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**Depiction of LGBT movement in contemporary
American literature**

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I hereby declare that this thesis is my own work, based on the sources and literature listed in the appended bibliography.

Plzeň, April 2015

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List of abbreviations

ACT UP	AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power
AIDS	Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome
DOB	Daughters of Bilitis
ECHO	East Coast Homophile Organizations
FDA	Food and Drug Administration
GLBT	Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender
GMHC	Gay Men's Health Crisis
HIV	Human Immunodeficiency Virus
LGBT	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender

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*The place in
Which I'll fit
Will not exist
Until I make it*

James Baldwin

1. Introduction

The twentieth century was the century of the fights for freedom and liberation, not only in the United States of America. Firstly, the suffragettes fought for the right of women to vote in the first years of the twentieth century and other fights of feminists for the women rights in general followed in the upcoming decades. Further, the colonized states fought for their independence and most of them succeeded. There were many battles also in the field of race, especially in the U.S. The so called Jim Crow laws, promoting separate but equal mantra in America, were banned in the 1960s. Along with this liberation came also LGBT movement (or GLBT movement, Gay Rights Movement or gay liberation). However, the LGBT liberation in America has not yet come to its end, considering the fact that for example the same-sex marriages are, during the writing of this theses, allowed only in thirty-seven states of the federation (Freedom to Mary 2015a; see appendix I). Moreover, in some states of the U.S., mostly in the Bible Belt¹, there is still almost no protection against hate crimes, employment discrimination based on sexual orientation, and same-sex marriages and adoptions are explicitly banned there, too (The Guardian 2012).

Still, a great progress has been accomplished. Even before the American Revolution, every colony in North America had laws which banned homosexual or otherwise considered sinful behavior (Eaklor 2008: 186) and punished it with death, even Pennsylvania, citizens of which, Quakers, stood against death penalty. The law was imposed by the British and was retained until the 19th century, when the death penalty was replaced with imprisonment and fines (Kuhn 2011: 10-11).

Becoming an issue of a great importance in American cultural and literary spheres, the objective of this thesis is thus to explore, in several steps, the depiction of LGBT movement in chosen works of American literature. I will

¹ South-eastern part of the US, commonly associated with conservative Protestantism and Republicanism.

focus on the depiction of the members of LGBT community, and try to connect the literary depiction with real time events ongoing within the LGBT movement, and characterize the reflection of the LGBT movement in the attitudes of the authors and the protagonists in their works. Another aim is to find out whether the chosen authors did somehow influence the LGBT movement.

Given the topic of the thesis and due to the fact that many of the works, which will be the subjects of the analysis have not yet been translated into Czech, this thesis will be written in English. I will work with both secondary sources, which deal mostly with the historical background of the movement and the chosen authors, and primary sources, which are constituted, besides the analyzed works themselves, also by the interviews with the authors, and Isherwood's diaries and autobiography *Christopher and His Kind*.

I will follow the development of the LGBT movement over time. Due to the extensiveness of the matter and the differences between specific groups of its representatives, each of which have their own history, development and issues, I will pay attention only to gay white male literature, and thus, to the depiction of white gay men.

In this thesis, a poem, two novels and a play will be analyzed. I have chosen three authors who published their works in the early consecutive decades of contemporary literature from the 1950s to the 1980s. The period is chosen bearing in mind the fact that it is the time when we can see the beginnings of the LGBT movement, which also provides background for the changing depiction of homosexuals in literature.

The first part of the thesis will briefly introduce some of the major points of the LGBT history, which influenced the perception of homosexuals later in the 20th century. In the following sub-chapter pre-contemporary American literature and its representatives will be discussed, since it served as an inspiration for later authors. The last section of the theoretical part will then contain information

about contemporary American gay literature. These chapters will give only brief and selected pieces of information due to the extensive range of the subject and with the purpose to provide basic background for the practical part of the thesis.

The practical part will constitute the main part of the thesis and will be based on the interpretation of several chosen works of contemporary American writers and their depiction of homosexuals as well as will contain brief biographies of the authors, and their connections to the LGBT movement in reality.

And finally, the analysis of the chosen works will be based on the reception theory. The author of the reception theory is a German literary theorist Hans Robert Jauss², who in 1967 suggested, that works of literature should be studied based on the reception of the reader (Stierle 2001: 199), whose understanding and reception of the text is based on her or his knowledge, experience or background (Stierle 2001: 234), which can further affect the later recipient if we consider adopting information from secondary sources (Stierle 2001: 235). Jauss says that no literary theory up to date (he mentions the Marxist school and the formalist school) recognizes the importance of the reader's reception, which is a mistake, because „no text (especially fictional) was ever written to be read and interpreted philologically by philologists”³ nor „historically by historians” (Jauss 1970: 8). From this reason, the reader also influences if and how the literary work will be perceived and valued in the future, it is the historical implication (Jauss 1970: 9). So, we will study the chosen sources from the perspective of a reader with a keen interest in American literature and the LGBT movement.

² Hans Robert Jauss (1921-1997) was an expert on Roman language and literature and a professor of literary science in Konstanz. He introduced the public to the reception theory during his inaugural lecture entitled *What does studying the history of literature mean and what purpose does it have? (Was heißt und zu welchem Ende studiert man Literaturgeschichte?)* which then became a base for his essay *Literary History as a Challenge to Literary Theory*, in which he described the importance of the matter (Stierle 2001: 275).

³ Author of the quote is Walther Bulst (Jauss 1970: 7).

2. Overview of American LGBT history and literature

In this chapter, the American LGBT community will be introduced. First, we will follow the evolution of the concept of homosexuality, and discuss terminology such as homosexuality and inversion. A sub-chapter on the first LGBT organization will follow, and the second chapter will be closed by an overview of homosexuality in American literature.

2.1. Beginnings of LGBT community in the U.S. in the 20th century

2.1.1. Evolution of the terminology and concept of homosexuality

The term „homosexual” was coined in 1869 (Stewart 2014: 25) by an Austrian journalist and physician Karl Maria Kertbeny. After he found out that his friend committed suicide because his homosexuality might be revealed, Kertbeny wrote several pamphlets arguing that same-sex love should not be punishable by death (Kuhn 2011: 11). The word „gay” as a description of the same-sex sexuality person came to use in the first half of the 20th century and started to be genuinely widespread in the 1950s. The word has had slightly different meanings through history, for example in the 19th century the term was connected to prostitution (Rupp 1999: 112).

In 1871, Doctor George Naphays wrote a handbook for men, in which he mentioned the existence of a male urban community, who visited restaurants dressed as women. A couple of years later, in 1893, Doctor C. H. Hughes described a community he himself called an Organization of Coloured Erotopaths located in Washington, D.C., where men dressed as women and had sexual relations with men of other races (Rupp 1999: 87-88).

Medicine distinguished different kinds of sexuality in the second part of the 19th century. The same-sex sexuality was defined as a kind of perversion, or also known as *inversion* – personal characteristics in contradiction with the gender (Rupp 1999: 89). Sexual inversion became a label which was often applied to LGBT people for the next hundred years (Eaklor 2008: 35). The

author of this concept was an English sexologist Havelock Ellis. This concept opened a discussion, the result of which was a theory that homosexuality was not a criminal act, but rather an act of a disordered person in a need of medical help (Eaklor 2008: 35).

In American medical paper, the term „homosexual” was first introduced in 1892 by James G. Kiernan. According to Kiernan, a homosexual was a person whose „mental state is a mental state of an opposed gender” (Rupp 1999: 90).

After a number of medical researches on homosexuality and its cause, there appeared comments criticizing its condemnation. In 1889, Doctor G. Frank Lydston challenged the criticism of homosexuals, arguing they should be treated as „the victims of physical and mental defect”. Still, even after medical discussions of this kind, homosexuality was still illegal and punished by law (Rupp 1999: 91).

2.1.2. History of American LGBT organizations

According to a historian and Women’s studies Professor Leila J. Rupp, one of the first impulses for formation of LGBT organizations or communities was the development of consumerist society and urbanization in the first decades of the 20th century. The development of consumerist society caused that groups of LGBT people started to connect and discuss the issue. The growing community also caused the interest of numerous doctors or sexologists, who newly named these sexual categories (Rupp 1999: 85). Rupp calls this era „the beginning of sexual liberalism” (Rupp 1999: 86). Another impulse came after the World War II, when many homosexual people settled in big cities such as New York, Chicago, San Francisco, which offered them at least a small sense of a gay community (Kuhn 2011: 27).

Although it was not until the 1970s that the full LGBT liberation aroused, it is possible to trace the beginnings of the official American LGBT rights groups

back to the 1920s. The 1920s were an era of jazz, Harlem renaissance⁴, and social and cultural dynamism not only in the United States. At that time, Berlin was the center of LGBT underground culture with thematic clubs, scientific researches on the topic of homosexuality (mostly under the Institute for Sexual Science), and even the very first gay magazine, *Der Eigene*, which was published in the period 1886 to 1931 (Strand 2010). The publishers of the magazine, which was sent to the subscribers secretly before the 1920s, but then was sold openly, founded a world's first gay liberation political group The Scientific Humanitarian Committee (*Wissenschaftlich-humanitäres Komitee*), which requested the annulation of a ban on homosexuality (McKay 2004).

In December 1924, when Henry Gerber, an American soldier born in Germany, returned from Berlin where he had been stationed after the World War I, he established a Chicago organization fighting for gay rights called The Society for Human Rights. The purpose of the organization was to hold lectures, give presentations, publish books and gain membership and funding from important people to fight widespread homophobia (Eaklor 2008: 55). The group called for the protection of people who were humiliated because of their psychological abnormalities or sexual differences, and they were obstructed from living an ordinary life all this in contradiction with the Declaration (Rupp 1999: 166). Gerber also published a newsletter called *Friendship and Freedom* (Kuhn 2011: 13). Eventually, the organization disintegrated only about a half a year after it had been founded, which was caused by a lack of interest of public, lack of funding, and above all the arrest of the vice president of the Society for engaging in homosexual intercourse. It resulted in a scandal covered by newspapers as a „strange sex cult“, and Gerber was discharged from the U.S Post Office for his sexual orientation (Kuhn 2011: 13). The founder of the organization nevertheless did not stop to fight for the cause, and kept on writing

⁴ A period during the 1920s which was a background for the „New Negro“ movement, which produced numerous African American artists and the revival of the African-American culture (Eaklor 2008: 57).

extensively on advocating and promoting LGBT rights until his death in 1972 (Eaklor 2008: 55).

The next step of the movement was to organize nationally. The first national organization for gay rights was the Mattachine Foundation, later renamed as the Mattachine Society. The organization was founded at the beginning of the 1950s by a member of the American Communist Party, Harry Hay, in Los Angeles, and in a few years it spread into Northern California and further to the country, with a strong presence in San Francisco (Raskin 2004: 10). The Marxist ideology of the founder had a significant influence both on the purpose and the structure of the organization. The structure was said to copy the structure of secret communist groups and their system of hierarchy and cells, which puts emphasis on the secrecy and its members were allowed to know only members in their own cell. Hay also commented on the oppression of gays, whose only chance was to organize and start their own movement as the African Americans successfully had done before them. The goal of this organization was quite similar to The Society for Human Rights – to promote gay rights, educate, and unite gay rights activists (Eaklor 2008: 96-97). It also created a theory of the homosexuals as a sexual minority and fought against police oppression (Rupp 1999: 167). In 1953 the organization underwent a series of changes along with the homosexual minority theory. The new Mattachine Society no longer claimed that homosexuals should have been treated as a cultural minority, but only that they “differ from the mainstream society solely in their sexuality” (Rupp 1999:168). Many of the Mattachine Society member also co-worked with psychiatrist Evelyn Hooker on the research on homosexuality (Hooker 1957: 19), as will be more explored in chapter three.

The Mattachine Society was succeeded by ONE, Inc., which also published a gay rights magazine ONE and in 1956 (ONE Archives 2014) founded the ONE institute for educative and research purposes, and offered a Homophile Studies program for students. One of the members of ONE, Inc. was

also the author Christopher Isherwood, further discussed in chapter three. The magazine won a legal battle over its existence in January 1958, after being accused of obscenity (ONE Archives 2014). Eventually the Supreme Court decided in favor of ONE.

LGBT organizations of the 1950s and 1960s were generally referred to as the homophile⁵ organizations due to the fact that the term homosexual was associated with sickness or criminality (Eaklor 2008: 96).

However, the above mentioned organizations were almost exclusively male, or at least controlled by men⁶. The lesbian activists were united for the first time in 1955 in San Francisco under the name Daughters of Bilitis. This was a counterpart to the Mattachine Society – exclusively female group of similarly thinking activists promoting gay rights through education and research. Daughters of Bilitis were also a feminist movement, emphasizing the fact that the lesbian experience is also strongly connected to sexism and above all, feminism (Eaklor 2008: 98).

The name of the organization was inspired by a literary piece, namely the *Songs of Bilitis*. It is a poem by the French poet Pierre Louys, in which Bilitis is a lesbian who lives on the isle of Lesbos. The group started as a gathering of only eight women inspired by the Mattachine Society, but later grew into a national organization that among many others supported the first lesbian conference in 1960, and published the first lesbian magazine *The Ladder* (Rupp 1999: 169).

2.2. American gay literatures

2.2.1. Transcendentalists

The gay themes did not appear in the mainstream literature until the 1950s and 1960s, although there had been many literary pieces mentioning the issue decades prior. Due to the Puritan society and low urban population, the

⁵ Homophile could be translated as „loving the same“ (Eaklor 2008: 96).

⁶ There were only a few exceptions, e.g. Philadelphia branch of the Mattachine society (since 1960) had a female leadership (Stein 2012: 55).

homosexual community in America was not much visible until the second half of the nineteenth century. One of the first American literary and philosophical movements, whose members often mentioned same-sex love in their works, were the Transcendentalists. One of their most eminent members, Ralph Waldo Emerson, allegedly homosexual himself, often wrote about male friendship which he put forward to heterosexual relationship. Similarly, Henry David Thoreau's poems also contain homosexual themes (Summers 2014: unpaginated)

2.2.2. Walt Whitman

Considered the greatest American poet, Walt Whitman mentioned homosexual relationship in several of his works, e.g. in his collection of poems *Leaves of Grass*, and most notably in the *Calamus*. *Calamus*, a cluster of poems published in *Leaves of Grass*, is generally considered to be a compilation of homoerotic poems celebrating a friendship between men (Rupp 1999: 80). The homosexual subtext was apparent, and when asked if the *Calamus* poems were homosexual, Whitman did not respond (Myers 2013: 370-371).

For the one I love most lay sleeping by me under the

Same cover in the cool night

In the stillness, in the autumn moonbeams, his face

was inclined toward me,

And his arm lay lightly over my breast – And that

night I was happy. (Whitman 1860: 358)

Whitman was according to Robert K. Martin the poet, who started an American male homosexual poetry, although Whitman himself tried to hide his homosexuality (Selby 2004: 120) and allegedly had at least six children (Myers 2013: 371). Besides his poetry, there are many indications of Whitman's sexuality in his diaries, or *Daybooks*. There he gave list of boys or men he met, and if they spent night at his apartment (Rupp 1999: 80). Whitman was explicitly

asked by a British writer J. A. Symonds to confirm the homosexual tone of his poems or his own sexuality in 1890, but he denied it (Rupp 1999: 94). Nevertheless, Whitman's poetry was an inspiration for generations of gay writers, including Allen Ginsberg who said about Whitman that he was a „freak” and that „his abnormality was the prime factor in shaping the message of Leaves of Grass” (Raskin 2004: 41). This quote suggests that Ginsberg was able to reach a conclusion about Whitman's homosexual subtext of his poetry.

Whitman was one of Ginsberg's favorites, and these two poets are often associated and talked about as the gay poets whose works „demonstrated and developed a gay poetic“ (Selby 1997: 120). Similarly, as Whitman was not only in his poems an avid supporter of democracy, Ginsberg, too, provides a criticism of the American society that does not fulfill his ideas of democracy, which will be elaborated later in the thesis.

2.2.3. Harlem Renaissance and contemporary literature

Later, Harlem Renaissance of the 1920s supported the LGBT expression both in art and social life. Among the acknowledged homosexual writers were poets Langston Hughes and Countee Cullen, or the novelist Richard Bruce Nugent, whose *Smoke, Lilies and Jade* (1926) is considered to be the first African American gay novel published by an African American writer (Eaklor 2008: 59). The 1920s Harlem gay minority also appeared in Blair Niles' 1931 novel *Strange Brother*. The novel is focused on a white homosexual protagonist, and depicts the connection of the white homosexual minority to the African-Americans at that time (Schwarz 2003: 14).

The term contemporary as related to literature may be defined in many ways. Therefore, for the purpose of this thesis we will focus on the contemporary literature as the literature written after the World War II.

It is possible to see a rise in numbers of works of literature which include a gay character or a gay theme in 1950s (Tručník 2011: 61), however, LGBT

literature was at that time only „an underground movement” (Cruikshank 1992: 116). One of the most prominent first contemporary works of literature with a homosexual theme is the novel by Gore Vidal, *The City and the Pillar* (1948), which is sometimes considered as the first homosexual American novel (Summers 2014: unpaginated) The protagonist, young man named Jim Willard, is in love with his high-school best friend Bob, who eventually murders him (Bram 2012: 6). The novel sparked outrage for its depiction of a homosexual relationship between two average American men, as opposed to earlier novels with LGBT themes, which mostly covered the topic of transvestitism (Kuhn 2011: 30), as in another example of early gay literature, *Other Voices, Other Rooms* (1948) by Truman Capote. In 1956, James Baldwin’s *Giovanni’s Room* was published by a mainstream publisher. It was a love story of two white gay men. Baldwin, who is considered to be one of the Harlem Renaissance authors, wrote about white men, because he wanted to escape the label of a „Negro novelist” (Bram 2012: 46), however, from writing about a minority based on race he moved to minority based on sexuality.

3. The loud voices of the Beat generation – Allen Ginsberg & Howl

3.1 LGBT in the 1950s and San Francisco

The LGBT situation after the World War II was rather ambiguous. In 1948, scientist Alfred Kinsey published his report on American sexology *Sexual Behavior in the Human Male*⁷, in which he stated that 46% of white American men had some sort of a homosexual experience. He also created a Kinsey scale of seven categories of homosexuality – from exclusive homosexuality to exclusive heterosexuality (Rupp 1999: 148-9). This report provided new information about the subculture (LGBT community still was not yet considered a minority) and opened the discussion on sexual orientation. It became a bestseller with two hundred thousand copies sold in only two months (Kuhn 2011: 29).

However, generally, the political situation for homosexuals worsened after the World War II. The homophobic politics as seen in purges of gay people in the army or navy, spread into the civil state sector. In the center was the senator Joseph McCarthy, who decided not only to fight communism, but also cleanse the state of LGBT people. The report *Employment of Homosexuals and Other Sex Perverts in Government* of 1950 concluded that „a one pervert has a devastating influence on other employees.” This resulted in many dismissals of LGBT people and newly set interviews which were supposed to examine the applicant’s sexuality (Rupp 1999: 145). Among thousands victims of this policy was also for example an astronomer Frank Kameny, who was dismissed from the U.S. Army Map Service in 1957. Kameny later not only sued and picketed the government because of the discrimination (Clendinen 2001: 113) but also became a candidate for Congress in 1971 (Clendinen 2001: 123).

San Francisco, however, for decades a center of various subcultures, could be considered as a gay asylum after the World War II and onwards. Even before

⁷ Followed by *Sexual Behavior in the Human Female* in 1953 (Rupp 1999: 148-9).

the war, San Francisco had a reputation of a city with liberal views and was open to various unconventional behaviors like homosexuality (Rupp 1999: 152).

As stated earlier, San Francisco was also the birth town of the first female-lead homosexual national organization Daughter of Bilitis in 1955. In 1956, the Mattachine Society relocated from Los Angeles to San Francisco and started publishing a journal promoting gay and lesbian rights and culture there (Eaklor 2008: 96).

Nonetheless, it is impossible to consider San Francisco as a „liberal heaven” due to events like police harassment, which was spread all over the country, and which among other consequences caused closing of several bars. The gay bar owners in San Francisco responded to the harassment in 1962 by forming an association called the Tavern Guild (Eaklor 2008: 96).

3.2. Beat Generation

The writers of the Beat Generation, with the term Beat⁸ coined by Jack Kerouac, rejected conformism of the Cold War America and emphasized the individuality and freedom of mind and body. They inspired several subcultures and literary movements which came after them (such as the countercultures of the 1960s). The movement is considered to form in the late 1940s both in San Francisco and New York.

The most prominent Beat authors were Allen Ginsberg, Jack Kerouac and William S. Burroughs. Ginsberg and Burroughs in particular write openly about homosexual relationships in their works, very often with the intention to shock public. The sincerity in the Beat’s works might be considered as a sign of a growing presence of homosexuality in 1950s and 1960s America (Davies 2012: 80). Burroughs is the author of the novels *Naked Lunch*, *Junky*, and *Queer*, which

⁸ There are several interpretations of the origin of the name. Another possible origin is an article from John Clellon Holmes in New York Times Magazin (Duval 2014: 33). The third interpretation is that the term was coined by a columnist Herb Caen in 1958 (Marler 2013: 31).

was written in the 1952, however, it was published no sooner than in 1985 due to the reluctance of the publishers (Marler 2013: 32).

3.3. Allen Ginsberg

3.3.1. Life

Allen Irwin Ginsberg was born in 1926 to a Jewish family in New Jersey. Both of his parents had huge impact on his future life and career. His father Louis Ginsberg was a teacher and a published poet, who influenced not only Allen Ginsberg, but also his second son, Eugene. He taught his sons about Milton and Wordsworth, read them poetry, and later criticized his son's poems (Raskin 2004: 27).

Ginsberg's mother Naomi, who immigrated to the United States from Russia in 1905 as Naomi Levy (Raskin 2004: 28), suffered from mental illness and spent several years in sanatoriums. She was a Communist and her political ideology also influenced her son (Bram 2012: 25).

In 1943, Ginsberg started his studies at Columbia at the age of 17. At Columbia he met people who influenced his career and his whole life. Among those people were future Beat writers Jack Kerouac, who studied there for a short time, and William Burroughs (Bram 2012: 25).

Although he impressed his teachers with his knowledge of William Blake and Percy Byshe Shelley, he didn't impress them with his behavior. On the contrary, at the end of his freshman year, Ginsberg was expelled for writing „obscene graffiti” on his dorm window (Bram 2012: 26). This experience is mentioned in Howl:

*„Who were expelled from the academies for crazy &
publishing obscene odes on the windows of the skull” (Ginsberg 1959: 9).*

He soon re-enrolled, but he spent his summers at the National Maritime Academy and on a merchant ship to Africa. He soon experimented with drugs

like Benzadrine, marihuana and even heroin (Bram 2012: 26). Both drugs and travelling were important aspects of the Beat generation.

In his later life, he practiced Eastern religion (Duval 2014: 35), he became a member of the hippie subculture, and a world widely popular icon, „a poet who was no longer known for his poems” (Bram 2012: 166). He was politically active, promoting the freedom of speech and the legalization of marijuana (Marler 2013: 32). He became known mostly for his protest poems, the obscenity trial and his drug use, however, his homosexuality was not discussed in the media. Even though he was open about his relationship to Orlovsky, whom he met in 1954 (Marler 2013: 59), and even described himself as Orlovsky’s husband in 1963 (Bram 2012: 37), he was often called his mere roommate (Bram 2012: 165).

3.3.2. Work

Howl is not by far the only poem which openly mentions homosexuality. In 1956 poem *A Supermarket in California*, which is also published in *Howl and Other Poems*, Ginsberg writes of Walt Whitman and describes his behavior, as he is „eyeing the grocery boys“ (Ginsberg 1959: 29), and puts the great American poet into the context of consumer-capitalist environment (Selby 1997: 126). Further, he closes *America* from the same collection with „America I’m putting my queer shoulder to the wheel“. He still wrote poetry after *Howl*, however, according to his publisher Lawrence Ferlinghetti, none of his later poems could compare to his masterpiece (Raskin 2004: 226). Some of his later poems which mention homosexuality and are worth mentioning are *Old Love Story* (1986), which describes the homosexual love through the ages (Raskin 2004: 146) or *Straight Heart’s Delight* (1980), written together with Orlovsky (Bram 2012: 166). Ginsberg died in New York on April 5, 1997 (Academy of American Poets 2015).

3.3.3. Sexuality

In connection to the overall topic of the thesis, it is necessary to elaborate more on Ginsberg's sexuality. Prior to the releasing of *Howl*, Ginsberg could be considered confused about his sexuality. While working on a school essay, he thought that *Leaves of Grass* were marred by the homosexual allusions (Raskin 2004: 20). He also considered writing poems with homosexual theme under a pseudonym (Raskin 2004: 58). He even expressed hope that a new born son of William Burroughs will not be a homosexual (Raskin 2004: 74) and in 1955 he wrote in his journal „my mind is crazed by homosexuality” (Raskin 2004: 152).

Ginsberg's public coming out happened in *Howl*, however the first person he told about his sexual orientation was Jack Kerouac in Ginsberg's dorm room on Columbia University in 1946 (Young 1996: 27). He knew he was a homosexual before the age of twelve, when he read works of a sexologist Richard von Krafft-Ebing (Duval 2014: 31), but he did not tell his family (Young 1996: 53).

In 1949 at court, Ginsberg was accused of a car theft, drug possession, and possession of stolen goods after riding in a stolen car with a couple of criminals. He was advised to plead insanity to avoid prison. At the court he said he is sick and wishes „to be cured, stable [...] and married” (Raskin 2004: 90). He was sent to the *Columbia Presbyterian Psychiatric Institute* due to the history of mental illness in his family, and for his confessed homosexual behavior⁹. There he was constantly interrogated about his sexual life and forced by his doctor to give up on his homosexuality (Bram 2012: 26-27), because at that time, homosexuality was considered an abnormality by psychiatrists¹⁰ (Hooker 1957: 18). He spent eight months there and gathered inspiration for his poetry. One of his inspirations and influences was a patient called Carl Solomon, who is immortalized in the third part of *Howl*.

⁹ Asked if he was queer by the jury, he did not answer but he nodded as yes (Raskin 2004: 89).

¹⁰ „When such homosexual behavior persists in an adult, it is then a symptom of a severe emotional disorder“ (Hooker 1957: 18).

After a series of psychiatric sessions in the institute, he tried to lead his life in line with sexual conformity, calling his homosexuality „camp, unnecessary, morbid, so lacking in completion and sharing of love as to be almost as bad as impotence and celibacy”, as he wrote in a letter to Kerouac (Marler 2013: 24).

3.4. Howl

The collection *Howl and Other Poems* was released in 1956 by publisher Lawrence Ferlinghetti at City Lights Books in San Francisco and met with varied reviews. The introduction was provided by Williams Carlos Williams, an American modernist and imagist poet. Ginsberg dedicated this collection to his friends and other Beats – Kerouac, Burroughs and Cassady (Ginsberg 1959: 3).

It was called a „confession of the new generation” (Rexroth 1984: 32) and a „personal assault on America” (Podhoretz 1984: 35) by some critics. Ginsberg’s father Louis assessed the poem as a „wild, rhapsodic, explosive outpouring with good figures of speech flashing by in its volcanic rushing” (Raskin 2004: 27). It is a poem based on destructive violence, against the mechanical, oppressive society which kills a spirit of an individual (Eberhart 1984: 25).

On the other hand, acclaimed poets like Ezra Pound (Bram 2012: 33) and Auden (Bram 2012: 36) were not impressed. Interestingly, some of its first reviews also called the poem boring (Bram 2012: 33). Which seems quite ironical given to the fact that a year after the poem was released, it went on a trial for obscenity.

The trial began on August 16th, 1957. Prior to this, the store clerk Shigeyoshi Murao working in the City Lights Bookshop was arrested for selling obscene material, although the charges against him were soon dropped, unlike from Ferlinghetti, who was charged with the same misdemeanor. However,

Ginsberg himself was not charged. At the time of the arrest, he was abroad with his partner Peter Orlovsky (Bram 2012: 34).

Both prosecution and defense summoned literary critics and experts. Concerning the obvious homosexuality in the poems, a professor of English at University of California and a critic Mark Schorer assumed that it is used as an evidence of the corrupt world (Bram 2012: 35). Asked how he understands the sentence „*Who blew and were blown by those human seraphim*” (Ginsberg 1959: 13), Schorer’s answer was that the words suggest a corrupt sexual act in a confused and corrupted world (Morgan 2006: 141). Nonetheless, it is important to mention that *Howl* was not on trial for the homosexual content, but only for the obscene language of the poem (Davies 2012: 81).

The charges against Ferlinghetti were dismissed, as according to the judge Clayton W. Horn, a book with a social importance „cannot be held obscene” (Morgan 2006: 197).

Howl could not have been possibly created anywhere else than in San Francisco. The city was a bohemian and artistic place, an inspiration for Beats like Ginsberg and Kerouac, and had a large homosexual community. Not only was it written there, but *Howl’s* first reading also took place in San Francisco in October 1955 at the so called Six Gallery Reading (Bram 2012: 32).

The bohemian mood of San Francisco, especially North Beach, paved the way to sexual experiments and political radicalism. Similarly as New York’s Greenwich Village and Harlem, San Francisco had many gay bars, where people met not only for fun but also for political purposes (Rupp 1999: 170).

3.5. Analysis of the poem and LGBT depiction

It is possible to see *Howl* as a defining piece of the Beat generation. The writers of the Beat Generation often used their own experience as a basis for their work, and *Howl* also contains both autobiographical features and references to the lives of other Beats. We can trace several major characteristics of the Beats in

the poem. It is important to provide a short analysis of the poem, which will specify the characteristics of the Beat Generation¹¹.

In the very first line, Ginsberg speaks of his friends as of „the best minds of [his] generation“. He frequently mentions a various kind of drugs or alcohol as turpentine, marihuana, benzedrine, alluding to both the drug culture of beatnics and the misery. He speaks of „negro streets“ and „contemplating jazz“, as the Beat Generation (and subcultures of hipsters and beatnics) was influenced by the African American culture. The poem goes through a large number of American cities („returning through Laredo with a belt of marihuana for New York“ or „fireplace Chicago“ or „who lounged hungry and loesome through Houston seeking jazz or sex or soup“) and foreign countries („ship to Africa“ or „Caribbean love“ or „poles of Canada“) which provides us with another major point of the Beat Generation literature, and that is the constant movement and travelling. Last but not least, there are also references to different kinds of religion. Although Ginsberg himself came from a Jewish family, the Beats were generally interested in non-Western religions. In *Howl* are references to Christianity („who bared their brains to Heaven under the El“) Islam („and saw Mohammedan angels“), Judaism („meat for the Synagogue cast on the pavement“ and „bop kabbalah“), and Buddhism („who vanished into nowhere Zen New Jersey“).

A hiding community

The homosexual community is described as a hidden one, as people who are forced to hide their love in the „streets of shuddering cloud“ (Ginsberg 1959: 10), „empty lots & diner; backyards“ (Ginsberg 1959: 14) and in „hometown alleys“ (Ginsberg 1959: 15), which are generally dark and anonymous places.

That corresponds with the reality of the life of the homosexuals and other „non-conformists“ who were otherwise punished by law.

¹¹ For the purpose of the analysis, we will use the text of the poem as published in Ginsberg 1959.

Graphic expression of homosexuality

The language of the poem is often graphic, even vulgar, which brought the publisher to the court. Anal and oral sex is described, and no romantic relationships are depicted in the poem. However, no matter how sexually graphic and explicit *Howl* is, Ginsberg wanted the reader to be „liberated from their self-deprecating image of themselves and to persuade them that they were angels” (Raskin 2004: 29). He compares the homosexuals to „human seraphims” (Ginsberg 1959: 13) or calls them the „saintly motorcyclists” (Ginsberg 1959: 13), and thus implicates and suggests to the reader that gay lifestyle is not a pervasion.

Promiscuity

Ginsberg describes both homosexual and heterosexual relationships and encounters in explicit manner, putting the emphasis on homosexual encounters. He describes the sexual promiscuity („scattering their semen freely to whomever come who may”) (Ginsberg 1959: 13) without prejudice or judgment, preceding the sexual revolution of the 1960s, and assaulting the restrictive conformism of the 1950 (Van Engen 2012: 4).

*„who balled¹² in the morning in the evenings in rose
gardens and the grass of public parks”* (Ginsberg 1959: 13).

Male-centrism

The poem is very male-centric. There is no mentioning of women, except for the criticism of conventional heterosexual marriage in

*“who lost their loveboys to the three old shrews of fate; the one eyed
shrew of the heterosexual dollar; the one eyed shrew that winks out of the
womb; and the one eyed shrew that does nothing but sit on her ass and*

¹² In this context, balling is a slang term for anonymous sex (Dictionary.com 2015).

snip the intellectual golden; threads of the craftsman's loom" (Ginsberg 1959: 14).

Women are described as the „old shrews" who destroy the life of men with seductiveness, laziness and the want of money, or solely as sexual objects¹³. According to Raskin, Ginsberg „embraced the misogyny" during the time he wrote *Howl* (Raskin 2004: 148). It is possible to connect the male-centrism of the poem to the male-centrism within the homophile movement, or in society in general.

Criticism of the society

Similar criticism of the society that judges the non-conformed minority appears in the second part of the poem. Ginsberg addresses Moloch¹⁴, a god from the Hebrew mythology who demands human sacrifices (Jordan 1997: 295). In Ginsberg's vision, Moloch represents the oppressive American society of the 1950s, and all the citizens including children are sacrificed to him, thus conforming to the major society. The society (Moloch) is described as a cold, oppressive, cruel and dictatorial place. It is „Moloch the loveless! Mental Moloch! Moloch the heavy; judger of men!; Moloch the incomprehensible prison! Moloch the crossbone soulless jailhouse" (Ginsberg 1959: 21). Moreover, it is a society not only intolerant to homosexuals, but it does not accept any visible signs of sexuality. It is a „cloud of sexless hydrogen" (Ginsberg 1959: 22), and its love is only the love of „oil and stone" (Ginsberg 1959: 21), i.e. materialism.

Ginsberg expresses his feelings about him being a homosexual without a community. Although he met homosexual or bisexual men at Colombia, still, there is a huge sense of loneliness, incompleteness and imperfectness.

¹³ „who sweetened the snatches of a million girls trembling" (Ginsberg 1959: 14) or „with mother finally *****" (Ginsberg 1959: 19).

¹⁴ In the Old Testament, children of the Israelites were sacrificed to Moloch. He was worshipped by several cultures on the Near East (Jordan 1997: 295).

„Moloch in whom I sit lonely! Moloch in whom I dream

Angels! Crazy in Moloch! Cocksucker in

Moloch! Lacklove and manless in Moloch!” (Ginsberg 1959: 22).

The depiction of a repressive society copies the real mood of the 1950s during the era of anti-communism. Besides the anticommunism, otherwise known as the Red Scare, there was also the Lavender Scare. While the Red Scare could be described as a „witch-hunt” for the communists, the aim of the Lavender Scare was to eliminate all homosexuals, at least from the federal employment (Eaklor 2008: 87). These governmental decrees and regulations¹⁵ intensified the homophobia and left the LGBT people, in Ginsberg’s words, „frightened out of [their] natural ecstasy” (Ginsberg 1959: 22). Moreover, Ginsberg was a communist¹⁶, too, therefore a double victim. This persecution also influenced the assimilationist policy of the early LGBT groups, which prevailed for much of the 1950s and 1960 (Dynes 1992: 172.)

Mental institutions

In several lines, he reflects the experience from the mental institution, to which he was sent after a minor criminal activity. He describes the patients as they are „demanding instantaneous lobotomy, and who were given instead the concrete void of insulin, metrazol electricity hydrotherapy psychotherapy occupational therapy pingpong & amnesia” (Ginsberg 1959: 18).

Homosexuality was considered a disease until 1974, and therefore „treated” in medical institutions (Slovenko 2002: 420). During the World War II, the establishment realized that it is impossible to arrest and imprison every

¹⁵ For example, the Employment of Homosexuals and Other Perverts in Government (1950), the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1952, which banned homosexual immigrants, or the Executive Order of 1953, which forbid the employment of homosexuals in the federal offices (Eaklor 2008: 87).

¹⁶ The biographer Jonah Raskin calls him a „part-time communist“ (Raskin 2004: 97), Ginsberg identified himself as a „combination of Jeffersonian Democrat-Socialist Communist (Raskin 2004: 33), and he also admitted his political thinking in his 1956 poem *America*. („America I used to be a communist when I was a kid, I’m not sorry“ (Ginsberg 1959: 40). Despite his inclinations to communism, he was deported both from the communist Cuba and the socialist Czechoslovakia.

homosexual in the army or in the navy. Therefore they enacted a new strategy, and sent them to hospitals or mental institutions (Kuhn 2011: 24). The homosexuals underwent a series of psychiatric sessions, were given drugs and even lobotomy under the practice called the *reparative therapy*, or *conversion* (Slovenko 2002: 420), were constantly questioned, maltreated and humiliated (Kuhn 2011: 24). The Atascadero State Hospital in California was known as „Dachau for Queers” (Slovenko 2002: 423).

The graphical homosexuality, male-centrism and anti-assimilationism resemble the policy of Clark Polak, the president of the Philadelphia branch of the Mattachine Society in the mid-1960s. Polak published a gay magazine *Drum* in years 1964-1969 (Eaklor 2008: 99), advertising it as „news for queers”, posting photographs of naked men, celebrating the gay esthetics, and promoting sexual liberation (Rupp 1999: 173), and thus diverting from the assimilationist model of the homophile movements, which sought acceptance through highlighting the similarities between the homosexuals and the heterosexuals (Dynes 1992: 171)

3.6. Chapter conclusion

In contrary to previous publications with LGBT themes (some of them were mentioned in the previous chapter), which described homosexuals as people who „deserve the same respect and opportunities as anyone else”, Ginsberg does not go along with the assimilation policy, on the contrary – the graphical depiction of homosexual relationships was unheard of and meant to shock, and precedes the anti-assimilationism of the LGBT organizations in later decades. At times when the world saw the LGBT community as sexual deviates or people needing a treatment and psychiatric help, Ginsberg revolted with writing a poem describing homosexuals as „nonconformist rather than deviants“ (Marler 2013: 33), defying the sexual conformity and the assimilation.

The characters in *Howl*, „the best minds“, are meeting each other in secret places, and are in hiding similarly as the LGBT people in the real 1950s America. But Ginsberg’s manifest is also the desire to come out, as he himself pointed out in 1974 – that *Howl* was his coming out poem (Young 1996: 53) – in the 1950s for the first time in the American history, LGBT people started to organize on a state or national level, promote themselves, publish newspaper, and educate the public. Ginsberg may be considered as a first leading author of American gay literature, for his frankness and openness in his poems was unprecedented.

No matter how politically interested Ginsberg might seem, another of the Beats, William Burroughs, aimed even higher, imagining the gay state (Marler 2013: 201). Ginsberg himself was never an active member of LGBT liberation movement, and was not considered one by other activists (Marler 2013: 34). His criticism was that the 1970s liberation movement was „hostile to a plurality of genders and intimacies“ (Van Engen 2012: 4), and that the LGBT movement failed to incorporate all sexual relationship outside the heterosexual spectrum (Young 1996: 47).

Ginsberg himself was not a gay activist, excluding his poems, with only a few exceptions. In 1964 he picketed the United Nations with The Homosexual League of New York¹⁷ to protest against the incarceration of homosexuals on Cuba (Marler 2013: 33), which was according to Ginsberg one of the biggest outcomes of the LGBT movement (Young 1996: 103). He also published his poem *Green Automobile* in *The Mattachine Review*, and he attended several meetings of the Mattachine Society in San Francisco, where he read his poems (Young 1996: 124). Ginsberg’s role in the LGBT movement was not as much as in the core than on the posters, his fame draw attention to the LGBT rights,

¹⁷ The Homosexual League of New York was founded in 1962 by a member of the Mattachine Society, Randolfe Hayden Wicker with the intention to inform society about homosexuals (Myers 2013: 371).

movements and events, including the Stonewall riots in June of 1969, which he discussed vastly in the press (Marler 2013: 34).

According to some experts, Ginsberg's poetry and *Howl* especially, „catalyzed American gay pride movements in the later twentieth century through their openness in the midst of punishing violence toward gay men” (Van Engen 2012: 2). Similarly, a specialist on English literature Raymond-Jean Frontain calls *Howl* the „head of the movement” (Van Engen 2012: 4). The message of *Howl*, however, contrasted with the then politics of the most known homophile organization, the Mattachine Society, which published a statement in 1953 saying that the homosexuals want to be „assimilated as constructive, valuable, and responsible citizens” and do not intend to change any institutions or laws of the country (Marler 2013: 29).

4. Christopher Isherwood and *A Single Man*

4.1. Christopher Isherwood

4.1.1. Life

Christopher William Bradshaw Isherwood was born on August 26, 1904 in Cheshire, England. He was born into an upper-class family to Kathleen and Frank Isherwood (Bram 2012: 55-56), who died in World War I in 1915 in Germany, which possibly added to Isherwood's pacifism (Bucknell 2000: 18). Isherwood attended boarding school and then Cambridge University to get his degree from medicine. However, he was dismissed later for writing joke answers on his test (Bram 2012: 55-56).

In 1930, he left England for Berlin, where he explored his homosexuality both in experience and in his writing. His friend from school, a poet Wystan Hugh Auden, was already there on a study trip, and he was the one who introduced Isherwood to the underground gay scene in Berlin (Bram 2012: 56).

As stated in the first chapter, Berlin could be considered the gay capital of the 1920s and 1930s, until the Nazis gained power. They reinforced the ban on homosexuality, and closed the gay bars along with the Institute for Sexual Science (McKay 2004).

His stay in Berlin also provided background and inspiration for several of his novels, namely *The Last of Mr. Norris* (1935), *Sally Bowles* (1937), and *Goodbye to Berlin* (1939)¹⁸, which also include some homosexual characters, often based on his personal features and experience (Bram 2012: 56-57).

Isherwood left Berlin shortly after the Nazis took power. He then travelled to China with W.H. Auden, and in 1939 (Bergman 2000: 17) to the United States, where they both eventually decided to stay. Isherwood in California, Auden in

¹⁸ Both 1966 musical and 1972 film *Cabaret* were (loosely) based on Isherwood's Berlin stories, with main character, an American singer Sally Bowles. However, Isherwood himself never much liked any of these, even though the film boosted his career and profits (Isherwood 2010: 31).

New York (Bucknell 2000: 18). Shortly after the World War II Isherwood became an American citizen. In the United States, he taught at a university until 1959 (Bucknell 2000: 25), studied Eastern religion and Hindu philosophy, translated Hindu texts and for a short while even intended to become a monk. He lived in California until his death in 1986 (Bram 2012: 58-59).

4.1.2. Sexuality and work

Isherwood discovered his homosexuality in England during his school days, but he did not embrace it fully until he got to Berlin. In his 1976 autobiography *Christopher and His Kind* he confessed that the real motif behind his trip to Germany were German boys (Isherwood 2013: 7). In Berlin he met a Czech-German boy called Bubi (Berthold "Bubi" Szczesny) (Isherwood 2013: 8), and later Heinz Neddermeyer, whom he tried to get from Germany. However, Neddermeyer was arrested and deported from France (Bram 2012: 57). Isherwood met his long-time partner, an artist Don Bachardy in the 1950s, and they lived together until Isherwood's death.

Isherwood wrote novels with gay or bisexual characters, however, in 1973 interview he rejected the thought of being a homosexual novelist¹⁹. In the 1970s he attended several Gay Pride or Gay Awareness events (Bergman 2000: 39), and started talking to the press about homosexuality, calling himself an advocate of gay rights (Black 2001: 143).

Prior to *A Single Man* Isherwood published several novels which included homosexual characters. In his 1935 novel, *The Last of Mr. Norris*, Isherwood decided on purpose to leave out the sexuality of the protagonist from two reasons. The first reason was a personal one. He was afraid that by acknowledging the homosexuality of the character named William Bradshaw (see Isherwood's whole name – Christopher William Bradshaw Isherwood), he would confess his own sexuality and thus create a scandal. The second reason

¹⁹ „I haven't written about homosexuality, at least not very much. I've introduced some homosexual characters, but that's not the same thing“ (Geherin 1972: 152).

was a literary one, that he wanted the reader to identify with the protagonist and concentrate his or her attention on Mr. Norris. Still, he also decided to avoid any sexual scenes that would imply the protagonist's heterosexuality (Isherwood 2010: 150). However, it is also possible to believe that Isherwood simply was not ready to come out literary, even though he lived quite openly in Berlin.

In another of his Berlin era novels, the main character, Sally Bowles, who is again based on Isherwood himself, is a gay man, Isherwood only indicated the sexuality of this protagonist by his „lack of romantic or sexual interest” in the heroine of the novel (Bram 2012: 56).

In his 1954 book *The World in the Evening* he introduced two openly gay side characters, couple Bob Wood and Dr. Charles Kennedy, and the main character Stephen, who identifies himself as a bisexual. Contrary to usual tragic depiction²⁰ of homosexuals, (as for example in James Baldwin's *Giovanni's Room* from 1956 or earlier mentioned Gore Vidal's *The City and the Pillar*²¹ from 1948), Isherwood's pair is a common couple in a happy relationship. Although the book met poor reviews, Isherwood was touched by many fan letters which praised him for portraying a happy gay couple (Bram 2012: 61). The novel and moreover the depiction of the gay couple was significant for a gay reader, because it confronts the life and also the struggle of the homosexuals. In a conversation between Bob and Stephen, Bob mentions that the homosexuals are ignored by the majority because the LGBT community does not confront them in any way, and therefore there is no chance for changing the persisting law against homosexuals²². Later, Bob also criticizes the anti-gay policy in the military, which was quite widespread (as it was already discussed earlier in a comment on the anti-gay policy after the World War II in the second chapter). According to

²⁰ As stated for example in Anthony Slide's *Lost Gay Novels*, where he mentions that „gay characters in literature must come to a tragic end“ (Slide 2013: unpaginated).

²¹ Isherwood criticized *The City and the Pillar* because of its tragic ending, murder of the gay protagonist. In his response to this novel he pointed out that the tragedy influences the reader in thinking that homosexual is predestined to a tragic life (Bram 2012: 59).

²² „Maybe we're damntoo tactful. People just ignore us, most of the time, and we just let them....So this whole business never gets discussed, and the laws never get changed“ (Black 2001: 142).

Allida Mae Black, Bob Wood from *The World in the Evening* might be „the first militant homosexual in American literature”, who is „willing to fight the system to protect himself and his kind.” (Black 2001: 142).

And finally, a novel *Kathleen and Frank* (1971) was written based on the letters and diaries of Isherwood’s parents. It is not only a book of reconciliation, in which he made peace with his parents, but also a book with his direct, public coming-out (Izzo: 2001: 251). Although his sexuality was quite known, until *Kathleen and Frank* he spoke about it only through indications. Further he openly wrote about his homosexuality in his novel-like memoir *Christopher and His Kind* (1976).

4.2. A Single Man and the depiction of a homosexual

Contrary to *The World in the Evening*, his 1964 novel *A Single Man* was centered on the gay protagonist. The novel focuses on the protagonist much more than on the plot itself²³. It follows a day in the life of 58-year-old George Falconer, an Englishman living in America, which is only one of many autobiographical features^{24,25}. George is a professor of English teaching in Los Angeles, California (similarly as Isherwood, who taught at L.A. State College). The story takes place after his long-time partner died in an accident, which triggers George’s depression. The reader follows the main character from the moment he wakes up to the moment he falls asleep and dies. During the day, George has a lecture in class, visits a friend dying on cancer in a hospital, then another friend, a fellow expatriate Charlotte, and in the evening he encounters one of his students.

²³ As Isherwood stated himself in a 1972 interview: „I am much, much more concerned with character than plot, because a little plot goes an awfully long way“ (Geherin 1972: 146).

²⁴ From Isherwood’s diary: „He [Isherwood’s boyfriend at that time, Gavin] feels that George’s way of speaking and his attitude to his college job are so absolutely me that one cannot accept him as an independent character“ (Isherwood 2013: 316).

²⁵ Isherwood’s novels are often based on real events and real people, however he often altered the reality and transformed it into fiction to make a point (Geherin 197: 144).

As for the reception of the novel, Isherwood himself called it „sour” (Isherwood 2010: 373). He decided to send the book to the *New Yorker*, but it was rejected not because of any shocking themes in the novel, but because the publisher did not think it was interesting enough (Bram 2012: 114). Similarly as in case of *Howl*, the reception varied, it was called Isherwood’s best novel by some and criticized by others. Surprisingly, *The Nashville Tennessean* celebrated the ordinariness of the homosexual character, even though they used the word „sex deviate”²⁶. And further, gay oriented magazine *ONE* provided a great review, which was even used on the jacket of the book (Bram 2012: 115).

The main themes in *A Single Man* are loneliness, forlornness and isolation. It differs from Beat literature on many levels. In contrary to for example Ginsberg’s *Howl*, which is focused on the physical experience when talking about homosexual relationship, Isherwood explores mostly state of mind of his character and avoids sensationalism. *A Single Man* describes the life of an ordinary man, whose homosexuality is not a center point of his life, although it influences it in many ways. Themes like loneliness, alienation, ageing and death are not exclusive for homosexuals. Isherwood shows the aspects of life common to all sexualities and minorities, however, he highlights the isolation of a man, who does not belong to any community and is a stranger in his own neighborhood. Isherwood explains that *A Single Man* is not so much about homosexuality, as about being a part of minority, and therefore it is also applicable to other minorities like African Americans or Jews (Geherin 1972: 152), and depicts the silent anger of a minority not being accepted by the majority. The loneliness of the main character, who struggles to overcome the loss of his long-time partner, is another crucial theme of the novel, and reflects Isherwood’s own relationship with his partner Don Bachardy and their crisis in early 1960s (Bucknell 2000: 26).

²⁶ „By making the leading character a sex deviate, he has provided a sharp contrast with the normal man and yet he has been able to show that all people experience the same emotions and face similar crises, no matter how they differ in normality and perspective“ (Bram 2012: 114).

The changing perception

The book begins with the protagonist slowly waking up in the morning. Before he goes to work, he thinks about his neighbors, Mr. and Mrs. Strunk and their children, whom he sees from his window. It is obvious that they know about George's homosexuality and his relationship to his past lover, and the opinions of Mr. and Mrs. Strunk on their neighbor differ. Through George's stream of thoughts, it is possible to see paradigms accepted by general public in the early 1960s.

First, there is George's assumption, that his neighbors are somewhat afraid of him.

„Do they know that they are afraid? No. But they are very afraid”
(Isherwood 1964: 10).

He suspects that they think of him as a vampire, a beast, a „fiend that won't fit into their statistics” (Isherwood 1964: 10), as someone who is unwilling to change. Even though they know about his homosexuality, they do not want to hear about it or acknowledge it. They might accept it but only if it stays hidden. This is Isherwood's recurrent theme, which also appears in *The World in the Evening*²⁷.

„What are they afraid of? They are afraid of what they know is somewhere in the darkness around them, of what may at any moment emerge into the undeniable light of their flash-lamps, nevermore to be ignored, explained away. The fiend that won't fit into their statistics, the Gorgon that refuses their plastic surgery, the vampire drinking blood with tactless uncultured slurps, the bad-smelling beast that doesn't use their

²⁷ „There's a few people right here in the village who really know what the score is with Charles and me, but they won't admit it, not even to themselves. We're such nice boys, they say. So wholesome. They just refuse to imagine how nice boys like us could arrested and locked up as crooks. They're afraid to think about it, for fear it's trouble their tender consciences.“ (Izzo 2001: 203)

deodorants, the unspeakable that insists, despite all their shushing, on speaking its name.

Among many other kinds of monsters, George says, they are afraid of little me” (Isherwood 1964: 10).

Through the attitude of Mr. Strunk, who appears to have more conservative opinions than his wife, Isherwood then indicates a change in the general perception of homosexuals in the early 1960s.

„Mr. Strunk, George supposes, tries to nail him down with a word. Queer, he doubtless growls. But, since this is after all the year 1962, even he may be expected to add, I don't give a damn what he does just as long as he stays away from me. Even psychologists disagree as to the conclusions which may be reached about the Mr. Strunks of this world, on the basis of such a remark” (Isherwood 1964: 10).

Although it would be difficult to determine if Isherwood chose to mention the year 1962 on purpose, the year was a milestone year in fight for the LGBT rights, because that year Illinois became the first American state to decriminalize homosexual acts between consenting adults (Simon 2010: 41), and New Mexico House of Representatives also tried to abolish the sodomy laws, however, unsuccessfully (Stewart 2014: 35). We can assume that Isherwood wanted to refer to the slowly changing perception of homosexuals in society by pointing out the year.

Contrary to Mr. Strunk, his wife shows a different perspective, which is much more tolerant attitude towards the LGBT community, and is influenced by the new psychological approaches towards homosexuality.

„[...] she is trained in the new tolerance, the technique of annihilation by blandness. Out comes her psychology book—bell and candle are no longer necessary. Reading from it in sweet singsong she proceeds to exorcise the unspeakable out of George. No reason for disgust, she

intones, no cause for condemnation. Nothing here that is willfully vicious. All is due to heredity, early environment (Shame on those possessive mothers, those sex-segregated British schools!), arrested development at puberty, and/or glands. Here we have a misfit, debarred forever from the best things of life, to be pitied, not blamed. Some cases, caught young enough, may respond to therapy“ (Isherwood 1964: 10-11).

This provides valuable information about the changing perception of LGBT community in the 1960s both of the public and the medical experts. The public took more liberal approach to homosexuals based on psychology and sexology researches, which still, however, did not consider homosexuality as an equal sexual orientation, but more likely as a disorder²⁸ caused by early environment or genetics that can be treated. However, the narrator does not share her or the psychologists' view on the cause of homosexuality, which explain the homosexual relationship as a substitute „for a real son, a real kid brother, a real husband, a real wife“ (Isherwood 1964: 11).

It is possible to assume that Isherwood mentioned psychology in context with homosexuality because of his friend, a psychiatrist Evelyn Hooker, whose field of study was homosexuality and she worked with Isherwood on her research while studying homosexuals through questionnaires and interviews (Bergman 2000: 26). She did not consider homosexuality an abnormality in contrary to the general view of psychiatrists in the 1950s, and she had demonstrated it already in her 1956 essay on her research *The Adjustment of the Male Overt Homosexual*, which proved that there are no significant differences between heterosexuals and homosexuals (Hooker 1957: passim).

However, even though the changing reception is depicted in the novel, Isherwood was more critical to it. Although he acknowledged the perception has changed, he criticized the indifference of people – maybe their perception has

²⁸ Homosexuality was considered to be a mental disorder until 1973, when it was removed from The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (American Psychiatric Association: 2015).

changed, but the laws still were the same, and the indifference of the people who stand aside and do not fight for the legal advancement is even worse than hatred (Scobie 1974).

Anger

On George's way to work, we follow his thoughts on his surroundings which quickly change from passive comments to aggressive images of his imaginative alter-ego Uncle George, who leads a „campaign of systematic terror” (Isherwood 1964: 16), punishing the oppressors.

„A local newspaper editor has started a campaign against sex deviates (by which he means people like George). They are everywhere, he says; you can't go into a bar any more, or a men's room, or a public library, without seeing hideous sights. And they all, without exception, have syphilis. The existing laws against them, he says, are far too lenient” (Isherwood 1964: 15).

To which George reacts with violent thoughts about revenge for the oppression and evokes the anger of the LGBT community, which is unsatisfied with the situation, however, often silently. This can be applied also to other minorities in America.

LGBT community in reality acted and protested against the ongoing oppression from law and government, however, usually only in smaller groups. In 1965, inspired by the Civil Rights movement a larger group of activists protested against the oppression, called for the rights and equality for homosexuals, and repeated this protest for four years (Rupp 1999: 174).

Minority

In his English class, George discusses Aldous Huxley's²⁹ *After Many a Summer Dies a Swan*. After a student asks him about a supposed anti-Semitism

²⁹ Aldous Huxley was Isherwood's friend, and died on cancer during writing of *A Single Man* in November 1963, on the same day as John F. Kennedy (Isherwood 2013: 691).

in the book, Isherwood, through George's monologue discusses the relationship between minority and a majority. According to him, a „minority is only thought of as a minority when it constitutes some kind of a threat to the majority, real or imaginary” (Isherwood 1964: 31). Isherwood spoke about the imaginary threat in 1974 interview in connection to the concept of the „Whitmanesque homosexuality”, which he explained as the relationship of two men not confined as heterosexual marriage. According to Isherwood, the heterosexuals fear, that their children could follow this pattern or that it could somehow affect their casual lives. They subconsciously feel there is a threat, however are not sure about its nature (Scobie 1974).

Even though LGBT community is not specifically mentioned, it is highly possible to assume that the author had it in mind, and by talking about the LGBT community as minority, he antecedes the gay liberation movement itself. The indication is in his look³⁰ at one of his students, Wally Bryant, who George vaguely describes as homosexual (Isherwood 1964: 27, Isherwood 1964: 30)

W.H. Auden criticized this part of the novel for the connections of the homosexuals with the African Americans and the Jews (Isherwood 2010: 366)³¹, however, by putting them into the same categories, it is possible to see associations between the racism towards the Jews or the African Americans and mistreatments of homosexuals in America.

The LGBT community is today generally accepted as a minority, which differs from the majority on a basis of sexual identity. LGBT people are considered a minority also because they were (or still are) discriminated due to their sexual orientation (Cruikshank 1992: 60), similarly as for example the African Americans were (or still are) discriminated against on the basis of the color of their skin. However, this view on homosexuals as a minority is still not a

³⁰ „George looks at Wally Bryant with a deep shining look that says, I am with you, little minority-sister“ (Isherwood 1964: 30).

³¹ „That there is too much made of the homosexuals' right to be regarded as a minority, in the same category as the Negroes and the Jews.” (Isherwood 2010: 366)

matter of course, as some homosexuals do not see themselves as a minority, because they feel like everybody else with the exception of their sexual orientation (Cruikshank 1992: 61).

George then continues with the criticism of the liberal politics and calls it „liberal hysteria”, „pseudo liberal sentimentality”, and „liberal heresy” (Isherwood 1964: 31). According to him this liberal politics is based on absolute equality – between both majority and minority and among different minorities. He accuses the liberals of having false ideas („[...] in which you begin to kid yourself you honestly cannot see any difference between a Negro and a Swede”) (Isherwood 1964: 31), and of unfair politics of associating the minority with a sainthood due to their persecution („Because the persecuting majority is vile, says the liberal, therefore the persecuted minority must be stainlessly pure” (Isherwood 1964: 31). The minority is therefore unfairly put into a better light.

„And I'll tell you something else. A minority has its own kind of aggression. It absolutely dares the majority to attack it. It hates the majority—not without a cause, I grant you. It even hates the other minorities, because all minorities are in competition: each one proclaims that its sufferings are the worst and its wrongs are the blackest. And the more they all hate, and the more they're all persecuted, the nastier they become!” (Isherwood 1964: 30).

The author contradicts the liberal opinion and claims that not only a minority is not pure, but also that the minorities compete against each other. He fights the idea of thinking about minority as about angels, not people, and suggests that oppression makes the minority hateful and aggressive towards others.

In February 1965, Isherwood had a lecture at the ONE Institute, where he mentioned the matter of minorities. According to the note³² in his diary, Isherwood, similarly as George in his novel, too, did not identify the minority of homosexuals with other minorities like the African Americans, and he showed no indication that he believed these minorities should cooperate and fight together against the oppression (Isherwood 2010: 383-384). In reality, LGBT people were occasionally oppressed from the Civil Rights Movement (Rupp 1999: 175), and even excluded. As for example Bayard Rustin, an African American activist and a homosexual, who was asked to leave the leadership of the Civil Rights Movement by Dr. King's advisors (Rustin 2015).

Identity

Last theme which needs exploring is the opinion on identity. George is a conscious homosexual, however, the reader never hears neither the word „homosexual” nor „gay”. He stands against the categorization of LGBT people („I'm not protesting against what you choose to call me or don't.") (Isherwood 2010: 87). The closest the reader gets to his characteristics is „cagey”, as he is called by his students (Isherwood 1964: 35), although it does not have to be a connection to his homosexuality, which he presumably hides in his workplace.

„Look—things are quite bad enough anyhow, nowadays—we're in quite enough of a mess, semantically and every other way—without getting ourselves entangled in these dreary categories. I mean, what is this life of ours supposed to be for? Are we to spend it identifying each other with catalogues, like tourists in an art gallery?” (Isherwood 1964: 87).

It is possible to connect George's opinion on the semantics to Isherwood's one. He disliked the term *gay* and preferred „the enemy's words”, as he called it, *queer* or *fag* (Luckenbill 2000: 39).

³² „And all because I cautiously said that I didn't think the Negro problem was quite the same as the homosexual problem, and that I didn't think the measures taken by the Negroes were necessarily those which we should take to solve it“ (Isherwood 2010: 38).

4.3. Chapter conclusion

In conclusion, it is possible to take *A Single Man* as a collection of personal essays on the feelings of a member of a minority, in particular George's monologue on the matter of minorities or his anger towards a „campaign against sex deviates” (Isherwood 1964: 15). The novel contains many autobiographical features, and therefore can be a trustworthy depiction of a life of a member of LGBT community and his relationship to the LGBT movement. The protagonist of Isherwood's novel is not an active member of an LGBT movement, however, he is aware of the slowly changing situation in the 1960s, and represents the silent anger of the community. He feels estranged and alienated – literally a single man. On the other hand he is a cultivated, intelligent professor, by far no sexual deviate or pervert with abnormal mind or behavior, as was often considered by psychiatrists and public. He does not share liberal opinions on the cooperation of the minorities. On the contrary, he sees a possibility of a conflict among them.

The sense of loneliness of a gay man is a reflection of the feelings of gay men in the 1960s. Dan Luckenbill, a historian and author, who contributed with an essay on Isherwood in Los Angeles in *The Isherwood Century*, describes his memories of the decade: „Through the 1960s, it had been difficult for me to come to terms with being homosexual and to find others who were” (Luckenbill 2000: 36-37). Isherwood's protagonist portrays an isolated LGBT person, who does not yet find his community and his movement, very similarly as Luckenbill's experience.

In 1974 interview Isherwood commented on the events and tactics in the LGBT movement. He criticized the raids on gay bars, calling it „harassment”, and supported the protests against them (Scobie 1974).

Isherwood's contribution to the movement was not through the political activism, but through his literary career. *A Single Man* was according to Edmund White „one of the first and best novels of the modern gay liberation movement”,

Isherwood himself is considered one of the greatest writers of gay literature (Bergman 2000: 205)

His work is still influential. *A Single Man* was adapted into a movie in 2009 starring Collin Firth as George, and *Christopher and His Kind* was filmed in 2011 with Matt Smith as young Isherwood in Berlin, both films were critically acclaimed.

5. Larry Kramer and post-Stonewall era

5.1. LGBT community in the 1970s – Stonewall and after Stonewall

Both Kramer's works *Faggots* and *The Normal Heart*, which will be discussed in this chapter, are set in New York City, which can be thought of as one of the centers of the LGBT community. It was a known center of gay subculture at the end of the 19th century (Rupp 1999: 88), and had one of the largest LGBT populations during the Harlem Renaissance, notably in Greenwich Village and Harlem (Rupp 1999: 115), with numerous bars and popular drag balls. During the 1920s there was an organization New York Society for the Suppression of Vice fighting against „immoral behavior”, including homosexuality (Kuhn 2011: 14), which suggest that it was quite widespread and generally known. New York was also the birthplace of Walt Whitman (Rupp 1999: 80), and Allen Ginsberg lived there for a long period of his life. After the World War II, the New York LGBT population grew in numbers due to the wave of immigrants, and it became „the literal gay metropolis” (Kaiser 2007: 14).

Greenwich Village in New York was also where the spot one of the major events of LGBT history took place, the Stonewall riot.

The end of 1960s is generally considered a breaking point in LGBT history. On Friday June 27, 1969, police raided a Stonewall Inn bar in Greenwich Village in New York, visited by gay men, transvestites („queens”), and occasionally, lesbians. Although police did these raids on homosexual bars quite regularly (only in June of 1969 raided at least five of them) (Kuhn 2011: 66), this time the attacked group fought back and the community burst in riots (Rupp 1999: 179). It resulted in a five-day rebellion, which was influenced by the radicalism and the countercultures of the 1960s (Eaklor 2008: 123).

Although the event was not widely covered by media, many LGBT organizations called it a dramatic breaking point in LGBT history (Rupp 1999: 180). It is also considered the beginning of modern gay liberation because many

people in the 1970s did not take part or even knew about the LGBT movements prior to the event (Clendinen 2001: 72). It became a symbol of anti-assimilation policy, and resulted in creating many new organizations and communities, like New York Gay Liberation Front along with several new groups in other cities, which demanded immediate and fundamental changes (Rupp 1999: 181). There were about fifty homophile groups before Stonewall and more than one thousand in 1973 (Cruikshank 1992: 60).

As a commemoration of the 10th anniversary of Stonewall, the National March on Washington for Lesbian and Gay Rights was organized in October 1979, becoming another milestone in the LGBT history, being called „the birth of a national gay movement“ and „a coming out party“ (Eaklor 2008: 173).

5.2. Larry Kramer

5.2.1. Life

Larry Kramer was born in Bridgeport, Connecticut on June 25, 1935 (Rubin 2012: 8) to a Jewish American father George Kramer and a Russian Jewish mother Rea Wishengrad. He attended Yale University and studied French and German, and eventually obtained his degree from English. (Bram 2012: 181-2).

After university he got a job in the film industry, where he worked for two decades. He became a successful screenwriter and a producer, e.g. for acclaimed *Here We Go 'Round the Mulberry Bush* (1967) or the adaptation of D.H. Lawrence's *Women in Love*, for which he was also nominated for an Academy Award for screenplay in 1970 (Nelson 2003: 237).

Kramer himself is HIV positive, which he found out in 1989, luckily the disease has not progressed. Ironically, he was treated by experimental drugs given to him by a doctor he criticized for his passive approach to AIDS in earlier years (Alter 2015). In July of 2013 he married his partner, an architect David Webster, in a New York hospital (Healy 2013).

5.2.2. Work

Larry Kramer is the author of numerous articles on the LGBT movement and on the AIDS crisis (which are collected in the *Reports from the holocaust*), his newest novel *The American People* (2015), and *Faggots* and *The Normal Heart*, which will be the focal points of this chapter. The first one deals with the gay New York scene during the 1970s, the latter focuses on the struggle of a gay community on the onset of AIDS. Kramer was also short-listed for a Pulitzer's Prize for his play *The Destiny of Me* from 1992, which is a sequel to *The Normal Heart* (Prono 2008: 159).

Kramer is one of the most politically active contemporary American writers up to date. He has been dedicated to the LGBT movement for decades, being an avid gay rights activist and public health advocate. In his 79 years he continues in writing and advocating the LGBT cause, and his career is still thriving. His play *The Normal Heart* was adapted into an HBO movie in spring 2014, and on April 7, 2015 his new novel, *The American People*, Volume 1, was published (Amazon 2015). The 775-page-long book, which he has been writing for forty years, explores the American gay history from the very first days of the country (Garner 2015) and introduces major historical characters such as Alexander Hamilton, George Washington, Abraham Lincoln, Mark Twain, and others as homosexuals. The reason for this, as he says, was that in gay history the roles of homosexuals in society were vastly overlooked (Alter 2015).

5.2.3. Sexuality and activism

As both previous authors, Kramer's first encounters with homosexuality appeared at high-school and influenced his later life and writing concerning the connection between sexual and emotional act (Nelson 2003: 237). During his first year at Yale he had a brief affair with his professor, and was compelled to psychoanalysis. He tried to commit suicide because of his homosexuality in his freshman year on Yale and his situation required psychiatric help (Public

Broadcasting Service 2006), which was recommended to him by his brother Arthur. This experience is mentioned in *The Normal Heart* several times.

Further, Kramer has been determined in founding out more about AIDS since the very first days of the disease when the magazines and the public began searching for information in mid-1981 (Bram 2012: 214). He is a co-founder of several LGBT organizations (e.g. GMHC, which will be discussed further) and is called an „outspoken critic of inaction” (Eaklor 2008: 177).

Kramer was also a co-founder of a protest group which stood up against AIDS, and that was the AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power (ACT UP), formed in 1987. In contrary to the Gay Men’s Health Crisis, which focused on the direct help to the affected, ACT UP was more politically active (Public Broadcasting Service 2006) and preferred direct demonstrations and confrontations, which seemed like the only possible way to solution (Cruikshank 1992: 76). They called for the attention to the AIDS crisis and requested new drugs for the treatment. Some of the members of ACT UP were also determined to „reclaim the term „queer” from its negative associations”, and also fought against the violence against LGBT people (Eaklor 2008: 177).

However, according to him the gay liberation has not yet come to an end and he does not see the Stonewall riot as a turning point for gay rights (Public Broadcasting Service 2006).

5.3. *Faggots* and the sex liberation

The LGBT community could be considered a dynamic minority which secured their position during the 1970s. There were many good signs – the new perception of the community itself („gay is good”, see more on page 56), newly formed organizations (Cruikshank 1992: 75) and openly gay politic figures (e.g. Frank Kameny or Harvey Milk). This period of such new situation of the gay community is depicted in Kramer’s novel *Faggots*.

The novel was published in 1978, which is generally considered to be a crucial year in a post-Stonewall literature³³ (Tručník 2011: 62). It is Kramer's portrayal of the New York gay community in the period between the Stonewall Riot and the beginning of the AIDS crisis. The satiric novel, which follows the protagonist, an author Fred Lemish³⁴, describes the community extremely graphically in all its vices, common and widespread drug use, partying and promiscuity, and Kramer's „own search for intimacy” (Nelson 2003: 237), which is even more complicated by the promiscuous behavior within the gay community. The protagonist is devoted to his search for a stable relationship, however, is disillusioned after encountering numerous promiscuous characters.

Promiscuity

The unstable relationships and often mixing of partners is one of the main points of Kramer's criticism, and the focal theme of the whole novel, which covers three days of parties and numerous sexual encounters.

It is often seen as a foreseeing of the upcoming AIDS crisis by some, especially in the famous line „before you fuck yourself to death” (Kramer 1978: 256), which is a criticism of the protagonist towards his lover Dinky Addams.

„But when I look around me, all I see is fucking. All we do is fuck.”
(Kramer 1978: 42).

In 1997, Kramer wrote a vicious review on Edmund White's novel *The Farewell Symphony* (published three months after the review), and accused not only White, but the whole gay men's fiction, of writing only about sex. Bram calls it a „strange new war against gay promiscuity” (Bram 2012: 291).

Drug culture

³³ *Dancer from the Dance* by Andrew Holleran; *Nocturnes for the King of Naples* by Edmund White; *Narrow Rooms* by James Purdy (Tručník 2011: 62-63).

³⁴ The protagonist is loosely based on Kramer. The name of the protagonist, F.Lemish, is in fact an anagram for the word „himself” (Woodhouse 2000: 110).

„We have to disco and drug and fuck if we want to live fantastic! Come, my dearies, let's dance!“ (Kramer 1978: 137).

The drugs are mentioned frequently within the novel, and seem to appear everywhere around the city, including the corrupted police (Kramer 1978: 164). The reader is introduced to many kinds of drugs which are regularly taken by gay men, with the exception of the protagonist, who „tried them all, found no answers“ (Kramer 1978: 130). We hear of the new drugs with names like Super K, Yellow Fever, Pink Rain, Gondolier, Magic, Nyll, Blotter, acid, coke and more (Kramer 1978: 129).

Even today, the drug use is quite common within the community. In 2014, annual Crime Survey for the first time analyzed the use of drugs by the LGBT people, and the outcome was that the general drug use in the community is three to four times higher than the use of drugs by heterosexuals, at the so called party drugs such ecstasy it is even more. There are several reasons of the high use of drugs, e.g. the tradition of gay bars and clubs, where the drugs are used most often (Moncrieff 2014), social anxieties or societal homophobia; as the oppressed minorities have generally higher experiences with drugs (Krescher 2001: 85).

Kramer has described *Faggots* as a comic novel, which made him laugh (Alter 2015), however, he was very criticized for the negative portrayal of the gay community. He was accused of being homophobic, and the novel was considered depressing and appalling (Rubin 2012: 6). It was even for some time banned by the only LGBT bookstore in Manhattan at that time (Shilts 2011: unpaginated), the Oscar Wilde Memorial Bookshop. After this destructive criticism, Kramer decided to keep a low profile for several years (Rubin 2012: 8).

However, Kramer was not the only one who warned against the dangers of this lifestyle, which was „central to the raucous gay movement of the 1970s“ and which resulted in a vast emergence of numerous venereal diseases within the gay community (Shilts 2011: unpaginated).

5.4. The Normal Heart and the arrival of AIDS

On July 3, 1981, an article with the title *Rare Cancer Seen in 41 Homosexual Men* was published in the *New York Native*³⁵. It became one of the very first articles on AIDS. It was believed to be some kind of a newly developed and quickly lethal cancer called *Kaposi's sarcoma*, diagnosed mainly in New York and San Francisco. The article spoke only of infected homosexuals, no mention of possible transmission on heterosexuals (Altman 1981).

It took two more years, however, until the mainstream media and general public started to be really interested in the topic, because it was found that AIDS could affect also heterosexuals, and that it can be transmitted also by a blood transfusion (Bram 2012: 217).

Kramer contacted the author of another 1981 *New York Native* article (*Cancer in the Gay Community*), Doctor Lawrence Mass, and requested more information about the disease (Bram 2012: 214). In January 1982 Kramer, Mass, novelist Edmund White and three more men together founded *Gay Men's Health Crisis* (GMHC) (Bram 2012: 216). The purpose of this organization was to offer support, distribute information and help to the afflicted, and support the treatment and prevention of the disease (Eaklor 2008: 177). He took his crusade seriously, writing numerous articles on the topic, criticizing the Mayor of New York City and the entire government of the United States for not helping to fight the cause (Bram 2012: 218). One of his most influential articles on the topic was *1,112 and Counting* published in the *New York Native* in March 1983, which was an impulse for the AIDS activism (the shortened version of the article can be found in appendix II). In the article, he called for an immediate action and warned against „death and extinction” of homosexuals (Kramer 1989: 33), and accused

³⁵ The *New York Native* was a gay magazine during the 1980s and much of the 1990s. In the first years of the AIDS crisis the magazine generally denied that there even was an AIDS crisis, even though many of its journalists died on the disease, and from that reason ACT UP decided to boycott it. Still, the magazine was one of the first one to discuss the disease at all (Pograbin 1997).

the straight population of inaction³⁶, because the AIDS crisis had not yet touched them too (Kramer 1989: 35). This was also the article, in which he heavily criticized Mayor Ed Koch (Kramer 1989: 41).

This uncompromising behavior caused the dispute between Kramer and the GMHC, and Kramer was compelled to leave the organization only a year later, which he called a brutal exile (Kramer 1989: 107). However, in March of 2015 he was honored by the GMHC, being the first recipient of the new Larry Kramer Activism Award (Healy 2015). He still believes that the government has a great part in preventing to overcome the disease, saying that „letting people die is evil and genocidal” (GMHC 2015a), which are very similar opinions as he stated in his 1985 play *The Normal Heart*, which was his literary response to the AIDS crisis. It is an autobiographical play about Kramer’s life, his family, GMHC and the cause to fight the disease. The original draft of the play was over seven hours (Bram 2012: 219).

The main plot of the play is the struggle of the protagonist Ned Weeks to raise awareness of the dangers of AIDS with the help of the newly created gay organization and Doctor Emma Brookner. Throughout the play, their friends and associates are dying while the government and medical public distanced themselves from the situation.

The protagonist, writer Ned Weeks, is similarly as in the case of *Faggots*, based on Kramer. This time, however, it deals with the fight of the LGBT community against AIDS, at times, when not only the majority of Americans did not want to hear about it, but also the medical experts and journalists stood aside. The doctors do not have enough information or funds on the research, the

³⁶ This criticism is very similar to the Isherwood’s criticism of indifference which was mentioned on page 41.

politicians refuse to fund the research or are wary of being too familiar with the homosexuals³⁷ (Kramer 1985: 17).

„I'm frightened nobody important is going to give a damn because it seems to be happening mostly to gay men. Who cares if a faggot dies?“
(Kramer 1985: 16)

Struggle of the movement

After the years of persecution, the LGBT movement succeeded in helping the members of the community feel self-confident and accepted within their community. To the gay community, gay became good in the 1970s. It was not only a slogan³⁸, but a rejection of homophobic opinions implemented by some heterosexual experts (doctors, psychiatrists, politicians), and characterizes the transition from the victimized, assimilationist subculture to a self-governing and „self-defining minority“ (Cruikshank 1992: 60).

However, Kramer warns against the absence of criticism within the gay community, which has found its self-confidence in the 1970s:

NED: „Gay is good to that crowd, no matter what. There's no room for criticism, looking at ourselves critically“ (Kramer 1985: 19).

This self-confidence seems to be one of the reasons, why the fight against AIDS in the early days struggled and the movement was not unified. The movement was without any major leader or unable to follow one (Kramer 1985: 19), and even the members of the fictional gay organization claim they are not activists (Kramer 1985: 34). Kramer observed that New York lacks the sense of gay community like in San Francisco (Rubin 2012: 9).

This disinterest of the majority of people in the AIDS „plague“ is discussed vastly in the play. Other people simply don't have any „interest in gay

³⁷ „You have a Mayor who's a bachelor and I assume afraid of being perceived as too friendly to anyone gay“ (Kramer 1985: 17).

³⁸ The official slogan, „Gay Is Good“, was coined by a gay activist Frank Kameny in 1968 (Kuhn 2011: 63).

health” (Kramer 1985: 15), or systematically avoid helping, even persecute the gay community (Kramer 1985: 76). However, even the gay community showed a little interest in the cause in the first days of AIDS and preferred to live in denial (Kramer 1985: 24). In Ned’s words, there were no organizations powerful enough to influence politicians or the public opinion (Kramer 1985: 18) and that „nobody with a brain [got] involved in gay politics” (Kramer 1985: 18). That mention might be a possible reminder of the dangers of the early gay politics, which resulted in death of a first openly gay public servant in high politics, Harvey Milk, who was assassinated in 1978 in San Francisco (Eaklor 2008: 154).

Kramer through the protagonist’s words accuses every gay man who does not take part in the movement from „helping to kill the rest” (Kramer 1985: 49). According to him, it is not possible to have any impact without a strong lobby, financial support and actively taking part in politics.

Promiscuity

The play also deals with promiscuity as *Faggots* did earlier in 1978. The promiscuity of gay men is by the protagonist described as a „principal political agenda” (Kramer 1985: 19) that „they’d die before abandoning” (Kramer 1985: 19). Promiscuity is an addictive (Kramer 1985: 19), liberating (Kramer 1985: 39) lifestyle, which differs them from the straight majority (Kramer 1958: 37)³⁹ who lives in „monogamy and fidelity and holy matrimony” (Kramer 1985: 39). They want to be equal and have the same rights as the heterosexuals, but still be different. This is a position into they were put by the American society, which defined gays as sexual outlaws (Rubin 2012: 6).

Kramer’s criticism of promiscuous lifestyle is focused on the apathy to their environment, obsession with sex and inability to be in a relationship other than the sexual one. This behavior is reflected in the image of the gay community, which is thus obstructed from any political action and fight for social

³⁹ MICKEY: It’s the only thing that makes us different (Kramer 1985: 37).

cause. By the criticism of promiscuity Kramer follows the idea of *Faggots*, that promiscuous lifestyle interferes with a stable relationships⁴⁰, which is even more complicated by the impossibility to get married⁴¹. In earlier decades, legitimizing same-sex marriage was not a top priority, however, there were some attempts. For example in the early 1970s, activists from Minneapolis and Seattle fought at the federal court for their right to get married, however, they were unsuccessful (Stein 2012: 87).

Relationship with other minorities

The difficulty with the homosexual minority is that they are not visually recognizable and that they do not share a historical and a cultural heritage, unlike other minorities in the US as for example the African-Americans, Jews, or even women (and partially trans genders) (Clendinen 2001: 13). *The Normal Heart* presents several mentions of other minorities, which provides the basis for the matter of cooperation and connections between homosexuals and other minorities.

Jews: Kramer, through Ned's dialogue with Felix, compares the holocaust and the genocide of Jews with the „genocide of homosexuals” caused by AIDS, and criticizes that the international community (the Christians, the Pope, Churchill, Roosevelt, the American Jews) (Kramer 1985: 32) stayed aloof, similarly, as everybody in the early days of AIDS. Kramer threatens, that without the immediate action the AIDS case might be too similar to the events of the World War II („Where was everybody for eleven years? And then it was too late”) (Kramer 1985: 31). In fact, Kramer visited Dachau in 1983, and the place was one of the influences on the play (Nelson 2003: 239).

African Americans: There are only a few mentions of African Americans. There is a comparison with the verbal racism (calling the African Americans

⁴⁰ „And having so much sex makes finding love impossible” (Kramer 1985: 39)

⁴¹ „Maybe if they'd let us get married to begin with none of this would have happened at all” (Kramer 1985: 5).

„Negroes”) and using the word „homosexual” instead of „gay” (Kramer 1985: 17⁴²). Second mention is in regard to the image of the organization („I’m worried this organization might only attract white bread and middle-class. We need blacks.”) (Kramer 1985: 35). As stated in previous chapters, the homosexuals were often excluded from the Civil Rights movement, on the other hand, they were also often inspired by them, e.g. the slogan *Support Gay Power* (Clendinen 2001: 23) which reminds of the Black Power slogan. This brings us to the matter of African Americans in the LGBT movement, which was not significant. Stein says that in general, African Americans were not well represented in homophile organizations, with the exception of DOB, the leaders of which occasionally were people of color (Stein 2012: 56).

Lesbians: The general stand towards lesbians is quite neutral. One member of the fictional GMHC acknowledges that there was never much connection or support between gays and lesbians (Kramer 1985: 35). This feeling was quite reciprocal, and many lesbian women felt as victims of gay sexism. Lesbians did not much participate in these organizations since the homophile activism of the 1950s, as their aims and concerns differed (e.g. feminism, the role of woman in society, maternal rights) (Stein 2012: 55).

Transvestites: There is a discussion in the play, where as one of the members of fictional GMHC states that „the battle against the police at Stonewall was won by transvestites” (Kramer 1985: 34), the other distanced himself saying he does not „have anything in common with those guys, girls, whatever you call them” (Kramer 1985: 34). In reality, the physical attack on a transvestite („queen”) by a policeman is in fact considered to be the cause of the actual riot and aggression during the Stonewall riot (Kuhn 2011: 70), followed by the attempt of a lesbian to escape the aggressive policemen, which were then attacked by the crowd (Kuhn 2011: 71).

⁴² „They won’t even use the word „gay” unless it’s in a direct quote. To them we’re still homosexuals. That’s like still calling black Negroes“ (Kramer 1985: 17).

The persisting hiding

Similarly, as in previously discussed literary works, *Howl* and *A Single Man*, *The Normal Heart* also contains the theme of an invisible, hiding community. After Stonewall, after the National March on Washington, after homosexuality being removed from the list of disorders in 1973 and many other significant events, the characters in Kramer's play still prefer to stay in hiding and anonymity, even though they are now embraced by their community.

The members of the fictional GMHC panicked when they realized that the word „gay” is written on the envelopes (Kramer 1985: 38) and feared of their sexuality being revealed. Although the gay community is much more united than in the previous decades, the outside world – namely mailmen, doormen, family, and most importantly the employers⁴³ (Kramer 1985: 41) – often do not know about the true sexuality of these men, who fear of the possible consequences of their finding out⁴⁴. That is an obvious criticism and one of the major issues of the gay community („I am sick of closeted gays. It's 1982 now, guys, when are you going to come out? By 1984 you could be dead”) (Kramer 1985: 36).

The protagonist of the play is clearly proud to be gay, and opposes the anonymity which still persists. According to him, the only way to definitive, united and articulated movement is to „demand recognition of a culture that isn't just sexual” (Kramer 1985: 88), and he suggests that to mobilize and fight politically it is necessary to assert a cultural pride (Murphy 2013: 25).

„I belong to a culture that includes Proust, Henry James, Tchaikovsky, Cole Porter, Plato, Socrates, Aristotle, Alexander the Great, Michelangelo, Leonardo da Vinci, Christopher Marlowe, Walt Whitman, Herman Melville, Tennessee Williams, Byron, E.M. Forster, Lorca,

⁴³ Bruce: „My boss doesn't know and he hates gays” (Kramer 1985: 41).

⁴⁴ NED: (nods) Bruce is in the closet; Mickey works for the Health Department; he starts shaking every time I criticize them— they won't even put out leaflets listing all the symptoms; Richard, Dick, and Lennie owe their jobs somehow to the Mayor; Dan is a schoolteacher; we're not allowed to say his last name out loud; the rest are just a bunch of disco dumbies. I warned you this was not a community that has its best interests at heart” (Kramer 1985: 53).

Auden, Francis Bacon, James Baldwin, Harry Stack Sullivan, John Maynard Keynes, Dag Hammarskjöld... These are not invisible men” (Kramer 1985: 87).

5.5. Chapter conclusion

As opposed to *Howl* and *A Single Man*, which depicted the struggle of an individual, Kramer definitely depicts the LGBT community and the movement.

While Kramer’s *Faggots* deal with the never-ending party during the height of the gay liberation movement, his play *The Normal Heart* is a thorough documentation of the struggle of the gay activists, who are literally fighting for their lives. His criticism is a call for an immediate action, revival of the movement and continuing in the fight against oppression (Kramer 1985: 77). Kramer was the impulse, which the New York gay community needed to organize. The play has many autobiographical features and the opinions of the protagonist copy the opinions of the author (e.g. criticism both Kramer’s and fictional Ned Weeks’ of the New York Mayor; both of them wrote articles on AIDS in the newspaper⁴⁵ etc.), it is therefore an authentic depiction of the LGBT movement in the 1980s.

The theme that connects both *Faggots* and *The Normal Heart* is promiscuity, which Kramer blames for the tragedies of the gay life. Both of these works depict some kind of desperation – the protagonist of *Faggots* is discouraged by the urban gay culture, and the main character of *The Normal Heart* is frustrated by the apathy of the society towards the gay cause and towards the dangers of AIDS.

Kramer was often accused of connecting AIDS directly to the LGBT community and thus causing the scare (Prono 2008: 158), and even anti-eroticism and homophobia, suggesting that gay men die as a result of their promiscuity. He was a known alarmist, criticizing drug culture and promiscuity

⁴⁵ The play even contains quotes from Kramer’s own articles (Nelson 2003: 240).

in *Faggots*, which in the 1980s turned out to be the „cause” of AIDS (Shilts 2011: unpaginated). It was also suggested by one of his critics that Kramer’s activism would be much more effective, if he changed his aggressive and blaming rhetoric (Long 2012: 74-75).

Kramer has a very critical perspective on the gay community and his opinions have not changed. He still blames the government of not helping and not cooperating with gays on purpose, and blames the health care system. He still criticizes the LGBT community for their apathy to their own cause, not fighting enough for their rights, and for the promiscuous gay lifestyle (Kramer 2004). In 2005, Kramer published a transcript of his speech called *The Tragedy of Today’s Gays*⁴⁶ which he delivered at Cooper Union in November of 2004. He reacted to the unsuccessful vote for gay marriage in the U.S., claiming that gay rights are „officially dead” (Kramer 2004). Nevertheless, his contribution to the LGBT movement and fight against AIDS is immense both in his literary works and activism (depicted e.g. in *The Normal Heart*), and he had a pivotal role in boosting the LGBT activism and raising AIDS awareness.

According to some, Kramer’s writing „catalyzed gay men and excoriated politicians and government agencies” (Murphy 2013: 329), and we can only argue what would the world be like without his devotion to the AIDS crisis. Both GMHC and ACT UP are still very active LGBT organizations fighting AIDS, particularly GMHC developed into one of the largest organizations fighting AIDS, and their programs include not only services for men, but also for women, transgender people and more (GMHC 2015b).

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Available
http://www.timelinetheatre.com/normal_heart/The%20Tragedy%20of%20Today's%20Gays.pdf.

6. Conclusion

The thesis elaborated the issue of representation of LGBT movement in contemporary American literature. Specific part of the work then dealt with the depiction of predominantly white gay men and the LGBT movement in general in the chosen works of American authors, namely of Ginsberg, Isherwood, and Kramer. Taking into account the historical background of the evolution of the LGBT movement and characteristics of the gay community, specific examples of their literary works were picked up for the practical part. It contained analyses of Ginsberg's *Howl*, Isherwood's *A Single Man*, Kramer's *Faggots* and *The Normal Heart*, all of which are today considered major works of the LGBT literature.

In the first chapter, the evolution of homosexuality since the second part of the nineteenth century was outlined. The continual transition followed. Homosexuality evolved from a pervasion to a disease and most recently as a characteristic of specific minority group. The following chapters then focused on the chosen authors, their works and their analyses.

Throughout the thesis, the contribution of particular authors to the LGBT movement was commented and shown on specific examples. All three chosen authors had a connection to the LGBT movement. Allen Ginsberg was an influence and an inspiration, even though he did not participate directly, with a few exceptions. Christopher Isherwood was not politically active, nevertheless he was committed to the movement in his literary career and is considered an icon of gay literature. And finally, Larry Kramer was and still is one of the leading activists fighting for the rights and health of the LGBT community, with a great impact on the movement through alarming the community, co-founding GMHC and ACT UP and through his criticism. However, he was not much appreciated for it in the early days. Obviously, the evolution of the LGBT movement can be also traced in behaviors and books of those three authors.

The thesis required connecting literature with fields like history, law, politics and psychology. None of these literary works discussed, with the exception of *Howl*, is translated into Czech or is hardly accessible, therefore, sometimes, I had to use secondary sources (e.g. in the case of citations from Isherwood's *The World in the Evening* I had to use Black's *Modern American Queer History*).

The representation of LGBT people in literature, and in other works of popular culture (TV, now also in PC games) is extremely important, as it allows the non-LGBT people to understand the life and struggle. And on the other hand, to LGBT people, it provides the needed sense of community and acceptance. The representation in literature had been changing throughout the decades, and thus constantly contributed to new perspectives on LGBT community.

Nowadays, LGBT organizations are still very active. GMHC still exists and is one of the largest activist groups fighting AIDS. One of their most current campaigns is Celibacy Challenge, through which they intend to cancel new FDA policy. Since the 1980s, homosexual and bisexual men were not allowed to donate blood due to the fact that they are a critical group. According to the new policy, this group might be allowed to donate blood but only after a year of celibacy (Saatchi & Saatchi North America 2015).

Moreover, the United States is on their way to recognize same-sex couple marriages nationwide. What Kramer's Ned Weeks saw as a failure, could finally become true in the summer of 2015, depending on the U.S. Supreme Court ruling after reviewing several same-sex couple marriage cases (Freedom to Mary 2015b).

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8. Résumé

Hlavním cílem této práce bylo nastínit zobrazení homosexuálů ve vybraných dílech americké literatury od 50. do 80. let 20. století, a dále toto zobrazení spojit s reálnými událostmi ve hnutí za práva LGBT osob v daném období. Jmenovitě se práce zabývala díly *Howl* od Allena Ginsberga, *A Single Man* od Christophera Isherwooda, *Faggots* a *The Normal Heart* od Larryho Kramera.

Teoretická část práce se zaměřila na americkou LGBT historii a literaturu s důrazem na první polovinu 20. století, které ovlivlily pozdější vnímání LGBT komunity veřejností, ale i odborníky z lékařství, psychiatrie či práva, a sloužily jako inspirace pozdějším autorům. Zaměřili jsme se na evoluci vnímání homosexuality, první významné homofilní organizace a významná americká literární díla zmiňující homosexualitu v období, která předcházejí současnou literaturu.

Druhá, praktická část, se zabývala samotným zobrazením homosexuálů ve vybraných dílech, v jejichž postojích jsme mohli vidět reflexi LGBT hnutí v daném období. Nejsilnější reflexe hnutí se objevila v posledním analyzovaném díle, *The Normal Heart*, které je přímo spojeno s aktivismem proti AIDS. Dalším důležitým bodem práce bylo popsat, jak daní autoři přispěli svým literárním dílem či aktivismem k LGBT hnutí. Zjistili jsme, že všichni autoři měli (či v případě Kramera stále mají) k LGBT hnutí určitý vztah, popřípadě je na ně nahlíženo jako na ikony gay hnutí a literatury, přestože sami aktivisty nebyli.

9. Appendices

Appendix I

Current situation of homosexual marriages in the U.S.

Source: Freedom to Marry (2015a). *States*.
(<http://www.freedomtomarry.org/states/>, December 5, 2014).

Appendix II

Abstract from *1,112 and Counting* by Larry Kramer (First published in: Kramer, Larry (1983). *1,112 and Counting*. *New York Native* 59).

Source: Kramer, Larry (1989). *1,112 and Counting*. In: Kramer, Larry, *Reports from holocaust* (New York: St. Martin's Press), pp. 33-50.

Appendix III

Howl and Other Poems and Allen Ginsberg (photo by Harold Chapman)

Appendix IV

A Single Man and Christopher Isherwood (photo by Florence Homolka)

Appendix V

Left: the cover of *The Normal Heart & The Destiny of Me*

Right: the cover of *Faggots*

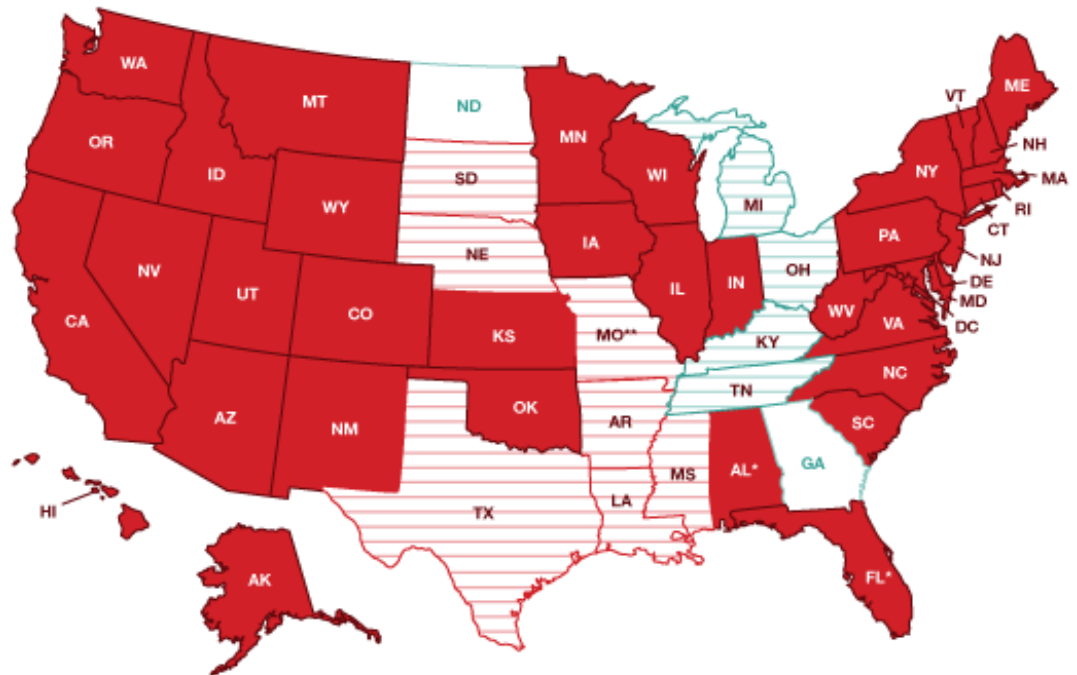
Appendix VI

Left: Larry Kramer wearing a sweatshirt with Silence=Death logo, a project which later evolved into ACT UP (photo by Sara Krulwich).

Right: Larry Kramer on the cover of *Advocate* (April/May 2015)

Appendix I

Winning the Freedom to Marry: Progress in the States



- Freedom to Marry
- Pro-marriage court ruling; pending further action.
- Marriage ban, lawsuit filed awaiting ruling
- Marriage case pending before the U.S. Supreme Court

*In Florida, the freedom to marry is in effect statewide while an appeal is considered by the 11th Circuit. In Alabama, a federal court has affirmed the freedom to marry—and both the 11th Circuit and Supreme Court have declined to impose a stay, but the Alabama Supreme Court has interfered, and couples are now seeking a class-action in federal court.

** Respects marriages legally performed in other states.

Last Updated March 4, 2015

Appendix II

If this article doesn't scare the shit out of you, we're in real trouble. If this article doesn't rouse you to anger, fury, rage, and action, gay men may have no future on this earth. Our continued existence depends on just how angry you can get.

I am writing this as Larry Kramer, and I am speaking for myself, and my views are not to be attributed to Gay Men's Health Crisis.

I repeat: Our continued existence as gay men upon the face of this earth is at stake. Unless we fight for our lives, we shall die. In all the history of homosexuality we have never before been so close to death and extinction. Many of us are dying or already dead [...]

Why isn't every gay man in this city so scared shitless that he is screaming for action? Does every gay man in New York want to die? [...]

We have been hearing from the beginning of this epidemic that it was only a question of time before the straight community came down with AIDS, and that when that happened AIDS would suddenly be high on all agendas for funding and research and then we would finally be looked after and all would then be well. [...]

Our mayor, Ed Koch, appears to have chosen, for whatever reason, not to allow himself to be perceived by the non-gay world as visibly helping us in this emergency. Repeated requests to meet with him have been denied us. Repeated attempts to have him make a very necessary public announcement about this crisis and public health emergency have been refused by his staff. I sometimes think he doesn't know what's going on [...]

With his silence on AIDS, the Mayor of New York is helping to kill us.

I am sick of our electing officials who in no way represent us. I am sick of our stupidity in believing candidates who promise us everything for our support and promptly forget us and insult us after we have given them our votes. Koch is the prime example, but not the only one. [...]

I am sick of closeted gay doctors who won't come out to help us fight to rectify any of what I'm writing about. [...] I am sick of the passivity or nonparticipation or halfhearted protestation of all the gay medical associations [...], and particularly our own New York Physicians for Human Rights, a group of 175 of our gay doctors who have, as a group, done nothing. [...]

I am sick of the Advocate, one of this country's largest gay publications, which has yet to quite acknowledge that there's anything going on. [...]

With the exception of the New York Native and a few, very few, other gay publications, the gay press has been useless. If we can't get our own papers and magazines to tell us what's really happening to us, and this negligence is added to the negligent non-interest of the straight press [...] how are we going to get the word around that we're dying? [...]

I am sick of gay men who won't support gay charities. Go give your bucks to straight charities, fellows, while we die. Gay Men's Health Crisis is going crazy trying to accomplish everything it does [...] fighting for you and us in two thousand ways, and trying to sell 17,600 Circus tickets, too. Is the Red Cross doing this for you? Is the American Cancer Society? Your college alumni fund? [...] This community is desperate for the services these organizations are providing for it. And these organizations are all desperate for money, which is certainly not coming from straight people or President Reagan or Mayor Koch. [...]

I am sick of closeted gays. It's 1983 already, guys, when are you going to come out? By 1984 you could be dead. Every gay man who is unable to come

forward now and fight to save his own life is truly helping to kill the rest of us. There is only one thing that's going to save some of us, and this is numbers and pressure and our being perceived as united and a threat. As more and more of my friends die, I have less and less sympathy for men who are afraid their mommies will find out or afraid their bosses will find out or afraid their fellow doctors or professional associates will find out. Unless we can generate, visibly, numbers, masses, we are going to die.

I am sick of everyone in this community who tells me to stop creating a panic. How many of us have to die before you get scared off your ass and into action? Aren't 195 dead New Yorkers enough? Every straight person who is knowledgeable about the AIDS epidemic can't understand why gay men aren't marching on the White House. Over and over again I hear from them, "Why aren't you guys doing anything?" Every politician I have spoken to has said to me confidentially, "You guys aren't making enough noise. Bureaucracy only responds to pressure." [...]

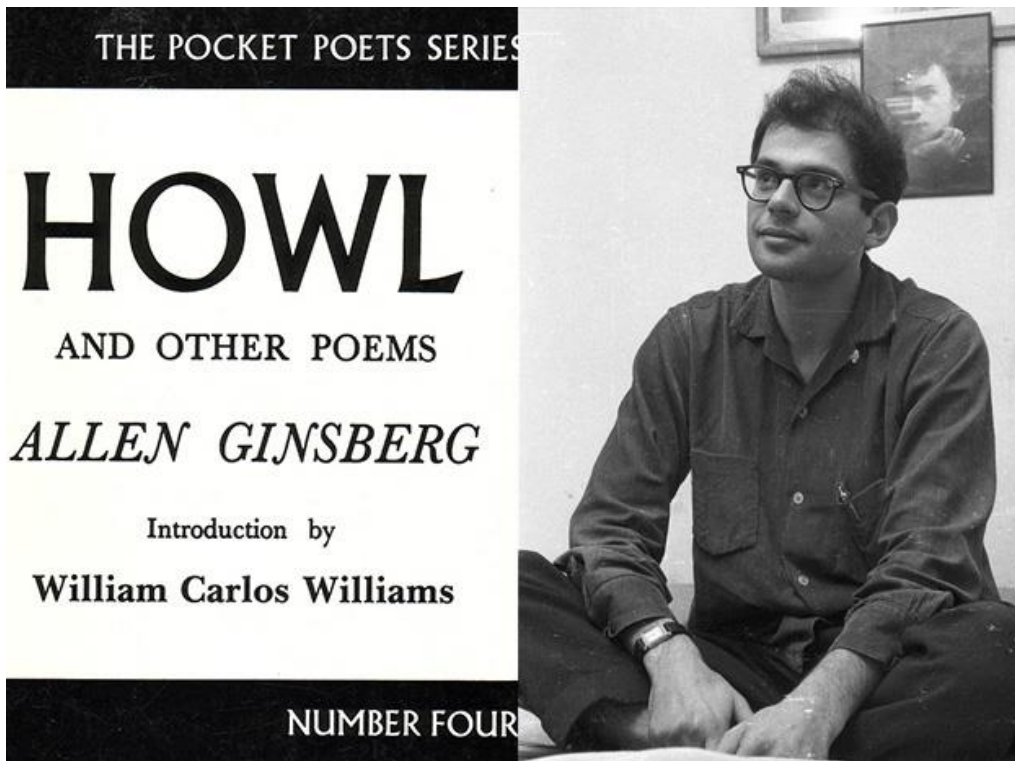
I am sick of guys who moan that giving up careless sex until this blows over is worse than death. How can they value life so little and cocks and asses so much? Come with me, guys, while I visit a few of our friends in Intensive Care at NYU. Notice the looks in their eyes, guys. They'd give up sex forever if you could promise them life.

I am sick of guys who think that all being gay means is sex in the first place. I am sick of guys who can only think with their cocks. [...]

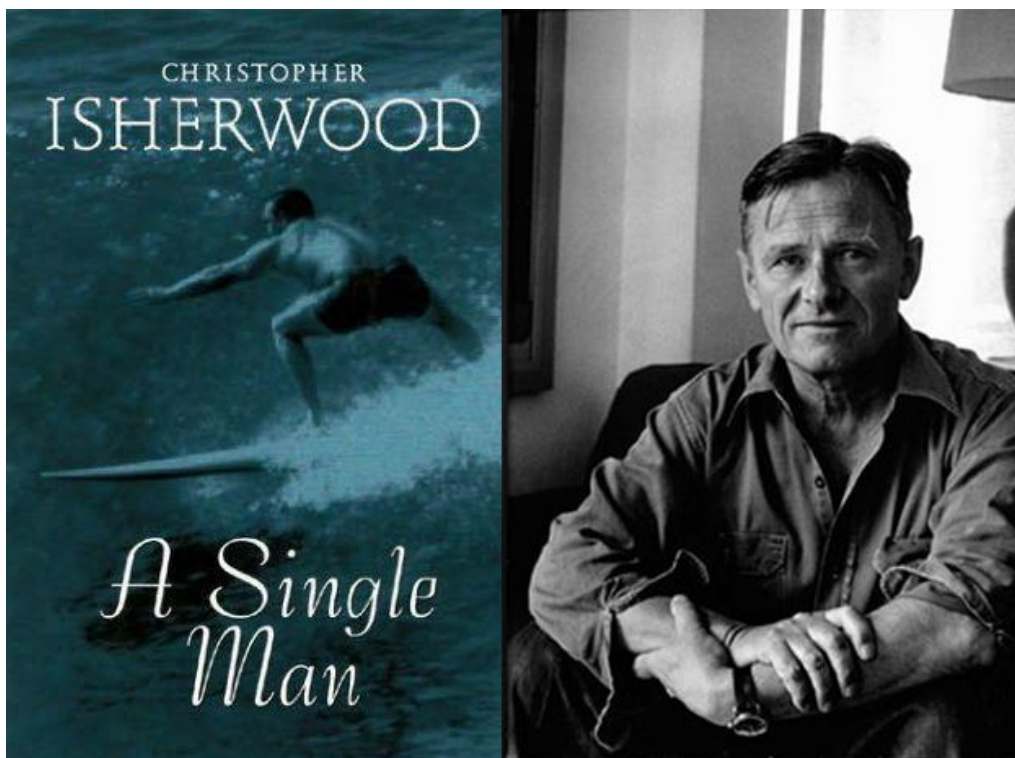
I don't want to die. I can only assume you don't want to die. Can we fight together?

L.K.

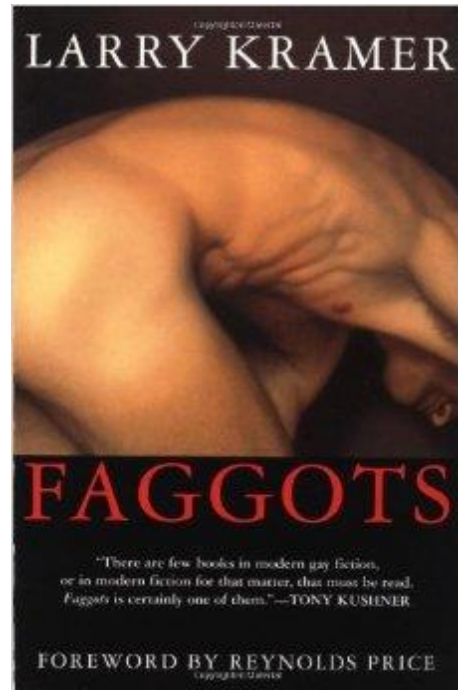
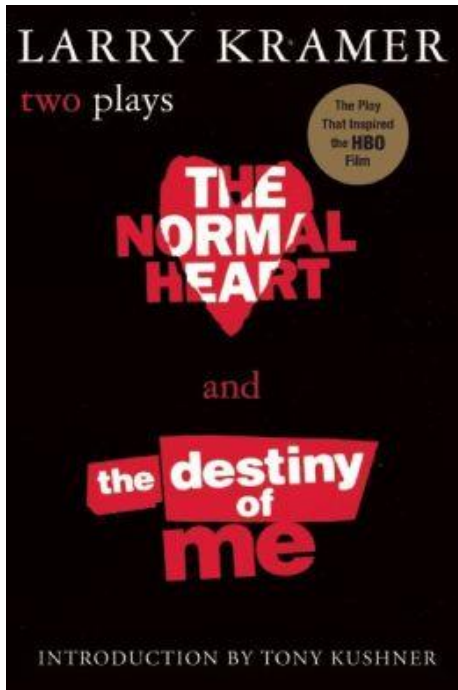
Appendix III



Appendix IV



Appendix V



Appendix VI

