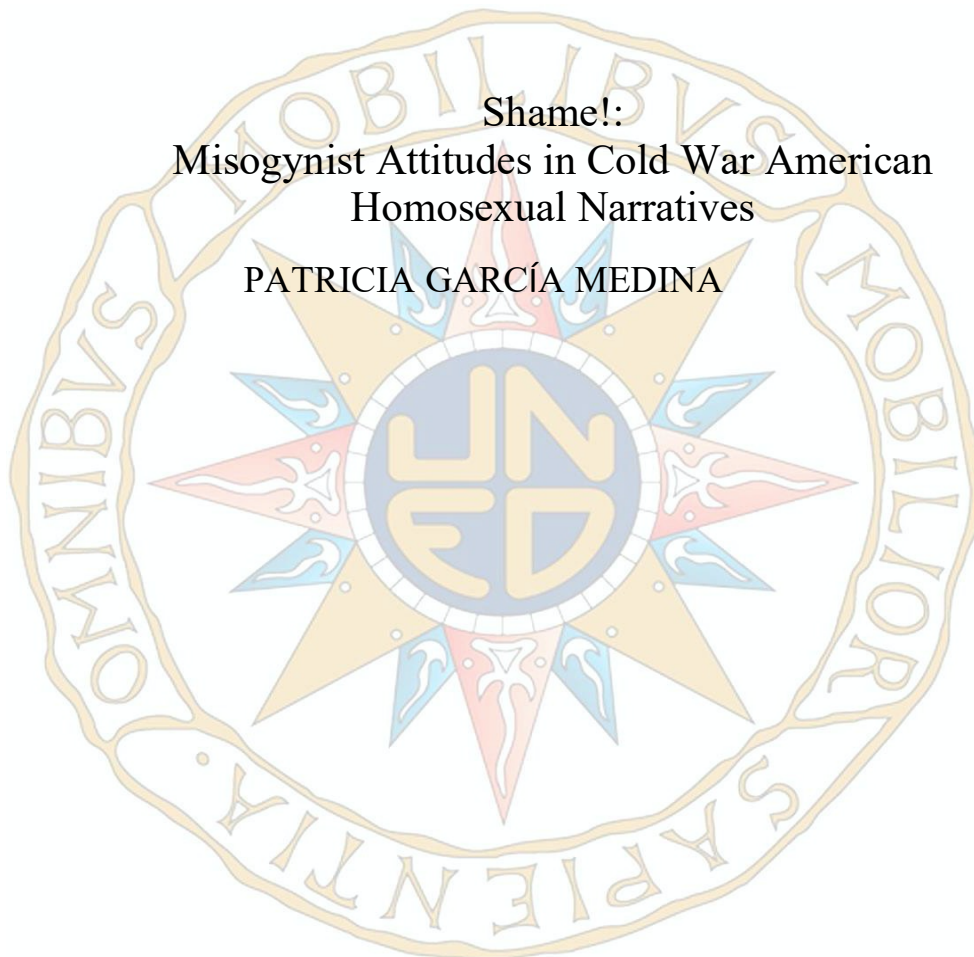




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Shame! Misogynistic Attitudes in Cold War American
Homosexual Narratives

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0. Introduction

0.1 Hypothesis

In this dissertation I plan on showing that the depiction of lesbian relationships and lesbians in Cold War literature, a key period in the United States for queer narratives due to the social movements that followed WWII, is misogynistic in its handling of the projections of homophobia, shame and guilt. Specifically focusing on the fiction literature that depicts queer characters in the decades ranging from the 1940s to the 1950s, I have chosen to look at how these traits develop in two novels with these characteristics from this period: *The Price of Salt* by Patricia Highsmith and *The City and The Pillar* by Gore Vidal. I argue that the homophobia exerted towards gay men in the narratives of this period does not follow the same patterns as the one that is pinned on lesbian women, which falls into a family-tied category. Lesbian women's shame and guilt are linked to betraying the roles that women had of caretakers and home makers, rather than exerting it in relation to the area of politics and society, as it is the case in the shame and guilt depicted in men's narratives.

0.2 State of the Art

The Cold War period in American history saw the flourishing of literature featuring queer characters thanks to the change in status the lesbian and gay communities had had during the Second World War. The relationship between history and literature proves extensively in this period of time, when two factors will prove key to the development of the queer movement in later decades: Firstly, the war would eventually give in to the necessity to provide homosexual individuals with an equal position in the lines of battle and war affairs. Secondly, and most probably as a consequence to the first factor, it facilitated the joining of gay and lesbian friendship groups. These groups, although highly discriminated against during and after the war, would prevail in time and create a sense unity in the homosexual community. Among other reasons, this sense of community made it somewhat easier for queer individuals to recognize their own feelings in others and thus consume the now popular lesbian and gay literature. This writing explored characters of all sorts and different backgrounds, hitting diverse literary genres, but especially enabled the publishing of popular novels with lesbian and gay characters in them. Scholars have already discussed from different perspectives how the homophobia was blatant in homosexual narratives, ideas that still echo on to this day. For instance, the clear notion that the closet was seen as a safe

space in 1950s US repeats in both the novels to be analyzed. The post-stonewall revolution that was led on the streets started in the secrecy of the home (Corber 1997; Bibler 2015). After World War II had validated the identity of so many gay men and lesbian women, queer social clubs started to be founded, only to extend on the relationships established in the time of the war. For the first time in history, homosexuals had developed a community that provided them with drive to fight against the blatant discrimination towards the community, which would eventually turn into the riots of the 70s. Although this idea is quite similar when looking into both gay and lesbian novels, there are many differences to be inferred as to how men are described to live this private life and how women are forced to live it.

Other scholars have also pointed out the fact that women's relationships were stigmatized in different ways that men's were, both sociologically and sexually. Lesbian women had successfully managed to stay under the radar of violence and hatred in many occasions, as their relationships were deemed as close friendships or as an unreal romantic relationship that lacked the gender bending uncomfortableness that male gay relationships entailed. Gay men's sexualities were much more overt, which made homosexual men the target of a more physical prosecution. The nineteenth century was a time when lesbian relationships were even praised in the grounds of women's "asexuality" and pursuit of moral excellency, which turned into a different pattern after WWII, but would nonetheless live on to be projected on to the novels written about women loving women (Faderman 1981; Bérubé 1990; Mitchel 2015). Homophobia is a clear trait of this genre at the time, which takes different shapes of in both of the novels being analyzed in this dissertation: *The Price of Salt* (1951) and *The City and the Pillar* (1948). Both authors (Patricia Highsmith and Gore Vidal respectively) having to have experienced homophobia themselves as queer novelists, use the works as a relief for the reality the lesbian and gay communities are enduring (Davidson 2015). The homophobia that the narration describes, however, projected in the main characters of these two novels differ on the basis of gender. The shame and guilt shown in the characters respond to misogynistic notions, placing said feelings of disgrace and culpability in different spheres of the characters' lives which is an idea that has not been yet widely discussed about the Cold War period. The shame that the lesbian characters propose in the novels is not the same as that shown for men, and it is clear from the analysis of these two novels from this specific period that the women's guilt is affiliated to their gender roles as females and their abandonment of motherhood, a type of guilt which does not burden the gay men in these novels. I will extend on this point in further sections of this paper, in order

to discuss what the implications for the characters are not only socially, but also in terms of their romantic relationships.

On these lines, Robert J. Corber leans on the cinematic adaptation of Highsmith's *Strangers on a Train* to highlight the American preoccupation of the second half of the twentieth century about homosexuality and communism. This opens the perfect window to discuss why homophobia towards men was more concerned with politics and society:

Corber argues that the film creates a resonance between discourse of homophobia and national security. [...] One discursive articulation of Cold War homophobia was the belief that gay men were susceptible to Communist propaganda, and were thus a threat to national security (Metz 2003: 210)

The notion of masculinity walked on thin ice during the Cold War period, when the economic systems crumbled and evolved into a completely different one. It was then that the figure of the strong, white, heterosexual man saw in this change a need to reconsider their own self-perception: “they [men] were forced to define themselves through their identities as consumers rather than as producers” (Corber 1997: 34). Robert J. Corber defends that this role, hitherto female, forces the male to readapt and this causes a time of uncertainty that shows in the need for reassurance that is present in Cold War literature. This role as a consumer swapping to the men turn masculine aggressiveness towards the home, which is where the foundation of the American family was. The rebellious Beat poets serve as a reflection of the turn that masculinity was taking at the time that the male characters in these novels were being portrayed. Scholars point at the fragility of masculinity at this time, deeply affecting all the male characters that will be analyzed in this dissertation, mostly Jim Willard and some of his partners in *The City and The Pillar*, as well as Richard and Hargess Aird in the case of *The Price of Salt*. According to Barbara Ehrenreich, the crisis of masculinity that protruded in the Cold War era influenced in the Beats their rejection to how women tied them: “Women and their demands for responsibility were, at worst, irritating and more often just uninteresting compared to the ecstatic possibilities of the male adventure” (Ehrenreich in Castela-Gómez 2016: 54). These misogynistic attitudes tightly link to what the characters in the two novels at stake represent, as will be dealt with in later sections of this thesis. This heightening of the masculine experience inevitably drives to the focalization that the Beats, specifically Allen Ginsberg, projected toward his overt homosexuality. As unforeseen as Ginsberg's confidence about homosexuality was, it does

not disentangle from the male freedom, based upon a disdainful concept of femininity, which is essentially the same notion that is projected upon the women of *The City and The Pillar*.

0.2 Objectives of analysis

I will be analyzing Patricia Highsmith's *The Price of Salt*, which was decades later republished under the name of *Carol*. For the sake of this analysis I will be referring to it by its original name, although I will also be looking at the fore and afterword included in the latest edition of the novel. My scope will also be put on Gore Vidal's *The City and the Pillar*. With this analysis I intend to find evidence of the narratorial details that reveal that the gay men in Gore Vidal's novel are entitled to live their homosexuality much more freely, given that the homophobic situations they endure imprison them much less than they do the women in Highsmith's novel. Both of them, written by queer authors and published around the same time (1952 and 1948 respectively), deal with the exceptionally delicate issue of struggling with homosexual identity and relationships while living in the early second half of the twentieth century. There are innumerable similarities in the experience of the main characters in these novels, but there is one crucial difference in between Carol Aird, Therese Belivet and Jim Willard: their gender. In my analysis of these two novels and their main characters (Jim Willard, Maria and Bob for *The City and The Pillar*, together with Therese Belivet, Carol Aird and Richard for *The Price of Salt*) I argue that the main characters' genders play a key role in the portrayal of their homosexuality.

0.3 Stages of analysis

For that, I will first have a look at the importance of WWII in the liberation of homosexual people in the US, paying attention at how recruitment of gay men and lesbian women helped many of them bond over their sexuality and create a sense of community that would later be crucial for their social fight. I will then dive into how the ideas of the subsequent Cold War backfired and turned homosexuality back into a national threat, which is clearly discernible through the events in both of the novels under scope in this dissertation. For that I will analyze how this national anxiety affects the necessity for a tragic ending of the novels, but specially focusing on where the tragedy is for the male protagonist in Vidal's novel, Jim, and where the tragedy lies behind the "happy ending" in Highsmith's. Tightly

wound with gender are the different projections of internalized homophobia that the characters show in the novels, which I will go into by paying attention to how their different experiences affect the way they struggle with their homosexuality. While the anxiety of homosexuality for Jim, the male protagonist in *The City and the Pillar*, resides in the shame for individual matters, I will argue that for Carol and Therese, the guilt resides in an external factor linked to their roles as women, instead of their individuality. I will then dedicate a fraction of my analysis to discovering how the liberation of women helped the characters in *The Price of Salt* to feel freer to live their relationships which was nowhere near the freedom allowed to Jim.

0.4 Theoretical Framework and methodology of analysis

For the topics at stake for this thesis, with the novels and periods selected I will be looking at them under the scope of a queer analytical perspective. Queer theory, which is increasingly gaining strength since the 1980s between scholars in different areas, concurs profoundly in one basic notion about queer research: there is political grounding to it:

While queer analytical perspectives offer a form of ‘critical scholarship’ that attempts to go beyond illustrating what is, (that is, unequal and unjust social relations based on gendered, sexualised and sexed categories), it also seeks to bring about material and social change (Nash 2010: 131)

This consequently implies that the materials surrendered to this field of study should take into account what is the social and political implication of the analysis of these texts, following the work of authors such as Corber (2003) or Zimmerman (2000). At the same time, I will point at the indivisible nature of the political context at the time of the production of these texts with how they were built. My approach will be along the lines of postmodernist criticism, in a text-based approach. As well as analyzing the texts through these approaches, I will take a close look to how feminist claims apply to these queer texts, using for that precedents of analysis such as those of landmark feminist theorists such as E. Abel (1982), pointing at issues like the deconstruction of myths in the dominant heteropatriarchal tradition that is present in these texts.

My analysis will be grounded on both queer and feminist issues that are dealt with in the novels and the actions and attitudes that differ on interpretation depending on the

gender of the protagonist, which will shed light towards the biases that the time when texts were written had towards the already mentioned misogyny and misrepresentation of the queer experience.

1. The rise of the queers: World War II liberation of LGBT communities and personalities.

It takes little argument to get to an agreement as to why novels with central queer narratives started to be clearly more prominent from the second half of the twentieth century on. Although it is true that some classic queer titles had already then been written and printed by that date, it was from that point on that publishers started taking an interest in the narratives that featured characters outside heteronormativity. The outlook is not so simple, of course. Lesbian and gay narratives were still openly judged, liable for moral deviance, subject to sexualization and many other disadvantages.

Second World War society leaned on the tragedy of deceased soldier lines and the desperation for new recruits to open the door to possibilities until then unimaginable. Many patriarchal rules were bent in favor of the necessities combat had created, including the widespread military maximum that the necessary traits to become a soldier were only to be found in heteronormative men. The tragic process of WWII had made all sorts of citizens apt for military service training, including homosexual men, lesbian women and even younger teenagers. Surprising as it might seem, prior to this, men were to be discarded from the service training if psychological examination deemed them to be not heterosexual: “Posted at the gates were the psychiatric examiners, many of them looking for hidden homosexuals” (Bérube 1990:33). By the summer of 1942, women and men, regardless of their sexual inclinations were equally trained to become part of the military environment, all acquiring traits until then deemed incompatible with femininity or any given ‘effeminate’ man (35) and all of them successfully completing the training.

Coming back to normality in the United States after the War meant an important reassignment of ideas on how life would look like from then on, including how people who had had their homosexuality *overlooked* were going to manage to keep this freedom from now on. Many marines settling in San Francisco admitted the strength this had given them to feel their identity strongly, as well as helping them start the talk on their ongoing discrimination: “Having served their country well [...] gay veterans, especially those who had fought in combat felt a heightened sense of legitimacy [...] and betrayal when denied benefits” (Bérubé 1990: 249)

Fiction reflects reality, inasmuch it was precisely around this time after the War that the queer community started to be more comfortable in its isolation from the spheres that had until then confined them: “The massive mobilizations of World War II helped foster a burgeoning gay subculture [...] After the war, many settled in these cities, and gay and lesbian subcultures became more and more visible.” (Bibler 2015:125). Michael P. Bibler is here right to assert that these subcultures became more visible, which accounts for the previously stated new thematic recurrence of lesbian and gay narrative plots. These reimaginations of the roots of the lesbian and gay communities only meant that a window had been opened for them to stare into and by no means would it signify the ending of the serious disadvantages homosexuals had to endure at the hands of society. However, it was the beginning of the question that would eventually lead to revolution. Homosexuals, having a new perspective on their own homosexuality, would start to shape how gay and lesbian characters in narratives would become more common, less tragic: “Other gay veterans began to feel less deviant after the war—and wondered if society might develop a new morality toward them” (Bérubé 1990: 250). The tragedy of their unfair psychiatric treatments also served as a bonding experience where gay and lesbian veterans realized they were being victims of the same type of prosecution. Radically different from the previous generations’ self-loathing that society was able to cast on the homosexual community, these small details constitute the spark of a change that would push the community forward without so many shame restrictions.

Apart from this, their roles that were crucial for the development of the war meant not only that the military would forcefully have to recognize the validity of homosexuals that until then had been neglected but that the community now had something to hold on to in order to justify their claims for rights as equal citizens. Unlike straight veterans of the war, homosexual veterans were “discharged as undesirables without benefits” which gave them a “target to attack, and new avenues of appeal to defend their rights as gay GIs and veterans” (256). However, as empowering as this injustice might have been for gay men and lesbian women who had served in the military, their inequality was also to be heightened. Thousands of people were given dishonorable discharges, the blue discharge, which supposed not only their being deprived of GI Bill entitlements, but to be discriminated on the basis of sexual orientation for the rest of their professional career. On the backside of the coin, there were some homosexuals who managed to shroud their sexuality, which lead to their possibility of them being able to keep their right to an honorable discharge: “ Thousands more gay men, bisexuals, and lesbians who managed to secure honorable discharges were able to enjoy GI

Bill entitlements only so long as they continued to conceal their sexuality from authorities” (Littauer 2018: 69)

Women’s same experience on this inevitably reveals an added layer shaped by misogyny in lesbian’s relationships. Women’s homosexuality had been for decades cast by texts as innocent, lacking the gravity of gay men’s homosexuality, due to the fact that women’s relationships were taken as emotional and not always culminant in sex (Faderman 1983: 19). The so called “gender bending” was the most overt problem that homosexual relationships presented. Mostly showing through the male abandonment of masculinity through the sexual act, because of the masculine and feminine roles assigned to each participant, was not so easily seen in non-sexual relationships. The fact that lesbian relationships were for so long deemed non-sexual, meant that the prosecution was not as rigid. The nineteenth century conception of the so called “romantic friendships” that had long been praised as well as overlooked vanished in the ideologies that reigned over the first half of the twentieth century. Closeness in between women started to be regarded as deviant in the first half of the XX century, gaining similarities with the eyebrows male homosexuality rose. Consequently, queer fiction writers of novels in the 1950s (such as the ones under analysis in these pages) inevitably took on the subtext of their heterosexual counterparts. Both of them had internalized homophobia, thus transmitting it to their novels:

Not only did twentieth-century lesbian literature by heterosexuals usually show love between women to be a disease, but that women who were professedly lesbian generally internalized those views. This was reflected in their own literature, which was full of self-doubts and self-loathing until the 1960s (Faderman 1983: 20).

Patricia Highsmith’s focalizer in *The Price of Salt*, Therese, serves as the perfect example of this self-doubting and hate that Faderman identified. The character is built around indecision, self-hate and with her inability to speak her mind with clarity or even make up her mind. Malleable to irritant levels, Therese starts off as casting the sensation that her life has not yet started. Although the reader learns through her actions that she is independent, active and conscious of her flaws of character, her thoughts project an absence of drive that suggests annulment by the people surrounding her: “Therese got up, as if she had no will of her own” (Highsmith 2015:14) . Her relationship with her own feelings for Carol kickstarts a spark of self-doubt that will not cease until the end of the novel, when it

seems to switch sides and pollute her lover instead in the final chapters of the novel: “You’ve come out all of a sudden. Is that what comes with getting away from me?” (294)

Self-loathing is something the gay community endured regardless of gender identity. Homosexual novels dealt most frequently with the issue of identity and the self-loathing as a homosexual in the Cold War period. In fact, the narration in Gore Vidal’s interpretation of Jim’s homosexuality is revolutionary in a period that had the perfect scenario for the redefining of terms. The conception of homosexuality as a “desire to escape gender, to deny it, to transcend it” (Corber 1997: 138) as was argued by some scholars was fought by Vidal in his reimagining and masculinization of male homosexuality. The outcome of this intention is extracted in the narrative to exert an excess of masculine supremacy that will show in the narrative as well as in the implications of the characters’ actions. These controversy with identity that the authors feel the need to explore, of course, do not emerge out of thin air. The social context that the Cold War had set, broadly showed in American society through the power of the older generations, which deeply influenced how homosexual authors interpreted their own homosexuality: “the older generation revealed anxiety about the changes in gender identity that they perceived in the young: languidness and long hair on young men and the promiscuity of young men and women” (Snyder 2007: 252)

Indeed, Gore Vidal would anticipate in the introduction to his *The City And The Pillar* what his own education on homosexuality dictated: “Until then [the time of the publication of his novel] American novels of “inversion” dealt with transvestites or with lonely bookish boys who married unhappily and pine for Marines” (Vidal 1948:,5). This fact would account for the prominent need the author had to find the representation of the masculine in his novel, given he had not found it for his own development as a human being.

Later generations of activists fighting for LGBT rights, especially liberationist homosexual activists, would take on Vidal’s rejection of the use of the term homosexual as a noun in favor of its use as an adjective to add on a layer of identity that would help mobilize the masses on demand for minority rights (Corber. 1997: 140).

The historical times the novels are set in make a deep impression on how the characters interpret the events, almost as if the war was one more character to throw a shadow over events. The war is understandably described differently from the female perspective and the male. In fact, from the appearances that the war makes in *The Price of Salt* it seems that it is a masculine domain. Never do the women talk about it except to mention it in relation to the men: “Richard mingling war and big business [...] and finally certain people he knew into one grand enemy, whose only collective label was hate”

(Highsmith, 136). Cold War anxiety, which turned every bit of society into a possible enemy is here expressed to be a male worry, not only through Therese's focalization but also through Carol's: "Maybe it's the times. If one wanted to, one could make out a case for racial suicide. Man trying to catch up with his own destructive machines" (Highsmith 2015:136). The only anxiety about the war that is shown to reach Therese, though, is shown in the next few lines; the anxiety of dying suddenly and unexpectedly: "Do you think both of us will die violently someday, be suddenly shut off?" (136). The reason for this anxiety, though, has no links to the social disaster WWII had caused in earlier years or with the panic of the possibility of hidden threats the Cold War provoked. The focalizer points her fear towards dying and not having enough time to get to know the woman she has fallen in love with: "Perhaps it was a statement after all: I don't want to die yet without knowing you" (136). Therese worries about the possibility of war only to see how it could affect her life in relation to her love affair.

The war, incipient in the timeline of *The City and The Pillar* is never linked to any of the women in any other way either. Jim Willard's relationship to WWII is not specifically tight, given that he does not live it in the first person but rather as an echo of distant events happening in Europe: "Jim lost interest in the war because there had been no battles" (Vidal 1948: 4,I:40). Interestingly, there is one conversation about the war once it is over in which the role of women in it is dealt with as nonexistent: "I'll bet you look good in a uniform. But I'm glad it's finally over, the war". (1: 46). Jim has a quite unilateral conversation with a Spanish woman in a bar, probably a sex worker as suggested by the narrative, whose past is unclear but probably linked to the war in various ways. Given her Spanish origin, it is possible that she had to flee Spain in the times of the Spanish Civil War only to move to a country that engaged in WWII. Even if these links are possible, she never comments on anything other than her interest in the role of Jim in it, not wanting to discuss or share experiences. This further ascertains the claim that the issue of the war, although socially shared by both men and women, queer and straight, is only shown to concern, in these narratives, men.

2. Imprisoned liberty: The curse of unhappy endings

Fictional homosexual narratives had already been exploited by publishing houses before the second half of the twentieth century. However, the mentioned favorable situation at the time of these two novels would call for a freer, more open and accepting interpretation of the relationship between the main characters and their love interests. Gay and lesbian narratives were rarely, nonetheless, portrayals of happy endings. Even in this somewhat favorable social context that the war had created, the baggage that the homosexual community had on its back shaped the way in which these stories were being transmitted to contemporary and future generations. Interestingly enough, there are many differences to be inferred from the Gore Vidal's portrayal of homosexuality and Patricia Highsmith's based only on the gender of their protagonists.

There is no denying that the historical context the war had left the door open for what would become a literary revolution. As Highsmith herself wrote in her afterword to the 1989 re-edition of *The Price of Salt*, her novel created an impact in the community that transcended generations because of the freshness of its happy ending. The emotional development of the two female characters in the novel materializing into their actually starting a life together in a healthy environment was something hitherto never published: "The appeal of *The Price of Salt* was that it had a happy ending for its two main characters, or at least they were going to try to have a future together" (Highsmith 2015: 311). The fact that this happy ending was accepted for publishing precisely at this time is no coincidence. The upheaved status of the subculture of homosexuality started to make publishing houses have a ghoulish fascination with the publication of novels that would feature lesbian characters. The publication of Allen Ginsberg's *Howl* served as the pulling of a literary trigger that moved the debate of homosexuality from shameful rooms to the public territory. The atmosphere being slightly more open to the conversation did not make it easy for Ginsberg to be honest about his homosexuality. In fact, the boldness of writing his poetry about politically controversial matters was part of what made his generation of poets, the Beats, remarkable. Ginsberg himself admitted his controversial poem *Howl* did not result in him being intimidated: "When I asked him why he hadn't been silenced by the climate of the Cold War and the anti-communist crusaders [...] he said that he had never been intimidated and never felt afraid" (Raskin 2004: 15).

Thus, the publication of this poem was a risky act for the political time of the Cold War, but it was nonetheless the time to publish it. The fact that the representation of queer characters in literature is unrealistic or tragic is, thus, a common characteristic of this literature.

Mentioned happy endings are so rare that they do not make an appearance even in Vidal's *The City and the Pillar*. Instead, the author presents us with a protagonist who never manages to surpass the barrier of self-loathing towards himself and the homosexual community. The ending in this case would agree with the tendency in homosexual narratives to leave the main character stranded, depressed and feeling an overall sense of guilt and shame. Vidal himself recognizes in his introduction to the 1965 edition of his novel under scope for this dissertation that it was coding at the time that "wickedness" (Vidal, introduction: 12) had to be punished, not conceiving it to be possible to have a homosexual narrative be cheery in its ending. The author, though, will go on to defend that Bob's dramatic murder was always intended and in no way due to pressure from the publishing house.

Surrendering to the expectations of masculinity Jim has been unable to let go, he walks away in the dark after having destroyed with unreasonable violence the only memory he had always been eager to walk back to: that night in the woods with Bob: "The lover and brother was gone, replaced by a memory of bruised flesh, tangled sheets, violence" (Vidal 1995: ch. 11). The final image of the novel suggests not only loneliness, regret and darkness, but also a wink to Jim taking his own life as the only way in which he could redeem his trauma. Making an allusion to the night by the river that had started his sexual awareness (losing his virginity to Bob back when they were teenagers): "Once more, he stood beside a river" (Vidal 1995: 11) Vidal seems to be hinting at the only possible ending of his, to move on with death: "Fascinated, he watched the water shifting dark and cold against the stony island. Soon he would move on." (ch. 11). However strong the suggestion of suicide might be in these lines, taking the literal meaning of moving on would also mean that Jim is not allowed to settle and be happy in the universe he had built for himself after years of saving and hard work. The reference that the omniscient narrator makes to the moment back in the river, which has been all Jim had desired through his entire journey serves as a cycle closing thought for the protagonist. This cycle-closing device shows the reader, that it is the path of violence that Jim has consciously decided to take after all of the experiences he has endured.

In a similar cycle-closing device (although for a happier purpose) the narrator in *The Price of Salt* uses Therese's doubts about her love for Carol. Throughout the entire novel,

internalized homophobia has led Therese to doubt if it could actually be love that she felt for Carol given she was not a man: “Could she say she was in love with Carol? She had come to a question she could not answer” (Highsmith 2015: 77); “It would be almost like love, what she felt for Carol, except that Carol was a woman.” (52); “Was it love or wasn’t it that she felt for Carol?” (100). Examples like these pile up through the novel, joined with Therese’s self-doubting and lack of drive, which will be dealt with later in this dissertation. These doubts eventually lead up to an assertive Therese who is capable of admitting that it is in fact love what she feels for a woman is a major step forward for homosexual narratives: “and it was Carol she loved and would always love.” (307).

It is also important to notice that, in contrast with *The City and the Pillar*’s last lines, these words necessarily imply the happiness at the acceptance of the fact that Therese loves Carol, whereas Jim’s last lines hide dark undertones that turn the ending into a tragic one where the protagonist will end up either dead or isolated. The groundbreaking fact of Highsmith’s decision to shatter this norm lies in changing the narrative that “To deviate from the lines is to be threatened with unhappiness” (Ahmed 2010: 91) or that to be something not agreeing with heterosexuality would most possibly entail tragedy. In fact, even in novels with a “pro-lesbian message” the protagonists will struggle emotionally, coming about each other through drama (Stenson 2010: 624), like the protagonists of *The Price of Salt* do. In this and many other pulp lesbian novels the ending is left open for hope, which is a great advancement considering that: “the prevalence of suicide and deaths, just being alive at the close could be considered an uplifting ending” (624)

Sara Ahmed already discussed the importance of a happy or unhappy ending in a queer narrative making an interesting remark on how homosexual authors of queer novels would already be aware of the use of these tragic endings. Giving the queer main character an unhappy ending would serve two purposes: First, it would make sure that the story would be appropriate to go to print, given that publishers would consider the character punished enough for their homosexuality. Second, by avoiding this censorship, it would make sure that the gay and lesbian communities had characters in narratives that they could relate to (Ahmed 2010: 88). Thus it can be inferred that the loneliness, dreary environment or death would actually be the best and only possible outcome for this type of novels: “We are not obliged to ‘believe’ in the unhappy ending by taking it literally, as ‘evidence’ that lesbians and gays must turn straight, die or go mad. What mattered was the existence of a ‘new book about us’” (89).

Highsmith's seemingly favorable approach to the ending of her novel, though, encloses a dark message in it, given that her ending is not happy at all. As I mentioned above, Gore Vidal's protagonist in *The City and the Pillar* faces an ending that suggests death or isolation due to his shame and the murder of the only man he showed feelings for. Purposefully the narrative drives the reader to believe Jim is lost after the violence perpetrated towards Bob: "He laughed loudly for several moments and then he stopped, wanting to cry or sob or shout" (Vidal 1995: Ch. 11). These lines give the reader the sense that Jim ultimately gave in to a 'sinful' lifestyle and this turned him into the monster that was capable of murdering an innocent man. Further so, Jim's establishment in New York, comfortable in the homosexual subculture, might drive the reader to think that it is this that has finally turned him into a violent senseless person as the one described to have killed Bob, a father and husband. Bob's disgust is made clear: "You're nothing but a damned queer!" (10, I) and it is Jim's inability or incapacity to deal with the pain and shame that it caused him to hear this from Bob, that it made him take on his anger: "Then fury came to Jim, took the place of love. [...] It was like a nightmare" (10, I). But in the case of Carol Aird, punishment of being deprived of love comes as severely. This is most definitely because of her history of lesbian relationships.

Carol has ultimately lost the custody of her daughter after the proof presented of her relationship with Therese and other women. The aggressive divorce settlement stems only from the frustration that Hargess feels in seeing his home wreck. He tortures his wife emotionally with the only weapon he seems to have to control his wife: "That was a retaliation for Carol's refusing to spend Harge's vacation with him at his family's summer house" (192). His anger over his lack of control over his wife, the reason that lead him to hire a detective that ultimately got proof of the relationship between the two women. Carol's losing, thus, is seen directly as a cause of the evidence presented: "I've lost completely", "Harge told the lawyers everything –whatever they didn't know already" (296). Carol refusing to give in to the "list of misdemeanors" Hargess and his family proposed indicates that she held on to her right to live her life as she pleased, and it cost her her daughter. More so, she is ultimately forced to choose between her family and her sexuality: "I refused to live by a list of misdemeanors – even if it did mean that they'd lock Rindy away from me as if I were an ogre. And it did mean that" (296). Lesbian and gay narratives tend to include these sorts of punishment which: "seeks to neutralize these positive messages" (Mitchell 2015: 162). That being the case, the happy ending for Carol encloses a message of defeat, where even if Carol and Therese manage to stay together in the end, the narrative would enclose it

with a penalizing note. In fact, due to how the trial is depicted in the novel, it is clear that there is punishment for the relationship Carol and Therese had during the turmoil of the former's divorce. The proof that Hargess' detective could extract after the two women's journey makes it impossible for her to even have a chance to a claim. The feeling the narrative links to this situation is, again, shame: "I should be ashamed, not for myself oddly enough, but for my own child" (271).

In the novel, Carol has long battled for her divorce, quite a scandal in the 1950s post-war America. However, as she points out several times throughout the novel, her marriage has been damaged for a long time, acting as a yoke to her. The main fight in this divorce, however, would not be the settlement of money, but rather the custody of Carol and Hargess' daughter. Hargess, Carol's husband, hangs on to the hope of Carol falling back in love with him only through his manipulation of her control over their daughter. Her preoccupation over losing Rindy is constant throughout the whole novel, making it clear that Carol is tied to her marital life, even if this is not what she wants anymore, making things difficult for her: "Harge doesn't make it easy for you to see her, does he?" (Highsmith 2015: 135), "It's not love. It's a compulsion. I think he wants to control me." (135). Carol goes here even further as to ascertain that her husband would have been pleasant to her if she had been submissive: "I suppose if I was a lot wilder but never had an opinion on anything except his opinion" (135). In fact, most of the distance that is drawn in between the two women is projected by Hargess. Since the start of their acquaintance, Carol's divorce puts distance in between the two women, as these problems occupy a lot of the older woman's thoughts: "Something too long to explain' [...] And a silence followed, an empty silence as if they travelled through space away from each other" (78).

Conclusively, the endings in these two queer novels seem to agree in their tragedy. The immersion of the characters in the homosexual subculture and their admittance of it, in the case of Jim by making a move on his love for Bob and in the case of Carol Aird in refusing to give in to the requirements of her husband's family, lead to their being doomed to live a life of absence. Jim will either die, as suggested by the narrative or live in the absence of peace of mind, after murdering Bob; while Carol will be forced to live in the absence of her daughter. However, their unhappiness lies in one very different pillar: Jim's doom stems from the consequences of his own actions, while Carol is forced by outer forces to renounce the most important part of her life if she wants to freely live her love for Therese. Although Jim's raging anger is suggested in *The City and the Pillar* to have stemmed from his being immersed in the homosexual subculture and how his shame made it unbearable for

him to hear Bob call him a 'queer', ultimately all of his actions lie on him. The same cannot be said about Carol, given that the threat of losing Rindy is what keeps the anxiety about her relationship with Therese alive along the story. The doom for the woman is familiar, related to her role as a mom and a home keeper, while Jim's doom is entirely a consequence of the violence he received and is exerting out on society, personified in Bob.

3. Marriage: Cold War pressure on the exemplarity of the nuclear family

Cold War America was in deep need for stability and ideological safety. Traditions brought along psychological safety, which imprisoned the possibilities for advancement, seen as alien and dangerous. Consequently, the acceptance of homosexuality, which had been stigmatized for centuries was not likely to make the cut into the American mainstream lifestyle. Political movements started to force the community into the so called 'mainstream'. This approached homosexuality and queerness from a wrong angle, trying to accommodate the community into the oppressive society rather than doing it the other way around, by accommodating society towards equality. Movements in the Cold War period would urge to the normativity of homosexual people by adapting to tight gender roles: "Organizers of demonstrations in this period [1950s-1960s] often insisted on strict dress codes: participants were required to dress in conservative clothing perceived as appropriate to their gender, dresses for women, suit and tie for men." (Stevens 2011: 82). However, even if the social context was positively ready to start a conversation, the American public was not. This contradiction shows in different aspects of the two novels under scope for this thesis, which narrative portrays the family anxiety that this era was characterized by:

As families were reunited and struggled to put their lives back together after the war, articles, books advertisements, and the media promoted idealized versions of the nuclear family, heterosexuality, and traditional gender roles in the home and in the workplace. [...] The media and government propaganda associated homosexuals and other "sex psychopaths" with communists as the most dangerous nonconformists (Bérubé 1990: 258)

Homophobia was being validated in the social anxiety of a community terrorized by war by the promotion of the well-known and well-established models of the nuclear family. Rejected by the country to whom gay veterans had devoted their work to during WWII, homosexuals felt more exposed to hatred than ever before. However, this vulnerability put lesbian women in a position of disadvantage in comparison to gay men, given that traditional strict gender roles were to dominate education and expectations once again, a barrier that the hardships of the war had slightly deconstructed for women. American authorities would

regard homosexuals as “a more serious national security threat than communists” (Littauer 2018: 69), and what is more, they would turn them into specific targets. Female school-teachers “faced intense scrutiny and pressure to marry” (69). Men and women felt also an excruciating pressure in order to “display perfect gender conformity in their mannerisms, appearance and institutional position”. (69). *The City and The Pillar* projects the character of Jim Willard as one who is allowed to self-discovery through the exploration of the world, which he can perform thanks to his straight looking lifestyle. The masculine gender performance of Jim, and subsequently his overt masculinity will play a major part in Gore Vidal’s novel. On the contrary, Highsmith’s *The Price of Salt* inevitably puts Carol and Therese’s gender in a position of disadvantage, both in terms of not possessing the ability to explore themselves and the queer world as Jim does, with liberty and in terms of the pressure they feel to be married or in the case of Carol, stay in a nuclear family model. Carol Aird’s character serves as the example of the life of a queer woman on whom societal restrictions have taken a toll, as she married young only to serve the purpose of normality. Therese will serve the example of a woman who has to a certain extent fought to untangle herself from these social notions, by fighting for a more independent life. However, they both suffer the consequences of their decisions as will be further explored later in this section.

As has happened with previous examples throughout this dissertation, there is a stance to be taken about how Jim and his partners, all men, live their privacy and secrecy and what the reader can draw from the narrative and how Carol and Therese are unable to. The fact that the narrative in *Carol* is driven by women will disable them to fight for any type of individuality outside what the gender roles have established for women, thus obstructing lesbian identity construction. The two main protagonists of the two novels, Jim and Therese, share the same desire for individuality and unapologetic freedom. The difference in between both of them is that the narrative in *The City and The Pillar* allowed Jim to explore himself emotionally in his youth by joining the navy. By having the agency of deciding about his future, Jim decided to escape an unwelcoming familiar home by joining the navy, following on his first love’s footsteps (Bob). All of the traveling that Jim did allowed him to explore the world of sex (for instance when a comrade takes him to his first brothel hoping he would have sex for the first time with one of the women working there), thus being allowed to discover his preference for men: “Caribbean, Pacific, Bering Sea, all over. I been around” (Vidal 1995: 4, I). The evolution of ideas about masculinity in the 1950s era can be easily discerned from the notions that were defended by the authors in the Beat generation. The crisis of masculinity in the post-war period lead to the heightening of

masculinity, which only happened through the antagonization of women in their imprisoned role of the home maker. Suddenly, the familiar sphere seemed to be tying and restricting, something that men were able to avoid while women were not. This imprisonment was to be avoided at all costs, looking at life through the lenses of adventure: “The possibility of walking out, without money or guilt, and without ambition other than to see and do everything, was not even immanent [...] when Kerouac wrote *On The Road*” (Ehrenreich In: Castelao-Gómez 2016: 55). This lack of money and guilt is clearly seeable in the case of Jim, who enlisted in the navy with the sole desire of walking out of his family home and explore the world. Without question or social responsibility, Jim was able to flee, and this feeling will extend to his ability to explore his sexuality.

In the case of the women in *The Price of Salt* it is clear that gender roles leashed them to their own fear, pushing Carol to marry her husband really young and making Therese unable to process why it was she had never felt desire for any of her boyfriends. Carol deems her marriage as a mistake, clearly pushed by the social boundaries that the Cold War had established: “At least you’re not going to make the same mistake I did, marry because it was the thing to do when you were about twenty, among the people I knew” (Highsmith 2015: 82). In fact it is made clear throughout the narrative how imprisoned both women feel by the relationships they have with men, which are the only thing they have known: “It summed up everything, her imprisonment now, here, yet [...] It was so easy for a man and a woman to find each other, to find someone who would do” (163). From this train of thought, one can infer that Therese looked in men for someone who would just fill a blank space, not realizing that love was about more than just that. Even if Carol’s marriage was accompanied by apparent love, her feeling now has clearly changed: “It’s just that now I can see who he really is” (83). Her sexual experience seems to be broader than Therese’s, given that she comments on her sexual encounters with men and women, but she is still castrated by how young she got married: “The first adventures are usually nothing but a satisfying of curiosity, and after that one keeps repeating the same actions, trying to find– what?” (83).

The narrative in Vidal guides the reader bluntly through the scenes that turn Jim into the person he would become as an adult. Scenes of homosexuality are shown, the focalization turns curiosity into something attractive and almost desirable. The feelings of rejection are normally acquainted through anger in the case of Jim, finding disagreeable the behavior of other men who loved men, but ultimately, he is free to form his own opinion: “Jim sent through several stages after his discovery that there were indeed many men who liked other men. His first reaction was disgust and alarm” (Vidal 1995: 4, I). The narrative

in Highsmith's novel gives the contrary effect, it presents guilt within the feelings of the two women, primarily tied to their relationships with men, making the reader position on the side of how both women are doing something wrong by not being faithful (emotionally). The narrative presents this guilt in an extremely personal way, one that is not necessarily described with words, but is instead achieved through the reader's own interpretations. Both Richard and Hargess, Therese and Carol's partners respectively, are brought into the scene in very particular moments, projecting their plans or expressing their feelings so that the reader can grow sympathy for them. Being the reader aware of how the relationship between the two women is developing, the men making an entrance on the scene would remind the reader that these women are compromised to the heteronormative model and are directly betraying it (through the figure of the men in their lives) by falling in love with each other. One such instance is observed when Therese struggles to let Richard know she is planning on embarking on a long trip with a married woman she barely knows. Pushed by this pressure, she "felt a sudden compassion for him", which the narrative reinforces by introducing Richard's clueless hopes for Therese and him to have a future together: "She knew Richard meant to show her an ideal life [...] to remind her that they might live together the same way one day" (152). Therese and Carol start to spend time together quite frequently and quite rapidly but always showing second thoughts about it, turning it into something both wrong and exciting.

The influence Hargess has over his wife is made especially overt when the two women are in the house. Carol, normally authoritative and carefree, tightens and loses her power in favor of whatever Hargess is on the house for. In fact, the first time that Therese's focalization allows the reader to get a first-hand account of Carol's husband, the narration masterfully drives the reader's anxiety by speeding up the pace of Therese's description, which moves from the most subtle step: "Then there was no sound until Carol's first step on the stair" (70) to then a rapid pace that shows a tense Carol: "Who's coming?" [...] 'My Husband' she said 'Hargess'. Then the doorbell chimed twice downstairs, and the latch clicked at the same time" (70). Different scenes depicting the sudden appearance of Hargess all follow the same pattern of anxiety: "Restlessly, she began to to put the room in order" (172) or "She closed the door and looked around the room, realized she was looking for any sign that she had spent the night" (175). This pace speeding up, which the narrator purposefully introduces to make the reader and the characters anxious about the situation, turns Therese and Carol's meeting into something reprimand worthy. The action of both women spending time at Carol's home suddenly makes them tense, feel like two children

caught red handed stealing cookies from the kitchen counter: “Therese felt the disdain and incivility in the question, like the sting of a slap in the face” (72). Even in the slightest symbol, Carol’s home feels like delinquency in the presence of Hargess: “He walked to his overcoat that Therese had noticed on the loveseat, sprawled open with its black arms spread as if it were fighting and would take possession of the house” (72). However, this feeling of inadequacy deeply affects mostly Carol, who loses her self-confidence in the house and around her husband: “Therese saw the same look of indecision cross her face that Therese remembered from the first moment she had entered the house” (173). Especially significant is the fact that the two women’s guilt or shame is not even linked to having had sexual relations in the familiar house, but rather to the simple fact of spending time together in that specific place.

It is this feeling of shame and the fact that it is mostly exerted in the household that is not shared in Gore Vidal’s account of a gay man’s life. The shame that Carol and Therese feel is tied to family and the household, Jim’s is not. In fact, Jim is completely free to live his first relationship with a man, Shaw freely and unattached. Jim moves in with his lover, only slightly worried that people would make comments, but being self-assured and confident in his decision. The narration in Carol, as mentioned above, projects anxiety over spending time with Therese in the home that Carol once shared with her son-to-be ex-husband: “She was preoccupied with something, and regretted after all inviting her out to the house, Therese felt” (62). The notions of the household in Cold War that were mentioned in the first section of this dissertation perfectly encapsulate why it is that Therese never really feels at ease when at Carol’s, providing reasoning for the fact that the narrator wants the reader to feel this anxiety as well. As defended by Victoria Hesford:

Therese’s presence jars the picture the house is built to provide [...] She is an imposter, someone who has to hide her things when Carol’s husband drops for a visit. Like the letter Therese slips between the pages of the *Oxford Book of Poetry*, the love between Carol and Therese cannot be expressed openly within the house. (Hesford 2005: 227).

As a main diversification in the two novels under scope in this dissertation there is this: the women in the lesbian novel are tied to men, a type of surveillance men do not have to endure. Carol is imprisoned in her marriage, as has been established, because of a social obligation to get married and go with the flow of that life stage: “With my marriage failing,

I was too afraid and too weak” (Highsmith 2015: 209). Therese is younger than her lover, more ambitious than her, more independent, but still, she is shown to be subject to manipulation through her inability to refuse other people’s desires. This shows in her relationship with Richard, which she is not comfortable in since the beginning “It isn’t pleasant. And I’m not in love with him” (81). In fact, once Therese starts considering her feelings for Carol, her boyfriend begins to be a source of anxiety and control: “It was not a manifestation of affection, but rather a means of ingratiating himself” (166). Even so, Therese lingers through the memories of their relationship together, feeling guilt when telling him about her trip with Carol: “The compassion for Richard was still in her, dragging after it an amorphous wake of guilt and a necessity to atone” (152). The fact that the two women are tied to men in a way that would make them feel guilty, trapped and like they are acting wrongfully, adds a layer of evil to their feelings for each other that Jim does not have to endure. The protagonist’s guilt in *The City and The Pillar* is not linked to any past relationship, as well as not entailing any type of betrayal on his part, like Carol’s does. Jim does not feel guilt at all by his actions, until the very end, when his guilt can be exerted from his feelings after murdering his first love Bob.

Although it might seem that the idea of marriage is poisoned in these texts, given that both these narratives reject it, there is a key difference in the rejection of marriage in each of them: Mrs. Robichek. The moments in Carol that Therese spends prior to meeting Carol Aird are spent in a frenzy of lonely, indecision-driven days. Her brand-new job at Frankenberg’s for the Christmas season provide her with nothing but bleakness and, curiously, the personification of it is introduced as well in the very first pages, a woman who has kept her job at the depressing store for around five years at that moment. Mrs. Robichek represents an interesting form of a woman in New York that immediately Therese is repulsed by. Alone in life, although wearing a “gold wedding ring” (6), Mrs. Robichek embodies the fate of female individualism. A woman left alone after marriage, most probably due to an abandonment that has left her living a solitary life and depending on a depressing job for a living. The issue lies on the impression the focalization projects on the reader, undeserving of pity and rather giving off a sensation of disgust: “Mrs. Robichek was the hunchbacked keeper of the dungeon. And she had been brought here to be tantalized” (16).

Therese’s lack of drive made her be coerced into visiting Mrs. Robichek’s apartment against her own wishes, which eventually leads to this feeling of discomfort. However, the horror that Therese feels is mostly linked to the hopelessness the life of Mrs. Robichek shelters, symbolized through her ugliness: “She knew that it was the hopelessness that

terrified her and nothing else”. Standing in the small apartment of a working woman who had nothing left but her ugly job and her ugly dresses, Therese runs away scared that that will become her reality. The only difference between Mrs. Robichek and her is age, given that they share the same employer, same hopes for independence that has become for the older woman into a life doomed by the loneliness and the loss of all hope: “flee before it was too late, before the chains fell around her and locked” (16). Therese’s anxiety in this scene progressively increases, one step at a time, when each of the symbols in Mrs. Robichek life start to fall on to her, starting with the dress the strange lady convinced her to put on and finishing with the spoonful of syrup she put on her mouth. The protagonist cannot confront her fear, being unable to express her desire to leave at once. The reason for this desire to leave alongside with the utter fright the protagonist shows is what should be most noticeable here: “If she did [lie down] she was lost. The chains would lock, and she would be the one with the hunchback” (17). The fear Therese feels is attached to her belief that she could become Mrs. Robichek: get her manners, her sad job, her loneliness and most of all, her hopelessness.

The life of a single (maybe divorced) woman in her fifties in Cold-War New York, can support herself entirely needing only her wages is perceived through the narrative to be lonely, sad, depressing as well as undesirable. Even her physicality shows signs of the unforgiving burden that makes her tired: “Mrs. Robichek finished with a shrug, as if that were less effort than a smile” (12) this weight reveals even physically in her posture, as if she was truly carrying a physical burden: “Now she was like the hunched old woman Therese had seen creeping down the stairs” (12). Focalized through Therese, who shares virtually the same type of life with the only difference of her age, the narrative conveys that a single woman’s life like the one Therese is living will only lead to becoming Mrs. Robichek. There is no other character who arises such disgust in Therese as Mrs. Robichek does, even if it stems from a branch of pity that the younger woman feels for how her life has unraveled. Although it might seem contradictory that a narrative whose female protagonist living an independent life in an America during the Cold War projects anxiety over not conforming to the norm, this foreshadowing is clear. Therese does not yearn for marriage, has an apartment of her own and is ambitious in what refers to her career options. Therese likes this life, regardless of why she made her decision, and she likes it. However, the reason why Therese has in fact traveled the trail of independence plays a role in the underlying message of the narrative. The fact that her traumatic relationship with her parents and their abandonment led her to living a lonely childhood, educated by nuns in boarding schools

where affection was scarce and coldness reigned suggests that this type of life would not have been chosen in a healthy environment. Perhaps more overtly associated with the context is the consequence of not conforming to heteronormativity because of the Cold War anxiety hovering over an intrusion of the home analyzed above. Therese seems to realize in this meeting what society had been telling her: time was working against her in this life she had chosen, and she will be locked in Mrs. Robichek's skin if she follows this path. Thus, the focalizer in *The Price of Salt* not choosing to conform to the norm is secretly portrayed as a consequence of the tragedy of an unfortunate childhood that lacked proper parenting, also a sign of Therese's interest in women, like has been pointed out in section two of this thesis.

Such forecast of what could happen if he did not settle down is not inscribed in the narrative for Jim Willard. Forceful marriage is also shown in diverse characters in Vidal's novel. Social pressure is shown to be a factor for men as well, but in the way the narration puts it, there is an agency attached to the decision that is not conceded to the women in *The Price of Salt*. Jim, for instance, pursues sexual intercourse with women in an attempt to adapt to the heteronormativity he had escaped until then: "He still half-believed that should he ever have a woman he would be normal" Vidal, 7,III). Paul, one of Jim Willard's sexual partners, feels validated, as Jim himself, by women's attraction to him but has never been attracted to them. In a "spirit of rebellion against his own nature" Paul decides to marry a woman at one point in his life. Knowing that he was not attracted to girls and simply desiring to feel socially validated, he never consummated the marriage and thus it was annulled. The agency that Paul shows, the power to make and unmake and the nonexistent guilt for the rupture of heteronormativity is something women in Cold-War novels were not gifted with. His punishment because of this inadaptability, though, will show through the final stages of his life: "He lived alone and saw few people [...] his bitterness never left him" (Vidal 1995: 5, II). The narrative seems to reward the part of the queer community that turned to the "safety of a family life" (5, II) choosing to reject "the edgy pleasures of a homosexual affair". (5, II)

There is dissidence, nonetheless, in the way Paul and Mrs. Robichek are lonely. Men in Gore Vidal's narration are allowed to choose not to adapt to a heteronormative life, showing agency in the decisions made for their lifestyle. Paul's outcome is in no point shown comparable emotions to the disgust Therese is described to feel for Mrs. Robichek who is in a similar situation to Paul's. Abandoned by multiple lovers, the man has focused on his career and seems to have been suck into his own depression. The emotions associated to his loneliness attach more to a feeling of pity for his resentment than disgust, even if it is clear that he has in fact been punished by the narrative for his homosexuality. Paul "gained

strength” (5, II) from his suffering and his (chosen, to a certain extent) isolated life, while the choice-making seem to have dragged Mrs. Robichek into the darkest of desperations. It can be drawn then, that loneliness in old age, the refusal to conform to the familiar standards and the home is shown to have different outcomes in the case of men and women in the two novels: The female version of an abandoned middle-aged woman has been dragged to being sad, depressing, hunched, exhausted and incapable of letting go of her past. In contrast, the male version, who willingly chose not to conform to heteronormativity and thus perform an act of rebellion against tradition, ended up in the same position, only his feelings are interpreted to be strength-worthy and to lead to his feeling filled from other sources of social acceptance, like his writing or his ability to travel around the world.

Although he feels the pressure to be attracted to women, in order to conform to the norm of masculinity, his anxiety does not stem from the fact that single men cannot carry a life on their own, but rather from social necessity to spend his time with women. In fact, very possibly, Jim’s necessity to spend time with Maria, even after years of self-recognition as a man who is exclusively attracted to men, attests for the gender roles controversy assigned to him:

It is a heteronormative regime in which men must incorporate women as lovers into the patriarchy through the ritual exchange of them, especially, marriage, whereas it is a misogynistic regime in which men must socially marginalize women because the ascendancy of women has the potential to endanger men’s interests and privilege. (Takeuchi 2011: 28)

Ascertained by the masculine ability to attract women, Jim’s masculinity would allow him to continue on his mission to live his life as a gay man who is interpreted as superior to femininity not only in his protruding masculine gender expression but also on his ability to reject their attraction towards him. In this interpretation we can also find a misogynistic depiction specifically on Carol’s unavoidable link to her husband’s actions and who never recognizes Carol’s freedom on top of how Jim can exceed his power over the women in his life without needing to commit to it. These notions are engraved in Jim’s education through how masculinity and dominating women are tightly wound.

Homosexuality has only arisen doubts about gender expression in Jim, ever since his first sexual experience with Bob. For the protagonist, this encounter did not affect masculinity (Corber 1997: 154), but for Bob, who interpreted homosexual sex as a form of

gender inversion where Jim was being interpreted as occupying the role of a woman. Jim Willard's perpetuation of gender roles is not as overt as Bob's who clearly relates sex to the creation of male and female roles, and this was interpreted by Corber as "a rejection of patriarchal values" (154) from Jim's side, given he disallowed the gay necessity to establish a masculine and feminine side to every relationship. However, I disagree in that even if Jim's homosexuality is interpreted by him against the current of Cold-War gender inversion, if he rejects these roles it is only because he decodes femininity as inferior or a loss of power. This loss of power because of a symbolic gender inversion is something that haunts the protagonist throughout the entire *The City and The Pillar* narrative, which eventually leads to his needing to like the only woman who he has seen as more than background noise, Maria. Jim Willard repeatedly expresses his concern about how her candidacy would be ideal as someone who he should feel attracted to. Addressing not at Jim's self-loathing for not being able to be attracted to Maria, which he describes several times as his personal failure, but rather at how his focalization of Maria's reaction to this is shown, reveals the recurrent glorification of masculinity seen in the novel. Jim has a hard time accepting that not even a deep emotional connection with a woman could push him to sexual intercourse with her, but Maria seems to be as disappointed. At his realization, after several weeks travelling together "Maria was baffled" (Vidal 1995: 6, II) that he could not fulfill his duty as a man. Maria's interpretation of Jim's homosexuality as a 'failure' to comply with her sexual desires does not seem to be in accordance with her character. For an unmarried woman who agrees to travel with two men, one of them a renowned homosexual sportsman and the other one his young companion it would seem naïve to not be aware of their relationship. Maria's ignorance only adds to the masculine interpretation of female thoughts, given that she would not necessarily need to see it as a failure of his masculinity, but it is in fact likely that Jim would associate any trace of his homosexuality to it. Thus, Maria being impressionable enough to be surprised at Jim's attraction to men can be interpreted as one more sign for this novel's diminishing of women and femininity.

Two main ideas are to be extracted from this section. Firstly, these two narratives depicting queer lives in Cold War 1950s America show clear misogynistic assumptions about the roles of women in what refers to family and marriage, as has been shown above. Carol's anxieties in the novel, which clearly affect her ability to build a healthy relationship with her love interest, Therese, are strongly bound to her role as a mother and the home. Carol Aird's actions tell of an outspoken woman that automatically loses her authority and self-confidence when confronted with the presence of her husband. Hargess power

manipulates Carol's ability to look forward and undermines her power to develop a life of her own by herself, proven by how not even distance can rid her of his power over her.

Secondly, the masculine counterpart of the protagonists of *The Price Of Salt*, Jim Willard, is never under the social obligation to not be alone, like is suggested in the case of the women. Carol was socially drawn to marriage, which made it an idea impossible to reject, as has been earlier argued to be the case of Mrs. Robichek. Carol's marriage, however, exerts a command over her life that it simply does not in men who follow the current and get married to fulfil the social expectation of the American Cold-War home. One such example in the masculine driven narrative of *The City and The Pillar* is Jim Willard's first love, Bob. Even if the narrative seems to exploit the idea of Bob enjoying the homosexual encounter with Jim back in their infancy, it seems unlikely that he would have further explored his homoerotic desires in the navy. Corber defends that the pressure of heteronormativity pushes Bob harder than it does Jim, who regardless of being subjected to his *macho gay* style, does not submit to heteronormativity and pursues his sexual desires. Arguing that by rejecting Jim, Bob "projects his own self-hatred onto him" (157), Corber defends Bob's feelings to reject queerness in order to reassure his own position of power in the scale of gender. This gendered power relations that none of the two men can let go of shows in the physicality of their last wrestling in the final scenes of the book, as they did in the first encounter, this time not ending in love making but in death. Jim's masculinity or power is threatened by Bob's rejection when he calls Jim a "queer" and so it is necessary for him to engage in a physical fight for the recovery of it. These power relations seem to be clear in heteronormativity, which is why it makes it safer for Bob to get married in his hometown as he was expected to. Bob's rejection of his role as a husband and father that the weary Cold War period demanded of him can be interpreted as another type of punishment homosexuals would endure, less overt than death or loneliness: compliance.

Said compliance provides him with the masculine power that Hargess possesses in his marriage to Carol Aird, even if Bob rarely ever finds the strength to adequate to the roles expected of him in the home, which push him to flee as soon as he can. Bob transmits his doubts about the righteousness of his behavior to Jim, knowing he is neglecting them in favor of his career. Jim clearly tries to push him away from his family, claiming that: "If you're happy at sea, stay there. Sally isn't the first woman to marry a sailor" (Vidal 1995: 10: III). Jim suggests that Bob should make up his mind to be happy, regardless of what it meant for his family, and concludes with a revealing: "You'll have to make up your own mind" (10: III) aiming at how the men in this narrative are free to make up their minds

regardless of their families. The power to neglect his family does not show any sort of consequence for him, which does show in Carol's case. The power Hargess shows over his wife is one that Bob's wife is unable to exert on him. Social pressure made Bob get hitched and it is social pressure that is stopping him from staying away from home in the navy: "She's so damned set on my staying put. Her family, too" (10: III). However, even if this pressure can exert a violent force on his life, it is up to him to decide what to do.

In the case of Carol Aird, the decision comes to either compliance to her life as a wife and a mother with her husband Hargess and her child or the complete abandonment of her daughter's presence and social circle. The imprisonment that her marriage connotes for her living is acknowledged by the character. In fact, this lack of agency over her divorce has shaped several decisions in her life at the time the novel takes place. Carol, who has had at least one other lesbian affair, chose not to leave her husband when she was unfaithful because she knew what that would mean: Hargess would be able to manipulate the facts and in a vindictive act, take her daughter Rindy's custody from her: "I know the fact that Rindy existed stopped me from leaving Harge then" (Highsmith 2015: 209). Therese does not seem to fully understand this link to a marriage, in that she asks Carol why she could not simply leave her husband to live her romance with Abby, which Carol resolves with a distressed: "When you haven't got a chance"(208). There is a remark to be made here in how the narration plays with Therese's innocence. Therese resolves that Carol must be undermining her idea because she has never been in charge of a family: "because she hadn't had any responsibilities" (208). The contrast with Bob's burden is made clear here, given that for Carol family is a "responsibility" which she has struggled to escape, in fact, she has felt like she had no choice but to stay in order not to lose everything whereas for Bob it was a simple matter of deciding if to please or upset his wife.

The narrative takes on this opportunity to break the feeling of control Carol has achieved through talking about her marriage from a very distant place in another part of the United States to introduce precisely the piece that will break the peace: the detective. The trip that Therese and Carol take together, a point of no return in their embracing their interest on each other, is constantly seen through the lenses of guilt, sometimes less overt than others. At Carol's place, before sailing on their journey, Hargess makes an appearance that destabilizes the mind of the reader, calling the reader's attention on how Carol could be morally judged for the abandonment of her family. Mr. Aird brings flowers to Carol and does not seem to mind the presence of Therese (to whom he had been hostile just days earlier) and speaking cheerfully: "his air of good cheer. [...] And if he cared enough to

pretend, he must also care in some way for Carol”. He seems to hold no objection to the two women’s trip, receiving the news without any foreshadowing of what will become a fatality. It is when both Therese and Carol have achieved a comfortable level of distance from their lives in New York some weeks later that the power of Hargess Aird to control his wife comes into action: the moment when the reader realizes a detective was hired to gather evidence that could incriminate Carol and take away the custody of Rindy: “Harge has had a detective following us since Chicago” (219).

From this moment on, the feeling of inappropriateness that the two women felt when at the Airds home will haunt them again, this time completely overpowering the meaning that their relationship must have had for them: “Therese sat up with her elbows on her knees and her hands pressed to her forehead, yielding to a shame she had never known before, that she had repressed before the detective” (239). In fact it is when Carol realizes the cage she is in in her journey with Therese that she changes drastically her attitude towards her, once her freedom is cut even as far from New York as they could possibly go by car, Carol realizes her marriage is a prison, which pushes her aloofness to Therese: “But Carol seemed deliberately to pay almost no attention to her that day. There was more arrogance in the tilt of her cigarette” (204). Contrastively, as noted before, Jim’s encounters with men are not shaded with the guilt that the relationship in Carol is described with. Although it is clear that Jim struggles with his sexuality and endures hardships, his relationships are never linked to the anxiety of betraying the familiar home that the narrative in Highsmith’s *The Price of Salt* provides the women with. Jim Willard’s anxiety is linked to the expectation of the home, which he never fulfils in the novel, but the ink with which Carol Aird is stained is the utter dismantling of a perfect Cold War America family. The political implications of linking homosexuality to the breaking of the home in this historical period has been discussed above, making it notable her that in the case of these novels, it was approached very differently to gay men than to lesbian relationships because of the weight of gender roles. Hargess hiring a detective to follow them and record information that could be used against Carol in a court and this detective being a man also shows that it is men in this narrative who are preventing these two women to live their relationship, even if it is in the privacy of the closet, the importance of which detail will be analyzed in the next section. Although Bob never embraced his supposed homosexuality or at least bisexuality, his taking off cannot be controlled in any way by his wife, thus not determining his fatality like the narrative in *The Price of Salt* did.

Thus, even if the institution of marriage and the social pressure of it imprison both gay men and lesbian women, it is clear that women's relationship to it is one of need, whereas men's narratives do not show the same amount of duty and fatality attached to the ending of it. As seen in the portrayal of one unmarried or lonely woman (Mrs. Robichek) and her male counterpart (Paul) in *The City and The Pillar*, consequences are fatal for the female side were she to step out of the norm and live alone. The male character is allowed to, in his loneliness and depression, explore life unlimitedly, while the female middle-aged woman is focalized by the protagonist to be little less than a horrifying creature both physically and mentally. Aside from this, there is a duty inscribed in the mind of the women that makes them unable to abandon their familiar role. When confronted with the necessity to flee the scene because of his uncomfortableness, Bob simply resorts to his naval duties in order to be able to avoid staying in his hometown, as he has done throughout his life. Carol's ability to flee the scene is pivotally different. Although she does have the means to run away with Therese in a journey that would allow the two of them to explore their feelings for each other, the shadow her marriage and maternity cast over her follows closely, until it eventually leads to her downfall: losing her daughter's custody. Hargess' fluctuating attitude towards his wife, play a crucial role in the development of Highsmith's narrative.

4. Gender role projections in homosexual relationships: “who is the man?”

Another way masculine power exerts subjectively in the narrative is the way in which homosexual relationships have gender roles assigned to each of the participants, even if both are the same gender. The concern of concealing the homosexuality of the characters through a misuse, or directly an omission, of their gender was a common feature in earlier decades. However, this had transformed into blatant gender expression with different assignments of gender roles. The 1920s had been characterized for highlighting things such as the uncomfortableness of dealing with lesbian love: “Lowell avoided the personal because of the taboos of her day which surrounded the subject matter that was most personal to her: lesbian love” (Faderman 1981: 399)¹. But the war flipped this scenario around, where lesbian love was talked about in popular culture and a rapid growing subculture in America, whatever the stigma of it. The problem then arose not on how to conceal the portrayal of such relationships, but rather on how to get rid of the taboos surrounding lesbian (and gay) love in narratives.

Gender roles are a strikingly vast part of the unsolved stereotypical interpretation of homosexual relationships that developed around the taboos Faderman mentioned. Restrictive notions about lesbian relationships often forced lesbian authors to change their texts to adapt them to expectations society would have of their gender: “She [Patricia Higsmit] was not alone among lesbian writers who made perfunctory disguises which weakened their work” (399). Both the novels under scope in this dissertation assign opposing gender roles to the different sides of the couple, which in the case of Jim is determinant in the way he interprets his own sexuality, ultimately leading to his murdering Bob.

It makes sense to address the weight of gender roles of these novels in relation with how the Cold War era tensed the rope of them: there was an acute crisis of masculinity. The authors of the Beat generation, determinant in this cultural period, largely address this issue. Specifically dealing with how homosexuality affected masculinity, there is grounding to believe that overall, homosexuals did have a social need of overcompensating, by proving masculinity overtly. Writers in the 1960s were catalogued by contemporary literary critic Leslie Fiedler to be wired to go against the norm, writing about “emotionality and

¹ The artistic movements that followed the end of World War I had, however, already helped push forward some tolerance of homosexuality in cities like Paris, Berlin and New York, although the rest of the US was not as progressive.

immediacy” (Sobral 2012: 4). However, when confronted with masculinity, Fiedler blamed an overly sentimental (this is, feminine) American literature on the profusive writing of homosexual authors. According to him, heterosexual authors had “permitted homosexuals to speak for them” (In Snyder 2007: 253). This meant that homosexuals had taken over American literature, and consequently led to a very feminine type of writing (254). Crisis of masculinity is clear through these perceptions about the writing of the Beat generation: gay authors were not masculine authors, and the lack of action from the heterosexual writers had left Cold War American literature in a state of degradation because it was now feminine.

Jim’s relationship to his first love is potentiated through the feeling of masculinity that it concedes to him, to the justification that the protagonist so desperately needs that he can be a masculine man and be attracted to men at the same time. The situation presented at the ending of the novel, Bob accusing him of being a “queer” places Jim in the same basket as the gay men he had been rejecting throughout the narrative. Being one of the feminine gay men that he shared night clubs with dispossesses Jim of the only thing reassuring his identity: his masculinity. Thus, this flipping of the roles, where with this comment Bob places himself as the masculine part of the relationship, drives to Jim’s necessity to wrestle for his masculinity: “It indicates that the relationship cannot escape the rigid hierarchies structuring male homosocial bonds. Jim resorts to raping and murdering Bob in order to dominate him” (Corber 1997: 157).

Jim cannot escape his need for masculinity, and this leads to his overt rejection of the gay men who don’t strictly follow the gender rule he expects from men. His refusal to become a part of the community is normally seen verbally, although many instances in the narrative indicates that his actions also speak for this rejection.

Notably enough, there is one key gender role that has not been taken into consideration yet: sex. The fact that Jim Willard’s approach to his sexuality is inherently sexual while Therese’s is not, attends to another stance on how misogyny applies to homosexual narratives in the Cold War period. Contradictory as it might seem to describe a character’s journey of sexual self-discovery without the actual introduction of sexual relationships or a very limited quantity of it, Highsmith’s narrative shows only one. This was already noted by Annamarie Jagose when they commented on the queer literature tendency to assume that women’s relationships with other women would not take a turn on certain sexual aspects that gay men’s with other men would: “lesbian experience is not coterminous with gay male experience, she [Adrienne Rich] sees as ‘qualitative differences in female and

male relationships” (2015: 34)² Jim’s introduction to his own sexuality was, logically, sexual. Therese’s approach to her first love relationship with a woman is that of doubt, guilt and regret. Lack of sexual desire, or sexual intercourse, reinforces the idea of the romantic friendships that were socially accepted for women, as has been mentioned earlier in this thesis. The two women not engaging in sexual intercourse suggests, apart from what has been analyzed in the section above, that this narrative is still castrated by the idea that women assuming the role of men (engaging in sexual relationships with women) is what makes these relationships reproachable. Carol and Therese do have sex; but at a high cost. This relationship to sex that the women in *The Price of Salt* have, has nothing to do with Jim Willard’s approach to it.

Something that repeats in through different periods in homosexual narratives is the inclination to portray people with a considerable age difference. This is normally a trait to be portrayed exclusively in male homosexual narratives, but in this case both novels under scope in this thesis share this same trait: “the justification of pederasty among male homosexuals, the pronounced ageism in male homosexual standards of sexual attractiveness, etc” (Rich in Jagose 2015: 34). Although it is true that the age difference is a factor in both narratives, the case of the protagonist in *The City and the Pillar* is more pronounced than the one in *The Price of Salt*. However, the notable difference here is how early the sexual encounters start for the former and the latter. Jim Willard’s focalization starts practically as soon as his sexual consciousness does, following his steps of self-discovery, as has been pointed out before. The fact that the reader is acquainted with the protagonist so young helps the narrative justify the naivety of Jim in the relationships that he has, most of which happen with older men. A reason that justifies this is the necessity the narrative has to introduce characters who are more comfortable in the gay scene the main protagonist is getting to know. The case of Therese in *The Price of Salt* could also be attributed to this, given that Carol’s trajectory in her relationships with women has been wider than Therese’s nonexistent experience in the queer scene. However, the actual effect of the age difference that separates Jim and Carol shows in the way their partners behave toward them. The way these attitudes are projected, however, vary in these two narratives, making them divert due to gender.

² Adrienne Rich argues in favor of the “lesbian continuum”, given the definition of the term “lesbian” holds a patriarchal value that limits the sexual dimension of the lesbian relationships: “Female friendship and comradeship have been set apart from the erotic, thus limiting the erotic itself. But as we delineate a lesbian continuum, we begin to discover the erotic in female terms” (Rich 1980:650)

Jim's masculinity prevents him from having a role other than the one associated with men, the dominant role, his partners, thus, will have to be willing to adhere to a contrary role, given the strictness of the narratives in this sense. Contrastively, although the narrative in *The Price of Salt* fails to verbally recognize the gender roles that the two women take up, the power of words recognizes them immensely. Probably due to a misconception of power dynamics in homosexual relationships or the necessity to place heteronormative and homosexual relationships on the same level, Highsmith's narrative establishes the older woman as the dominant or knowledgeable part, while placing the other as the weak and dominated. These power dynamics start from the very beginning. The character building of Therese is thought to provoke anxiety at her lack of self-confidence and divertive personality. The fact that focalization happens through her, makes the reader aware of how much the character doubts her actions as well as having a more observant than active role in the novel.

Perhaps due to Therese's traumatic past as an orphan, the figure of Carol as an older woman who cares about her could be comforting for her. The fact that Carol Aird is always in control of the situation makes Therese feel at ease, calming the anxiety that she feels at the store in all of its ugliness as well as in her life, where she is slightly lost. It is because of this feeling that constant comments that position Therese in the place of an inexperienced person or even a child seems so natural for this narrative: "Therese felt like a puppy Carol had bought at a roadside kennel" (Highsmith 2015: 80). Revealingly, Carol will at time even call Therese a child: "Child, child, where do you wander – all by yourself?" (84) and that would not call attention in this narrative since the feeling of calmness the older woman always seems to show does assign her the role of an adult. However, the narrative takes specific routes to assure that these roles that position Carol as the adult and Therese as the child, or contrast Carol as the powerful with Therese as the weak are well established: "You're as weak as this match" (137). These contrastive roles would agree with the necessity to protrude the strict gender roles Cold War America had established for men and women. As weak as the role assigned to woman was, it seems like one of the women needed to be stronger, more assertive and consequently more similar to the roles assigned for a male character.

The nineteenth century had a different conception of relationships between two women, as has been mentioned before. The notion of romantic friendships was well extended and even laudable in that it was supposed to enhance the personality of the two women (Faderman 1981: 18). These types of relationships, nonetheless, showed a clear delimitation

of how gender firmly established their role in society. The friendship would be socially acceptable if both women applied their role of women, very specifically demarcated: “As long as they appeared feminine, their sexual behavior would be viewed as an activity in which women indulged when men were unavailable” (17). These roles would not suppose a threat for Victorian society were the women never to impersonate the figure of a man, but if they did so much as act masculine, then this act would become horrific: “But if one or both of the pair demanded masculine privileges, the illusion of lesbianism [...] was destroyed” (17). In fact, it would seem to have frightened the very foundation of gender norms, given that it would have been seen as “the attempted usurpation of male prerogative by women who behaved like men” (17). According to this scholar then, the rejection of lesbian relationships would have conditioned to the following question: is there a masculine acting woman in it?. The problem arises from the threat that such a fixated social structure saw in the roles assigned to each gender, women appropriating roles of men or vice versa would cause a disruption of the social order that masculine power was not willing to afford. Such strict heteronormative and gender conforming norms were to be repeated in Cold War America as has been above mentioned because of the communist fright. There was a threat to be addressed, one that could even hide in the most regular homes, which pushed norms to be kept simple and strict.

This clearly relates to Jim’s preoccupation with his own masculinity and the rejection he shows in the narrative for gay men who act feminine, as long as the masculine part of a gay man stays masculine, no visible threat would pollute the “normality” he could hide behind. In this sense, Jim follows the path that society has set for gay men, which only need to be sufficiently masculine looking to be acceptable, apart from living in the privacy that the closet provides, as has been earlier discussed in this dissertation.

Examples throughout the novel range from simple superiority comments or orders that Carol would give: “Sit over there, Therese” (130) or “Be a good girl” (108) to the glorification the younger woman makes about Carol: “Many people looked at Carol, however, because she was generally the most attractive woman in the room [...] she looked at no one else but Carol” (229). Carol’s perspective also shows how she also believes herself to be knowledgeable, able to handle their issues better than Therese. Thus is shown in the letter that she writes to her at the moment of departure, after having left for New York in a rush once they know Hargess has enough evidence to get full custody of Carol’s daughter: “I wonder if you will understand, Therese since you are so young and never even knew a mother who cared desperately for you” (271). Even though Carol is very dominant in her

treatment of Carol, the way other characters treat Therese account for the same type of character perception the narrative wants the reader to have. Richard, although tries harder to conceal his feeling of superiority towards Therese, also casts this shadow over her lack of judgement: “You so seldom make up your mind about anything. You’ll probably change your mind again” (154). Carol, on the other hand, is focalized through Therese, which would also explain why we perceive Carol as unbreakable through most of the novel.

Thus, the highly gendered portrayal Patricia Highsmith chose for her main characters in *The Price of Salt* could be looked at from two different perspectives. The narrative’s purpose on making Carol assertive and Therese overtly lacking could be due to: (1) an innate heteronormative assumption that there is one masculine and one feminine part in all relationships, be it heterosexual or homosexual or (2) a defiance of the Freudian conception of homosexuality. Therese’s lack of maternal love, given she despises her mother could account for the reason why she falls in love with the assertiveness Carol treats her with. By making Carol adopt typically masculine misogynistic and controlling attitudes, the narrative would be acknowledging the possibility of a homosexual relationship that does not lack anything just because there is no man in it. In what refers to the former option, the main idea could stem from the pressure that the traditional family exerted in these narratives. As has been explained before in this dissertation, the sole fact of having a non-heteronormative narrative would be a defiance only allowed by the publishing houses if there was a tragic ending to condone these conducts.

This would account for the reason behind Carol’s constant treatment of her lover as a child and making frequent remarks about their age difference, which seems to confer an air of superiority the younger one does not have. Nonetheless, the way in which the paternalism plays in the couple seems to show that the only way of asserting one’s power and experience is by adopting masculine attitudes. Therese’s childish attitude shows as well on the way Carol autonomously engages in conversation with other people when they are alone while Therese remains silent or uninterested in the conversation, like a child would: “Therese waited for a sign from Carol to leave, but Carol was still deep in conversation” (227). Even though the youngest woman wants to leave, she makes the effort of sitting there to fulfill the desires of her lover “for an hour and a half, and managed to be polite, because she knew Carol wanted her to be” (227). This behavior is completely missing if looked at the other way around. On the contrary, Carol treats Therese with expensive gifts, as well as making her feel insecure about her economic situation, anxiety that will also be dealt with later in this dissertation.

The narrative closes in a very different note, however, when the adulthood of Therese makes an appearance. After Carol has lost the custody of Rindy, both women spend some time apart in what is similar enough to a break-up. Carol's rushed abandonment of Therese after Hargess' detective has exerted the masculine power over the lesbian couple forces Therese to go through a time of reflection that will lead to her ultimately realizing her potential. The narrative still portrays Carol to serve as a type of awakening, the realization that Therese needed to get out of the trance-like state she is shown to have been in at the beginning of the narrative when she simply followed the current. Her relationship to the people around her, especially Richard, starts to be insignificant once she falls in love with Carol or starts spending time with her: "She felt immensely superior to him suddenly, to all the people below stairs. She was happier than any of them" (95). Therese's growing since meeting Carol is revised by the two women when they meet each other again after the time of separation they went through because of the traumatic divorce experience, which drove them apart as has been explained above. This experience changed both women, since Carol's relationship with Therese was revealed to a judging room in a violent way: "Harge told the lawyers everything – whatever they didn't know already" (296). After this time, Carol can notice that "You're all grown up– with grown-up hair and grown-up clothes" (294). It took Therese these months of separation to be able to grow enough independence to refuse to spend time with Carol, which she was unable to do at the beginning of the novel. Acknowledged by the protagonist, her growing up had taken place after Carol had left, further ascertaining how she had taken the role of a child in her relationship with her: "Yes, she had been born since she left Carol. She had been born the instant she saw the picture in the library, and her stifled cry then was like the first yell of an infant, being dragged into the world against its will" (294).

Such infantilization of a character is not found in the character building of Jim Willard. Even if his relationships do often respond to the tendency of older men being attracted to Jim in his early twenties, he is never treated as having an ill-judgement or not being in control of his actions. In fact, quite in the contrary, Jim's tendency to behave according to masculine attitudes accounts for a great self-determination in his relationships with older men. He is portrayed to be an aloof lover, never too emotionally invested in anything that could serve as a liability of his homosexuality. This lack of age difference relies mostly on *The City and The Pillar's* focusing on Jim's masculinity rather than his age. Being it true that Jim's age influences his decisions as well as the way in which he relates to his homosexuality, it is most heavy on how he reacts to the homosexual subculture than to

his own relationships. Jim's partners are always slightly older and provide for him economically, but their freedom and the fact that their economic situation belongs to them (as opposed to the women in *The Price of Salt*). Thus, the only gender role that applies in the novel can be Jim's preoccupation with showing the love for his partners, which could project a message of femininity.

5. Internalized homophobia and the privacy of the closet

Society has imprinted the notions that Jim and Therese project in relation to homosexuality throughout these two novels. These notions clearly point towards their misunderstanding and distance from the homosexual community, even if both are actively engaged in homosexual relationships, be it sexual, romantic or both. Their misconceptions do not evolve throughout the novel, they just exploit the individualism of their relationships, but never referring to or accepting the labels that they overtly reject.

Jim Willard, a man, approaches this rejection in a completely different manner than the women in *Carol* do. His attitude towards being attracted to men is shown through his actions, never in his doubts about it. It seems as if his character was from the beginning assertive, driven and aware (though not accepting) of his own desires, regardless what the surroundings permitted, which would only be secondary in this novel. There is self-loathing at the very beginning but never self-doubt about Jim's feelings for Bob like the ones repeated over and over in the case of Therese Belivet. The male character never projects hate towards himself, only the others: "His first reaction was disgust and alarm" (Vidal 1995: 4, I) and the little self-hate vanishes quite quickly in reassurance that it is idyllic, once Jim has embraced his encounters with men: "girls no longer intruded upon their perfect masculine idyll" (4, III). Jim's need for assertion on his masculinity will be one of the fundamental pillars in Gore Vidal's novel, which tries to establish a new destigmatized version of gay men. Jim feels safe in his masculinity, given that his internal homophobia stems from the idea that gay men look and act feminine: "[...] these strange womanish creatures" (4, III). There is aggressiveness tied to Jim's rejection of feminine gay men, but it also stems from the opinions of his surroundings, which he asserts once he starts frequenting the gay subculture of the city: "If a man likes men, he wants a man, and if he likes women, he wants a woman, so who wants a freak who's neither?" (4, III). As ascertained by this gay character, Jim learns that the *optimum* way of being a gay man is to adapt to the notion of masculinity.

Robert J. Corber defined Jim's search for reassurance in his masculinity as the search for the "gay macho style". Discussing scholars' words about effeminate theatricals on the gay subculture, he concludes that this behavior led to disagreements in the Cold War period, given that "the most threatening aspect of male homosexuality is precisely its relation to femininity" (143). Men willingly sacrificing the power that masculinity confers them with

through sex synchronizes with the gender confusion which will be dealt with later in this section. More so, gay sexual relationships cause the symbolic loss of the power and assertiveness that men are associated with (144). Leo Bersani's (1987) idea of this metaphorical loss can be linked to Corber's idea about the shift of the male initiative. In the Cold War era, men's roles in society switched from production to consumption (as earlier mentioned) and so the notion that manhood needed reassurance gains strength. Thus, Jim Willard adopting misogynistic attitudes and rejecting the subculture he encounters throughout the novel, would only mean his rejection of the feminine traits that he has been taught his sexuality embraces. Jim's rejection of his own sexuality, although present, does not surface through doubt like Therese's does, but appears buried under piles of anger, which will ultimately drive his rage at the time of murdering Bob. The Cold War period plays a crucial role in how the protagonist of *The City and The Pillar* feels the need to project his power over women. The pre-existing homophobia from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries upraised in the social crisis America lived through in this period. Not only was systemic homophobia crucial to uphold the inherently American value of the traditional family, but it was now about to be further justified by the crisis of masculinity: "The cold war fifties and sixties, however, produced a heightened crisis of masculinity resulting in emphatic disavowals of homosexuality and aggressive homophobia" (Snyder 2007: 255). This avows for the reason why Gore Vidal's protagonist fights so keenly to constantly reassure and make overt his masculinity, which he feels a loss of at the realization of his homosexuality. Maintaining his masculinity would keep him in the norm of tradition, a concept highly valued and intertwined with this historical time.

The first example can be found in the moment Sally hints at Jim not liking girls when they are teenagers: "Jim flushed. 'She's full of crap. I'm not afraid of her or anybody'" (Vidal 1995: 1, II). In this instance, Jim resorts back to his masculine notion of not being afraid, using it as his defense mechanism against the feminine trait that fear entails. However, by this point, the reader has already learned through Jim's focalization that he is in fact in love with Bob. The word 'love' is never bound to Jim's relationships, the word is not even mentioned in the narrative, even if he will go on to live long affairs with men in his future. This further ascertains the rejection that Jim feels towards the queer world and how society interprets it. Even when confronted with his partner's (Shaw) feelings, he never would correspond them: "...how great the love was he had to give but how hopeless it all was knowing that such deep feeling could never be returned" (4, V). Jim's homosexuality is perceived by himself to be a failure for his masculinity as well, as is stated several times.

For instance, in his attempt to have sex with Maria, who he shares a deep friendship with but for whom he has no sexual attraction. Jim “failed” since he “could not perform the act” (Vidal 1995: 6, II 110). The protagonist’s denial of his homosexuality for the sole reason that he possesses what he believes to be a strong masculinity further develops: “They were confidants. Yet when it came to physical contact [...] Jim could not bear the softness and smoothness of a woman” (6, II 110), these physical traits of vulnerability to women reveals two ideas: (1) women are weak and (2) this vulnerability is undesirable for Jim. The perception that masculinity consists of sexually pleasing women could be read as simply Jim’s focalization of the issue, but the narrative perpetuates this idea with Maria’s vision of it: “Because he was both masculine and drawn to her, she found his failure more all the more mysterious” (6, II 110). In presenting a male protagonist who denies his homosexuality on the basis of how overt his masculinity is, as well as interpreting his not being attracted to Maria as a failure of it by both the focalizer and the woman, reinforces stereotypes about gender roles that directly affect the reading of the gay community that the novel so deeply explores. Instead of achieving its aim of presenting a “‘normal’ all-American” (Intro, 5) homosexual man, Vidal’s narrative deploys feminine men (and femininity) as undesirable.

Corber supports the idea of masculinity by arguing that Jim can only be comfortable in the participation of the gay scene because he does not fit into the effeminate homosexual stereotype:

Because he does not behave in an effeminate manner but is an accomplished athlete, he must not be gay, and thus he can participate in the homosexual “underworld” without identifying himself with it. [...] Having internalized the dominant understanding of gay male desire, he tells himself that he must not be gay, despite his exclusive attraction to other men. (Corber 1997: 147).

Thus, Jim does not truly accept his homosexuality, since he relates a loss of masculinity to the sexual surrendering to another man. Instead of assimilating his own homosexuality into the gay scene he has been frequenting for most of his adult life with his lovers, he rejects it, choosing not to adhere himself to the loss of superiority masculinity provides him with. This reading of Jim’s denial to accept his sexuality clashes with a deeper motivation for the writing of this revolutionary novel at the time. It can be inferred that the homophobia, be it internal or external, that the protagonists in *The City And The Pillar* project does not stem fully from a need to reconcile with the subcultural assumption of transvestite gay men in New York, but rather from misogyny. Jim’s refusal to build a healthy

sexual identity constructs around two basic things: (1) his homosexuality and (2) his masculinity. Since his teenage years he deviates his homosexual tendencies on the basis that nobody would suspect of it given he is athletic and masculine, traits that build a safe space for him in his hometown. Jim only refuses his desire for men on the basis that the only widespread notion about gay men is their association with gender expressions typically associated with women: “if he saw enough of the queens, he might begin to like their society and be happy in it. But this was not possible, [...] Jim dropped out of the gay world, preferring to haunt [...] young men like himself” (Vidal 1997: 9, I). The problem with this position is that in his intentions to establish more varied notions about gay men, the narration launches a series of constant discriminatory comments and scenarios for these traits, typically feminine. Thus, with Jim’s “dropping” the gay scene, the narrative interprets that he did not believe another style of gay man than the one associated with the queer scene in New York, related to feminine attitudes, was possible. Since feminine traits are rejected systematically throughout the narrative it is assumed that due to his masculinity, Jim is not representing another dimension of homosexuality, but rather undermining it based on the community’s stereotypes. This rejection of feminine men in precisely this time of history can be related to enlisting requirements. Dismissal for men who wanted to join the army in WWII would attend to, among other things, homosexuality. Lacking an effective manner to identify which men enlisted were gay, psychiatrists would draw on subjective and equally ineffective physical appearance which included: “feminine characteristics among the ‘stigmata of degeneration’ that made a man unfit for military service” (Bérubé 1990: 13). Such humiliation and traumatic regulations may account for an overt rejection of homosexual men who did actually show traits associated with femininity in this period of time.

Robert J. Corber defends Vidal’s position in arguing that “he sought to complicate the narratives available for understanding the construction of gay male subject position” (140) which clearly opened the door for gay men in Cold War America to understand a multiplicity of identities in the homosexual construction. However, in his construction of a “gay macho style” in Cold War America to show the possibility of simultaneously being homosexual and masculine (140), the narrative is undermining the gender construction when it is associated with femininity. In his trying to distance himself from the traits that would associate Jim with falling into the stereotype of the feminine gay man, the narrative constructs misogynistic treatment of gendered traits associated with women and his rejection of them. Corber would defend that: “*The City and The Pillar* [...] does not subsume gay

male subjectivity under the category *woman* but acknowledges its alterity” (159), but I believe this alterity points to the notion of the supremacy of the masculine traits Jim agonizingly feels condemned to demonstrate.

One very overt example of how Jim’s masculinity is asserted over his homosexuality is sex. Jim’s love life is highly allergic to talking feelings of love. The notion of love as something inherently feminine is thoroughly repeated in the narrative, which greatly highlights women’s proximity to love, thus showing how Jim is reluctant to anything traditionally womanly. Vidal’s representation of a male character who refuses to surrender to feelings of love interpreted as vulnerability aligns with the concept of coldness in the expression of intimacy and emotion practiced by the members of the Beat Generation. It is only through the rejection of emotional vulnerability as a characteristic of femininity that men can ensure superiority and resilience:

Men wish to avoid pain and to have the pleasure of a Perseus as he shielded himself from the Medusa’s gaze. To gain this bounty, they devise strategies to ensure their dominance and to cajole or push women into submission. Scornful of most secular authority, Beat writing still reveals some of the more well-worn of these strategies. (Stimpson 1983: 379)

Therese Belivet’s inaptitude to make decisions, another contrast with Jim’s assertiveness, disables her to explore her attraction to Carol before starting to fall in love with her. On the opposite end, Jim is very sexually driven and allowed in the narrative to act on them: “Jim touched him, as he had so many times in dreams, without words, without thought, without fear” (Vidal 1995: 1, III). Fear is a revealing choice of words from the narrator, given that just moments earlier Sally had accused him of being afraid and it is precisely fear that stops the women in *The Price of Salt* from acting on their sexual desires spending instead, most of their time together aimlessly flirting. This fact points again at the notion that women are less sexually driven than men: “the view of females as having little sexual passion” (Faderman 1981: 16) The way *Carol’s* characters are built indicates that these women would have never acted as boldly as Jim did the first time he had the chance to be sexually active. This lack of boldness is what took weeks for the two women in Highsmith’s novel to approach the common ground to go together on a trip and eventually confess their feelings for each other through a kiss.

In Highsmith's *The Price of Salt*, the rejection of the homosexual community shown by Therese agrees with what the surroundings seem to have transmitted, rather than from experience: "She heard about girls falling in love and she knew what kind of people they were, and what they looked like" (100). This conversation takes in a moment when Therese is still relying on her insecurity to guide her thoughts. As Therese herself admits, she has not been given the chance to explore the subculture, not like Jim in *The City and The Pillar* has. But around this time, lesbian relationships were already written about in medicine journals, although not in novels: "Without models to show that love between women was not intrinsically wrong or unhealthy, the experts' pronouncements about lesbianism worked as a self-fulfilling prophecy" (Faderman 1981: 412). Thus, the only impression Therese must have had about what it meant to be in love with a woman came entirely from external sources, which explains her own struggle to be happy and self-confident until far along in the novel. Jim's first impression towards his realization of homosexuality as a normalized issue in subculture New York was his own. It was him who decided to discover the gay bars, it was also him who could be assertive on how to control his emotions towards the homosexual people he encountered, making it his experience to evolve towards feeling more comfortable than society let him in such scenes later on in the novel. Although never completely feeling a part of it, Jim felt increasingly comfortable in the gay scene of the country: "In the evenings, they would visit queer bars, pretending to be innocent tourists and fooling no one" (Vidal 1995: 5, II). Jim Willard has a chance to explore his feelings in a long time span, while he gets acquainted with the diverse areas of homosexuality across the country. Ultimately, his rejection of the community will diminish, allowing him to live a more comfortable life with his at first denied identity: "Jim gradually learns to accept his homosexuality [...] becomes increasingly willing to identify himself with other gay men" (Corber 1997: 148). This never is mentioned in the case of Carol Aird or Therese, who simply do not interact with the community further away from the seldom appearances of Abby, Carol's former lover.

Richard, Therese's boyfriend in *The Price of Salt* had expressed what was his opinion on the matter, just as lightly as if commenting the weather, answering to Therese's question once: "Do you mean people like that? [...] But those things don't just happen. There's always some reason for it in the background" (100). Therese's "background" is not ideal either, which further potentiates her internal homophobia. Having had a troublesome past, which still carries a weight on her shoulders, it would make sense that Therese refuses her own labelling as a queer woman if the reason for it lies on her familiar inconformity to

standards. At this point Therese is hinted to have identified all of the symptoms of her love for Carol, but the narrative keeps on making her insecure, as if she was certain this would not be her case, given she did not fit into the stereotype in her head. The denial is overt, given that by the end of this conversation with Richard she answers with an assertive “No” (100) to his question about whether she had fallen in love with a girl or not. Sometime later, when Richard’s instincts have worked their wonders, anger takes over his feeling that Therese was in fact interested in Carol: “Do you want to go to bed with her?” (166). To which Therese’s internal homophobia responds defensively and fills her with feelings of “humiliation, resentment and loathing of him” (166). However, Therese’s shame is by no means tied here to a socially created hatred towards the homosexual community nor to an attack towards her gender expression like Jim’s homophobia was. Rather, Therese is ashamed of her feelings once Richard mentions the sexuality of it, making the homophobia more of an internal than a social issue. It is notable to mention at this point that sex between women and sex between men had completely different social interpretations. While male sex has been condemned for ages, misogyny turned sex between women in something more attractive, as has been mentioned earlier.

Especially in the Cold War era, more specifically during the 1960s, contemporaries considered lesbian sex to “make women sexier, in the swinger’s parties where lesbian sex was encouraged as a “turn-on” for both men and women” (Faderman 1981: 20). This feeling is the one Therese extracts from her conversation with Richard, which is how she senses the rejection of her homosexual feelings as something desirable for men, a curiosity, which is a type of rejection never seen in Jim’s life from an opposite gender: “He stared at her, and for a moment beneath the anger she saw the fixed curiosity she had seen before, as if he were watching a spectacle through a keyhole” (Highsmith 2015: 166). In this moment, Therese’s shame is linked to sexual objectification, triggered by the question Richard asked, rather than to the public conception she has taken of the queer community from society. Sexual desire and objectification of lesbians is one of the main characteristics of the genre *The Price of Salt* originally adhered to: pulp fiction. In fact, while Jim’s unwillingness to adhere to the label of homosexuality most probably stems from his rejection to readjust the gender norms of what he understands as homosexuality, Highsmith’s Therese and Carol do not as much express their abhorrence for the queer community as they feel the internal shame that is cast upon them. Richard’s disgust with the relationship Therese established with Carol, a reaction that is representational of societal interpretations, will show overtly once Therese and Richard break up. It seems as though once Richard has accepted the feelings he used to have

for Therese are no longer valid as a weapon to cast control over her, the smoke and mirrors retire to show hatred:

I know I had stopped loving you then, and now the uppermost emotion I feel towards you is one that was present from the first—disgust. It is your hanging on to this woman to the exclusion of everyone else, this relationship which I am sure has become sordid and pathological by now, that disgusts me. (265)

However, by this part of the narrative Therese has grown enough in understanding herself and her feelings to be able to finally disembowel what was tying her to Richard: her need to fit into a society she did not like. The protagonist is no longer worried what society would interpret of her relationship to Carol, in fact she could imagine Richard telling close friends about her, but now has the agency to assert that: “She wouldn’t care at all, whatever he said” (265)

In *The City and The Pillar* Vidal wrote Jim to be an understudy. He never confronts his feelings for men, never labels himself as anything other than manly: “Because he was masculine and drawn to her” (Vidal 1995: 6, II) and part of the navy of the United States. Likewise, the focalizer in Highsmith’s *The Price of Salt*, Therese, is never curious about what it would be like to admit to everybody her relationship with Carol, even if it might strike as odd that two women that met barely a couple of months earlier (one of them married) travel the country together. This might be understood in the context of the Cold War. The queer community has gotten to a point of strong establishment in what refers to having labelled firm groups of people who had acknowledged the unwelcoming society they were living in. This feeling, taken in the context of Cold War America twisted into turning the idea of “the closet” or “coming out of the closet” into something that the queer community did not need or want. The “closet”, understood as the metaphorical place where a queer person stays while concealing one’s sexual orientation or gender identity was a safe haven for them, who did not need to expose in a society that was violent and unaccepting: “Sherry shows that earlier uses of the term did not carry the same meaning that it has in the twenty-first century.[...] a protective device, not a place of hiding.” (Bibler 2015: 12).

The fact that these novel’s authors chose to not “out” their characters to society, making them secretive in their homosexual identities does not necessarily imply their lack of innovation. Queer characters that live their lives in the closet in the 1950s Cold War America still provided literature with breakthrough narratives whose characters would

become relevant for the history of queer literature. As defended by Bibler: “Although they might not seem to take an open stance of pride and liberation, these works still resist the narrow confines of shame and quietism that we in the twenty-first century have come to associate with being in the closet.” (21).

Indeed, every narrative written about homosexuality would have been a risky stand in this period. The authors of these two novels shared the same desire to create them so that there could be an open window to the queer liberation: “Gay and lesbian writers imagined strategies of privacy to cope with and resist the landscape of police crackdowns, governmental oppression, and public discourses focused on deviance and shame” (22). Which further ascertains the notion that there is truth attached to each of these stories. Patricia Highsmith wrote in her afterword for *The Price of Salt* in its re-edition that her novel never intended to be a revolutionary tale, just the imagining of her own self becoming closer to an especially charming customer at the department store she was working at: “One morning [...] there walked a blondish woman in a fur coat [...] I felt odd [...] yet at the same time uplifted” (309).

The privacy of the relationships in these two novels, thus, takes on reality. Sadly, the description of reality shows traits in these narratives that place lesbian women in positions of less privilege than gay men. Pulp narratives, the genre of literature that made lesbian relationships so prominent in literature of the 1950s, targeted mostly male readers. This fact meant that the authors would be eager to include feminine gender roles to the women in these narratives, which oftentimes meant they would be married or in relationships with men, like the women in Carol did. It also meant that these narratives were to be highly sexualized, and thus punished for their agency and adoption of masculine gender roles: “The target readership was generally heterosexual men, and the novel’s messages incorporated overtly pathological and salacious elements” (Mitchell 2015: 155). In fact, this genre to which *The Price of Salt* belongs, would encourage bodily sensations over emotional investment, which is why their “pleasure and the shame are, it seems, inextricable” (160). The fact that this genre was specifically targeted for men makes it surprising that it was so eagerly adopted by lesbians. The fact that there were no writings portraying healthy, non-guilty or happy lesbian relationships turned the guilt and secrecy of these novels into an attractive trait of lesbian narratives that would persist for years.

Thus, for the reasons explained in this section, it is clear that homosexuality was pushed into secrecy in the Cold War era for a reason of safety. However, this privacy pushed the men in *The City and The Pillar* into a liberation in living their sexuality in closed circles

where the protagonist, Jim, could explore different lovers and even different areas of the homosexual subculture. For the women in *The Price of Salt*, privacy took on a different turn. Instead of driving them to being able to enjoy their sexuality free from social constraints like the closet did for Jim, misogyny dyed the closet of lesbianism with shades of guilt, treason to the family and the male gaze of the sexual desires of heterosexual men.

6. A lesbian's room of her own

Women's preoccupation with liberty and independence is one of the central themes in *The Price of Salt*. Both the main characters' backgrounds are built on how the two women relate to the economic world, thus how able they would be to move freely in this environment. Therese Belivet has somehow managed to live in Virginia Woolf's "room", given that, as a creative artist, she has managed to prove Woolf's point of a woman needing economic independence in order to achieve freedom. Although her position as a temporary clerk in a big corporation does not fulfill Therese's professional expectations, it does pay the rent of the little apartment she lives on her own at in New York City. This trait is groundbreakingly astounding because of the social context in which the novel was written. The fact not only that Therese is a woman who actively chooses her independence (regardless of her traumatic childhood being the reason behind her choice) but also that she is a female artist is a tremendous statement for the Cold War period. As has been mentioned before, the Beat generation served as a great influence in what the literature of this period would be regarded as, as well as sparking the debate of homosexuality thanks to Allen Ginsberg's *Howl*. But the female Beat writers, the women artists, were feeling pushed into the background, thus realizing "the marginalization that their male partners forced on their creative potential" (Castelao-Gómez 2016: 54). Women artists in this time did not find a community for them, let alone the independence that Therese shows in the novel, as Diane di Prima stated:

We made the community, there was no community before. When I hit the Lower East Side in 1953, they thought I must be a whore, because women didn't live alone, and then slowly, you found a few other people doing the same thing in other areas. (Grace & Johnson in Castelao-Gómez 2016: 52)

The fact that these women with growing independence were being compared to prostitutes, points at what the double layer was of inappropriateness for society. First, women living alone were not adequate because that was something that women simply did not do and secondly, for Therese, there is the layer of refusing to accept a man into her life by marrying. Thus, the inadequacy not only refers to her independence, rejected for women at the time, but also for her inability to adapt to the gender roles she had been assigned.

Aside from that, Highsmith's narration gives the reader an impression that Ms. Belivet has always been independent, even capable enough to leave her previous apartment and social circle in search for a fresh start in another part of the city. This instance of unconventionality of character that Therese shows might be one of the few she is shown to feel agent at, in contrast with Carol's economic dependency on her husband: "What do you have to pay for an apartment like this?" (Highsmith 2015: 104). Therese shows professional ambition: "I'll be making more soon. I won't be living here for ever, either" (105), trait that gets quickly overturned by the realization that the world would not make it easy for her to live a comfortable life with her wages. Her ambitions include traveling around and discovering new places, but her own focalization is negative on her anticipation of how the wages of the jobs she could get would not pay for them: "She probably wouldn't have the money for it, when that happened" (105). The jobs that she can get as a woman do not show prospect of saving large quantities, but they do pay their way through the independence Therese is after, as she does when abandoned by Carol after their trip together, when she is able to find low paying jobs to make her way back on her feet and back to New York on her own terms.

But the economic situation is one of the main differences that homosexual men and women show in these two Cold War novels. The way they are able or not to live their homosexuality greatly depends on what their economic situation is tied to, apart from many other instances that have been afore mentioned in this dissertation. It is no coincidence that the protagonist homosexual man in these two narratives, Jim Willard, leaves home early in his life to pursue a career in the navy. In fact, there is a long list of homosexual men who saw the army or specifically the navy as a way out of constrictive households on their way to freedom. Bérubé describes gay marine's accounts of their reasons for enlisting the navy: "He [Tom Reddy] wanted to "find out about myself all by myself. I knew pretty much that I was gay" (5). This is precisely what is described to have happened to Jim. His position as a man who can freely leave the home in search for his individuality allowed him to explore himself and his sexuality in his early adulthood. Through his work in the marine corps he could travel, see for himself how men his age related to homosexuality in other parts of the country and remarkably enough, save money. This economic characteristic of the navy makes an appearance in *The Price of Salt* as well, where Therese makes remarks on how Richard also had this opportunity when he was younger:

It was easier for him to save money. He had saved about two thousand in a two-year hitch in the Navy, and a thousand more in the year since. And how long

would it take her to save fifteen hundred dollars that a junior membership in the stage designers' union cost? After nearly two years in New York, she had only about five hundred dollars of it (Highsmith 2015: 21)

Therese is much more specific about money than the men in *The City and The Pillar* are, most probably because of how it affects her personally on her career advancement. Not only did Therese's gender provide her with fewer opportunities to spare some of her salary for her savings, but it also frustrated her hopes for an education that could get her a better paying job. World War II changed the scene for women, in fact lighting the spark for what would become the second wave of feminism. Women being able to, after the war, achieve something similar to economic freedom or to even have the choice for it was a novelty around the 1950s, and this favors how women who love women live their relationships. Lillian Faderman already got to the conclusion that the only reason why romantic friendships in the XIX century and lesbian relationships in the twentieth showed such opposite connotations was due to women's greater independence in the twentieth century: "Now a woman can hope to carry on a love relationship with another woman for life. It can become her primary relationship, as it seldom could have with romantic friends of the past for economic reasons if no other." (20). Women achieving the freedom to have "a room of their own" or even an apartment of their own, like Therese does, would push the gender roles that were established up until that moment. Ideally, women would have had no need to get married to a man to have a breadwinner in the family, because they would have been so themselves. However, the women in these novels are tremendously limited in what refers to economic development as opposed to the men. The protagonist in *The City and The Pillar* is certain his future will bear jobs that will pay for his needs, he hopes for career advancement and even is able to save enough money to set up his own tennis school. For this he relies on the financial support of his lovers, who offer to relief his low salary as an inexperienced tennis instructor. It is the fact, however, that Jim chooses to accept the livelihood that Sullivan offers instead of being socially pushed to it that gives him a freedom that the women in *The Price of Salt* lack. Had Therese and Carol had the freedom to work, travel around the world and live together that Jim and his lovers have, their story might have been completely different.

7. Conclusions and discussion

Throughout this thesis, I have outlined the main differences between the portrayal of male and female homosexual characters in the North American literature of the Cold War era, analyzing two specific novels of the same time: *The Price of Salt* by Patricia Highsmith and *The City and The Pillar* by Gore Vidal. I first focused on analyzing why this period of time is of such importance for queer literature, specifically homosexual narratives, balancing how history and politics had aligned to open up a door for the homosexual narratives to become of national importance. As has been mentioned, the tragedy of the Second World War forced governments to ease their restrictions on soldier requirements for enlisting, which included less strength in the appliance of moral clauses. As unfortunate as this is, it clearly served the purpose of a leap towards the creation of LGBT identities, which triggered the subsequent liberation in the following decades. Such was the case with many novels that started to feature homosexual characters that still are heard about today. However, homophobia still made an appearance in these narratives, as it is understandable because of the social context that they were written on. Even if the Second World War had proven the equity of all citizens in the United States in their value to uplift their country in times of distress, the same trauma left by it would stop society from helping its citizens to grow in diversity as well as in national spirit. As has been argued above, after devoting themselves to the war that the country had to fight, many homosexual veterans were given the dishonorable discharge, which prevented them from advancing in their lives as any other veteran did, among many other discriminations they would have to endure. However, these served a greater role in that they made the homosexual community realize their value to society and join forces to start what years later would become the LGBT movement.

The homophobia that society cast upon these individuals shows in how homosexual characters are shown in these two novels. Nonetheless, the homophobia that is portrayed differentiates the treatment it gives to homosexual women and the one it gives to men. Being it true that both genders suffer from the consequences of a highly traditional-family-based society, one cannot ignore the fact that the social approach to homosexuality in these two novels is unfavorable for the ideas that were to be imposed on women who loved women. As I have shown through this dissertation, the narrative in *The Price of Salt* provides the women with burdens the men in *The City and The Pillar* do not have to carry just because of their gender. One such instance is how the women are tied to the family, while the men are much freer to choose how and when they settle down, or if they do at all. This provides

homosexual men with an opportunity to explore their sexuality free of social obligations which the women are simply taught to endure from a very young age. The fact that Carol Aird married young because of how much pressure her social circle put on her castrated her options to explore her sexuality better (or at all) which could have avoided all of the trauma described in Highsmith's novel. Jim Willard, contrastively, was free to join the Navy and explore not only the world (which Carol wanted to do desperately and never could) but also his own homosexuality and even the subculture that was tied to it in depth. Likewise, the fact that the men in his life were allowed to live a life of their own comfortably allow them to simply not adhere to the rules that the women in *The Price of Salt* were pushed to follow. Although Therese decides to pursue a career of her own, she is second-guessed by the thorough description of the character of Mrs. Robichek, a single woman who works at the same department store that she did in the Christmas season and whom Therese is utterly disgusted with because of the poorness of her character and sadness of her lifestyle.

Jim's homophobia was intricately linked to his masculinity, which he defends with enthusiasm. His walk through the subculture of homosexuality in Cold War America shows how the feminine traits of those homosexual men who conformed the majority of those described in the novel are rejected by him. His shame, then, is linked to how homosexuality is interpreted as a loss of gender, a loss of masculinity that Jim refuses to give up. This masculinity so entangled with Jim's internalized homophobia was socially rooted. The Cold War period tightly linked the outsider, or in this case, the people outside the norm, to the dangers that were lingering on the air of tension that American citizens were under. One clear example of how men were reacting to these tensions are the writings and testimonies of the Beat authors which, as mentioned in earlier sections, saw women as the burden that tied them to the norm they were eager to escape. *The City and The Pillar* constructs a homosexual protagonist who is strongly handcuffed to the heteropatriarchal rules of masculine behavior, which prevents him from living his homosexuality freely. On the contrary, these gender roles that Therese Belivet and Carol Aird also have to endure prevents them from having a real choice. The rejection they feel towards the community is directly burdened on their shoulders, through guilt and shame because of how they have abandoned their family (in the case of Carol) or their plans to live a heteronormative life (in the case of Therese). The guilt and shame that homophobia projects in these characters is not external like Jim's is, but rather implicit in their abandonment of their roles as women.

The original thesis of this dissertation has been proven through the evidence afore summarized. The depiction of homosexual relationships, as well as the type of homophobia

present varies depending on the gender of the characters involved. Even if both analyzed narratives show homophobic tendencies in their creation of such lesbian and gay storylines, the homophobia the lesbian women are shown to endure is highly misogynistic. Their suffering is depicted to be closely related to the home sphere, which entangles internal hatred through guilt and shame pushed forward by their lack of traditional family values. The same lack of values does not strangle the homosexual men as strongly. In addition to this, gay men's freedom is not in these novels clipped by any means because of their role as men, in fact, both works consistently draw the men as rejecting of femininity. These traits mirror real life social tendency in Cold War America for homosexual men to feel femininity to be a burden, in fact a burden needed to be abandoned, as seen through the notions mentioned through the Beat generation social influence.

To analyze the past of queer representation in literature is key, in order to be able to assess how much of the impact of these characters has been a positive influence in what queer literature today understands as precedents. The proof that even queer narratives written by homosexual authors proposed problematic models of lesbian and gay characters helps with the understanding of the present connotations of LGBT members in society. Because of how the first steps of the queer liberation in literature were portrayed, not only straight people but most importantly lesbian women and gay men will very easily fail to accept their sexuality in the same healthy way as straight people are allowed to through innumerable literary models. Fair representation in literature is key to uplift the social understanding of homosexuality, thus preventing miseducation from governing the judgement of sexual orientation in all members of society.

Acknowledging the flaws that these characters show in their understanding of their own sexual orientation, as well as their need to ascribe to strict gender roles in both these novels is an important step towards establishing what queer literature in the future should avoid. Both these narratives have been proven to adhere to homophobic tendencies that deprive the homosexuals in them of, for instance, a happy ending. As has been mentioned earlier, the fact that not even *The Price of Salt*, interpreted as the first lesbian focused novel with a happy ending only because it avoided tragic death or profound regret, escapes from giving Carol or Therese a healthy relationship free of guilt or trauma. This fictional relationship having served as inspiration for generations of queer women could have contributed further to the community had it been less burdened with the shame that characterized homosexual characters. In addition to this, the misogynistic notions that tainted the novel clearly fails to help break the gender roles assigned to women, also

perpetuating the gender roles inside homosexual couples. In the understanding that both these novels project homophobic and misogynistic attitudes, I show how Gore Vidal interpreted a gay man's masculinity as one necessarily ascribed to highly anti-feminine gender expressions, which Jim needs to adhere to in order to prove his manhood. Future representations should avoid the portrayal of such images. The concept that male homosexuality entails a loss of masculinity, an idea widely spread in Cold War America and *The City and The Pillar*, is just a reflection of the homophobia this period had entangled in its core.

Further research would benefit from analyzing whether these ideas projected in Cold War homosexual narratives play a role in the way in which homophobia is being portrayed in current homosexual narratives. Although it is true that this tendency seems to be reverting, it would be interesting to test whether the mentioned signs of homophobia for women that have been identified in these narratives still apply to lesbian narratives today, and if not, how these have evolved. Equally, it could be tremendously important to specify if masculinity is still projected as overt in gay narratives, and if so, if it is presented as an compensative rejection of women and femininity, thus making misogyny still apply in today's queer texts. Both these ideas could grow into the understanding that homophobia is not only rooted deeply into how American society has developed but also in that through literary portrayal of queer characters, true change can be inspired. Other pieces of research would be of use to assess, now that it is clear that the queer narratives of Cold War America were in fact misogynistic in their treatment of homosexuality, whether social conceptions of homosexuality have been affected by these literary ideals: are lesbian women more pressured than gay men to fulfil a normative family, that is, through motherhood? Literary models of such relationships could have been a factor in how an ideal lesbian relationship or family is interpreted in society today.

Interestingly as well we could look into how these homophobic notions might have shifted after the second wave of feminism, when women's empowerment could have strengthened the way in which literature interpreted lesbian relationships, and how this affected the internal battle gay men faced against their femininity in order to achieve the masculinity society dispossessed them of.

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