



A Study of Congenital Invert in the novels of Marguerite Radclyffe-Hall's *The Well of Loneliness* and Eugene Luther Gore Vidal's *The City and the Pillar*

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Queer Theory is an interdisciplinary field that encourages one to look at the world through new avenues. It is a way of thinking that dismantles traditional assumptions about gender and sexual identities, challenges traditional normative approaches, and fights against social inequality. It grows out of gay/lesbian studies, feminist studies and feminist theory. It analyses how the sexual identities are constructed, how they operate, how they are enforced, and how social concepts are linking the sexual behaviors with sexual identities. Marguerite Radclyffe-Hall, an English writer, who is known for her vociferous opinions about homosexuality in the novel *The Well of Loneliness* (1928) which created a scandal in Britain for its treatment of lesbianism. In this novel, she explored the homosexual behavior of the protagonist Stephen Gordon, a female invert with various women. Eugene Luther Gore Vidal, prolific American novelist and essayist who is well known for his outspoken political opinions and witty satirical observations in the novel *The City and the Pillar* (1948), which shocked the public with its direct and unadorned examination of a homosexual character Jim Willard, a handsome youth in Virginia who have an intimate homosexual relationship with his friend Bob. This research paper identifies the controversial norms of homosexual identity which struggles for dominance in the heterosexual society in the novels of Marguerite Radclyffe-Hall's *The Well of Loneliness* and Gore Vidal's *The City and the Pillar*. The congenital inverts create a chaotic situation for the future generation because "normally sexed" individuals, particularly children or young adults, are very easily lured into experimenting with homosexual practices, thereby accounting for homosexuality's contagious quality.

Keywords: Queer, Congenital invert, Homosexuality and Heterosexuality.

The main objective of this research paper is to examine the novels of Marguerite Radclyffe-Hall's *The Well of Loneliness* and Gore Vidal's *The City and the Pillar* use of homosexuality is an explanatory discourse of queerly gendered character of Stephen Gordon and Jim Willard as a congenital inverts. In 1869, a German psychiatrist, Carl von Westphal published a case history of a young woman who from childhood, preferred to dress as a boy, play boy's games, and, later in life, was sexually attracted to women. The aim of the research paper is to illustrate the intellectual resilience of a particular understanding of the nature of homosexuality and its socio-legal consequences.

In the novel of Radclyffe Hall's *The Well of Loneliness*, the protagonist, Stephen Gordon, is born in the late Victorian era to upper-class parents Sir Philip and Lady Anna Gordon in Worcestershire who are expecting a boy and who christen her with the name they had already chosen. Even at birth she is physically unusual, a "narrow-hipped, wide-shouldered little tadpole of a baby". She hates dresses, wants to cut her hair short and longs to be a boy. At the age of seven, she develops a crush on a housemaid named Collins and is devastated when she sees Collins kissing a footman. Once Sir Philip hears the crush of Stephen, he removes Collins from his service, leaving Stephen to grieve her first love. Later in life, Stephen finds enamored again with married woman Angela Crossby. Stephen writes a letter to Angela

expressing her feelings. Angela then hands it to her husband, who gives it to Stephen's mother Lady Anna, creating a rift between mother and daughter. Stephen's father, Sir Phillip, dotes on her; he seeks to understand her through the writings of Karl Heinrich Ulrichs, the first modern writer to propose a theory of homosexuality, but does not share his findings with Stephen. Her mother, Lady Anna, is distant, seeing Stephen as a "blemished, unworthy, maimed reproduction" of Sir Phillip. At the age of eighteen, Stephen forms a close friendship with a Canadian man, Martin Hallam, but is horrified when he declares his love for her. The following winter Sir Phillip is crushed by a falling tree; at the last moment he tries to explain to Lady Anna that Stephen is an invert but dies without managing to do so. Building on the congenital inversion theories of the early sexologists, Richard von Krafft-Ebing and Havelock Ellis, Hall constructed the first popular articulation of a lesbian identity and argued, without apology, for the invert's right to love.

Radclyffe Hall symbolically describes her lesbian protagonist Stephen Gordon as congenital invert. The term "congenital invert" comes from early 20th-century sexologist Richard von Krafft-Ebing and it refers to a type of inborn gender reversal where women could be born with a masculine soul and vice versa. Through this novel, she makes a political statement about the position of lesbians, and of lesbian writing, that dares to strike its readers in ways more direct and profound than the audaciously avant-garde. Stephen Gordon is a congenital invert with a highly developed sense of honor, despite of money and privilege; she must shoulder societal disapproval and romantic disappointments with a noble sense of abnegation. Radclyffe Hall's socially marginalized women leave a lot to be desired. Lilian Faderman has pointed out in *Surpassing the Love of Men*, Stephen Gordon is silly and weak in *The Well of Loneliness*. A critic, Claudia Stillman Franks has written that 'the old fashioned format for prose fiction suited [Hall] well enough', ultimately suggesting that Hall 'settled' for tradition rather than risking innovation or originality. Another Hall's biographer Lovat Dickson observed that, at the time of writing *The Well of Loneliness*, the 'romantic idea still dominated the novel', and it was therefore 'natural for [Hall] to invent the sort of background common to so many of the late Victorian and Edwardian novels she had read as a child and a young woman'.

The novel of Gore Vidal's *The City and the Pillar* centers on the congenital invert *Jim Willard*, a handsome youth and a good tennis player in Virginia, who is a best friend of *Bob Ford*, his senior player, is about to leave high school, the two make a camping trip into the woods in the late 1930s. Jim and Bob are elated to be in each other's company and after some moaning between them about the Bob's sexual relationship with the local girls breaks the friendship of Jim and Bob. Jim decides to go to sea and becomes a cabin boy on a cruise ship after going to New York to look for work. After high school, Jim becomes a sailor in a ship where he meets a seaman named Collins. Both of them have a double date with girls in Seattle. But the date is a disaster for Jim, who must realize that he is unable to drink enough to overcome being repelled by the female body. When he finally storms out, Collins calls him a queer, which causes him to think about his invert character. Their affair is ended when Jim meets the writer Paul Sullivan at a party, who is in his late twenties. Jim is drawn to Paul Sullivan at Hollywood parties because he seems stereotypical homosexual guy from the other men, even though he is married once. Then he becomes a kept man of a movie star named Shaw. Jim's relationship with Shaw gives him his introduction into the queer demimonde. Like the characters of Forster's *Maurice* and Baldwin's *David*, Vidal's protagonist Jim is characterized as a 'normal' man but for his desire for other men views Jim as an 'invert man'.

R.W. Connell's concept of hegemonic masculinity will be incorporated in this analysis to account for the constitutive power of masculinity in constructing a subject position that tries to mend the gap between gender and sexual identity. The aim of this research paper is to explore how Vidal's novel negotiates the struggle of the homosexual individual to express and pursue love and desire while still adhering to a standardized normative masculinity.

I think you're the unluckiest type. (...) You'll attract everybody, yet you won't be able to do anything about it. Not really. Oh, maybe someday you'll find a woman, but not a man. You're not like the rest of us, who want a mirror. It's exciting in a way but it's also sad. (85)

These statements addresses the ongoing mental struggle of Jim who faces the perceived gap between him and a young man Bob who is sexually attracted to other men and the "rest of us", as Sullivan points out, those who identify as homosexual. Jim is reduced to the passivity of being desired and rendered incapable of truly desiring anything or anyone else. As Lillian Faderman comments, several congenialist writers such as Iwan Bloch, Magnus Hirschfeld, and John Addington Symonds concurred that homosexuality was indeed an inborn characteristic, but refused Krafft-Ebing's assertion that homosexuality was pathological and the morbid result of tainted heredity.

Douglas' views on homosexuality would fit in easily at any strategy meeting of the Family Research Council (FRC), Concerned Women for America, or any other national organization dedicated to anti-gay activism. Their views had a direct impact on congressional debate regarding gays in the military had a direct impact on the Home Office's decision to prosecute the novel *The Well of Loneliness*. In 1998, a consortium of pro-family organizations orchestrated a massive print and television advertising campaign to publicize the 'ex-gay movement.' An advertisement entitled *From Innocence to AIDS* in which One Mother's Plea to the Parents of Homosexuals, it told parents to never accept a child's homosexuality because "the life you save may be your child's future". In the FRC position paper entitled as *How Domestic Partnerships and Gay Marriage* and *The Myth of Homosexual Monogamy* concludes with a statement that "in the gay life, fidelity is almost impossible." The emphasis on promiscuity highlights that in the wake of the HIV/AIDS epidemic, gay (male) sex is an unhealthy, as well as immoral, practice. In *The Mother's Plea* advertisement clearly states that "homosexuality is often a fast life of anonymous sex, drugs, alcohol, physical exhaustion in pursuit of pleasure, and even physical violence."

This research paper concludes that homosexuals cannot excuse their behavior by claiming that they are "born that way". Innocent teenage children and ignorant people become prey to the congenial gays who are having no shame on their invert behavior in the society. They create a chaotic situation for the future generation because "normally sexed" individuals, particularly children or young adults, are very easily lured into experimenting with homosexual practices, thereby accounting for homosexuality's contagious quality.

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