CHAPTER V

DEPROFANATION

Researcher: What scientific evidence can you adduce to prove the innate bi-sexuality of all? (I can understand Hermaphroditism and its equivalent in the myths -- Aristophanes or Ovid.

Gore Vidal: Freud assumes everyone's bi-sexuality but believes breeding to be the purpose of sex which, of course, it is. But as the planet is being destroyed by the human race, we shall not survive much longer in any case. Even so, any form of sex that does not produce babies is to be altruistic, if nothing else. In ancient times man was few and needed numbers so Sky God taboos were invented. Also (cf. Plato's Symposium) tyrants feared male couplings as they lessened the patriarchal authority of the ruler, on the other hand, they were encouraged for military reasons (Sparta, Thebes) as the lovers were more courageous, each fighting for the other. Society's attitude have always been confused expect in the Mediterranean world where sex simply is -- without a value added by the state (See Appendix).

5.1.0 Literature concerned with sex has been proliferate since ancient times, but the politics of sex/text is a recent phenomenon brought into sharp focus by feminism. The conflict between the male and female in terms of the patriarchal system and the family as the matrix of society resulted in greater economical, political and sexual freedom for women. Yet in this atmosphere of relative sexual
freedom brought in by feminism, homosexuality bore a relegated status of a kind that was once that of the woman. But contemporary sexual polemics has witnessed even the "coming out" of the homosexual. It is in this context that Vidal's satire of the sexual ideology of America bears special significance. In a series of novels from *In a Yellow Wood* (1947) to *Myra Breckingridge* (1968), Vidal takes on marital, permissive heterosexual and homosexual ideologies only to displace the center (marital ideology) and foreground the marginal (Homosexual ideology). Thus by deriding and ridiculing the sacredness of the center and purifying the sacrilegiousness of the marginal, Vidal, in his novels, deprofanes sex via the sexual ideologies.

5.2.0 The sexual ideology of the United States has its roots in the all-permeating influence of religion. Like all other aspects of life, man-woman relationship, in early American society, was inevitably and strictly guided by the rule of "The Book" and every deviation had its immediate corrective in the Mosaic absolutes. To ensure the sanctity of the "Holy Land", the pilgrim fathers prescribed a strict moral/sexual code. Marriage was the end-point of all man-woman relationship and its sole aim and purpose was to procreate, "to multiply and replenish the earth", fulfilling the command of God in the new - found land. As for any
other kind of relationship between man and woman, except filial ones, it could be construed as lust -- "whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart" (Mt 5: 29).

5.2.1 The result of such a vision was a happy nexus between the church and the state, reflecting its theocratic nature in peculiarly strange laws idiosyncratic to American Society. Even when the whole of Europe had no such laws, the United States had made legislation to enforce morality and punish sin. Vidal notes that since adultery and fornication were forbidden by the Bible, the puritans made these criminal offences, even though no such laws existed in England. Forty-three states punished adultery and fornication (Vidal 1972a, 190-92). Vidal was writing in 1965 and the situation has changed since then, but it is still disarming to know that even in the 20th century morality is legislated by the state. In the same vein nearly every state punished fellatio, cunnilingus and anal intercourse, while almost every state forbade sexual relations and/or marriage between the white race and its "inferiors": blacks, American Indians, Orientals (ibid.). Theoretically, the church and the state remained separate but in practice the state was theocratic, in at least regulating the individual's private life. Today no such
laws exist but the ideal remains. Sex within the confines of marriage, the man as the head of the family (Patriarchal system), and the family as the matrix of society; all deeply embedded in Biblical doctrines. This, then, is the marital sexual ideology of the United States.

5.2.2 The difference between the ideal and its practice, however, was too real and too great to be effaced. Fifty years preceding the second world war, the simple agrarian economy had grown into a complex industrial set-up. The industrial revolution brought in prosperity, engendering social liberation including a changed role for women. From a housewife she took on jobs that were traditionally the repository of man. As gender roles changed, sexual codes also changed. Sexual tolerance grew and gave way to licentiousness. Pre and extra marital behaviour was increasingly observed, resulting in many divorces.

5.2.2.1 With the post-war economic boom, sexual liberation reached its apex. Though, for a short while, a romanticised domesticity emerged, it failed to hold on as the suffragist and feminist movements of the 1960s radically disrupted the social system. Meanwhile a new sexual ideology was being born, yet with a heterosexual bias. It was a notion of "free-sex" within the precincts of a man-woman relationship.
Feminism added a new dimension to it by positing that the double standards of morality that applied to men could as well apply to women. Implicitly stated was the assumption that if men could be promiscuous without its stigma, women could also be judged accordingly, giving a feminist slant to the heterosexual position. Thus sexual liberation and the feminist movement together led to a permissive heterosexual ideology. It ruptured the myth of marital ideology and made adultery and fornication a reality while the influence of feminism undid the patriarchal system and promoted equality among the sexes.

5.2.3 Yet another sexual ideology, homosexuality, slowly protruded its head after the second world war. It had existed both as a reality and a literary theme since ancient times. But the second world war and the Kinsey report of 1948 witnessed the "coming out" of the homosexual, which made it a public issue and opened up a whole history of homosexuality. Once again, it was the "Holiness code" which had prescribed a death sentence for homosexuality thereby forcing the homosexual to remain "invisible". Following the "holiness code", Rome declared homosexuality a crime to be punished by death during the reign of Constantine in 324 AD. The English parliament also made gay love a felony to be punished by hanging. The whole of Christian Europe followed
suit. America was not to be left behind. In 1641, the Massachusetts Bay Colony promulgated its famous "Body of Laws and Liberties", which listed twelve capital crimes among which was "lovemaking between men". Connecticut, New Hampshire, New Jersey and Pennsylvania also adopted the same law. In 1656, New Haven extended the punishment to Lesbians. In 1682, William Penn introduced a reform and reduced the punishment to six months imprisonment, but under English pressure capital punishment was reinstated eighteen years later (Crompton 1978, 68-71).

5.2.3.1 It was only after the Revolution that in 1786 Pennsylvania took the lead in abolishing the death penalty which the other states did in the next decade. However, the homosexual was "invisible", virtually non-existent till the appearance of the Kinsey Report which revealed that out of every ten Americans one was a homosexual. This facilitated the "coming out" of the homosexuals. The mid 1960s witnessed the first gay picketings of the White House, the Pentagon, the Civil Service Commission and the Independence Hall. But much more significant was the Christopher Street rebellion in New York in June 1969 (Kyper 1978, 388-407). Now 'gayness' was an established fact and publicly declared itself as a new sexual ideology -- the declaration of being homosexual. Homosexuality, in effect, undercut the
assumption of the former two sexual ideologies and pointed to man's bi-sexuality as more and more cases of married men having homosexual relationships were discovered. Moreover, it realigned the relationship of the sexes from that of man/woman or woman/man to that of man/man or woman/woman. Though repressed for a very long time, the homosexual ideology, thus, emerged and prevailed.

5.2.4 These three sexual ideologies still maintain their status quo. Marital ideology is adhered to by some, while some are permissive heterosexuals in spite of receiving a rather grudging approval in society. But even though the homosexual identifies and believes in having come into his own, he/she is still despised and still considered sacrilegious. The three ideologies exist independent of each other and at the same time define themselves in relation to marital ideology as deviations. Thus they are three in one, the triune sexual ideology of the United States.

5.2.5 Vidal's satire consists of a fictional response to this contradictory and paradoxical extratext in a series of novels from *In a Yellow Wood* to *Myra Breckinridge*. His reading qua writing of the extratext elicits a displaced center and foregrounds the marginal in such a manner that
all three sexual ideologies are subverted by an abandoning of the logic of sexual relationships and sexual categories. The strategy Vidal adopts is once again the juxtaposition of ironic discourses and counter-discourses in most of the novels. The irony is effected not by the introduction of foreign elements to the formal structure of the works but by the juxtaposition of the conflictive sexual ideologies which act as warring forces of signification, subvert and undercut each other thereby displacing the center.

5.3.0 In a Yellow Wood begins this satire of the sexual ideologies. In it, Vidal depicts three locales, each of which represents one of the three ideologies and shows how they undercut each other in an ironic intratextual juxtaposition. Keeping the marital ideology as a defining point, Vidal issues opposing significations that undermine the status of this standard ideological code and introduces a play on the notion of sex via the sexual ideologies.

5.3.1 'Golden and Heywood' is one such locale representing the puritanic marital ideology. All the employees of this firm including its proprietor, Mr Heywood, seek to attain a stable marriage relationship. However, the marital ideology is corrupted by its worldliness as seen in Mr Heywood. He is the epitome of the
two icons everyone wanted. Hence, Mr Murphy reminisces that he would like to be like Heywood who has a lot of money and a beautiful wife: "Mr Heywood did everything properly. He had inherited a lot of money... that was another thing to be said of him -- he knew how to choose women. Mr Murphy wondered what it would be like to marry a beautiful woman" (IYW: 47).

5.3.1.1 Murphy's desires are reflected in the echelons of 'Golden and Heywood'. Richard Kuppleton, Murphy's subordinate, too aims at a more fetchimg job and a beautiful wife. Marital ideology is ingrained in him as a repressive phenomenon. This is signalled by his puritanic fear of doing wrong in the sight of his mother. He is plagued by guilt as he is envious of Robert Holton who is going to take precedence over him in the firm. The thought of it gives him nightmares: "He was also worried because he found himself hating Robert Holton and his mother would never have approved of that" (IYW: 44). He had another fear too. His desire to have Caroline as his wife worries him because, "It was important to have his mother like his future wife -- if he ever had one (IYW: 42). While for Heywood and Murphy, marital ideology is a means of attaining respectability in society, for Kuppleton, it is seen as a repressive force that is stifling and encumbering him. In both the cases, marital ideology is corrupted.
5.3.1.2 Vidal not only shows the weakness of the marital ideology, he also signals its failure, which is delineated in what is held out as the symbol of success in Mr Heywood. Mr Heywood's marriage is subtly linked to his puritanic outlook of life. He is the example of what the application of a puritanic work ethic could do to a man: "He had the puritanical horror of doing nothing. His family had made him believe that it was necessary always to work and he rather liked the work, too. It made him think less about his own uniquely miserable life" (IYW: 108). Having worked hard as a rule, Heywood makes himself prosperous and successful. But corresponding puritanic rules regarding matrimony are a failure. In spite of having married thrice, he never enjoys marital success. For Heywood, "His wives were a large part of the general dreariness of his life. He never seemed to marry the right women... He wondered sometimes if he shouldn't collect stamps or have a hobby like that" (IYW: 108). Puritanism applied to business relationship seemed to have struck gold, but applied to human relationships, it definitely called for disaster. Mr Heywood's only solution is to devote himself to something that also entails a business relationship -- stamp collection or any such hobby.

5.3.1.3 Caroline is perhaps the only employee of 'Golden and Heywood' who has a romantic desire for marriage.
Gripped by a sense of ennui, she frequently goes into fits of depression: "She had a malaise. Having thought of this word, she was pleased with it. The word described her sudden fits of depression" (IYW: 29). She thus sees marriage as a means of deliverance from the daily drudgery of life at 'Golden and Heywood'. But that, implies Vidal, is only an illusion. Her friendship with Jim Trebling is a pointer in this direction. She casually asks Holton if Jim is engaged or not and gets annoyed when Holton hints that she can have him. But in spite of this she courts Jim and plans to go out with him even a second time within a span of two days. So Holton warns: "Just don't take him too seriously, though. He's sort of an expert with girls" (IYW: 167).

5.3.1.4 Marital ideology is undercut by the ironic differential relationship of Mr. Heywood's unsuccessful marriages and successful business enterprise. On the other hand, Mr Murphy, Kuppleton and Caroline are shown to be trying to attain the ideal of Mr Heywood's success in business and a beautiful or handsome wife/husband which they don't realise is illusory. Though Mr Heywood does not have any extramarital relationship in defiance of the marital ideology he marries thrice, which in effect, questions the stability of a one to one marital relation (ideology). What is maintained by him is only a facade of the puritanic marital ideology.
5.3.2 But as the locale shifts to Mrs Stevanson's apartment, it breathes an atmosphere of relative freedom in its heterosexual permissiveness and completely undermines marital ideology. A rich widow, Mrs Stevanson's "outstanding" cocktail parties in their joyful abandon provide the right cover for high society to mate. Mrs. Stevanson herself has many lovers and she likes the company of painters, sculptors and actors whom she invites for her parties. There is not much action at her place, but the ambience, in its suggestiveness, embodies a permissive heterosexual ideology of which Mrs Stevanson and Carla Bankton are examples. Besides, both Mrs Stevanson and Carla Bankton seek refuge in permissiveness having either naturally or due to circumstances abandoned the marital ideology. Albeit, Mrs Stevanson's widowhood provides her the licence to permissiveness while Mrs Bankton's estrangement from her husband drives her to it.

5.3.2.1 In Mrs Stevanson and Carla Bankton, Vidal therefore exemplifies the complete failure of the marital ideology. Moreover, by shifting from a well-defined puritanic locale to a locale of relative freedom and sexual permissiveness in Mrs Stevanson's, Vidal juxtaposes and, thereby, undercuts marital ideology.
5.3.3 When Carla and George Robert Lewis leave the apartment and arrive at a gay club, the action of the novel shifts from the permissive heterosexual to a defined homosexual one. As a foil to Mrs Stevanson's apartment, the gay club undercuts the permissive heterosexual ideology. George Lewis, from the first, stands as an odd man out in Stevanson's apartment. He is described as an artist and editor of *Regarde* with "a marked tendency towards Socratic love" (IYW: 93). It is he who takes Holton and Carla to the gay club. Holton who has never been to such a place before notices that "men sat with men and women with women" (IYW: 116). The waiter is described as one with long bleached hair, thin and moving "stiffly, self-consciously, like a woman thinking of rape" (IYW: 144). Holton is so innocent that he does not realise that he is surrounded by homosexuals, including George Lewis. On the other hand, Carla expresses a rather denigrating attitude towards the homosexual. She calls it a "trivial" world revealing her heterosexual bias. However, her unhappy married life presents a contrast to the relative freedom and happiness of the world of homosexuals, exemplified in George Lewis' abandonment of conventions to become an artist. Neither the promiscuousness of Mrs Stevanson nor the pursuit of extra-marital relationship, it is suggested, is better than the gaiety of the homosexual world.
5.3.4 In, thus, portraying three locales and projecting representations of ideologies in the characters of each locale, Vidal subverts the one with the other, and suggests a deferring notion of sex. The ironic undermining of the three sexual ideologies takes place as the signifier 'sex' changes its meaning from locale to locale, which defines the signified -- the sexual ideologies. If sex is taken to be the act of intercourse between two persons, then, the displacement of the signified from locale to locale is as follows:

Sex (Signifier)

(Signified\(^1\))
Husband + wife
(male) (Female)
(Marital Ideology)

(Signified\(^2\))
Husband + wife
(male) ( Female)
(Permissive heterosexual)

(Signified\(^3\))
wife + husband
(male) (male)
(feminist permissive heterosexual)

(Signified\(^4\))
male -- male
Female -- Female
(homosexual)
5.3.4.1 In the novel, Mr Heywood represents the first signified, though even this is questioned by his having married thrice practically translating itself into a permissive heterosexual, the second signified. Mrs Bankton, in her extramarital relationships represents the third signified while George Lewis stands for the fourth. The binary elements of these signifieds are also reversed and undone through this kind of signification. The male/female binaries change to female/male in the feminist heterosexual, which is later reversed into a female/female and male/male configuration in the homosexual ideology.

5.3.5 An important point in this play is Holton's position with regard to the sexual ideologies. As an employee of 'Golden and Heywood', he does not crave for business success nor a beautiful girl as a would be wife. He does not put himself forth as an impediment to either Kuppleton's promotion or Caroline's affair with Jim. At Mrs Stevenson's also, he views things dispassionately withholding his comments. The gay club does not shock him either. He does not pass judgement as Carla does, but views the hermaphrodite Hermes' dance as "interesting" (IYW: 128), even though new to the homosexual world. When Carla tries to renew their old relationship, seduces him to bed and pushes him into accepting her as his lover, he refuses.
Holton does not feel guilt or regret for the affair but knows that "he could not make a world separate" (IYW: 162). Finally, Holton decides to devote himself to work as a "successful broker in an office" (IYW: 163). His decision is significant. As James Elliot puts it:

Holton neither condemned nor affirmed the system within which he worked, he simply did his job. Similarly, when Holton was whisked away by a homosexual art critic to a gay bar in the village, where he was shown a series of lewd gay dances, and seduced by the wealthy wife of a famous artist, who would leave her husband for him, Holton did not condemn either the sexual deviance of the man nor the marital unfaithfulness of the woman, though he did not desire to follow their way of life. Both the woman and the homosexual were vindicated in this novel, albeit only through a complete suspension of moral values (Elliot 1978, 174).

5.3.5.1 Holton's suspension of judgement is characteristically Vidalian. The complete amorality and neutrality of Holton's stand is what Vidal takes recourse to in his qualification of sexual acts. In a Yellow Wood presents the three ideologies as the status quo, allowing them to be undercut in their opposition to each other. It does not entail any attitude towards them. The complete suspension of moral values is a pointer towards the perspective in which sexual relationships should be viewed. The absence of a stable marital relationship (Heywood's included) in In a Yellow Wood indicates a deferred
signification of the ideology, where Heywood's is a failure while Kuppletton's, Murphy's, and Caroline's, are illusory. The married couples (Carla) seek a satisfactory relationship outside marriage. Marital relationships are, thus, seen as too encumbering and stifling. Though the permissive heterosexual is given some concession, it also ends unhappily as in Carla's case. Only the homosexual is viewed in positive light.

5.4.0 The City and the Pillar takes over from the gay club of In a Yellow Wood. While the gay club defines a homosexual world and undermines the heterosexual permissiveness of Mrs. Stevanson's apartment in In a Yellow Wood, homosexuality completely pervades and undermines heterosexuality in The City and the Pillar. Vidal's purpose in the novel is to examine the "... homosexual underworld and in the process to show the 'naturalness' of homosexual relations, as well as making the point that there is of course no such thing as a homosexual" (Vidal 1965a, 245).

5.4.1 The take over from In a Yellow Wood in The City and The Pillar is total, yet there is a difference between them. In a Yellow Wood presents certain stereotypical homosexual characters. George Lewis is "slim and not very tall, with a pretty feminine face" (IYW: 94). The waiter is
portrayed as one who moves stiffly and self-consciously as a woman while Hermes De Bianca is described as a voluptuous old belle with heavy and feminine hips. The effeminacy of all these characters is that of the cliched homosexual figure, found also in *The City and the Pillar*, but only as a foil to the redeeming picture of a natural homosexual in Jim. In his afterword to the revised version of the novel, Vidal says: "I set out to shatter the stereotype by taking as my protagonist a completely ordinary boy of the middle class" (Vidal 1965a, 246). His aim in *The City and the Pillar* is therefore two-fold. To vindicate the naturalness of homosexuality as against its despisement by the heterosexual (both marital and permissive) and also to create a fresh image of the homosexual as an all-American man.

5.4.1.1 Ronald Shaw and Paul Sullivan, the stereotypical homosexuals of *The City and the Pillar*, serve as contrast to Jim. Both of them are driven to homosexuality by outside forces. Ronald Shaw's homosexuality is the product of mother-domination. Shaw's devotion to her mother rises from the punishments he used to get from her in his childhood: "...punishment for masturbation, for telling lies (he had loved to pretend), for not working hard in schools... Her severity made him both love and hate her, and made him
Hollywood's most eligible bachelor" (CP: 94). Like the domineering mothers of Heywood and Kuppleton, Shaw's mother controls him and represses his instinctual feelings. His homosexuality is therefore the result of the release of the unconscious libido which instead of being directed at the female is projected onto the male. As for his relationship with women, he could only worship and venerate them and never feel attracted toward them.

5.4.1.2 Though Shaw emerges as an individual and seems to have transcended the stereotype through his success, intelligence and natural beauty, Vidal holds out the fact that his homosexuality is unnatural and illustrates in him a homosexual type. The homosexual philosopher explains this type with great clarity. He remarks that in Germany the homosexuals are the most virile of men but in England and America the homosexuals were marked by oversensitiveness and effeminacy. This, he explains, is the result, "not so much a healthy love for other men than a hatred of women, a repugnance, a revolt against their authority. That, I think, is the American homosexual" (CP: 238). Whereas homosexuality is reasoned out to be caused by mother domination, the oppressiveness of the mother is explained as the result of the unwieldy puritan ethics of work and marital ideology. Sullivan points out that the puritanic
work ethic is not compatible with its marital ideology. Men work hard and sacrifice most of their adult life to make a place for themselves in the world. After having this they look for a wife, a family, a car, for without these they are thought not to be conventional successes. But:

...by this time their capacity for passion has been so sublimated, perverted into work that there is little left for the women to do but have a child as quickly as possible, a child she can love and rule, and, if its a boy, render it, perhaps, impotent and terrified of women (CP: 263).

Shaw is such a product which renders him effeminate and makes him an unnatural homosexual.

5.4.1.3 Sullivan is another kind of stereotypical and unnatural homosexual. He is the "frustrated radical writer who represented the stereotype of the homosexual ideologue", as Elliot describes him (Elliot 1978,174). Having given up catholicism and rebelled against God, Sullivan is out to indulge in defying social conventions. Like an 'angry young man', he takes up cudgels against the establishment wanting to thrash its stifling laws and rules, especially those relating to sex (CP: 139). Sullivan's homosexuality is a way of defying society but having had many unsuccessful homosexual affairs, "he put his whole capacity for love into his novels..." (CP: 134). However, as an ideologue, he lets
out his ire against society which represses homosexuality for the homosexual has to live under a pretension and project a facade of normality while continuing to release himself in the underworld.

5.4.1.4 Neither Ronald Shaw nor Paul Sullivan are, in Vidal's eyes, the ideal homosexual. One's homosexuality is the result of mother-domination, a negative turning away from women to men, albeit, the other's is only a rebellious stance, a defiance of social mores. Vidal eschews the identification of the homosexual with either of them and puts them in contrast with Jim, his ideal, in whom "he developed a homosexual character who, by conventional American standards, is 'normal' in every respect but his homosexuality" (Elliot 1978, 175).

5.4.2 Vidal portrays Jim as a boy from a middle class family with a strict father and a loving mother. His childhood is described as normal. Like all teenagers, he has a special friend in Bob. His admiration for Bob is rather strange but has no envy in it. They spend long hours together, playing tennis or planning adventurous outings. On one such outing, the first homosexual bonding takes place rather (un)consciously, naturally and innocently. Looking at Bob's white body, Jim feels "a kinship, a similarity, a warm emotion which he could not
name" (CP: 39). As they swim naked in the pond, Jim wonders whether he could tell Bob, "some of the strange things he thought, carry out in life his most personal dreams" (CP: 39). Later in the night, near the cabin by the river, Bob suddenly grabs Jim and wrestles with him, which arouses in Jim the same unconscious instincts and seeks its consummation in reality. It soon happens that both of them wrestle with, and discover, each other: "For Jim it was his first completion, his first discovery of a twin: the half he had been searching for" (CP: 48). This becomes a prototypian relationship which haunts' Jim's memories until it completely undoes him. Moreover, in describing this encounter in terms of a Biblical "one flesh" relationship, Vidal elevates Jim's homosexual relationship to a sacred level.

5.4.2.1 The homosexual act with Bob becomes for Jim the ideal, the yardstick by which he measures all other relationships. Bob is the only love-object of his dreams which he never finds either unusual or abnormal upon waking. When he discovers a group of effeminate homosexuals, it comes to him as a shock, so much so that he hates the idea of loving another man: "The ideal of being in love with a man was still a ludicrous one, still seemed unnatural and rather hopeless: in every case except Bob's and that was
different" (CP: 110). The reason he puts up with Shaw and Sullivan is because he sees some qualities of Bob in them.

5.4.2.2 Jim's relationship with women also brings Bob into focus. When he encounters Anne, he hates her crude animal lust. As she tries to seduce and grab him, he could see in her eyes, "this strange look: it was a personal and devouring look. ...It meant capture" (CP: 80). Jim's mind immediately shifts to the first lovemaking with Bob. Comparing it with Anne's, he finds that "it was not dirty like this, it was not unnatural like this" (CP: 81). The permissive heterosexual affair is to him unnatural, an aberration. He hates Anne because of her animal lust for him. But he is capable of a normal healthy relationship with women as illustrated in his relationship with Maria. Brought together by Paul Sullivan on the ground that Jim could become normal, Maria and Jim enjoy their mutual company which grows into a special fondness and understanding of each other. But the moment of becoming 'one flesh' could never occur for Jim, even though Maria desires it. Jim regards Maria as the perfect woman but knows that he cannot become one with her or any other woman. Sullivan accuses him now of being afraid of women, but Jim vehemently denies it, again recollecting his ideal Bob:

...because of Bob everything Sullivan said was false; his homosexuality was not the result of
negation, of hatred or fear of women, it came, rather, from a most affirmative love (CP: 271).

5.4.2.3 In Jim, Vidal has vindicated the homosexual and creates a personality far from the stereotype. In the process he denigrates both marital ideology and the permissive heterosexual. He describes Jim's relationship with Bob in such purity that it acquires the sacredness of the 'one flesh' relationship of marital ideology. Marital ideology, on the other hand, is castigated as a repressive puritan phenomenon which produces the aberrant homosexual, like Shaw. Heterosexual permissiveness is described in the language commonly used to denote the homosexual, dirty and unnatural. Indeed, it becomes sacrilegious in the sight of Jim. By attributing to homosexuality a symbolic purity and sacredness and by debasing heterosexuality as dirty and unnatural, Vidal cuts the very ground of differences between the three. At the same time he displaces/replaces heterosexuality with homosexuality, undercutting what he calls its dictatorship, seen in Jim's refusal to submit to Anne's seduction or Maria's loving companionship.

5.4.2.4 The 'normality' of Jim is seen in his romantic longing for Bob. Though he does have affairs with others, Bob remains for him the ideal partner, a life-partner as it were. His feeling of incompatibility for sex with females
also suggests a similar attitude of the heterosexual towards homosexual love. Vidal describes Jim's yearning for unity with Bob in terms of a heterosexual love affair underscoring the point that homosexual love is as normal and natural as heterosexual love. The homosexual philosopher confirms that Jim is natural, that he is the homosexual of the teutonic and primitive type:

...the basic type, the original pattern of which we are distortions, I'm sure he's natural while we're perverse and inverted: too far from the natural animal, the primitive who makes no particular distinction between the sexes but follows the instincts of lust and affection (CP: 235).

5.4.3 Vidal is not against heterosexuality but against its forceful imposition on anyone who differs from the mainstream (like Anne who calls Jim a queer or Maria who tries her best to make Jim 'normal') and at the same time against the victimisation of such people. Vidal views both the heterosexual and the homosexual with an amoral equity. Jim, towards the close of the novel, expresses the desire to be "born into a world where sex was [sic] natural and not fearsome, where men could love men naturally, the way they were meant to, as well as to love women naturally, the way they were meant to" (CP: 287). Vidal's vision is of a world where the terms, heterosexuality and homosexuality, do not
exist as abnormal in any way. He would have them exist separate but equal.

5.4.3.1 Elsewhere, Vidal has pointed out that contemporary concern with sexuality is a reflection of the conflict between "the society man has constructed so illogically and confusedly and the nature of the human being which needs a considerably fuller expression sexually and emotionally than either the economics or morality of this time will permit..." (Vidal 1964, 31-32). Yet the very same society which faces the reality of mass murder and violence and approves of its representations in the mass media, attacks as Vidal says: "any love between two people which does not conform" (ibid.). In his novels Vidal votes for this fuller expression of sexuality without any inhibition or infringement by society, a vision which Jim expresses.

5.4.3.2 Having already demonstrated the repressive effects of the puritan marital ideology in Heywood and Ronald Shaw and the destructive or rather unhappy nature of the permissive heterosexual in Maria Verlaine and its dirty and unnatural side in Anne, Vidal redeems the homoséxual from his hitherto denigrated stature. By redeeming the homosexual, Vidal elevates his status to that of the normal and natural in sexual relations. He also does not leave the
order of the oppositions untouched. He reverses the binaries heterosexual / homosexual to homosexual / heterosexual. He sees the need for abandoning all categories altogether. This he represents both as separate and equal, in his novel The Judgement of Paris.

5.5.0 In The Judgement of Paris, Vidal makes Philip his spokesman as he does of Robert Holton in The City and the Pillar. Moreover Holton and Philip are akin to each other in their amorality, the only difference being that whereas Holton maintains a strict neutrality with regard to the homosexual and the heterosexual, Philip posits a positive acceptance of the homosexual. A committed heterosexualist himself, Philip does not despise but rather shows a positive tolerance of the homosexual, with a warmth of understanding that is extraordinarily heterodox.

5.5.1 The sexual history of Philip's life is interesting and revealing. His first sexual encounter sets his preferences: ..."his own tastes were set when, at thirteen, he seduced a high school senior" (JP: 71). To him, sexual preference for either male or female was only a matter of taste. He continues to experience other pleasures but his inclination for the heterosexual never changes. At the age of fifteen, he faces a lady who asks him to beat her with a
silken cord, but he had refused her sternly. A year later, a leading athlete of his school had invited him to indulge in certain erotic ceremonies which he relinquished, in spite of his great admiration for the athlete. His natural modesty coupled with his predisposition for the opposite sex, "caused him with great politeness, to refuse the invitation" (ibid.). Later, whenever such occasions arose he always declined politely. At that early age itself Philip's attitude presented a broad-mindedness, a disinterested curiosity of things.

He was never outraged ... In fact everything interested him in the abstract and several times when friends of his tried to sell him on this or that variation he had admitted that it all sounded very interesting and that perhaps some other time he might give it a try (JP: 71).

5.5.1.1 Significantly, Philip recollects his early childhood as he faces the world of homosexuality inside the Bath of Nero, at Rome. Having come along with Evans, Glenellen and Norman, who readily eulogize the therapeutic effects of taking boys -- "good for the soul", says Norman, "source of life", remarks Glenellen -- Philip's attitude is again that of an interested spectator, expressing curiosity at the face of the novelty of things. When he himself is offered a boy as "a gift" and it is too late to refuse, he tries to explain to the boy that he is an 'abnormal' in this
world of normals and that "due to some fundamental perversity in his own nature he would rather forego the pleasures of the couch" (JP: 79). Not understood by the boy, because of the language barrier, he communicates with him through gestures, of his 'abnormal' preference for women. The explanation satisfies the boy, and without murmur or disapproval on either side, the encounter ends on a friendly note.

5.5.1.2 Philip's empathetic understanding of the homosexual allows him to look at the heterosexual from the former's perspective. This brings about the realisation that in the world of the homosexual, he is "abnormal" as in the conventional world of the heterosexual, the homosexual is considered 'abnormal'. The same empathetic understanding is shown by the boy. His close acquaintance with Jim, another homosexual proves his acceptance of the homosexual. Even in this case, when Jim proposes that they make love, he refuses politely without showing any aversion towards him. In fact as Jim takes drugs and lies down on the bed, Philip takes off Jim's shoes and sits down beside him till Jim falls off to sleep. Philip respects Jim as a friend and treats him as a human being to be cared and comforted.

5.5.1.3 A committed heterosexual, Philip thus does not have any bias or prejudice against the homosexual. His
indulgence, is however, for women, as Norman's or Glenellen's is for men. As a young bachelor, Philip is not inhibited by any sense of scruple in his affairs with women. He considers all sex including Socratic love as a matter of pleasure. When he starts his affair with Regina, the narrator remarks that Philip had not fallen in love with her, rather "he finds her attractive and it seems to him a very pleasant way to spend his first night in Rome" (JP: 49). Regina too does not have any particular affection for Philip. Assuring him that her husband was too busy to demand his marital rights, she describes her extra-marital affair not as the fulfilment of a romantic longing, but as an enjoyment of the sexual act. She remarks: "I have never loved anyone either, nor have I ever once put someone else's interest before my own" (JP: 118). Philip's world is a heterosexual one existing independently and equally with the homosexual one.

5.5.2 Thus Vidal succinctly shows that the heterosexual and the homosexual worlds coexist in harmony. At the same time, he advocates sex per se not only as a function of procreation but as a pleasurable activity, a recreation done with the mutual consent of individuals. In the Roman Bath therefore a boy is available for five hundred lire. Norman calls homosexual love, a "play", "a game" (JP: 74) and
Glenellen is quick to point out the therapeutic effect of sex, without which every Roman would become "hopelessly frustrated and neurotic without this marvellously organised release" (JP: 78). The narrator's digression on sex without love points out that nature is master over society's rules and regulations, that society's moral attitudes change from generation to generation, in spite of which the concept is disagreeable to man (JP: 93). But Philip in his passioned speech justifies sex without love. He says, "of all the games and of all the hungers, the most exalted, the most god-like is the sexual act...there is nothing to compare with it" (JP: 271).

5.5.2.1 In The Judgement of Paris, therefore, Vidal illustrates, from the heterosexual point of view (through Philip), the complete acceptance of the homosexual, reversing his condemnation of the heterosexual from the homosexual point of view (through Jim) in The City and the Pillar. The reversal, albeit, the acceptance of the homosexual is not done as a condescending gesture on the part of Philip but with an empathetic understanding of it, as innate and natural like his own heterosexual inclination. By placing both heterosexuality and homosexuality at par with each other and by arguing for sex per se, Vidal downplays the categorization of 'hetero' and 'homo' and cuts
the very ground of its distinction in terms of individuals. Sex is now seen as the underlying continuum which defies both 'homo' and 'hetero'. In the novel Vidal illustrates the thesis that there is nothing such as a homosexual or heterosexual person, these are adjectives describing the sexual act, not people and that what makes some people prefer "same-sex sex" derives from whatever impulse or conditioning that makes some others prefer sex with their opposite (Vidal 1972a, 67-74; 186-196) (Vidal 1982, 149-165, 167-184).

5.5.3 In his fictional response to the sexual ideologies, Vidal has gradually displaced their oppositional primacy in relation to each other and finally arrives at the position of effacing the opposition altogether by drawing attention to its underlying continuum, sex. But he is yet to create havoc by letting loose his play on the signifier sex, showing its semantic volatility, which he does in Myra Breckinridge.

5.6.0 Myra Breckinridge (1968) issued out a period of political upheaval and turmoil. The 1960s saw the rise and establishment of the feminist / suffragist movements, with quite a large number of radical and seminal feminist texts. Betty Friedan published The Feminine Mystique in 1963. It
was followed by Katherine M Roger's *The Troublesome Helpmate* (1966); Mary Ellmans' *Thinking about Women* (1968); and Kate Millets' *Sexual Politics* (1969). These directly influenced and aggravated the feminist movement in America. The mid 1960s also saw the first gay picketing of the White House, culminating in the Christopher street rebellion. So at this time the sexual ideologies were brought into sharp focus and in conflict with each other as the church looked askance at the subversion of its moral values and its standard of marital ideology. It was this quickened moment of extratextual reality that led Vidal once and for all to settle the question of the sexual ideologies in *Myra Breckinridge*.

5.6.1 In this climate Vidal portrays the eponymous protagonist of the novel, Myra Breckinridge, as a feminist ideologue. Obviously, then, Myra castigates both the puritanic marital ideology as well as the permissive heterosexual bias. She is not against permissiveness but against the heterosexual bias which has it that man is the head and the female just his slave. Vidal does not withhold his undermining of the feminist either. Even as Myra subverts marital ideology and heterosexuality, she is herself undone by the central structural irony of her own character. Finally all these categories of sexual
relationships -- the heterosexual / homosexual / bisexual as well as their societal codes of the puritanic marital ideology, the permissive heterosexual and the sacrilegious homosexual-- are completely ruptured.

5.6.2 As a feminist ideologue, Myra Breckinridge is no purist in sexual matters. She denounces the Jewish injunctions against "the normal human sexual drive towards promiscuity" (MB:76). Her own taste is for both the sexes. She says of herself:

I do share the normal human response to whatever is attractive physically in either sex. I say normal human response, realising that our culture has resolutely resisted the idea of bisexuality. We insist that there is one one [sic] right way of having sex: man and woman joined together to make baby, all else is wrong (MB: 89).

5.6.2.1 For Myra, marital ideology is an anomaly in terms of what she calls the normal human desire for bisexuality. When she sights Rusty and Mary Ann wanting to settle down into marriage and have children, Myra sets out to indoctrinate them into bisexuality. When both do not relent, Myra 'rapes' Rusty and destroys Mary Ann's dreams of marriage and family. Rusty becomes a homosexual and Mary Ann turns to Myra for comfort. Consequently, Mary Ann starts living with Myra as his/her wife. The end of the novel reduces marital ideology to ridiculous proportions
when Myra at last enacts the faithful husband, after marrying Mary Ann in Vegas and settling down to live "a happy and normal life raising dogs and working for planned parenthood" (MB: 219).

5.6.3 A feminist, Myra is all out against the patriarchal permissive heterosexual bias. She is out to see the systematic degradation of manhood. In keeping with her feminist ideology, she has a rather radical vision of a new world order, with the realignment of the sexes. Her agenda and programme is:

... the destruction of the last vestigial traces of traditional manhood in the race in order to realign the sexes, thus reducing population while increasing human happiness and preparing humanity for its next stage (MB: 38).

Myra believed that the process had already begun and now the "roof had fallen in on the male" (MB: 58), it was the age of the women triumphant (ibid.). Myra describes man as no more a classic hero, with no significant role to play except to act out in travesty the classic hero by putting on cowboy clothes, boots, black leather. To her, it is a myth of culture that the male must be dominant, aggressive and woman oriented. The truth is, however, that they are only slaves to an economic and social system.
5.6.3.1 As femme fatale, Myra uses her sexual prowess to conquer malohood and restore womanhood. Her aggressive feminism had already proved itself in unmanning the entire elite of Trobiand Islanders. Her ire against the patriarchal permissive heterosexual bias, the double standards of morality of men not allowed to women unleashes her feminine self. Subjugated, dominated and considered an object of pleasure for long, Myra now reverses this positioning with her disarming seductive sexuality and feminine pulchritude. She evokes keen desire in men only to keep them in her power so that she could "possess man, in her own good time and in ways convenient to her tyrannous lust" (MB: 18).

5.6.3.2 Myra does not indulge in mere rhetoric. Her sexuality becomes the weapons for keeping her modelling class, and even Buck Loner under control. She knows that men desire her and so she keeps them in her power. When she finds Rusty defiant, contemptuous and secure in his masculine superiority, she cannot stand the affront to her femininity. So she plans a strategic unmanning of him. In the infirmary, Myra disgraces Rusty gradually putting into him the fear of her aggressive femininity so that in fear he is reduced from a man to a child. Under the pretext of taking an inventory of his physique, Myra deftly uncovers
Rusty's nakedness, to his profound embarrassment. She makes him pee and masturbate and finally humiliates him totally by 'raping' him with a dildo. Myra thus unmans Rusty and becomes the "woman triumphant" (MB: 133). She exults in the glory of the moment seeing the destroyer become the destroyed and in achieving a great victory for her sex.

5.6.4.0 The symbolic rape scene forms the satirical and deconstructive core of the novel. It is in effect the 'rape' of marital ideology, of the patriarchal heterosexual system, of feminism itself and of all gender divisions. Rusty represents the all-American man whose manhood is ruptured. The supremacy of the male, the patriarchal order, is completely reversed in this scene, where the female becomes the aggressor. Moreover, Rusty is enervated. After a short stint of masculine aggressiveness and revenge against women, he becomes a homosexual. His male chauvinism and permissive heterosexual character is wholly undone.

5.6.4.1 Though Rusty is permissive, Mary Ann is faithful to him all along with the desire that she could marry him and have children. Her desire is brought to nought. As part of her humiliation of Rusty, Myra seduces Mary Ann, but she is not given to lesbianism. Later, as the result of a hit and run accident, Myra's original person emerges out
physiologically. S/he is a man. As the curtain falls on the novel, it is reported that Mary Ann marries Myra and they live happily together.

5.6.4.2 With this single structural irony, Vidal reveals the duplicitous nature of Myra's character and breaks the myth of the feminist ideologue. All along she has been a poser, purporting to be the widow of Myron, while s/he is Myron, transformed into a women through a sex change by Dr. Montag. Dr. Montag explains that this is because "Myron's polymorphism was coupled with a desire to surrender entirely to the feminine side of his nature" (MB: 78). Therefore Myron used to get himself frequently laid by men. Consequently, because of the desire to put men completely in his power, Myron ends his life and becomes Myra (MB: 80).

5.6.4.3 The accidental change of Myra at the end of the novel effaces all gender distinctions. Though Myra/Myron physiologically emerges as a man, s/he is without male genitalia, which is the identifying point of the male. Neither is she female. The sex change leaves some questions unanswered. How does one define Myra's sexual acts with Rusty and Mary Ann? Is Rusty's 'rape' to be described as heterosexual or homosexual? The same ambiguity pervades her relationship with Mary Ann. It might be argued, as
Bernard F. Dick does, that the transsexual operation is a metaphor for androgyne. So when the feminine principle predominates, Myra/Myron is a woman and it is she who seduces Rusty. Similarly when the masculine principle dominates s/he is attracted to Mary Ann. But this is not accurate as Dick himself points out. Myron, the film critic, was an "easily buggered fag", while Myra is attracted to Mary Ann. He, therefore, sums up Myra/Myron's sexuality thus:

Myra even transcends the mythical androgyne and becomes the amalgamation of every sexual type: male/heterosexual, female/heterosexual, male/homo-sexual, female/lesbian-in short, ultimate sexuality (Dick 1974, 157).

5.6.5 In Myra Breckinridge, Vidal's deconstructive satire on heterosexuality/homosexuality is total. In this original invention of the person of Myra, Vidal ridicules the sexual ideology of the States. The final picture of Myra, settling down happily with his wife, after a bizarre life of kinkiness, is an image acceptable to society. But Vidal makes it the ad absurdum of marital ideology. Myra is an emasculated man, who can never assert his marital/conjugal right nor raise a family. He has to satisfy himself by "raising dogs and working for Planned Parenthood" (MB: 219). As a feminist, Myra undoes the permissive heterosexual bias by subjugating men to her will,
of which the 'rape' of Rusty is the apex. Myra also unmakes the sacrilegiousness of the homosexual by presenting it as the only panacea for the world's problems -- the population explosion, shortage of foodgrains and nuclear war. But, in the gender change of Myra, Vidal deconstructs all sexual categories altogether, making her the figure of a semantic sexual volatility. His moral is that sexual preferences are natural and innate and best left to the individual. As Harold Bloom very aptly remarks:

The polemic of Myra remains the best embodiment of Vidal's most useful insistence as a moralist, which is that we ought to cease speaking of homosexuals and heterosexuals. There are only men and women, some of whom prefer their own sex, some the others, and some both. This is the burden of Myra Breckinridge (Bloom 1984, 5).

5.7.0 Through the strategy of 'deprofanation' in his novels, Vidal thus undoes the stigma attached to sex, its profanity, apart from the sacred space of marital ideology. Vidal accomplishes this by altering the positioning of the sexual ideologies through his rewriting/redefining of them in the novels. In In a Yellow Wood, Vidal puts forth the sexual ideologies as they are according to their traditional primacy. Thus the oppositions are marital ideology / permissive heterosexual / sacrilegious homosexual. But in the social system, the very existence of an opposing ideology undercuts the primacy of the other. Vidal proves
this by shifting the locale from the centre (marital ideology) to the marginal (sacrilegious homosexual). In *The City and the Pillar* the binaries, marital / permissive heterosexual, collapse as marital ideology receives only an absent signification. Moreover, in it, the heterosexual / homosexual binary is reversed by according primacy to the homosexual. But in *The Judgement of Paris*, this reversed opposition is no longer tenable. Through his argument for sex per se, Vidal downplays the categorization of 'hetero' and 'homo'. 'Hetero' and 'homo' exist separate but equal, where sex is the underlying continuum. The erasure of the oppositions forwards the deconstruction of the sexual ideologies with an alignment of 'hetero' and 'homo' where sexuality is highlighted, instead of different sexual acts. Finally, in *Myra Breckinridge*, having done away with the oppositions and their given order of priorities, Vidal represents in Myra a sexual volatility, that totally undercuts the very system of oppositional polemics thereby undoing all attribution of categories to sex -- a complete deprofanation.