversity inside the term “homosexual” itself. He says that the terms “signified distinct social categories not equivalent to ‘homosexual’” (14). These words were, however, largely used inside the gay community; outside it other words with more negative connotations were often found.

For instance, in *The City and the Pillar* words such as “queer” are used by the characters to denote distance between what they perceive to be “normal” men and those who

are allegedly “abnormal.” Chauncey states that this “queerness,” i.e. otherness, “hinged on their supposed gender deviance” (19). For instance, Jim’s sailor friend Collins uses the word to mark Jim as unnatural after his unsuccessful sexual encounter with Anne: “Let the queer go, don’t mind him” (81). And then the word comes up again when Jim tries to seduce Bob and is refused: “You’re a queer [...] you’re nothing but a damned queer!” (306). When the degrading term is first used by Collins it does not visibly provoke Jim, because he does not relate to the word or what it connotes. This has changed by the time Bob utters the word, however, and consequently Jim reacts differently in the two situations.

In *Giovanni’s Room*, the use of such words to distinguish those of homosexual orientation is also mainly done in such a way as to invoke negative feelings. For instance, David refers to the overtly effeminate characters whom he meets out in Paris as “les folles,” a term playing on the French word “fou” meaning “lunatic” or “madman”/“madwoman.” An equally negative connotation comes with the word “tapettes,” which David uses in the narrative to refer to those who were kicked out of the cafés when the police hold their raids after Guillaume’s death. Denoting an effeminate homosexual character, connected to the English words “poof” or “queer,” the word gives a negative image of the homosexuals as depicted by David. Furthermore, the word “fairy” is used by David as means of invoking negative feelings about Guillaume after the imprisonment of Giovanni: “he was just a disgusting old fairy. That’s all he was!” (133). Giovanni also uses this word to shame David after they have been separated because of Hella’s return, when he compares David to Jacques and Guillaume and says how they are a “disgusting band of fairies” (124). However, the word’s connotations are also played on by Jacques when he insinuates in an exchange with David that he might not be as unmoved by Giovanni as he claims to be. Inside the word “fair,” one can easily imagine the term “fairy”:

“You have been very *unfair* to me,” he said. “You have been very dishonest.” This time I did sound sardonic. “I suppose you mean that I would have been *fair*, I would have been honest if I had – if – ” “I mean you could have been *fair* to me by despising me a little less.” [emphasis added] (49)

It might also be, however, that is just a tongue-in-cheek remark from Baldwin on the homophobic tendencies that are shown in David. Nevertheless, one can argue that with the issue of the young boy’s virility and the categorization of those of homosexual orientation, both novels seek to show that there is no concrete way of being either homosexual or

masculine. Yet, as shown in the initiation scenes, the two novels go about doing it in different ways.

Reinventing the Categories of Manhood

Summers claims that all the minor characters in *The City and the Pillar*, with the exception of Paul Sullivan, are “emotionally stunted, [...] predictable and sketchily drawn” (121). He makes this claim based on how Ronald Shaw fulfills the role of the macho, American heartthrob in all his egocentric glory, and likewise on how Maria Verlaine is presented as the desperate “faghag.” Although these characters can be argued to be fairly predictable in their characterizations, playing on stereotypes of the actor and the “faghag,” to say that they are “emotionally stunted” or “sketchily drawn” seems rather presumptuous. All of the supporting characters in both *The City and the Pillar* and in *Giovanni’s Room* are invested in the protagonists’ quests in one way or another. They function either as helpers or hindrances to the main characters’ search, and they have huge influence on how Jim and David develop. Though they might be predictable in how they are presented, they all have their troubles and issues that come to color the relationships with the two men. Thus, these characters are not empty, they are not shells. They are essential personas in the novel that influence Jim and David and vice versa.

In *The City and the Pillar*, it is first and foremost the character of Ronald Shaw who plays an important role in this aspect. The Hollywood movie actor who Jim enters into a relationship with on his arrival to Los Angeles is a different kind of man. Born in Baltimore as George Cohen, he transformed himself into a “fiery young Irishman” (93) by the name of Ronald Shaw in order to gain access into the world of glitz and glam. The importance of keeping up appearances further forces Shaw to enter a double life in which there is created a gap between the man the public gets to see and the one that frequents the homosexual underworld of Los Angeles. To maintain his role as the nation’s leading male actor, as well as a first rate sex symbol, he puts on a show for the public where he performs his masculinity and creates a shield behind which he can hide his sexual orientation. This play on what James Penner refer to as a “homosexual doubleness” (83) not only secures his position in terms of income and fame, it also creates a space for him to move inside his private sphere. This dual identity also presents to Jim a safety in his manhood which he craves, because through Shaw’s masculine display to the outside world, an act defying the notions of what society

perceives to be the character traits of the homosexual, Jim continues to be “normal.” In other words, as long as the public cannot identify Shaw as a homosexual individual, neither can they label Jim as such. Furthermore, since Jim is equally masculine in his appearance and conduct, he does not threaten Shaw’s public image.

Shaw expresses what Penner calls a “hard masculinity” (83), i.e. a glorification of masculine gender norms and a consequent aversion towards those who do not conform to them. The narrator states that “Shaw had definite ideas about the way men should look” (118), a fact that is further emphasized by his speech on how he hates “those others, those fairies” (106). Echoing Jim’s homophobic distaste for the “freaks” (106), the two men start out their relationship on basis of their similarities as masculine men. Still, with Shaw’s constant talk about how he just wants to be loved, Jim is reminded of the fact that he cannot love men, that is, except for Bob “and that was different” (110). Consequently, when he meets Paul Sullivan, a man who “seemed normal” (121) and also “reminded him somehow of Bob” (123), the relationship with Shaw ends.

Whereas the relationship with Shaw was mainly centered on the need for both to maintain a masculine façade, the relationship with the rather anonymous writer is given the opportunity to take on a deeper meaning for both participants. Because Sullivan does not live his life in the spotlight, he is after all only an anonymous writer compared to Shaw, he does not need to mask himself as anything other in order to protect his status in society. Where Shaw paraded his masculinity and protected Jim because of his performance, Sullivan in his anonymity creates a free space where Jim does not need to prove anything to anyone. That is to anyone other than himself.

Unlike Shaw, Sullivan is in many ways an internalized character. Whereas Shaw must present something to an audience, focusing on outward appearances and what things might *look like*, Sullivan is more preoccupied by the notions of inner life and what things *feel like*. As a writer, he yearns to feel the pain of life and then suffer accordingly: “The pain of failure, of incomplete relationships, of uncommunication” (130). Even in his relationship with Jim, he sees the opportunity to inflict pain on himself by introducing Jim to the “faghag” Maria Verlaine, a friend of his ex-wife. For this reason it is natural that it is Sullivan, and not Shaw who forces Jim to really look at himself and realize that he is “not unlike these others” (126). Through Sullivan’s role as a mentor, he introduces Jim to the “usual pattern” (125) of development towards a homosexual identity in the male, and also makes him realize that he has the capacity to feel something for another human being than Bob. It is through the

relationship with Sullivan that he eventually comes to regard himself as a masculine homosexual man.

Even though Jim expresses contentment with the relationship he has with Sullivan, it cannot last. With Sullivan being what Kiernan calls an “emotional masochist” (42) and Jim being the restless youngster hunting for his dream-lover, the affair comes to an end the first time with Jim going into the Army. The second time it is Sullivan’s insecurity about his own status as a gay man which splits them up and eventually leads to Jim going back to Virginia.

What is quite the paradox when it comes to Sullivan is that even though he promotes the life of the “ordinary” homosexual to Jim, and advocates for a possibility of existing as openly homosexual in society, he refuses to “out” himself in public. Despite his insistence on how “We should declare ourselves” (141), he seems to realize that there is no arena for such a declaration at the present time in puritan America. Thus, both Shaw and Sullivan show Jim ways of being both masculine and homosexual men, yet neither dare face the public and present themselves as homosexual men that something other than the stereotypic image of the homosexual man.

This is not the case with Giovanni, however, who is perhaps the most avowed of the masculine homosexuals that are portrayed in the two novels. Rather than hiding behind a mask of constructed heterosexuality in order to conform to the gender norms, he presents himself to David and the world with complete honesty. This honesty will eventually be his downfall. Nonetheless, one can argue that Giovanni represents for David a possible solution to the issue of what kind of man he is, emphasizing the notion of love in their relationship rather than any issue of gender or sexuality.

Giovanni is, unlike both Shaw and Sullivan, not afraid of what he is or what people might think of him. Having fled from his past as a family man in Italy, he is an outsider in Paris on the basis of nationality, yet at the same time he fits into the milieu of the Parisian underworld far better than the other foreigner, David, does. Adams asserts that Giovanni brings a Mediterranean temperament into the story, which set against the North American disposition brought in by David creates a tension which emphasizes the differences found in cultural background (42). Marlon B. Ross agrees with this assessment, and states that it is particularly through this dissimilarity in cultural background that the novel can evolve into a story about issues of sexuality. He actually states that without the ethnic differences between Giovanni and David “it would be impossible for the novel to script its story of tortured same-sex desire” (26).

One can agree with Ross' claim to a certain degree, because in the relationship between David and Giovanni the difference in cultural background has great impact on how they understand the world around them, as well as how they understand themselves. For David, the relationship with Giovanni presents a threat to him not only as a masculine man, but also as an American man: "Besides, it is a crime – in my country, and, after all, I didn't grow up here, I grew up *there*" (72). For Giovanni, on the other hand, the liaison with David is free of any cultural critique, at least he as an individual does not carry any with him. In this manner their backgrounds have implications for how the issue of same-sex desire can be presented in the novel. However, to claim that it would be "*impossible* to script a story of tortured same-sex desire" [emphasis added] (Ross 26) without the ethnic distinction seems to be ruling out the possibility, and the naturalness of how different individuals understand similar situations differently. Although the cultural background certainly does influence the story, it should not be argued to be pivotal to the notion of depicting a tortured same-sex desire as Ross here claims.

Giovanni has, as stated previously, no qualms about his affair with David. This is because he does not understand his manhood to be questioned on the basis of who he desires, whether sexually or romantically. This becomes quite clear when the couple argues about David's return to Hella, and David insinuates that what Giovanni really wants is a girl. To this Giovanni answers: "I am not trying to make you a little girl. If I wanted a little girl, I would be *with* a little girl [...] You are the one who keeps talking about *what* I want. But I have only been talking about *who* I want" (126). With this utterance, Giovanni states that to him it does not matter whether the object of his affection is a man or a woman, because to him the question to ask is simply whether that person is the right one or not. What the relationship with David might implicate in terms of gender has no relevance to him.

Even though Giovanni fiercely believes that the relationship with David has no implications for his status in the Parisian community, it actually has in certain respects. For instance, the relationship in itself offers protection from the advances of other men, e.g. Jacques and Guillaume. This is especially important when it comes to Guillaume, because as an employee of his establishment, Giovanni is particularly vulnerable to his employer's moods and fancies. As long as Giovanni is together with David, Guillaume cannot take advantage of him, either sexually or financially. The relationship also offers a more direct security in his economic status, because of David's money and his connections with his family back home. We never get to know if David actually earns any money to provide for his

stay in Paris, yet we must assume that he had a certain amount of money to live on. This money would most likely also benefit Giovanni.

This means that as long as Giovanni is with David, he is in many ways protected from the strong forces of the Parisian underworld. And in this respect he attains a certain status which elevates him from the other young boys who in their poverty are forced to depend on older, generous men to keep them, or else they must submit to prostitution. When Giovanni is left by David, he therefore loses both his protection against the other men, as well as the financial security. He is ultimately left with no other choice than to enter into a relationship with Jacques, and when that ends, it is insinuated that he becomes one of the “street-boys” (131), i.e. a prostitute. Despite Giovanni believing himself to be above the notions of what gender and sexuality has to say in his relationship with David, he is not immune to the system of power which operates inside the *milieu* and in society in general.

Another character in *Giovanni's Room* who also promotes a homosexual lifestyle, is the Belgian born, American business man, Jacques. He is not what one would call a masculine man, in fact he and Guillaume are once described as falling “into each other's arms like old theatrical sisters” (28), creating the image of the stereotypical effeminate homosexual. Even though he becomes one of “the others,” and is different from all the other characters we have looked at thus far, he is an important source of inspiration and knowledge to David and therefore an interesting character to discuss in terms of function.

Like Sullivan in *The City and the Pillar*, Jacques takes on the role of mentor for the young novice, introducing him to the Parisian underworld and showing him the ropes of the homosexual community. Unlike Sullivan, however, Jacques is a proclaimed gay man living in a society where homosexuality is, if not accepted, at least tolerated, and therefore he is not preoccupied with trying to shield himself from the eyes of the public. Jacques is presented as a rather flamboyant and outgoing individual, yet he asserts a certain vulnerability and desperation in his mentorship with David. One can argue that his strength as a literary character in the novel lies with precisely this ambiguity of character.

Jacques' motivations for playing mentor to David might on the one hand be based on a genuine compassion for the young American, whom he can relate to on the basis of both cultural background and frustration with sexual orientation. However, Jacques cannot be argued to be a sentimental character, and the more realistic notion might be that there is some other egocentric reason as to why he wishes to have a relation to the young man. As with the other homosocial constellations in the two books, the friendship between the two functions as a shield against the public eye, however, it operates in a slightly different manner. Rather than

being preoccupied with his status as a gay man in the community, Jacques is concerned about his status as a man of popularity; a notion which he believes is strengthened by his friendship with the young, masculine David. Ergo, David functions as a protection from the beliefs that Jacques is roaming the bars “out of desperation” (25), and consequently strengthens Jacques’ standing in the community. Even though David also acquires a certain kind of protection in his manhood in his friendship with the “fairy,” one can say that the roles in this relationship are reversed, and the protected, i.e. David, has become the protector.

In addition to functioning as figures against whom Jim and David must measure up in terms of masculinity, the male supporting characters also help emphasize the point the novels try to make about masculine identity as a construct of society. Through the characterized tension between the masculine and effeminate homosexual men, one can argue that the novels play on an understanding of identity as something which is composed out of a normative understanding of gender. Butler’s theory on performativity focuses on precisely this normative gender construct, which she sees as sometimes used to enhance the heterosexual ideal. She argues that “performativity is not a singular act, but a repetition and a ritual, which achieves its effects through its naturalization in the context of a body, understood, in part, as a culturally sustained temporal duration” (*Gender Trouble* xv). This can be taken to mean that the individual actively plays out internalized and culturally constructed gender norms in order to be recognized and categorized. Hence, the individual has an opportunity to invent him- or herself inside the ruling gender norms. What this theory of performativity also implicates is that seeing is *not* believing, and that the individual can manipulate the boundaries within the normative constructions.

In all the homosocial constructions we have encountered thus far, the notions of illusion and appearance seems to be the paramount themes. Not only does Shaw live his life in a “world of illusion” (Adams 20) in the city which has built a billion dollar industry on manipulation of the truth, but Jim and David also have basic character traits, e.g. the habit of self-deception, that are connected to the concept of creating a mirage. Furthermore, all the relations we have looked at thus far function either as covering up or hiding specific features about the individuals in the constellation, or as a means of enhancing them. For instance, when David is together with the “fairy” Jacques, a man representing the stereotypical effeminate man, his masculinity is strengthened on the basis of their gendered dissimilarity. Because they cannot be categorized as “the same” in terms of gender, David is also secured in terms of his sexuality. He cannot be homosexual, because he does not look and behave like the typical homosexual man, i.e. Jacques. The friendship covers up his sexuality and hides it

behind his apparent gendered behavior in a play on stereotypes. This play on power effectively implies that the notions of manhood and masculinity in the two novels are something which can be manipulated to transgress the boundaries of society.

This is not to say, however, that either David or Jim are effeminate men “in disguise.” Even though they play on the notion of appearance and performance in this aspect, they are both masculine men who are clear of suspicion when it comes to their gendered identity. The notion of illusion in this context does not reflect any hidden gendered femininity in the two (which is *the* stereotypical gendered attribute associated with homosexuality at the time), but rather the need to present oneself as a “normal” individual in a homophobic, judgmental society. In other words, the characters manipulate the stereotypes society has set for the categories of gender and sexuality in order to improve their reputation and status in society.

This concept of categorization is particularly emphasized in the two novels; just as being a homosexual man is seen as one specific category – in which the members are seen as one homogenous group of looks and behavior –, other categories are also recognized and judged on basis of their believed character. Jim, for instance, is constantly referred to as “an athlete” (21), a term which is filled with insinuations throughout his journey in the gay underworld. Shaw once remarks how Jim being an athlete is also “very interesting” (98), and at the “fairy party” (233) Jim is put on a pedestal as the “natural” (235) male on basis of his athletic background. Likewise, David’s label as “the American” keeps him both a stranger and at the same time not to the gay milieu he frequents in Paris. Even those these labels say something about how the societies in the novels operate, what is interesting to look at is not so much how the categories define its boundaries, but rather how these boundaries are questioned and reinvented by the narratives themselves.

As masculine homosexual men, Jim and David are the most apparent examples of how the two novels complicate the categories of gender and sexuality. As has been mentioned previously, their masculine appearance and behavior protect them from being identified as gay men. It is precisely because of this duality that they are also unable to connect with their identity as men. They quite paradoxically become “normal” because of their “abnormal” “abnormalities.” In *The City and the Pillar*, it is most notably Maria Verlaine and Ronald Shaw who play with this notion of gender categories; her as the “faghag” who cannot connect to homosexual boys, and he as the macho homosexual superstar. Furthermore, we also encounter the stereotype fairies at Shaw’s parties, and Rolloson who pushes the boundaries of the set gender norms by wearing lipstick (266). In *Giovanni’s Room* we also encounter characters that transgress these boundaries of gender and sexuality; there are *les folles* (men

who dress and act like women) and “the beast” (who is at first labeled “it” by David as a result of his unidentifiable gender). David also assigns gender characteristics to Joey and Hella in order to point out the “wrongness” of them: Joey is described the morning after as looking “like a baby [...] his cheek flushed, his curly hair darkening the pillow and half hiding his damp round forehead and his long eyelashes glinting slightly in the summer sun” (7); Hella’s body is after Giovanni’s imprisonment described as “harder and firmer” (140), i.e. more manly and thus “wrong.”

By questioning the boundaries of set categories, and particularly those having to do with gender and sexuality, the novels seeks to destabilize the categories themselves and argue for an understanding that there is no such thing as “normal” or “abnormal.” The categories of the homosexual, queer, masculine, effeminate, feminine, butch, etc. are nothing more than constructs invented by society. This implies that they can be just as easily reinvented. As Gilbert states: even though the homosexual “was seen as the mirror for contemporary masculinity [...], this mirror reflected both ways” (75). The categories of manhood and masculinity are essentially unstable and can be subject to alterations and manipulations.

Female Influence and Power Structures

In addition to the male characters, there are also female characters in the novels that are important to discuss when it comes to the notions of manhood and masculinity. Even if they do not represent a threat to Jim and David in the same respect as the male characters (they are not individuals against whom the two men must measure up against), their status as women still has great effect on the protagonists’ understanding of themselves and how they are understood by their communities. Considering society’s insistence on the “abnormality” of the grown-up, single man, the women in the novels present a constant reminder of how Jim and David *should* live their lives: as masculine, heterosexual men inside the domestic ideal.

In *The City and the Pillar*, we meet the Maria Verlaine, “the faghag,” who, like Jim, David, Shaw, Sullivan, Giovanni and Jacques, hides behind a mask of illusion. Her life is spent roaming around the world, looking for the dream lover through a string of romances, which all end with her leaving the man behind. Adams asserts that she “has a penchant for ‘lost causes’ and for ‘doomed’ relationships with ‘artists,’” (22), a trait which he compares with Jim and his continued dream of a life with dream-Bob.

Maria's "lost causes" are usually gay men. She used to be married to a "handsome young Frenchman" (148), but that ended in divorce. To her "normal men" (156) give no fulfillment, rather "the men she felt the closest to were homosexual men" (157). Portraying the prototypical "faghag", i.e. "a woman who often has trouble relating to straight men and who finds fulfillment in intimate friendships with gay men" (Nissen, "Outing Jake Barnes" 44), Maria serves as a character in an important middle-position in the novel. It is especially through the relationship with Jim that she becomes a representation of the possible transcendence on the limits of sexuality, because in their affair she is neither normal in the sense that she is a straight woman dating a straight man, nor is she abnormal by being a straight woman dating a proclaimed gay man. On basis of Jim's status as an unresolved homosexual man, it is implied that Maria is also something "other."

Another element which further complicates the character of Maria is that even though she proclaims that she finds no fulfillment in straight men, she says that Jim is "a *normal* man" [emphasis added] (158). The phrase might just refer to how Jim is a masculine man and so very much unlike the stereotypical homosexual men who she undoubtedly has had encounters with in the past. However, the utterance might also indicate that Maria believes Jim not to have a homosexual identity, thus in her pursuit of the young man she goes against her own claim to find straight men unfulfilling. This might lead us to question her motivations for this interest in Jim. In actuality, they could be based on either a need to enhance her status as a sexually attractive woman by association with the young, masculine man, or it might be based on a simple need to be in an intimate relationship with someone. If we take the latter to be the case, Maria does in fact have certain similarities to another famous "faghag" in American literature, namely Lady Brett Ashley in Ernest Hemingway's *The Sun Also Rises*. As Nissen argues, Lady Brett Ashley is a woman who is more "in love with the idea of being in love" (43) than she is with the object of her affections.

Whatever the motivations behind the intimate friendship, Mari does, like the male characters discussed thus far, function as a shield for Jim's sexuality and status as a masculine man. To use a term often associated with the covering up of a homosexual orientation; she functions as a beard. With her youthful looks and behavior, she is precisely the kind of woman that could be associated with Jim. Through their relationship Jim's status as a masculine man is strengthened. As is the case with the other relations that have been discussed thus far, the affiliation with the young man also benefits Maria's status in the community. Being a "faghag," she is a sexual outsider as well. Yet, through her association

with Jim, who ironically is the “fag” she lusts after, she can also create the illusion of a seeming normality.

This is particularly illustrated by the scene where Jim, Sullivan, and Maria meet the Johnsons, an American couple who they make friends with. After the Johnsons have questioned Sullivan on the prospect of marriage, to which he wryly replies with a negative, they obviously find it “a bit odd” (162) that the three of them are travelling together. Still, they settle on accepting the normality of their companions, and state that “they were probably *all right*” (162). This situation not only illustrates the focus on conformity, especially in terms of domesticity and the idea that you are expected to settle down once you reach a certain age (note how Jim was not asked). It also emphasizes how the relations between Jim, Sullivan, and Maria seem to neutralize any notion of abnormality that might otherwise have been suspected of them. Inside this triangle of illusions, they are all safe.

In *Giovanni's Room*, it is David's fiancé, Hella Lincoln, who functions as the female influence over the main character. Even though she seems to be the character that is most successful in conforming to the norms of society in the two novels, she also has issues which reflect on her identity as a woman in the modern society. Due to her relationship with David, these issues also come to reflect on him in some ways. Hella first catches David's interest in a bar in Paris, on the basis of how she looked like a girl who it “would be fun to have fun with” (4). This detached, superficial interest seems to stick with David throughout the story, and one can argue that Hella is little more than a perfectly timed distraction from the troubles in his life, as well as a useful figure in order to put up a front. Not only does she provide the image of a future set in matrimony and twosomeness for the young man (which is, after all what the society dictates is *the* norm to conform to), she also functions as a protection against the notions of otherness in terms of sexuality and manliness. One can for this reason agree with Mae G. Henderson, who argues for an understanding of their relationship as a front put up by David in order to protect himself inside a “safety zone of conventionally constructed masculinity” (320).

This engagement does not only benefit David. It also contributes to Hella's reputation. Hailing from the same middle class background as David, Hella gains no social elevation by marrying him, per se. Yet the fact that she is an engaged woman, that she is spoken for, lends status in itself. When Adams claims that “There is little evidence of passion in their relationship and marriage is a calculated choice” (39), we can agree to a certain extent. As we have seen, their union benefits them both in some way; for David it becomes shield from society, and for Hella a means of elevating her status and correspondingly also her

womanhood. One can also agree with the other part of the statement, because passion does not in fact seem to be at the forefront of their relationship. We do not for a second believe that it is a relationship based on infatuation and romantic addiction, instead it comes off as a rather domesticated union, where the possible benefits are all that is important. However, the fact that David is the one to tell the story makes it possible, and even probable, that he also colors the story to fit into his purpose of telling it. Accordingly, even though their relationship might be depicted as one where passion is lacking, that might just be the image the narrator wants to portray in order to defend his actions.

Hella can be argued to be at once a protecting element in David's life, as well as a threat to his sense of self. She certainly functions as protection for David in her role as the other part of their union, and her own need to be in a domestic relationship is to David both a promise of safety as well as a threat to his identity. Justin A. Joyce and Dwight A. McBride compare David's desire for Hella with his "desire for home" (128), and this seems to be a valid claim in some respect. Hella does in fact represent for David the notion of home, both in terms of their shared native country, as well as the domestic image of a house and family. This "desire" is not so much, however, based on a wish to find himself inside the institution of matrimony and domesticity. It is rather a desire for him to be inside the "safe zone," as it were. The same can be argued to be the case with Hella, who simply wants to enter life as a married woman because anything else scares her. It is after she has returned from Spain, where she went in order to figure things out, that she comes back to David and proclaims that she wants "a man to come home to me every night" (109), because; "it's really all I'm good for" (109). It is as if they both need each other in this twisted, limiting relationship in order to actually be free.

Adams has a passage which illustrates this brilliantly, and it particularly focuses on how Hella and David really are not that different after all:

David and Hella [...] dedicate themselves to a quest for personal identity through sexual freedom and the bohemian life, but when this raises questions which are too threatening they seek refuge in convention, looking backwards to America to restore some sense of order and security in their lives. Reflecting on the 'peculiar innocence and confidence' of their early nights of 'fun,' David admits that 'nothing is more unbearable, once one has it, than freedom. I supposed that was why I asked her to marry me: to give myself something to be moored to.' (39)

Both Hella and David have fears of not living up to what is expected of them, and one can agree with Adams again when he says how Hella's "fears of not being a 'real' woman

coincide with David's fear of not being a 'real' man" (39). It might perhaps be for this reason that she cannot fulfill her role as the "watchdog." Instead of confronting David about her suspicions, she chooses to ignore the fact that David might not be quite the one he presents himself as. Hella says when she eventually catches up with him in the gay bar, that "I think I've known all along" (144), indicating her unwillingness to come to terms with reality. And also, one might argue, her cowardliness.

When she then follows up with how she now will return home, i.e. to America, she once again accentuates the issue of the safety of the home. David also sees this connection when he says how he wants to have children and be "inside again, with the light and safety, with my manhood unquestioned, watching my woman put my children to bed" (93). These utterances can easily be connected to what Rich calls "compulsory heterosexuality," (632) that is, the individual's need to recognize him- or herself as a heterosexual being within a sex/gender system. This need does not spring out of the individual itself, but out of a patriarchal ideology where a heterosexual institution has governance over the notion of sexuality. To both David and Hella, then, the notion of a compulsory heterosexuality manifests itself in the idea of marriage and the false union that they engage themselves in.

Even though the union between David and Hella, as false as it may be, seems to have more of a chance of success than David's relationship with Giovanni, it becomes clear by the time they arrive in the villa in the south of France that also their relationship is doomed. David describes how he suddenly came to find his fiancée "stale, her body uninteresting, her presence grating" (139). It is interesting to note that this happens only after Giovanni has been removed from the picture, suggesting that when the threat of homosexuality is removed the attraction of the shield is gone. David's dismissal of Hella is thus implicitly linked to his relationship with Giovanni. One can therefore argue that even though Hella and Giovanni only meet once, in a brief moment inside a shop, the two characters share a bond through David with each other. This relationship between all three characters might be argued to be a version of what Sedgwick refers to as an "erotic triangle" (21). This is usually a trope denoting the invisible bonds in a rivalry between two men over one woman, such as for instance Rowland and Roderick's interest in the lovely Christina Light in Henry James' *Roderick Hudson* (1875), but Sedgwick suggests that there is no reason why this should not also apply to other constructions of triangular rivalry, e.g. homosexual relationships.

Sedgwick asserts that inside an erotic triangle, "the bond that links the two rivals is as intense and potent as the bond that links either of the rivals to the beloved: that the bonds of 'rivalry' and 'love,' differently as they are experienced, are equally powerful and in many

senses equivalent” (21). In *Giovanni's Room*, the rivalry that links Hella and Giovanni is not based on any closeness in time or space; it exists rather because of the constant physical absence of one of the rivals. When Hella is away, Giovanni is with David, and vice versa. Being constantly aware of Hella, Giovanni competes with her for David even when she is not there. Hella, on the other hand, does not know of Giovanni before the meeting in the shop, and although he shortly after is imprisoned and physically cannot threaten her relationship with David, his ghost is always present. One can therefore argue that the rivalry between the two is not an “active” one, yet the bond that they share is as “intense and potent as the bond that links either of the rivals to the beloved” (Sedgwick 21).

The importance of this erotic dynamic is emphasized by the shift which occurs in the story after the meeting between the two rivals. Hella, who previously functioned as a possible savior for David, now develops into an obstacle which he must somehow overcome. Her arrival drives Giovanni away, as previously envisioned by David, yet it also makes David realize how a life with Hella might not be enough. His manhood is secured by her return, yet his identity is not. Giovanni has previously seen Hella as nothing more than a “mistress” (70), a woman of less importance, but after the meeting he comes to understand that this is not the case. Concluding with how he cannot win against Hella, he removes himself from the arena and, going against everything he believes in, leaves David. Even though David is driven by his own choices, which the narrative itself also reflects, these choices are constantly bound up in these two supporting characters. His decision to stay with Hella is a direct consequence to Giovanni's threat to his manhood. With Giovanni out of the picture the need for Hella is reduced. David is mainly a character who operates on his own, yet his interaction with others, specifically when it comes to the two “rivals,” influence how he understands himself.

In *The City and the Pillar*, one can argue that there also exists an important erotic dynamic presented by the constant presence of dream-Bob. Though he is physically absent for the most of the story, Bob is spiritually present as a powerful figure in each and every relationship Jim entertains. Not only does he represent to Jim the epitome of the male ideal, as emphasized in the initiation scene, he is also the representation of male desire and love. Every person Jim comes close to, be it Shaw, Sullivan or Maria Verlaine, is measured and then declared unable to compare to dream-Bob. Since there is no set triangular power construction as in *Giovanni's Room*, one cannot argue for the existence of an erotic triangle per Sedgwick's definition. Neither is Jim's narrative in itself directly influenced by the presence of such an erotic dynamic, as we see explicitly in *Giovanni's Room*. Nevertheless, the two quadrangle power constructions (Bob, Jim, Shaw and Sullivan or Bob, Jim, Sullivan and

Maria), in which Bob plays an important part, emphasizes how dream-Bob still has a certain power over Jim and how he develops throughout the novel.

Death Transgressed

As we have seen, both novels seek to complicate the notions of masculinity and sexuality, and they do so by playing in large part on established ideas of gender and identity. These ideas assert themselves especially in relation to the two protagonists, who in their masculine identities go against instituted conventions both in society and in the gay literary tradition. By playing on specific myths of gay sexuality, such as parental influence on the basis of sexual development, and myths of sexual initiation and young virility, the novels seek to question established stereotypes about both masculinity and homosexuality. The endings of the novels are no different. Rather than abiding by the literary conventions at the time, which deemed the homosexual a character that had to suffer for his “abnormality,” *The City and the Pillar* and *Giovanni’s Room* offer alternative outcomes. Even so, neither of the novels are free of fatalistic build-up towards the impending end.

When Jacques asserts that “Nobody can stay in the garden of Eden” (22), he generates an image of how everything good must come to an end; that is precisely what happens in both novels. Both Jim and David lose the ones they love; however, the fall from grace is not limited to include only the main characters. When it comes to Shaw, for instance, his downfall means having to embrace the norms of society, and he enters into marriage with a fellow movie star in order to fulfill his role as the American ladies’ man. The irony of this marriage is that his wife is also a lesbian (276). Their relationship can in some way thus be seen as more of a mockery of the ideal heterosexual domesticity than an actual submission to it.

Unlike Shaw, whose bane is the public image he is so dependent on, Maria Verlaine and Sullivan become victims of their own narcissism and lack of self-awareness. After the trip to Mexico with Jim, the narrator states how they all failed (173); Jim in exercising his love for Maria, Sullivan with keeping up a relationship with another human being, and Maria in her quest for love with the ultimate “fag.” These failures keep haunting the characters throughout the rest of the story, and for Sullivan it ends with him leaving Jim a second time, more bitter and insecure than ever before. Maria, on the other hand, is wounded by her incapacity to claim Jim, and later states that “Normal men were necessary” to her now (221). The “garden

of Eden” (22), the notion of a state of blissfulness and freedom, slips further away from the characters as the story develops and as the characters’ flaws establishes themselves.

The idea of an Eden is not only referred to in the novels as a utopian existence, it also takes on more tangible aspect. The idea of an Eden as a sacred place of union is discussed by Fiedler in his work *Love and Death in the American Novel*, where he talks about the notion of a “hierogamos” (354): the idea of a sacred marriage. He claims that in the American literary tradition, this myth of a divine union exists as an established concept, and can be seen to operate inside the homosocial structure in works such as *The Sun Also Rises*, *Huckleberry Finn*, and *Moby Dick*. This union, Fiedler states, rests on the existence of “the longed-for spouse, the questing lover, and the sacred setting” (354).

The City and the Pillar can be argued to fit into this tradition quite nicely; not only does it contain all the three elements which Fiedler claims are necessary, it also has a grounded thematic basis in the aspect of living in the idyllic past. Jim’s Eden, as it were, goes back to the isolated cabin and the weekend he spent there with Bob, and it makes such an impression on the young man that even though years go by he cannot rid himself of the weekend’s perfection. He keeps Bob with him as a glorified image of the “one and only,” and even though they are separated for many years, the image of dream-Bob remains. With this Jim’s Eden becomes quite literally a “place out of history and time” (Fiedler 355).

Because Bob is the one to share Jim’s experience of Eden, he is also the only one who is essentially a potential partner for Jim. Every time Jim meets other people, he compares them with Bob and concludes how they are so unlike him; so unlike the dream figure of his dream world. Every relation Jim establishes is somehow controlled by the absent Bob; and because they cannot compare to dream-Bob, in the end they all fail. As the title of the novel suggests, downfall will come to those who look back. This in some respects comes to be true for Jim as well. His Eden seems to be a stable notion, rested on the idyllic past which cannot be touched, yet the fact that he keeps it with him and constantly looks to it for a possible future makes it impossible to achieve.

For David, the notion of Eden might also refer back to the scene of sexual awakening, which he experiences with Joey in his teens. Inside this incident there is innocence found in the intimate relation between the two young boys, who care for each other in isolation from the outside world. Whereas this notion for Jim becomes the basis for an obsession, David rather than anything wants to forget. This is not an issue when it comes to Giovanni because where the incident with Joey was controlled by the domestic ideal of the American society, Paris becomes a safe spot for the young man in the absence of repressive institutions. In this

new Eden, Giovanni can be argued to build up under Fiedler's notion of how "the forbidden erotic object tends to be represented by a colored man" (*Love and Death* 365). Unfortunately, not even this Eden is given the chance to last.

Both novels lead up to the grand finale with an air of hopelessness but it is not all futile. The most prominent example of this is how death is not an exclusively fatalistic trope in any of the novels; it also stands as an element of hope and possible redemption. In both novels the object of the protagonist's affection dies at the end of the story, one of them being a proclaimed homosexual man. While one can argue that this is an example of how the novels conform to the literary convention of the homosexual's death as punishment for his "abnormality," the fact that both Jim and David are alive by the end of the novels signal that something is happening to this convention in gay literature.

In *The City and the Pillar*, the theme of death is treated like a thing of beauty in many ways. It is first introduced by Maria Verlaine, who claims that death is "peaceful and inevitable" (164), and further that it is something which has the power to make the individual "eternal" (164). This way of thinking about death, as something natural and transcendent, is also reflected by Jim, who after having killed Bob says that watching the life leave his body was "peaceful and natural and somehow very right" (308). This apparent glorification of death emphasizes the novel's play on a romantic mythic theme, and can be argued to tie into the romantic idolization of Bob as the dream object. The romantic illusion of the dream in many ways continues with this illusion of the beauty of death.

Because of this spiritual understanding of death, one can almost see Jim's killing of Bob as a sacrifice rather than a brutal act of murder. His death is necessary for Jim in order to keep the illusion of dream-Bob alive and to avoid it being smashed by the real version of his fantasy. When Bob enters Jim's life again as a purely heterosexual man, and consequently will not acknowledge Jim the way he so desperately wants to be acknowledged, the fantasy Jim has carried for so many years – his illusion of reality – is threatened. The killing of Bob can be for this reason be argued to be motivated by not so much the anger that Jim feels after Bob's outburst about how Jim is "a damned queer" (306), which several critics focus on in this respect (e.g. Summer, Kiernan), but rather by a need to keep things as they are. Jim needs to hold onto his grasp of reality and truth, and in that image Bob exists as the pivotal figure. The problem is that Jim cannot be argued to have a very solid grasp on either what is real or what is true; these values exist only as ideas inside his dream world.

In *Giovanni's Room* the notion of death does not conjure up any remotely positive dream images. Instead, death becomes a trope which ties into the anguish and despair David

feels because of his own insecurities about himself, as well as with other issues. For instance, the notion of death as something grotesque and unpleasant is very much present both with the character of the mother, in her “putrescent” (9) body, and in the character of the “mummy” (34). On a personal level, David also brings up the notion of death as a way of sending a message, namely that a suicide would be a revenge, a “way of informing the world of how awfully it had made me suffer” (92). Whereas the element of death in *The City and the Pillar* is to some extent focused on as something liberating and glorious, this is not the case in *Giovanni's Room*.

Unlike Jim, David plays no active part in the death of his lover, yet he stands as an instigating factor nonetheless. It is on a basic level David leaving him which gets Giovanni reacquainted with and dependent on Guillaume again, and thus one can indirectly ascribe his death to David's fear and unwillingness to act. Giovanni can also be said to be sacrificed in order to preserve an illusion of reality, that is, David's illusion of himself as a failed man. Giovanni does in fact create a lot of problems for David by entering his life and questioning his outlook on it and himself, yet he also presents a possibility for David to let go of his issues and become whole. Giovanni's death can as a consequence of this be understood as a sacrifice in which David is presented the possibility of keeping the image of himself as a failed man. Without this mark on his soul he ultimately does not know how to understand himself.

When critics analyze the endings of the two novels, they tend to comment on how they are both highly melodramatic as well as unrealistic. The latter characteristic is particularly assigned to the ending of *The City and the Pillar*, which is considered to break with the carefully crafted distance between Jim and the supporting characters. Summers argues that it is in fact “as falsely romantic as the modes of thought that the novel criticizes with such cool clarity” (127). Gore Vidal himself comments on this final killing, saying how “it was a bit much” (Clarke), yet he also defends the ending by claiming that what was being killed was actually not the character Bob, but rather “the idea of perfect love that has existed only in the romantic's mind” (Clarke). This quote emphasizes the understanding of Bob's death as a signal that the dream has come to an end; and consequently contradicts the assertion that the murder was done exclusively in affect. The claim of the murder's unrealistic character can for that reason be argued against.

It must be noted that Vidal actually changed the ending in the later edition of the novel, which was published in 1965. Many critics stick to this edition because they feel that it reflects the proclaimed purpose of the novel in a better way. In this edition, Bob is still the victim, yet rather than being killed by Jim he is raped. Whether or not this ending is more

“realistic” or not is something which this discussion will not dwell on, yet it is interesting to note that the edition which is accepted as “the definitive text” (Adams 24) is also the text where there is no death at the end of the novel. Thus, it radically goes against the convention at the time that a literary work dealing with a recognizable homosexual protagonist must end in tragedy. Now, it certainly ends in tragedy for Bob, who is violated by his childhood friend. Yet unlike the earlier edition, this ending is more than anything tinged with the notion of retribution and revenge on Jim’s part. One can argue that even though the original edition might be rightly accused of being melodramatic and unrealistic, it certainly emphasizes both Jim’s reluctance to leave the dream world, as well as his romantic character. With the rape in the newer edition, Jim is removed from the dream world altogether, and his character takes on a whole new, darker feature. Instead of being motivated by a need to keep things as they are, he is here motivated by a notion of retaliation for all the heartbreak Bob caused him over the years. Consequently, one can wonder which edition really differ the most from the stereotypical literary gay work of the time, and puts the gay character in the more flattering light. To achieve this was in fact one of Vidal’s aims in writing the novel in the first place.

Although the deaths in the two novels are not those of the protagonists, i.e. the main “abnormalities,” the deaths of the main supporting characters emphasize both novels’ focus on the suffering of those who are perceived to be “other.” This is for instance what happens with Bob, who must suffer because he is now different from Jim. A similar understanding can also be given of Giovanni’s death in *Giovanni’s Room*. David must, as stated previously, be rid of Giovanni, because he causes him to question the understanding of himself as a failed and struggling man. When Giovanni is charged with the murder of Guillaume, a man who comes from one of the most distinguished families in France, David does nothing. Ironically enough, Guillaume, described by David on several occasions as a fairy and a rather recognizable figure in the Parisian underworld, is cleared of any suspicion whatsoever. The young, masculine bartender is immediately a suspect on the basis of his “otherness,” i.e. his nationality. Guillaume is here protected by the reputation of his “French manhood” (133), which is a rather ironic notion, and Giovanni as the foreigner is the one who has to suffer. Both deaths can be argued to be based on the notion of false understandings of truth and reality, which in essence also can be argued to stand as direct links to the novels’ critique against the established views on gender and sexuality.

It is also in this contrast between reality and imagination that we find the protagonists on the last pages of the novels; Jim has returned to the bar in order to drink away reality – to return to the land of dreams –; David is standing in front of a mirror contemplating how to be

freed from the prison of his body and the reality of what hunts him. Adams claims that Jim has not developed much by this time in the novel; instead of revising “the values by which he lives” (24), or developing a “compassionate sense of fellowship with other in his situation [...]”, he wallows in drunken self-pity and we are left with the image of him amusing himself by scorning the advances of some ‘little fag’” (24). Even though the latter is true to claim that he is unmoved by events, and that there has been no development from the young Jim whom we meet in the second chapter of the book is untrue. When Jim moves out of the bar to go to the waterfront, he says himself how he is “changed” (314); because, “if he was not changed he could not live for he had destroyed the most important part of his life, Bob and the legend” (314). In other words, Jim acknowledges in the narrative that he has undergone some sort of development throughout the story; it ultimately rests on how he relates himself to Bob.

It is interesting to note that Jim in the next paragraph goes back on his claim on change, however, saying “he knew he could not change, that no dream ever ended except in a larger one and there was no larger one” (314). This follows after a moment of remembering “the noise of a brown river” (314), i.e. the river by the cabin where he was with Bob. This quote insinuates that Jim can never leave the dream world where Bob resides; Bob will always be a part of him. As Bob has haunted him throughout the novel, as will he continue to haunt Jim even after his death. Still, as the active cause of Bob’s death Jim has in essence moved Bob out from his fantasy dream world and into the real world, where he must now face the consequences of his actions. Not only when it comes to the emotional turmoil of death of his lover, and most importantly the fact that he was the one to cause it, but also considering how he now faces the real possibility of imprisonment and execution.

The last paragraph of the novel paints a rather dark picture when it says how Jim will “go to the waterfront and look at the sea [...], dark and cold against the shore” (314). The sea has here changed from a symbol of freedom from his time at sea into one of depicting the darkness Jim now finds himself in. The sea has also become his escape route as well as a final goodbye to his previous life; once he leaves New York he will physically leave Bob as well as “all the other men who might have been his brothers and lovers *the way Bob had been*” [emphasis added] (313). Jim asserts how he will now have to learn “The rivers, lakes and the islands” (13) all over again, and create for himself a new future where the past must now function as a part of reality, seeing as he cannot escape it. He realizes at this stage of the story that his past will always be part of both his present and future, and even though he would like to “destroy the fear; he could only forget, for a while how it began” (20). His only option of survival is to flee from the familiar grounds of New York; the question is only whether a life

without Bob is even possible for Jim. The ambiguity of the final paragraph suggests that it might not be.

The ending of *Giovanni's Room* is also concerned with this coming to terms with oneself; here David turns to the mirror in hopes of finding his true self. As a direct link to the first page of the novel, he once again watches his reflection, yet this time what he sees is “my body, which is under the sentence of death” (149). This utterance might refer at the one hand to how he cannot live now that Giovanni is no longer alive, and on the other it might relate to how he as a homosexual character in a literary work is sentenced to die as the end draws near. However, even though his feeling of imprisonment and damnation is so strong, it is also here that David realizes that he has an opportunity of salvation:

The body in the mirrors forces me to turn and face it. And I look at my body, which is under the sentence of death. It is lean, hard, and cold, the incarnation of a mystery. And I do not know what moves this in body, what this body is searching. It is trapped in my mirror as it is trapped in time and it hurries towards revelation. [...] I long to crack the mirror and be free. (149)

By cracking the mirror, as it were, shattering the insecurities he has about his own sexuality and coming to terms with his own identity, David can be set free. The ending of the novel indicates that there is a chance for David to do so, yet with the pieces of the letter he tore up blowing back towards him it is also suggested that maybe David will remain trapped in his body and in his insecurities.

Jacques once asserts that should David “play it safe long enough [...] you’ll end up trapped in your dirty body, forever and forever and forever” (50). By having denied his feelings for Giovanni throughout the entire story he has effectively “played it safe long enough” and so become an instrument in his lover’s death. It is after all only in the narrative flashback that David confesses the depth of his love for the Italian: “No matter how it seems now, I must confess: I loved him. I do not think I will ever love anyone like that again” (99). David has, like Jim, changed over the course of the telling of the story; he has divulged things in the narrative that has not been revealed in the original story, suggesting a growth in him as a human being. Nevertheless, as David’s fear caused him to hold back from Giovanni in the past, so does his fear cause him to do the same in the present time. When he gets the notice of Giovanni’s date of execution he quite tellingly does nothing, instead he removes himself from the physical presence of his lover and travels out into the countryside to escape. The story of flight repeats itself. David can therefore be argued to remain a man caught in his own

insecurities, and even though he is presented with opportunities to be the man he has the potential to be, he cannot “crack the mirror.” As long as he will not realize that his possibility of freedom is found in his acceptance of himself he will remain “trapped in [his] own dirty body, forever and forever and forever” (50).

Conclusion

Actually, there is no such thing as a homosexual person, any more than there is such a thing as a heterosexual person. The words are adjectives describing sexual acts, not people. Those sexual acts are entirely natural; if they were not, no one would perform them.

Gore Vidal, *The Second American Revolution*, p. 161

Jim Willard and David, the protagonists of *The City and the Pillar* and *Giovanni's Room* respectively, both struggle with how they are to understand themselves as men in the post-World War II era. Coming from the American middle class, both boys are expected to “grow up to be a man” (Baldwin, *Giovanni* 14), and to embrace the qualities of the masculine male as presented to them by society. To “be a man” is most notably to be recognized as a “not-woman” (Beasley 12), i.e. the categories of manhood and masculinity are seen as in opposition to what are considered exclusively feminine qualities.

Being what the narrator in *The City and the Pillar* calls a boy with “regular and ordinary features” (33), Jim is regarded and recognized throughout the story as a “normal” young man who has no reason to fear being identified as anything other than a “man.” The same is the case with David. Connected to the issue of manhood is also the concept of sexuality; a reigning view in the United States in the forties and fifties was that the “abnormal” sexuality of the homosexual man was uniquely characterized by his feminine features. The ultimate threat to ideal masculinity was perceived to be the homosexual man. What further complicated the issue was that by the forties effeminacy was no longer a reliable marker of homosexuality in the modern world (Fejes 14-15). One can therefore understand the threat of the “hidden homosexual” to be fundamental in society at the time. For Jim and David, this comes to be a problem, because even though they outwardly are everything a man should be, their sexual orientation causes them to fear being labeled as something “other.”

In addition to the paradigms of masculinity versus femininity, and heterosexuality versus homosexuality, we also encounter in the novels the concept of boyhood versus manhood. As Kimmel states, to be a man also meant not to be a boy (18), something which both Jim and David as young men on the threshold of adulthood come to realize. In boyhood one is secured inside the innocence connected to childhood but in manhood one is not protected in the same way. When Jim and David have their first homosexual encounters in what are described as idyllic contexts, continuing in the tradition of earlier gay literary works, they are both made aware of the fact that they are now considered men, and cannot escape

being categorized by society on basis of their actions. One can therefore assert that *The City and the Pillar* and *Giovanni's Room* further complicate the issues of manhood and masculinity by also introducing other concepts of gender and sexuality into the discussion.

Sarotte's claim that the main goal is to be a "man's man" (188) is illustrated by David's father who plays on the concept of male camaraderie and boyishness in order to be recognized as a masculine male. The paradox is that the men whom the father requires recognition from are also the ones who he must prove himself against. The tension that is created by this convention is exemplified by Jim's father, who unlike David's father is not too pleased with his masculine son. To him, Jim's masculine features and youth stand as direct threats to his own status as a man. David also struggles with the relationship with his father. After the encounter with Joey, he fears that his secret will somehow come out. The boys' decision to leave the domestic sphere of the home and venture out in the world to explore stands as a direct consequence to this threat.

Even though the novels are similar, both when it comes to the thematic issues they discuss as well as the narrative development, the characters of Jim and David are somewhat different. It becomes clear after the initiation scenes, that whereas Jim's troubles lie with how he cannot connect with the category of the homosexual man, David is more concerned with how his manhood is questioned on the basis of his sexual orientation. For Jim, the erotic connection he feels with Bob is consummated by the sexual act; an act which he does not understand to be identity-making in any way. Although Bob on his side insinuates that what they have just done does not belong in the adult world, that it there will be considered "abnormal" (it is "kid's stuff" (49)), Jim does not see it that way. As the story develops, and Jim comes to learn that there are men "who like other men" (91), he too becomes aware of distinction between the "normal" heterosexuality and the "abnormal" homosexuality.

David exhibits what Woods terms "internalized homophobia" (293), which causes him the morning after to see the sexual act he performed as a direct threat to his status as a man. It is not the situation in itself that causes him to feel this way, i.e. it is not the fact that he felt something for someone of the same sex; it is rather the fact that the body onto which he projected his lust belonged to another man. Hence, David tries his hardest to resist when Giovanni enters his life, and he continues to resist the label as a homosexual man as long as he can. This he does primarily through his relationship with Hella Lincoln, whose womanhood is both a protection from the homosexual label, as well as a reinforcement of his masculinity. Jim also tries to strengthen his masculine status when he goes out with Collins to

pick up girls, but it all ends in disaster as he cannot perform the act with the girl after all. After this, there is no woman in his life until Maria Verlaine comes along.

When Gilbert asserts that the “homosexual was seen as the mirror for contemporary masculinity” (75) in the forties and fifties in America, he illustrates the main issue of both novels. When he also says how “this mirror reflected both ways” (75) he opens up for an understanding of the categories of gender and sexuality to have the power *to* alter, as well as *be* altered. Jim and David as masculine homosexual men exemplify this in a brilliant way; they are “abnormal” in their “abnormality,” thus they paradoxically become “normal.” Through actions of performativity, a term borrowed from Butler, the male characters in both novels, for different reasons, seek to either hide specific features about themselves or enhance them. This is particularly centered around the notion of masculinity. Through a display of characters and situation that question the ruling gender norms, e.g. the “faghag” and the respective feminine and masculine qualities that David sees in Giovanni and Hella, this issue is further complicated. Because the novels seek to show that the boundaries between the categories of “normal” and “abnormal” are easily transgressed, one can argue that the novels show that the categories of sexuality and gender are not stable after all.

Whereas the male characters play up against the protagonists on basis of their manhood, the female supporting characters introduce the notion of a feminine quality which has the power either to enhance or minimize Jim and David’s masculine qualities. By entering the protagonists’ lives, Maria Verlaine and Hella Lincoln both present the idea of a domestic ideal; and with it the idea of “compulsory heterosexuality” (Rich). Furthermore, inside the relationships they conduct with the two men, they also come to influence how the stories, and consequently also the characters, develop. Inside these power constructions, which have some similarities to what Sedgwick terms “erotic triangles” (21), there are factors which both help and deter the main protagonists on their journey towards self-discovery. These power constructions can be seen in both *Giovanni’s Room* and *The City and the Pillar*, yet the fact that the main complicating character in the latter is an absent character and exists mainly as a dream figure, argues for an understanding of David as more vulnerable to the influence of the supporting characters, also in a negative way.

Jacques asserts that “Nobody can stay in the garden of Eden” (22), a statement which proves to be accurate for more or less all the characters in the two novels. Although the two protagonists are alive as the novels come to a close, their involvement in the deaths of Bob and Giovanni cause their futures to be more than a little uncertain. Jim states how he must leave New York as his status as a free man is threatened by the murder of his one and true

love. Still, such a decision proves to be difficult to make as this also means that he must continue to live his life in a reality without Bob. Jim has come to be a changed man through the story and has come to realize that he cannot escape the past – whatever he chooses to do, Bob and the dream world will follow him throughout the rest of his life. David is not subject to such an epiphany; he carries on in the same manner of ignoring his feelings for Giovanni, even after he has been imprisoned and sentenced to die. This lack of action is *the* essential character flaw in David, and it is because of precisely this defect that he comes to find himself at a crossroad as he leaves the villa in France. He proclaims how he longs to be saved, a process which one can argue he has started by instigating the narrative in *Giovanni's Room*, still the complexity of his uncertainty goes so deep that the possibility for a future only exists as long as he can realize this hubris. The ambiguous character of the endings, where the protagonists are presented as standing on a crossroad caught between the past and the present, can therefore be argued to support the notion of a “solution,” yet at the same time also complicate such an understanding.

Critics have tended to focus on how *The City and the Pillar* and *Giovanni's Room* are revolutionary in their honest portrayal of male homosexual characters, as well as how they illustrate the gay milieus in the big cities. What I have seen missing in the countless analyses of the two novels, however, is an analysis with a more critical focus on how the works problematize the concepts of manhood and masculinity. Not only is this interesting to look at in a literary context, but it also says something about how society operated in the United States in the forties and fifties. This is not to say, however, that the novels have lost their significance as revolutionary or unique in today's literary context; even though the novels were given particular merit in the times before Stonewall, they also point out interesting elements in the discussion on manhood and sexuality as we see the issues treated today. Many will not think of *Giovanni's Room* as the most essential work by Baldwin, still there is no denying that the issues around which he spins his tale are as relevant today as they were in the United States in the fifties. Likewise, Vidal's novel is equally relevant; in fact there was held a special symposium at Yale University in 2003 to commemorate the fifty-fifth anniversary of the publication of *The City and the Pillar* (Altman 130). Times have changed, yet the question of how one is to understand “the complexity of manhood” (Baldwin, “Freaks” 815) still reverberates throughout society.

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