



**TRABAJO DE FIN DE GRADO**

**«*PERHAPS SOME SUBSTITUTE FOR SALVATION: VIDAL, RECHY AND  
THE HOMOSEXUAL NOVEL IN THE COUNTERCULTURE*»**

**Autor: FRANCISCO SÁNCHEZ TORRES**

**Tutor: MAURICE O'CONNOR**

**GRADO EN ESTUDIOS INGLESES**

**Curso Académico 2015-2016**

**Fecha de presentación 09/06/2016**



**FACULTAD DE FILOSOFÍA Y LETRAS**

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## **ABSTRACT**

This project examines the countercultural production associated with homosexuality and the gay liberation movement. We will analyse two texts pertaining to this production and underline their features and how they use American symbols to reflect the homosexual experience. Furthermore, the objects of analysis shall centre upon two works which have been ignored to a certain extent by academic research in the study of this period. In this respect, we shall display how these novels can be included as representations of American counterculture.

**Keywords:** Vidal, Rechy, counterculture, gay literature, American studies, queer studies, gay liberation movement.

## **RESUMEN**

Nuestro TFG examinará la producción contracultural asociada a la homosexualidad y los movimientos de liberación homosexual. Analizaremos dos textos y señalaremos sus características, así como usan los símbolos tradicionales americanos para reflejar la experiencia gay. Además, nuestros textos han sido ignorados hasta cierto punto por la crítica sobre este período. Proponemos que estas novelas son ejemplos de la contracultura americana.

**Palabras clave:** Vidal, Rechy, contracultura, literatura gay, estudios americanos, teoría *queer*, movimiento de liberación gay.

*Il avait besoin de moi pour être et j'avais  
besoin de lui pour ne pas sentir mon être. Moi,  
je fournissais la matière brute, cette matière  
dont j'avais à revendre, dont je ne savais que  
faire : l'existence, mon existence.*

Jean-Paul Sartre, *La Nausée*.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Our aim in the following project is to approach the American counterculture from the point of view of marginalised voices and discourses. The period we are dealing with can be traced back to the end of the 2<sup>nd</sup> World War and which flourished during the 60s. It will be necessary, therefore, to give a proper background that explains this artistic movement. During the counterculture (from its beginnings in the Beat Generation and onwards) there has been a series of dominant discourses that challenged American society. Among these discourses sexual liberation and unconventional sexualities and behaviours champion a great deal of the literary corpus. Our focus will be centred on the homosexual production associated with the counterculture movement.

For the development of the analysis we are applying the concept of counterculture in its broader terms, and this will be explained later on. Then homosexual literature, obviously assuming its marginal and controversial position in society not only at the time of their publication but also nowadays, counts as a countercultural production, whether or not this is explicitly its aim or not. For the sake of a better understanding of the development of the homosexual novel during the counterculture period we shall analyse two works that belong to different decades: Gore Vidal's *The City and the Pillar*, published in 1948, which scandalised post-war America and John Rechy's *City of Night* (1963) which became a literary landmark thanks to its peculiar style and content. The themes and motifs present in both novels will serve for the purpose of examining how homosexual literature found its main propeller in the counterculture movement. We consider these works, among the rest of the production by other authors, a key to understanding the foundations of the homosexual liberation movements that reshaped Western society and gave voice to previously marginal themes in literature.

However, we will only deal with two novels out of a great stream of cultural production in the genre, which share similar traits and themes. Apart from Vidal and Rechy, we can find Beats such as the literary and poetic productions of Allen Ginsberg's and William Burroughs or other authors that belong to the 60s and 70s, which include Andrew Holleran, Edmund White, James Baldwin or Patricia Nell Warren, amongst many others. There are many other literary works that foreshadowed the appearance of a countercultural production associated to homosexuality, like Djuna Barnes *Nightwood* for example.

As a final remark, we would like to draw the readers' attention to the fact that our objects of analysis have not been subject of sustained research. This means that we have not

had access to an extensive bibliography pertinent to the specific focuses of our novels. We have, therefore, used more general works and we have applied their theories to our texts, in order to underline the characteristics of these novels according to a concrete period of American history and American letters. We consider it to be, nevertheless, a great advantage, as we shall allow the readers to draw their own conclusions and at the same stimulate further investigation into these novels, which will result in a more extended bibliographical production.

### **1.1. The US in the 40s, 50s & 60s**

The end of the 2<sup>nd</sup> World War in 1945 marked the rise of the United States as the greatest superpower thanks to its prosperity in terms of industry and its powerful weaponry. The US had developed the atomic bomb and used it against Japan, causing a widespread feeling of fear among developed countries. However, its predominance would be contested by the USSR, which also started producing atomic weapons. After the end of the 2<sup>nd</sup> World War two main orders were established: that of the US and its allies (Western Europe) and that of the USSR and its allies (Eastern Europe and part of the territories that nowadays correspond to the Middle East). The so-called Cold War had begun and both countries raced for economic, cultural, political and military supremacy.

Despite the appearance of rivalry between the two countries, the war was to develop inside the countries and their societies rather than outside; ‘this was mainly a struggle of ideologies rather than of bullets’ (Jones 1995: 517). The US and the URSS promoted different government forms (capitalism vs. communism) and therefore individuals had to show different behaviours, or so both governments considered. Truman, who came to presidency after Roosevelt’s death and rightfully became president in 1948, promoted ambitious social reforms but they were stopped and reduced. Nevertheless, there was a general sense of the US being in charge of the rest of the world. The United States then committed itself to containing the atomic bomb and other menaces. This ‘containment’<sup>1</sup> would come to affect domestic affairs:

Domestic anticommunism was another manifestation of containment: if presumably subversive individuals could be contained and prevented from spreading their poisonous influence throughout the body politic, then the society could feel secure. (May 2002: 15).

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<sup>1</sup> Term coined by George F. Kennan in 1946, for further information see (May 2002: 15).

Furthermore, the main element in the scene of the late 40s and the 50s was the HUAC<sup>2</sup> and Joseph R. McCarthy<sup>3</sup>. Then America entered in a state of constant alarm against Communism and also of fear and social suspicion. According to M. A. Jones, 'For the rest of the decade people suspected of even the vaguest sympathies with Communism, or indeed of unconventional social behaviour, were liable to be removed from positions of trust' (Jones 1995: 533). All these factors produced an American society that in the 40s and the 50s was more self-conscious than ever in its history, bringing suspicion about every member of it at the minimum and smallest gesture. Then society organised around the concepts of consumerist culture, nationalist pride and domesticity, creating a constant pressure that came self-imposed by the individuals themselves, although at first it was the government that created that pressure. The witch-hunt of Communists was a mere excuse for redirecting the behaviour of American society after the war, stopping and annulling the social changes that the 2<sup>nd</sup> World War had brought. In a sense, women came back to the kitchen and men had to reassume the leadership, as well as retake the symbols of their masculinity at home.

It was the 60s that brought the release of all the forces that had been repressed during the late 40s and the 50s. The social crisis the US was living in and the advent of Vietnam War marked the end of the persecution and anti-Communist behaviour of the previous decade. A great social unrest rebelled against the war and it was translated to all spheres of the American community. The previous movements towards racial equality and gender equality appeared again and became stronger. Other social revolutions were to take place during the 60s, such as the Gay Liberation movement and the radicalisation of Feminism thanks to works like Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* (1963). At the end of the 60s, the Stonewall Riots preceded the cohesive organisation of the homosexual communities in America to achieve respectability and social recognition.

## **1.2. Concept and origin of counterculture**

Theodore Roszak (1933-2011) theorised about counterculture at a time when counterculture was still a phenomenon in development. He coined the term and defined it as 'that healthy instinct which refuses both at the personal and political level to practice such a cold-blooded

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<sup>2</sup> The HUAC (House of Un-American Activities Committee) was founded in 1938 in order to fight ideologically against Nazism. It, however, became the main instrument for ideological and political repression. 'The Committee became notorious for its brazen publicity-seeking, its partisan attempts to capitalize on the growing anti-Communist hysteria, its bigotry, its bullying of individuals with unconventional opinions...' (Jones 1995: 529).

<sup>3</sup> Senator J. R. McCarthy (1908-1957) achieved great fame during the 50s due to his anti-Communist campaign and his witch-hunt of thousands of American citizens who were accused of belonging to Communist movements.

rape of our human sensibilities' (Roszak 1969: 47). The youth participants of this movement defined the beginnings of the counterculture, which found its main basis in student groups at University that protested against social injustice and war and it was precisely at Columbia University where Allen Ginsberg, Jack Kerouac and other artistic figures such as William Burroughs met in 1944. This group of poets, novelists and other kinds of artists was to become the movement called Beat Generation. The Beats expressed therefore their malcontent towards American post-war society and the culture of industry, technology, etc. These authors produced a revolution in the artistic spheres during the 50s thanks to groundbreaking literary works such as *Howl and Other Poems* (1956), *On the Road* (1957) or *The Naked Lunch* (1959). Allen Ginsberg's 'Howl' became not only his best known poem but one of the most controversial<sup>4</sup> and at the same time widely recognised pieces of poetry in America. Ginsberg also gave voice to sexualities that were considered deviant as his poetry reflects his sexual experiences as a homosexual. Generally speaking, the Beats popularised the use of drugs and sexual liberation as a means of protest against the establishment.

Just as Roszak would define it at the end of the 60s, it became clearest to the young Beat Generation that, in order to renew American society and try to solve the problems against which it struggled, their revolution had to necessarily be grounded on cultural politics and not by rather politically correct means, which would take generations to see its effects but by new, more aggressive means. Political, economic and international affairs would prevent them from succeeding in their social revolt and 'beyond such front-line issues, however, there lies the greater task of altering the total cultural context within which our daily politics takes place' (Roszak 1969: 4-5).

For the reasons pointed out by Roszak (1969), the Beat Generation has to be considered as the root and initial development of what was to develop in the 60s as a widespread counterculture movement. The counterculture movement that exploded in the decade that followed the splendour of the Beats remodelled the concept and the tenets of the movement, and although it was no systematic movement (the Beats themselves were very disperse in spite of the connection they had), this new counterculture relied on other discourses that had appeared but were not mainstream in Beat production as well as in the canonical. Then it must be taken into consideration that we should not regard counterculture as a radically different

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<sup>4</sup> *Howl and Other Poems* was subject of a trial with charges for obscenity that ended in October 3rd 1957 when the judge fell in favour of the book underlining its 'redeeming social importance'. For further information, see (Gair, 2008: 73-74).



cultural manifestation but rather as ‘the experience of radical cultural disjuncture, the clash of irreconcilable conceptions of life’ (Roszak 1969: 43).

When we previously expressed that we were taking counterculture in broad terms we precisely referred to the description Roszak makes of the concept in *The Making of a Counterculture* (1969). Therefore, our selected works present that cultural ‘clash’ the philosopher talks about. Both novels, despite their chronological distance, as well as many other works from the 60s onwards are deeply rooted in the counterculture. *The City and the Pillar* and *City of Night* both show alternative worlds, that do exist in the US, to the American standards and propose different lifestyles and thoughts. Furthermore, they present, as Roszak states, young protagonists who are dissatisfied with the society they live in, taking then part in this ‘youthful opposition’ and becoming an example for the readers.

## **2. DEVELOPMENT OF COUNTERCULTURE**

The following paragraphs will be devoted to giving an account on how countercultural discourses evolved from the Beat Generation to the later ideas that governed mainstream counterculture during the 60s onwards. Gore Vidal’s novel, although he preceded the Beats and did not take part in the movement, also shocked the American public. However, he never showed allegiance towards the movement, in spite of the fact that *The City and the Pillar* undoubtedly reflects the ideas that will later form the countercultural generations.

### **2.1. Ideas of the Beat Generation**

The Beats were mainly represented by Jack Kerouac, Allen Ginsberg and other artists like Burroughs, dissonant voices that questioned American society, as we have already said, and proposed serious alterations of its structure to enable the visibility of new individuals and new political, social and cultural ideas. They expressed their disconformity with the trends and tenets of the American 50s through the extensive use of drugs and other psychotropic substances and the insistence on deviant forms of sexuality.

Allen Ginsberg, one of the most representative icons of the Beat Generation, committed himself and his work to spread these ideas and became one of the most notorious individuals in the US. His open acceptance of Communism and support of the Soviet Union (support he lately withdrew after his tour in Europe and the Communist countries, where he considered that the ideology was not being well applied) granted him not only enemies but a controversial position among the American public. Ginsberg struggled to achieve recognition and to normalise homosexual themes and identity within society. In “Howl” we can read:

who let themselves be fucked in the ass by saintly motorcyclists, and screamed with joy,  
who blew and were blown by those human seraphim, the sailors, caresses of Atlantic and Caribbean  
love,  
who balled in the morning in the evenings in rosegardens and the grass of public parks and cemeteries  
scattering their semen freely to whomever come who may,  
who hiccuped endlessly trying to giggle but wound up with a sob behind a partition in a Turkish Bath  
when the blond & naked angel came to pierce them with a sword, (Ginsberg, [1956] 1986: 36-  
39)

*Howl & Other Poems* shocked the American reading public and was subject of a trial. However, Ginsberg achieved his purpose and gave visibility to new lifestyles that would be reclaimed by the Gay Liberation Movement in the following decade. However, the approach will differ, as the liberationist will pursue rather more radical discourses whereas Ginsberg's approach aimed towards adaptation.

Although Allen Ginsberg was considered one of the main figures, the most famous of the Beats was Jack Kerouac. Kerouac's work departed from the Beat tenets but relied in different discourses in comparison to Ginsberg. More devoted to the exploration of the American territory and the widespread culture of bars, jazz sessions and drugs, Kerouac became the symbol of the countercultural man. However, this symbol, although did not respond to the usual behaviour of the American man, fitted much more in the American masculine ideology than that proposed by the author of *Howl*.

Jack Kerouac and *On the Road*, one of his most famous novels, created the hypermasculine man, whose sexual impulsiveness towards women and his nomadic, cowboy-like lifestyle revived some kind of archaic sense of masculinity. Dean Moriarty and his fellow Sal Paradise (although Paradise's fixation towards Moriarty reveals a kind of adoration that almost trespasses the limits of erotic attraction) revised the representation of the American man and tried to invest him with a new, hypermasculine power.

Therefore, it is obvious that, although the Beats led the way towards counterculture, their mainstream discourses were not enough to support the countercultural movements of the 60s, that needed to re-elaborate counterculture.

## **2.2. (Homo)sexual visibility and liberation**

When the Beat Generation had effect on society, the 60s had already begun and some kind of new attitude started to develop in the artistic and social spheres in the US. Minorities and discriminated collectives such as black people or women assembled and created several organisations that pursued the structural change of American society. Throughout the decade

the country witnessed how people organised themselves and established the foundations of these movements.

Moreover, taking into account our two novels and several others (James Baldwin's *Giovanni's Room*, Vidal's *Myra Breckinridge*...) there was a growing interest in focusing on homosexual relationships and tendencies. All this, as Douglas J. Eisner, makes us think that the authors 'were aware of the homophile movement' (Eisner 1996: 7). Then, a generation of novels and novelists that were so much inclined towards depicting homosexual situations in America would prepare both the homosexual underworld communities and the major public to the events of Stonewall. Respecting this, we agree with Trudy Steuernagel (1986) in that this incipient homosexual writing was the starting point for bigger events:

Art has the potential to expand our knowledge and manipulate our emotions and beliefs. Homosexual fiction can make a valuable contribution to the gay rights movement. It can present the gay experience to individuals who might otherwise have little direct knowledge of homosexuality. Moreover, it can convey images of homosexuality which challenge the stereotyped view that homosexuals are sick, disturbed individuals. Art cannot make a revolution, but it can prepare the ground for one. [...] Social change involves more than restructured attitudes and feelings, but what people think and how they feel influences what they do and how they act. If homosexual fiction can affect what people think about homosexuality and how they feel towards it, it can directly influence their behaviour. (Steuernagel 1986: 125)

The Stonewall riots marked the departure towards homosexual visibility and the liberation movements of the Gay Liberation Front. On June 28<sup>th</sup> 1969 in New York<sup>5</sup> the police raided the Stonewall Inn, which was a common place for the homosexual community. However, the harassment from the police was responded by riots. Although the police dispersed the crowd, during the following days hundreds of people demonstrated against the police and the government in the city. The riots soon became famous and there was a widespread support of the movement. Gay and lesbian people then created the short-lasting organisation Gay Liberation Front (GLF), which assumed the same discourses as the rest of radicalised social movements.

It is, therefore, important to regard our novels in the light of these events, as they represent a rather generalised feeling of closeness to the homosexual desire and the aspects surrounding this, up to that moment, subculture. Both *The City and the Pillar* and *City of Night* take part in creating the discourses that will serve for the purpose of the gay liberation movements after Stonewall, as we have already said. But the fact is that, although John Rechy later followed the movement, Gore Vidal avoided to align with it and rejected some of its

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<sup>5</sup> New York city had the most aggressive policies against homosexuality and it was quite common to have the police raiding bars and arresting people on charges of sodomy.

principles. This controversy will be part of our analysis of both novels, which at the same time represent and do not represent the whole of the discourses of liberation and sexual freedom.

### 3. ANALYSIS

We shall now proceed to the analysis of our selected novels *The City and the Pillar* and *City of Night*. Along with the main themes and motifs, we will try to explain how these novels influence the homosexual movement and become pieces of countercultural art.

#### 3.1. *The City and the Pillar*: the post-war American man, monomania and American institutions

*The City and the Pillar*, a *Bildungsroman*, tells the story of Jim Willard, a young athlete and tennis instructor, and his monomaniac passion towards Bob Ford. It makes him travel all around America in the navy and meet the artistic spheres of Hollywood, as well as the underworld bar culture of New York. He finally reunites with Bob Ford with disastrous consequences for both of them.

Vidal began his writing career in 1946 with *Williwaw*, a novel that made him nationally famous and forged his persona of World War II writer. However, in 1948 he published *The City and the Pillar*, which astonished the reading public because of his unexpected twist in his narrative production. As he himself expresses in the Preface<sup>6</sup> to the novel:

If I published it (*sc.* the novel), I'd take a right turn and end up accursed in Thebes. Abandon it and I'd turn left and end up in holy Delphi. Honour required that I take the road to Thebes. [...] I knew that my description of the love affair between two 'normal' all-American boys [...] would challenge every superstition about sex in my native land. [...]

I gave the manuscript to my New York publishers, E. P. Dutton. They hated it. One ancient editor said, 'You will never be forgiven for this book. Twenty years from now you will still be attacked for it.' I responded with an uneasy whistle in the dark: 'If any book of mine is remembered in the year 1968, that's real fame, isn't it?' (Vidal [1994] 1997: 3)

In his revealing preface, Gore Vidal points out at the first of the main themes in the novel, as it is the description of the homosexual man. Surely the most controversial depiction of homosexuality at his time, Vidal affirms that he 'broke that mould' (Vidal [1994] 1997: 3). The author despises previous representations of male homosexuals as excessively feminine or rather introspective and intellectual.

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<sup>6</sup> The preface was written in 1993, more than forty years after the publication of the book.

Therefore, it is precisely in *The City and the Pillar* where Vidal expresses his critique against this stereotypical version through the main character. Jim, the protagonist, responds to the model of the all-American boy, a paradigm of youth and masculinity. Both Jim and Bob Ford are depicted as athletes:

They had known each other all their lives but it was not until this last year that they had become close friends. They had been on the baseball team together and they had played tennis together, even though Jim always won, to Bob's chagrin. (Vidal [1948] 1997: 18)

Vidal challenges the previous conceptions of the male homosexual by means of using these characters. Jim (because Bob does not come out as a homosexual in the course of the novel) represents the masculine authority and power, although his sexual behaviour is not traditionally attached to these characteristics. Then the author directs his attack against the tenets of hetero-masculinity.

The novel does not stop its systematic attack on masculine figures right there, but follows with Jim's experience in the navy. In Chapter Three, Jim enrolls in a ship line and begins discovering the world of the sea. However, when he faces his first encounter with a woman that tries to seduce him, he escapes from her. Also, after meeting a sailor called Collins, they go for some women and they end up having a sexual encounter. Nevertheless, Jim is repelled by the woman's body and Collins calls him 'queer'. This moment in the novel comes to be crucial to understand the characterisation of Jim:

He was not what Collins had called him. He was certain of that. Yet why? At the moment when what should have happened was about to happen, the image of Bob had come between him and the girl, rendering the act obscene and impossible. What to do? He would not exorcise the ghost of Bob even if he could. Yet he realised that it would be a difficult matter to live in a world of men and women without participating in their ancient and necessary duet. Was he able to participate? Yes, he decided, under other circumstances. In any case, the word Collins had shouted after him was hardly apt. (Vidal [1948] 1997: 53)

Jim tries to rationalise his sexuality and avoids considering himself a 'queer', because of the connotations that were applied to this word. Queers, in the era before the utilisation of this name in queer theories, were men to whom feminine characteristics were applied. So, the syllogism ends in contradiction: if Jim is masculine, then he cannot be a queer but queers like men, and so does Jim. Therefore, the disjunction lies in the fact that Jim needs to rationalise which aspect of his personality has the deepest impact on him, whether liking men or being masculine. His choosing his masculinity prevents him from regarding himself as a queer, and then challenges the concept of masculinity the readers had.

Vidal plays subtly with the concept of the hyper-masculine in American society. His criticism is frank, overt but not as direct as to aim towards accusation. He tries to uncover the rather hypocritical nature of American individuals and institutions. The army will be his aim in Chapter Seven, when Jim enlists. The narrative then gives an account on his experiences in the army, where he discovers that sexual relationships are not codified in terms of desire but rather in hierarchy and convenience. Although Jim declares he is not interested in having sex with other men, talking about 'alert-looking soldiers, forever searching for a response' (Vidal [1948] 1997: 112) in Colorado Springs, he lately feels a strong attraction and sexual desire towards one of his mates. Although Jim ignores whether there is any other male homosexual in the barrack, he invites him to dinner and to get drunk. When they end up in a hotel, Jim tries to take sexual advantage of the young corporal, who rejects him immediately.

Any reader at the time would consider that the soldier's action was the right one for a member of the army, according to the traditional hyper-masculinised propaganda. However, Jim discovers that this young soldier later begins a relationship with his immediate superior, far more convenient than with a simple mate:

'Hello, Jim.' Kervinski blushed. 'I expect we're both gold-bricks today. By the way, Ken told me he spoke to you about Louisiana.'

'That's right.' Jim was startled. 'I didn't know you knew him.'

'Oh, yes!' Kervinski beamed. 'As a matter of fact, we're going into the Springs for dinner tonight. Why don't you join us?' The invitation was put in such a way that it was perfectly clear that the last thing in the world Kervinski wanted was for Jim to join them.

[...]

Jim was baffled. He had failed with Ken. Kervinski had been successful. It seemed impossible, yet obviously something had happened and both were now eager for Jim to be shipped out. (Vidal [1948] 1997: 123-124)

Then, Jim's experiences in the army, together with a black soldier he meets that undergoes constant racist behaviours from the rest, make him leave and try to catch up with his past.

Previous to his experience in the army, the narrative directs its criticism towards the world of Hollywood, which was known as the refuge both for Communists and sexually deviant individuals. Vidal reflects this situation by means of directing the narration in a slow pace that slowly unveils the underworld society of Beverly Hills:

Otto Schilling warned Jim about the bellhops. He explained that since they were not normal young men, they would try to corrupt him. [...]

Jim went through several stages after his discovery that there were indeed many men who liked other men. His first reaction was disgust and alarm. He scrutinised everyone carefully. Was he one? After a while, he could identify the obvious ones by their tight, self-conscious manner, particularly when they moved, neck and shoulders rigid. After a time, as the young men grew used to Jim, they would talk

frankly about themselves. Finally, one tried to seduce him. Jim was quite unnerved, and violent in his refusal. Yet afterward he continued to go to their parties, if only to be able to experience again the pleasure of saying no. (Vidal [1948] 1997: 58-59)

Jim's attitude is, as it happens all over the novel, rather ambiguous. Although he denies participating in the blossoming gay community, he attends parties and tries to socialise. Thanks to his appearance in the underworld of Beverly Hills, Jim meets Ronald Shaw, a famous actor. Shaw plays the role of the next pawn in Vidal's systematic deconstruction of American institutions and iconic images. This Jewish-born, but Irish-like artistically named actor always plays the role of the Casanova protagonist in films, also always portrayed as a women-seducer by his voice and charming manners. The truth behind his artistic persona comes to be very different, as Jim discovers when Shaw develops a strong attraction to him and hires him as his personal tennis trainer.

Jim found Shaw not only an agreeable companion but, more important, informative. He showed him the secret Hollywood where, so it was said, nearly all the leading men were homosexual and those few who were not were under constant surveillance. A number of women acted as outriders to the beautiful legion, and they were often called upon to be public escorts. They were known as 'beards'. But they were not always reliable. One evening a drunken outrider tried to make love to Shaw and, when he pushed her away, she shouted obscenities at everyone present; then she was led away and no one ever saw her again.

For purposes of publicity, Shaw appeared regularly at nightclubs with girls, often rising actresses. He did this to satisfy the head of the studio, a nervous businessman whose nightmare was that scandal might end the career of his hottest property. (Vidal [1948] 1997: 69-70)

When Jim goes to live with Ronald Shaw, Vidal gives us access to the world of fame in the United States after the war. Shaw marries a woman, another actress, to keep his heterosexual appearance. However, we know at every moment that his attention is exclusively devoted to Jim. Nevertheless, when Jim meets Paul Sullivan, a famous novelist, Shaw is left behind and the novel starts dealing with another important theme.

Guilt is embodied by Sullivan and Vidal uses this character in order to create the stereotypical figure of the person obsessed with his own failures (be them psychological or physical) as a projection of degeneration in his soul. The author then employs the description of his life to criticise the potential problems of the moralising discourses produced by religion in society:

None suspected that he had forsaken the Church because he was homosexual. For a long time he had tried to exorcise the unnatural spirit, demanding furiously of God that he be freed of this terrible inclination. He prayed continually. But in the end, God failed him, and he turned to Hell. He studied a book on witchcraft, celebrated a Black Mass, tried to sell his soul to the devil in order to be free of lust. But the devil had no use for him either, and so Paul Sullivan abandoned all religion. (Vidal [1948] 1997: 83-84)

Sullivan's neurotic behaviour and his obsession with self-inflicted pain respond to the moral pressures imposed by religion, which cause the individuals to react against themselves. The protagonist feels attracted to this character but finally realises that the vision he has of his sexuality differs completely from that of Sullivan. Whereas in Beverly Hills Jim felt in the centre of a community that worshipped the body and sexual relief, with Sullivan Jim explores the moral intricacies of what his faith considers a deviant and unnatural sexual behaviour. He is incapable of sticking to any of these extremes because he moves between them, without falling inside of any of them.

The last of the great themes in the novel is represented by the last chapters of the book. The city as the centre of sexual desire plays an important role in the novel, as it will also become the link to our next selected novel. Near the end of the events narrated in the novel, Jim moves to New York, where the narrator depicts the homosexual underworld and bar culture in which Jim submerses. The narrator, after detailing the different levels of homosexuality in New York (high and low societies), proceeds with a description of how the city functions:

From all over the country homosexuals had converged on New York. Here, among the indifferent millions, they could be as unnoticed by the enemy as they were known to one another. Yet for every one who lived openly with men, there were ten who married, had children, lived a discreet, ordinary life, only occasionally straying into bars or Turkish baths, particularly at five o'clock, that hour between office and home when the need for relief is particularly urgent. (Vidal [1948] 1997: 149)

The narration also follows explaining the social codes and jargon:

These masculine, rather tense men appealed to Jim, who disliked the other sort he met through Shaw. Yet he learned a great deal from the bold homosexuals. Like jazz musicians and dope addicts, they spoke in code. The words 'fairy' and 'pansy' were considered to be in bad taste. They preferred to say that a man was 'gay', while someone quite effeminate was a 'queen'. As for those manly youths who offered themselves for seduction while proclaiming their heterosexuality, they were known as 'trade', since they usually wanted money. Trade was regarded with great suspicion; (Vidal [1948] 1997: 149)

The narrator then offers a very broad perspective on how the big city, such as New York, is ready to be presented as a sexual common place where the confluence of many types of people helps developing a complex, self-sufficient society apart from the heterosexual society. New York becomes some sort of place for desire, although the members of this new society are pretty aware of the covert nature of their relationships.

This theme is quite important because during the revolutionary years of the Gay Liberation Front and other organisations, cities like New York, Los Angeles or San Francisco became the place for gay communities to establish. Vidal expresses how bigger populations allow a larger diversity for this community to relate and to find a way to express themselves



through different vocabulary or social mores. Nevertheless, the sexual politics assumed by the gay community (the importance of sexual expression) will be criticised by the narration. At a certain point the narration says: ‘He now knew a number of people but none well. It was easier to have sex with a man than to acquire a friend’<sup>7</sup> (Vidal [1948] 1997: 151). The city, as we will explain more thoroughly in our analysis of *City of Night*, needs to be regarded also as a symbol of existential loneliness.

Among these greater themes in the novel we identify the main propeller of the action in the novel: Jim’s pursuit towards wholeness<sup>8</sup>. This wholeness, usual in every *Bildungsroman*, is represented by a new encounter with Bob, his first object of desire. From beginning to end, the novel has always that presence in and out of the narration, in the psyche of the protagonist, who always acts out of impulses directed by his thought about him. Bob Ford becomes the double<sup>9</sup> of the protagonist, whose intentions towards reuniting with his friend only reflect his desire of finding himself and reconciling the aspects of his own nature that prevent him from easiness.

Thus, when Jim finally meets Bob again, it is in his birthplace. Coming back home means the closing of the events Jim has gone through and the end of his maturing process. However, he finds that Bob Ford has married and established a life. Feeling betrayed after his years of longing, he invites Bob to New York in a desperate attempt to have the last sexual encounter with him again. When Bob refuses and calls him ‘queer’, the fatal word, Jim fights him and ends up raping him.

Finished, Jim lay on the still body, breathing hard, drained of emotion, conscious that the thing was done, the circle completed, and finished.

At last Jim sat up. Bob did not stir. He remained face-down, clutching the pillow to his face while Jim dressed. Then Jim crossed to the bed and looked down at the body he had loved with such single-

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<sup>7</sup> Here Vidal in some way foresees one of the main concerns in posterior homosexual literature. The AIDS epidemic that became the stigma of gay communities produced an important body of protest literature and criticism, which not only questioned the US Administration but also the mores of homosexual communities. In works like *The Normal Heart* by Larry Kramer the main character criticises the sexual excesses in Fire Island and New York as the key for the exponential spreading of the disease. Vidal and Kramer agree in that sexual promiscuity is not a defining trait of homosexuality but a sexual policy. This judgement appears also in other works by Kramer (*Faggots* for example) or in Andrew Holleran’s *Dancer from the dance*, which depicts the gay scene of parties where promiscuity and drug abuse are hand in hand.

<sup>8</sup> The main psychological trait in Jim is monomania, an obsession towards one particular idea. The most famous case of monomania in American literature is Ahab’s fixation with the whale in Herman Melville’s *Moby Dick*. It is interesting how Gore Vidal coincides in the aspects of the persecution by sea and in some way appropriates the theme of this foundational novel, subverting its meaning.

<sup>9</sup> The novel works with two main doubles of the protagonist. The first, Bob, represents the life Jim could have led if he submitted to the dominant discourses. The second, Paul Sullivan, represents the darker side of his nature and also how Jim would be if he let himself drown in guilt because of his sexual orientation. The device of the Doppelgänger contributes towards explaining the split inside the protagonist’s psyche.

mindedness for so many years. Was this all? He put his hand on Bob's sweaty shoulder. Bob shied away from him: fear? disgust? It made no difference now. Jim touched the pillow. It was wet. Tears? Good. Without a word, Jim went to the door and opened it. He looked back once more at Bob, then he turned out the light and shut the door behind him. (Vidal [1948] 1997: 183)

This represents the total destruction of the hetero-patriarchal authority, because Jim takes from Bob the possibility of being a complete man, as his masculine integrity has been utterly disintegrated. Now the heterosexual man is presented as a frightened, vulnerable human being, whose power has been contested and defeated by the homosexual man. The novel reaches its climax by means of a psychomachia that reveals symbolically how the protagonist decides to eradicate from himself the last vestiges of his alternative future life according to socially accepted standards. By turning the light out and leaving the scene, Jim erases Bob's part of his own personality, by denying its existence anymore in the text. Bob had been a constant motif and now disappears in the narration, his mere existence destroyed by Jim.

*The City and the Pillar* is the perfect example of the countercultural novel just before counterculture sprouts in the US. Through its themes and characterisation, a direct criticism is launched against the foundational ideas that compose American society. It challenges society and dominant discourses, proposing lifestyles and giving voice to individuals that are deliberately omitted from the common spheres. Nevertheless, the text was not primarily devised to protest or to claim for any change in the social structure of America, although it has been used for that purpose by organisations. Gore Vidal, as we have already said, refused participating in any movement towards sexual liberation. However, his novel succeeds in questioning society without demonstration, without protest, just from the point of view of an individual that does not fit in conventions and therefore underlines the lack of diversity and tolerance in America.

### **3.2. *City of Night*: sexual rebellion, capitalism and the American city**

*City of Night* was published in 1963 and depicts the life of a young man who travels, working as a male hustler, all around America, from El Paso to New York, New Orleans, Los Angeles and many more cities in order to find himself<sup>10</sup>. The novel shocked the reading public but

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<sup>10</sup> Again a *Bildungsroman*, it is interesting to mention that a great deal of the novels which shared the same genre and themes that were produced during these decades prefer the form of the *Bildungsroman*. Works like James Baldwin's *Giovanni's Room*, Edmund White's *A Boy's Own Story* or less markedly Andrew Holleran's *Dancer from the Dance* depict the coming of age and the discovery of sexuality. We consider it became the favourite form for this genre due to its perfect applying to the homosexual experience, as the *Bildungsroman* helps the

became an immediate success, although John Rechy did not leave his night job, as he explains:

I did nothing at all to promote the book, even to the extent of denying that I wrote it. I felt that if I left the streets as soon as I had some success, I'd be betraying the world that I wrote about. And the truth is that I couldn't give it up. I'd been hustling for so long that it was a habit. (Smith, 2008: para. 2)

Rechy led a double life that was divided between his literary career and his night job as a hustler, as his later books reflect. However, *City of Night* has become his best-selling novel as well as a literary landmark in American literature. The novel proposes a revision of how sexuality, capitalism and the urban space work together.

When the reader comes across *City of Night*, the depiction of America reminds us of a dystopic or a science fiction novel. However, Rechy tries to narrate a real situation by means of a narrative technique of extreme distortion. America is wrapped in the opening paragraphs at the beginning of the novel:

Later I would think of America as one vast City of Night stretching gaudily from Times Square to Hollywood Boulevard—jukebox-winking, rock-n-roll-moaning: America at night fusing its dark cities into the unmistakable shape of loneliness.

Remember Pershing Square and the apathetic Palm Trees. Central Park and the frantic shadows. Movie theatres in the angry morning-hours. And wounded Chicago streets.... Horror-movie courtyards in the French Quarter—tawdry Mardi Gras floats with clowns tossing out glass beads, passing dumbly like life itself.... Remember rock-n-roll sex-music blasting from jukeboxes leering obscenely, blinking many-coloured along the streets of America strung like a cheap necklace from 42<sup>nd</sup> Street to Market Street San Francisco.... (Rechy [1963] 2009: 3)

Rechy's version of America presents the country as an enormous and distorted city, where sounds, images and colours are blurred and blend with urban elements such as parks, streets... From the beginning we can see how Rechy avoids the stereotypical presentation of America as order and stability and focuses on the darkest aspects of the urban expansion and the hyperreal environment in which the population moves. The city then is composed by different strata, some of which are conventional and accessible, some of which are accessible but terribly unconventional and, therefore, presented as an alternative, underground world. In *City of Night* John Rechy proposes that this underground world is the only reality in the city, which recalls Jean Baudrillard's later 1981 work *Simulacres et Simulation (Simulacra and Simulation)*. Baudrillard says the following:

Les gens ne se regardent plus, mais il y a des instituts pour ça. Ils ne se touchent plus, mais il y a la contactothérapie. Ils ne marchent plus, mais ils font du jogging, etc. Partout on recycle les facultés

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readers in their personal growth and, therefore, would serve to help other homosexual readers to discover themselves.

perdues, ou le corps perdu, ou la socialité perdue, ou le goût perdu de la nourriture<sup>11</sup>. (Baudrillard 1981: 27)

For Rechy, this is the description of New York:

Times Square, New York, is an electric island floating on a larger island of lonesome parks and lonesome apartment houses and knife-pointed buildings stretching Up. (I will think dazedly one night: Someday this city will tear its wharflined fringes from the ocean and soar in desperation to the Sky...) (Rechy [1963] 2009: 15)

So, among this appearance of light, power and so on, Rechy unveils the dark reality of the American city, with its paranoid members that are oppressed by the image they should give and the desires they really have. The city then becomes the main space throughout the whole novel, the space where characters interact and reveal that the external appearance of the city responds to an artificial creation, rather than it reflects the real experience of its inhabitants.

The only moment in the novel where this conception of the city explodes is in Part Four, devoted to New Orleans and the Mardi Gras. There, in a setting described as rotten and corpse-like, the Mardi Gras reunites all strata of society and lets individuals purify themselves cathartically by means of the parades and the religious rituals. Surrounded by the most absolute chaos and the most disordered human conduct the protagonist realises the hyper-reality he is living in:

And lucid suddenly as if I had stepped beyond the world, I watch the spectacle, and I remember myself years ago before I left that window through which I had merely watched the world, uninvolved.

*Mask!*

Masks, masks....

And I think: Beyond all this—beyond that window and this churning world, out of all, all this, something to be found: some undiscovered country within the heart itself.... (Rechy [1963] 2009: 324)

This criticism against the hyper-reality society lives in comes together with a strong criticism against capitalism and the effects of this ideology on individuals. Developed in terms of sexuality and sexual awareness, this theme is reflected in the protagonist of the novel and how he regards himself. The narration deals with his life as a male hustler and subtly reveals how the protagonist codifies his sexuality. These characters need to be sure of their masculinity and do not usually consider themselves homosexuals, because the sexual intercourse with a same-sex person has been transacted. As Pete (another hustler the protagonist meets in New York) explains:

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<sup>11</sup> 'People do not look at themselves anymore, but there are institutions for that. They do not touch anymore, but there is contact-therapy. They do not walk anymore, they jog. We recycle everywhere lost faculties, or the lost body, or the lost sociality, or the lost taste for nutrition.'

He was moodily silent for a long while, and then he said almost belligerently. "Whatever a guy does with other guys, if he does it for money, that dont [sic] make him queer. Youre [sic] still straight. It's when you start doing it for free, with other young guys, that you start growing wings." ... (Rechy [1963] 2009: 34)

Then we can see the effects of the capitalist ideologies in society and their deep impact, because when money represents the personality and identity of an individual, anything that escapes from it has necessarily to be regarded as unconventional. Pete (as well as the protagonist and many other characters throughout the novel) hypocritically understands his sexuality as being apart from economic aspects and having sex with men does not risk the concept he has of manhood (heterosexual) as long as money is involved.

Money, therefore, and the idea that any action which is transacted can be alienated from individual identity becomes the shield under which the protagonist and many characters cover themselves against the necessary self-analysis. By creating this false illusion, these characters survive in the heteropatriarchy, out of the limits of respectability from the point of view of society, but inside of the limits of the sexually and behaviourally conventional from the point of view of the male hustlers themselves.

This criticism is subtle but, we consider, present throughout the whole novel. Capitalism, the predominant and most iconic ideology in the US, allows and justifies the alienation of individuals from themselves. *City of Night* reflects that the acquisition of these ideas produces the alienation of the sexual intercourse from the rest of discourses. Then, homosexual intercourses mediated by payment must enjoy some kind of privileged position in the perception of how the participants of it should be regarded in terms of sexuality. However, the narration (and the narrator) displays a great contradiction, as it shows the life of hustling and the sexual chaos as a rebellion against the system, although this rebellion is mediated by the capitalist ideology.

The protagonist, due to his numerous arrests and public scandals, considers himself a rebel and an outsider. It is true that these hustlers and their job are outside of society and that precisely makes them outsiders. Nevertheless, it is a contradiction that these characters use money to assure themselves about their sexuality, a trait that is obviously influenced by social appearance. But we do not consider it merely a contradiction in the composition of the text but a necessary contradiction to understand the novel. This work reflects autobiographically the life of an individual who begins an existential quest towards finding the meaning of his presence in reality and, therefore, needs to be surrounded by contradictions that reinforce the confusion the protagonist presents. The young protagonist fails to understand at first his position in the world because he is incapable of reconciling his sexuality with his identity, a

fact which makes him pursue that truth by travelling around the country and using his sexuality as a means of defying the system:

The central character of *City of Night* does not go beyond his sexual rebellion. Indeed, Rechy has indicated that his purpose is only to describe the existential nightmare which is characteristic of all existence, not to suggest a way out of it. His use of the phrase “no substitute for salvation” in all of his works is meant to convey the truth that there is no redemption, no possible salvation. Rechy’s narrator is a rebel, however. His homosexuality has political implications—is political—because it symbolically negates the ethics, the values, and the sexual mores of the Establishment. (Steuernagel 1986: 130)

The text also codifies its rebellious nature in form and style. According to the style, the narration, as we will explain later, is developed in a stream of consciousness technique, which implies the lack of containment in thoughts. The narration comes directly from the mind of the protagonist without any filter or censorship on the author’s behalf. Its form furthermore rejects all the conventions of literary language and spelling, creating some sort of linguistic chaos that reflects this rebellion against what is established (Steuernagel 1986: 129).

Due to his nomadic nature and his job, this character regards himself as out of the system, not following the consumerist trend of capitalism, which would require him to study or get a job and start creating a family, in order to contribute to the social balance. Then, homosexuality and hustling become some sort of rebellious act, which cannot help being somewhat contradictory, as the protagonist is unable to enjoy his sexuality (which anyway makes him an outsider) without the constant presence of money. However, this contradiction is conscious, as it belongs to a greater idea—that is, the lack of affect:

She would tell me about how everyone she had ever loved had left her: her mother, dead—her father, constantly sending her to boarding schools as a girl—her two previous husbands, Gone—her son, disappeared. “Theres [*sic*] no love in this harsh world,” she lamented. “Everybody’s hunting for Something but what?” (Rechy [1963] 2009: 34)

The whole novel reflects, through the themes we have seen (sexual rebelliousness, the city a two-fold dimension of hyper-real and the reality of the underworld, and the pervasive influence of capitalism), a deep analysis on how American society lacks human affect. *City of Night* is a hyperbolic, nightmarish reflection of the US as a whole, taking the gay underworld of prostitution as a synecdochic representation. As Stanton Hoffman states:

The culmination of this emergence occurs, I think, in Rechy’s novel, where the “gay world” and all its parts overwhelm not only the possibility of any relationship implying human involvement, but also the existence of the particular characters who would form this relationship if they could, and especially the existence of what is meant to be the centre of focus in that novel, the narrator as character, and where it functions as a metaphor for a destructive and despair ridden American reality. The America of these novels is the possibility of a vast hell always defining a smaller and intense personal hell.

[...]

The human beings who emerge, then, from these novels are beings who exist in a lonely, love-mad culture, and who seek to define themselves in the destructive context of that culture. (Hoffman 1964: 195-196)

*City of Night* therefore strongly reacts against American society and its basis, using for that purpose and extensive characterisation. In the novel we can find, as it occurred in *The City and the Pillar*, a long description of society stratum by stratum. Every aspect and part of society is presented in the text, from the highest elements in society to the lowest, showing that they are always intertwined. Then, there are sections such as the chapter devoted to Lance O'Hara, a social climber in the Hollywood spheres, whose story reflects upon the loss of youth and beauty. The novel intends to demonstrate how hypocritically all the society participates in the underworld of American prostitution, drugs and sexual promiscuity, while its external appearance denies and condemns these acts.

Drugs, unlike in *The City and the Pillar*, become an important element in the narration, as they are pervasively present. The abuse of drugs reinforces the nightmarish quality of the narration, as well as rendering the extensive presence of these substances in America visible. The protagonist is involved with drugs all throughout the novel and there are numerous depictions of drug-dealers and drug-consumption, underlining the necessity of their abuse in order to keep on living in the underworld. They mediate between the individual and the world as sometimes, as it happens in the New Orleans events, they are the only vehicle that can allow interaction between human beings:

Those face-crammed days in which time existed in the one dimension of Now, immediately. In which I took pills indiscriminately to keep me awake—pills passed from one person to another with more abandon than a cigarette is offered. In which I made it several times a day, often only pretending to come (Rechy [1963] 2009: 300).

Maybe the last but not least important aspect of this novel is the narrator, which, based on the fact that the author claims the work to be autobiographical, responds to Rechy himself. The novel uses a narration characterised by the stream of consciousness and abstraction that helps create that sense of psychological narration. Also, the narrator becomes somewhat blurred in the narration and the readers get the feeling that the narration could perfectly be in third person. As a character, the protagonist is a rather naïve and anxious young man in search of his self in American society. It shares a great deal of traits with the protagonists of novels like Dostoevsky's *Crime and Punishment*, Albert Camus's *L'étranger* or J.D. Salinger's *The Catcher in the Rye*, as the character cannot make sense of life and therefore wanders around

trying to find a satisfactory answer. Then the narrator becomes some sort of Everyman, which stops representing a personal experience but starts portraying a higher-range experience.

Particularly, this novel has been compared to Kerouac's *On the Road* and *The Catcher in the Rye*, due to its use of the American myth of the road and the existential young man who goes out to the open world. John Rechy, we consider, enacts a new view of the American tradition of the rather quixotic journey towards self-recognition. The myth of the road, popularised by Kerouac and aim of a vast cultural production in different arts, became queered by Rechy, and this appropriation served for the purpose of showing that the homosexual reality does not differ from the heterosexual one:

The army passed like something unreal, and I returned to my Mother and her hungry love. And left her, standing that morning by the kitchen door crying, as she always would be in my mind, and I was on my way now to Chicago, briefly—from where I would go to freedom: New York!—embarking on that journey through nightcities and nightlives—looking for I dont know what—perhaps some substitute for salvation (Rechy [1963] 2009: 13).

The existential quest, which finds its best expression in *The Catcher in the Rye*, is treated in both works as a criticism against the generational confusion in American society, characterising the American individual as deprived of a reason for existence.

Generally, we can say that *City of Night* had all the characteristics to become a foundational text of the homosexual counterculture, as it depicts unconventional social mores, unconventional lifestyles and deviant sexualities, as well as appropriating traditional American symbols and themes in order to give them a new meaning applied to the reality of the homosexual communities and individuals. The criticism in the novel goes directly against the harmful effects of consumerist culture, capitalist ideology and hetero-patriarchal oppression on the freedom of individuals to have a certain sexual identity. It proposes a sexual liberation by means of a rebellious sex-life and therefore compiles the discourses that were beginning to arise all over the US, which would later gather around the gay liberation movement.

Through our analysis of Gore Vidal's *The City and the Pillar* and John Rechy's *City of Night* we have seen how these two novels represent a change in literary production, as well as a change in social structures. Both novels came to be used by the homosexual communities and homosexual intellectual spheres as testimonies of the oppressed experience of this subculture in the US. However, we must check the differences between Gore Vidal's work and that of Rechy's. *The City and the Pillar* subtly tackles the themes and its criticism is sharp but in any case harsh, as the narration is not crude and brutal, although the last scene (Jim raping Bob) is



tremendously violent, whereas *City of Night* presents a harsher criticism by means of a far cruder narration, where violence, drugs, oppression and sex play the role of creating an element of discomfort for the reader.

There is also an important difference between both novels: the end. *The City and the Pillar* ends rather tragically and melodramatically, underlining that the homosexual experience is always surrounded by a sense of the tragic and death<sup>12</sup>. However, *City of Night* ends with the protagonist going back home, meditating on the problems of affect in society through his own problems, offering a pessimistic, but at least not tragic, view of life, not of a kind of sexuality. In this case, it is clear that Vidal could not help following the tradition of finishing homosexual characters in death or tragedy, although he challenged the rest of the tradition, whereas Rechy newly re-enacts all the elements that characterised homosexual characters and narratives.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

In our project we have located the counterculture within a period that framed by the American 50s onwards, especially the 60s, with some antecedents. We have discussed the beginning and the development of this movement and related it to the apparition of organised and systematic movements that pursued sexual liberation and gay rights. Finally, we have analysed two novels applying the ideas we have been developing within this frame. Both in *The City and the Pillar* and *City of Night* we can detect those elements we consider necessary to compose a countercultural production. These ingredients are a systematic defiance of the basic discourses established by the hetero-patriarchal culture in society, such as a direct attack against heterosexual marriage and conventional families and lifestyles, conservative institutions, as well as against conservative political ideologies, restrictive policies and traditional male and female roles.

After the analysis of our selected works and their posterior comparison, we can conclude that counterculture can be regarded as one of the most aggressive and influential movements not only in the US but also in both English-speaking and non-English-speaking countries. These social movements were translated into the different arts and created in a period of several decades a highly influential cultural production that not only wills to change society at the time of the counterculture movement, but still is relevant today. It is important

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<sup>12</sup> This end granted Vidal a great controversy, which led Donald Webster Corey, leader of gay and lesbian rights in the 50s. Corey remarked that Vidal's representation of the male homosexual perpetuated the traditional standards. For further information and a great approach to the questions Corey poses to Vidal's text, see (Corber 1994: 30-32).

to mention that, although these movements pertain to a particular period where their influence was at its highest, most of these works have not considered their purpose to be fully achieved, neither in the US nor in any of the Western countries. Nowadays there are still controversies related to these social issues, as there still exist discourses in society that display a will towards restoring (or maintaining) a hetero-patriarchal order.

In the case of our object of study, it is clearly the social upheaval which has less evolved, due to the influence of the HIV/AIDS epidemic in the eighties or the pressure religious authorities have been imposing on society. Homosexuality is still a target of criticism in the US and topics such as gay marriage produce great controversy<sup>13</sup>. Although in countries such as the US, Spain or Germany great advances have been made in reference to homosexual visibility and equality, there are still countries in the Western sphere that lack a proper law which enforces sexual equality or, as in the case of Russia, forbid homosexuality by passing laws against it. Nevertheless, we must mention also the fact that the tolerance and visibility of queer sexualities and genders have increased in their appearance in cultural productions such as TV shows or music, without falling into the stereotypical representation and characterisation.

The novels we have selected, together with many other literary works we have already mentioned throughout our project (James Baldwin's *Giovanni's Room*, Andrew Holleran's *Dancer from the Dance*, Larry Kramer's *Faggots* and *The Normal Heart*, Allen Ginsberg's *Howl* or Edmund White's *A Boy's Own Story*) belong to a tradition of wrongly-called homosexual literature, now established, which has evolved from the late 40s until present time. We consider that the term for this literature is incorrect because of its rather shallow meaning. The use of the term 'homosexual' applied to a literary work is ambiguous, as there is no clear demarcation between what is homosexual literature or not. Should we, therefore, consider Walt Whitman's *Leaves of Grass* or Lord Byron's poetry homosexual literature just because both authors displayed homosexual or bisexual tendencies? Or, should we catalogue as homosexual literature any text in which a homosexual tendency is presented, no matter the sexual condition of the author? In any case, we do not regard *The City and the Pillar* or *City of Night* as homosexual or queer novels in the sense that their themes and symbols are queer. On the contrary we have evidenced that they are not as they come from the same source as

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<sup>13</sup> We must take into account the fact that it was not until 26 June 2015 that the US Supreme Court ruled that same-sex marriage had to be lawfully established in every state of the country. For further information, see (BBC, 2015).

non-queer literature. There is, we feel, a need to classify literature and because of that necessity some tags that become widespread, inadequate though, appear.

Our selected novels, on the contrary, display the postmodern condition of literature and society, as well as the fact that they serve for the purpose of giving voice to a sphere of society that has been traditionally kept apart from mainstream literature and reduced to secondary, stereotypical roles. They deal, in our opinion, with homosexuality in the same sense heterosexual novels deal with heterosexuality and precisely in that aspect both novels represent a change in literature, as they portray a certain piece of reality trying to avoid any convention around it. Furthermore, they do not try to normalise a situation but present it as normal, not as an event or condition but as a part of identity, being the main conflict the fact that the whole identity is not accepted in society because of a certain part of it. We must therefore appreciate the role of these novels in reconfiguring the previous conceptions of the homosexual individual and assume their inevitable contribution to the discourses in favour of sexual liberation and equal rights for everybody, no matter what their sexual preference is.

Finally, our project also serves for the purpose of examining the representations of individuals and their relations to sexuality in modern culture. We consider it important to study how societies represent individuals in cultural productions because they definitely mark the progress in society towards the acceptance of traditionally considered deviant family structures or deviant sexualities and gender identities. Our aim is not simply a move towards Gender Studies in the sense that we want to show how a certain gender or sexual preference is configured in our selected novels, but, moreover, to show what society expects from these individuals to represent and how these novels fail on purpose to satisfy these expectations. Furthermore, we must regard the fact that when we usually talk about counterculture, we tend to stick to the canonical works of the Beats and some other authors, omitting those other works that belong to the same period. We, therefore, have chosen to focus on these rather marginalised voices in literature (we do not refer to Vidal as much as we refer to Rechy) in order to get a broader perspective of how counterculture works and to which social extent it expands. Counterculture, therefore, reaches far and wide into society, covering many individuals, whose personal traits contribute towards creative production.

We therefore consider that, although counterculture has been widely studied, it still offers a large and open field for research in order to find and bring forth forgotten works that may help us obtain a broader view of a movement that defined society. Counterculture marked, as Theodore Roszak pointed out, the will of the unsatisfied youth towards social change and the need to renew the social structures in society. Precisely nowadays, not only in

the US but also in our country, that the worldwide ideological crisis, dressed up as an economic crisis, has showed its profound regressive effects on society, we need to look back and remember the social upheavals that changed it. Therefore, the past experience becomes the key for the creation of a new youth with task of renewing society the same way their predecessors did.

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