



HÁSKÓLI ÍSLANDS

Hugvísindasvið

Reality or internalized homophobia?

**The representation of gay men's lives in Alan Hollinghurst's
*The Line of Beauty***

B.A. Essay

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May, 2014

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Abstract

This thesis concerns the attitude to homosexuality in Alan Hollinghurst's *The Line of Beauty* and argues that its representation of the lives of gay men exhibits a kind of internalized homophobia. I present my thesis within the theoretical framework of queer theory. I begin by explaining what the gay novel is and its characteristics. Then I talk about the queer theory; its definition and its general assumptions and focuses are explained. I then apply it to a reading of the novel. What is more, the paper also challenges the origins of the theory, attempting to interpret the queer theory not only as a deconstructing theory, but rather a mix with an essentialist view. In the next two sections I focus more on the novel. The section three considers the experience of gay men living in a straight society with special reference to "coming out" in its first part, and political as well as society's responses to homosexuality in the latter part. In chapter four I expose further themes present in this particular gay novel, which makes the thesis statement even stronger with its exposure of the rather not happy aspects of being a gay man in the literature. Furthermore I also touch upon the subject of the AIDS epidemic. Later on in that chapter I discuss further proof of internal homophobia by its exhibition of the internal exclusions and other struggles of being member of the gay community.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	2
GENRE AND THE THEORY	4
THE GAY NOVEL	4
QUEER THEORY	9
SURVIVING THE DAY AMONG THE STRAIGHT	13
COMING OUT AND HOMOPHOBIA	13
POLITICS AND SOCIETY	16
INSIDE THE QUEER WORLD- NOBODY SAID IT WOULD BE EASY	19
AIDS- EPIDEMIC	19
DESTROYING ONESELF	23
CONCLUSION	26
WORKS CITED	27

INTRODUCTION

The topic of this paper is "Reality or Internalized Homophobia?- Representation of Gay Men's Lives in Alan Hollinghurst's *The Line of Beauty*". The reason for choosing this subject is related to the observation that a large number of gay novels, as compared to novels based on lives of heterosexuals, are rather monothematic. The main theme of this sub-genre of fiction novel is usually the struggle of gay men with the world as well as the misery and greyness of gay men's existence filled with sexual practices. Consideration of these features may push one to wonder whether that really was the reality of gay men's lives: if so, the author's choice to emphasize it even more is a sign of disapproval, and if not, an even bigger question arises, namely why does the author choose to show such misery instead of the rainbow hue of happiness. Whichever of the two is the case, both expose a specific kind of unconscious internalized homophobia. At this point it is worth to point out that the term's definition does not aim at suggesting that the authors themselves are living in self-denial or self-hate; the only concern is their choice of victimization and sabotaging the main character with the on-going gay stigma. Furthermore, in this paper the term of *internalized homophobia* intends to convey not just a feeling of hatred of one's homosexuality but more broadly, stands for all kinds of disapproval and exposure of negativity towards male homosexuality. It also includes the negative representation of it in fiction. The fact that all the mentioned components are expressed by the author himself is crucial to the significance of the word "internalized". The novel itself is guilty of internalizing homophobia within its symbolic structure by not allowing for reasonable expectation of happiness for a homosexual. Something of this sort takes place in *The Line of Beauty* by Alan Hollinghurst, which "might be considered a culturally significant British text" (Kagan, 278) and is written by the "most important gay novelist in Great Britain since E. M. Forster" (Kagan, 278). After having read *The Line of Beauty* and seeing its focus on the darker side of lives of homosexual men, one acknowledges that the Alan Hollinghurst's novel shows "symptoms" of internalized homophobia. This is a view shared by the author of this paper and it is explained in detail throughout the text.

This paper presents an analysis of *The Line of Beauty* by Alan Hollinghurst as a support for this view of internalized homophobia. Alan Hollinghurst is a British novelist, who is considered one of the most respected gay novelists. What is more, he won the Booker Prize for this work, which assures one that this is a significant piece not only of gay literature, but also and most importantly of English language literature. Considering the large spectrum of the meaning

of that award, one is being assured that this is a proper source for this paper's main thesis: although the symbol of homosexuality is a colorful rainbow, which usually stands for feelings related to happiness and cheerfulness, and the word gay itself is one of many adjectives describing the state of joy, lives of homosexual men in Hollinghurst's novel were not necessarily filled with contentment and peace of mind, but with anguish, prejudice, hostility and hatred; consideration of this proves that *The Line of Beauty* exhibits internalized homophobia.

This thesis statement defends the view that *The Line of Beauty* shows internalized homophobia. Chapter two introduces the theoretical framework for the discussion: first it explains what the gay novel is and what its characteristics are, that lead to the assumption stated in the thesis statement. Its latter part talks about queer theory: what a queer theory is, what its general assumptions and focuses are and how it can be useful while reading *The Line of Beauty*. However, it also challenges the origins of the theory, attempting to interpret the queer theory not only as a deconstructing theory, but rather a mix with an essentialist view. The next two chapters focus more on the novel. Section three considers the experience of gay men living in a straight society with special reference to "coming out" in its first part, and political as well as society's responses to homosexuality in the latter part. Chapter four exposes further themes present in the gay novel, especially in *The Line of Beauty*, which make the thesis statement even stronger with its exposure of the rather not happy aspects of being a gay man in the literature. It touches upon the subject of the AIDS epidemic. The second part of this chapter on the other hand discusses further proof of internal homophobia by its exhibition of the internal exclusions and other struggles of being member of that community.

THE GENRE AND THE THEORY

The gay novel

The gay novel is a subgenre of the novel that has become significantly popular in English language literature in the twentieth century about the time of the First and the Second World War. Its popularity did not stand for the number of copies sold, but for the amount of literature that included homosexual themes, especially male ones. Its relation to the time of the war is that only during this period strong themes of male homosexuality and “intense feelings between men”(Barry, 144) were being suggested to the reader, like for example Martin Taylor’s poems in *Lads: Love Poetry of the Trenches* which were analyzed by Mark Lilly in his *Gay Men’s Literature in the Twentieth Century*. In his work Lilly exposes “the presence of homo-erotic undertones” (Barry, 144) in war poetry, which “at the time functioned as a kind of licensed area in which it was possible to express male-to-male feelings in an unusually direct and open way”(Barry, 145). Nevertheless, the idea of *love* present in these poems was open to interpretation. One could interpret it as actual romantic love; a more conservative reading, however, allowed one to decode it as homosocial, or simply as sympathy for another human being, which could be portrayed as sadness after the death of a fellow soldier. Still, some poets were bolder in their writing than the majority and set as their priority exhibition of “same sex love as superior to men’s love for women” (Barry, 145). An example of this can be Geoffrey Studdert Kennedy’s poem named *Passing the Love of Women*, where the poet states “But I know a stronger love than theirs, / And that is the love of men” (Kennedy). The reason for this is possibly that the war setting “allows tender physical contact between males” (Barry, 147) and it makes the war “a ‘safe’ area in which feelings evoked and expressed are different from those felt in more ordinary circumstances” (Barry, 147).

With respect to novels, their plots “highlight queer themes, characters, and proto-gay identities” (Kagan, 280). They mention homosexuality to a greater or lesser extent and place it as a key interest. Usually it is the protagonist who is a homosexual himself or herself but this cannot be taken for granted, since any other lesser character could be queer as well. According to Michael N. Stanton “gay novels [...] are about a search for identity” (Shanton), therefore their plots are almost always dominated by the realization of and coming to terms with own sexuality often accompanied by a large portion of self-denial and ‘coming out of the closet’ to either

family, friends or to any other societal environment. What is more, interpersonal relationships and various struggles and problems related to it, like living within a heterosexual-dominated community, sexual promiscuity, sexually transmitted diseases (and in consequence health problems often fatal), homophobia, experiences of hatred, prejudice and injustice as well as societal and political attitudes towards homosexuality are most often present too. Very often a message of these novels is a search for the essence of one's own happiness, looking for a personal kind of utopia, where no negativity and prejudice would be felt. However, when compared proportionally, gay novels and especially Alan Hollinghurst's novels, are extremely rarely written in a stereotypical happy-ending pattern, compared to fiction focused on heterosexuals, which more often is. In them, the protagonist gets through all the obstacles without significant problems and finds own idea of happiness at the end. In contrast, Alan Hollinghurst's novels take a rather realistically gloomy view on life, which sabotages homosexual lives and highlights the theme of victimization. Even though the author of *The Line of Beauty* has as much freedom in their writing as any other writer does, they still choose to limit happiness of the protagonist to not catching any sexual transmitted diseases, not getting into drugs addiction and so on, letting one wonder whether that is all there is awaiting homosexuals. What Alan Hollinghurst's novels also do is "[it] tak[es] on minority histories and liberal viewing pleasures." Furthermore, very often dramatic or even tragic undertones are present: a picture of a protagonist who is in the closet, anonymous and promiscuous sexual adventures on daily basis and unrelenting criticism of homosexuality coming from the surroundings. What is more, the great concern of the AIDS epidemic often shapes the character and the message of these works. Consideration of all of these components of this genre steers us to a belief that Alan Hollinghurst's gay novel deconstructs a stereotype of gay men's life and romantic experience. Existence on earth is a pattern of advantages and disadvantages and this particular sub-genre of fiction puts emphasis on exhibition of reality, accentuating all its cons, rarely falling into unrealistic impression of life consisting of general happiness with few obstacles that usually are easy to overcome. It tends to present homosexual experience as relentlessly fraught with danger and distress, while any happiness is shallow and short-lived. All these features define the broad term of internalized homophobia, which is not supposed to be understood literally, but in a broader way by focusing on the rejection of adding more 'colors' to its content. Apart from that, it is rather crucial to notice that writers of gay novels are not necessarily gay themselves,

nevertheless the most authentic picture can be seized by those who have lived it themselves, as stated by Georges Letissier, “write[ing] about gay life from a gay perspective unapologetically and as naturally as most novels are written from a heterosexual position”(Lettisier, 199).

Homosexuality has always been present in literature. Even though, its being chosen as the main issue of the plot is more of a recent phenomenon, nevertheless the existence of male gayness has been written about for just as long as it has been known of. In the eighteenth century homosexual acts were not very much present in literature. It was mentioned briefly, but overall it was mainly shown in more of an abstract or even satiric way. William Backford’s “Vathek” or M. G. Lewis’s “The Monk” are two examples. In the first one homosexuality is introduced within the main character’s nightmare. The latter instead exposed substantial male-to-male infatuation throughout the narrative line, notwithstanding that changes at the end, when an unspoken “anti-gay” spell is cast and the male object of physical attraction turns into a woman and a heterosexual happy ending occurs.

The nineteenth century’s respectable literature did not include gay themes in its content, until the novel “Teleny”, which is suspected to be written by Oscar Wilde, where the main themes are lust, love, betrayal and eventually death. Another work, this time officially known as written by Oscar Wilde was “The Picture of Dorian Gray”. It was published shortly after “Teleny”. Its plot does not talk about homosexuality directly, but it suggests that the protagonist, whose name stands in the title, Dorian Grey, is a homosexual. He openly detests women, he is extremely beautiful and in love with himself, by which suggesting that he had a narcissistic personality.

A change took place in the literary works of the twentieth century, where writers talked about homosexuality slightly more boldly, which can be closely related to the fact that homosexuality was decriminalized in Britain in 1967. The theme of queer was presented in writing most often in settings, which required most man-to-man interaction and moments of intimacy between two men were more likely to happen. Places most often chosen for the setting were boarding schools or army. Both places create an environment conducive to the creation close male friendships and feelings of unity, which potentially could stand behind for moments of transitory attractions, where emotions can be intense, heterosexual outlets unavailable, and homosocial intimacy provides a natural preface for homosexual intimacy.

As mentioned earlier, struggles and concerns are most often presented in Alan

Hollinghurst's gay novels. As well as homophobia and fear of society's hate, the outbreak of AIDS has had its impact on shaping the genre too. This epidemic is very often one of the most significant concerns of gay men. Sometimes it could be even called the antagonist of the novel, as it very often just as much as the heterosexual society stands in the way of the protagonist to true happiness. The AIDS disease is a very important matter as it often has a great impact on the events of the plot. It is either one of the main character's principal worries, or causes of their suffering, when they watch their closest friends dying from it, or it even leads to the actual death of the protagonist. Since its outbreak, AIDS is often personified as the main and the greatest "villain" in Hollinghurst's novel, repeatedly replacing prejudiced heterosexual society on that account. One might argue that the writers who were gay themselves or were inspired by other homosexuals, perhaps friends or family, lived in the fear of the sickness as well, which was the inspiration for such a theme.

The Line of Beauty seems to be internally homophobic itself, as it rarely talks about happy gay men, who are also capable of keeping healthy and stable relationships, can be in love and have successful careers. There is no general expectation that male-male relationships can be happy and fulfilling. The novel does little to nothing in order to change that view, which it easily could, considering it being *fiction*. Instead, it shows nothing but prejudice and death by disease. It also exposes emotionally transient and shallow couplings and therefore implies that there is nothing more. In a heterosexual novel, this might be viewed as a problem of the particular individuals or social group being discussed, rather than as an existential statement of *all* heterosexual relationships. The novel rarely falls into fictional use of rainbow-hued happiness; what it does is it continues lingering on the bleak reality that has been present in the history of gay struggle.

The historical context of the lives of homosexual men reaches probably as far as the existence of humanity does; here we focus on the last three centuries. In the eighteenth century in Britain homosexuality was considered sodomy and anyone accused of acts of this sort was prosecuted. Homosexuality was considered unnatural, immoral as well as sick and against religious beliefs, which stands for being against God's will leading to being damned. Debates on decriminalization of homosexuality were taking place in this century, yet unsuccessful. Not much had changed a century later: prosecution continued of sodomy, also known as buggery, which was punishable by death penalty, usually by being hanged. However, a huge switch occurred in

the twentieth century. Homosexuals became less afraid to admit their sexual preference and often would meet in larger groups, which led to opening the first gay pubs. A tremendous spark of hope arose in the lives of homosexual men after decriminalization of lesbianism, which contributed to Sexual Offences Act in 1967 making homosexuality for both men and women legal in the light of civil law. Still, society's attitudes changed little and acts of homophobia and gay bashing were constantly taking place. These aspects are continually shown in the *The Line of Beauty*, which apparently refuses to exhibit to the reader a homophobia-free world. Instead, it invariably keeps on exposing frequent episodes of prejudice and society's unchanged perception of 'disordered' sexual orientation, which can be confirmed in Foucault's works where he says that "homosexuality appeared as one of the forms of sexuality when it was transposed from the practice of sodomy into a kind of interior androgyny, a hermaphrodism of the soul. The sodomite has been a temporary aberration; the homosexual was now a species" (Foucault, 43). What is more, it was a kind of species that until 1973 in the United States was considered disordered to the level where it required psychiatric medicalization. Although Alan Hollinghurst was not pathologizing homosexuality per se, he was in some ways under the influence of the discourse about the sick homosexual. It usually includes the AIDS theme in it and makes one identify it with homosexuality. Following this path, having AIDS perceived as a death sentence lets one think of homosexuality as a death itself. What is more, another reason to believe in inner-homophobia is the belief shared by Judith Butler that the main distinction between heterosexuality and homosexuality is that the first one is "naturally-given" (Barry, 139) and is a "normative 'self'" (Barry, 139), while the latter one is "the rejected 'Other'" (Barry, 139).

Alan Hollinghurst's gay novel is a very specific sub-genre of literary fiction. It focuses on the greyest and darkest aspects of gay men's reality, emphasizing them and making them seem like the only reality out there. It refuses to add colorful themes, just as it does not avoid speaking up about discrimination, prejudice and bigotry. In result, its refusal to add more happiness-centered fiction suggests internalized homophobia, which the above arguments explain in detail.

Queer theory

Queer theory is a field of post-structuralist critical theory that began at the beginning of the 1990's. The theory, just as post-structuralism would suggest, aimed at deconstructing binary oppositions by showing that:

...the distinction between paired opposites [...] is not absolute, since each term in the pairing can only be understood and defined in terms of each other, and, secondly, that it is possible to reverse the hierarchy within such pairs, and so 'privilege' the second term rather than the first.(Barry, 138)

Queer theorists also look for the background of the work and read the particular literary piece through the historical, political, cultural and even the author's background, as it "seeks to describe and classify etiologies of homosexuality"(Seidman, 130). The theory is closely related to feminist and women studies and it "does for sex and sexuality approximately what women's studies does for gender." Nevertheless, "rather than being 'woman centred' [it] rejects female separatism and instead sees an identity of political and social interest with gay men."(Barry, 138) The need for creating this theory had its beginning when it was realized that queerness cannot be studied only as an opposition to heterosexuality. As confirmed by Ulricht "you cannot study fish by comparing them to birds or vice versa, because they belong to different species."(Sullivan, 6) The theory's name derives from the fact that "the term lesbian and gay studies did not seem inclusive enough"(Seidman, 133), and the theorists wished to include there also along with homosexuals, the bisexuals, transgenders and other sexual minorities as it is claimed by Plummer that the theory "is interested in exploring the borders of sexual identities, communities and politics." What is more they choose "sexuality [to be] fundamental in personal identity." An Australian queer theorist Annemarie Jagose in her book "Introduction to Queer Theory" published in 1996 stated that:

Queer focuses on mismatches between sex, gender and desire. For most, queer has prominently been associated with simply those who identify as lesbian and gay. Unknown to many, queer is in association with more than just gay and lesbian, but also cross-dressing, hermaphroditism, gender ambiguity and gender-corrective surgery. (Jagose)

Similar point of view is also shared by Don Kulick:

This is where the term *queer* enters in: queer is claimed to be a more open and inclusive

category than gay or lesbian. It also denotes other groups that do not observe society's norms for "normal" heterosexuality. The category queer comprises everyone who questions heterosexuality's claim to be the purpose and the meaning of life. (Kulick, 9)

It is crucial to remember, that the "books about gay writers, or by gay critics are not necessarily part of lesbian and gay studies, nor are books that are part of this field directed solely at a gay readership or relevant only to gay sexuality." (Barry, 134)

Queer theorists search within different facets of life, including the family life, romantic relationships as well as the sexual sphere. They wanted to show that:

Homosexuality is no longer to be seen simply as marginal with regard to a dominant, stable form of sexuality (heterosexuality) against which it would be defined... it is no longer to be seen as transgressive or deviant vis-à-vis a proper, natural sexuality (i.e. institutionalized reproductive sexuality) according to the older, pathological model, or as just another, optional "lifestyle," according to the model of contemporary North American pluralism. (Seidman, 134)

Furthermore according to them "homosexuality is a result of nature, [and] it cannot be unnatural" (Seidman, 136). Additionally "it is impossible to separate one's sexuality, from one's class, one's gender and so forth" (Seidman, 137) since it is a part of identity which is essential and in this sense it is ideal. Considering all that one could begin to wonder why the queer theory would be strictly limited to being a sub-theory of post-structuralism, and not related to essentialism as well. After all, essentialism is an approach which "regard[s] [the features] as the basic 'givens' of our existence" (Barry, 33) Keeping that in mind, as well as the facts known nowadays, that homosexuality is not a choice, but something inseparable from one's being, as confirmed by Ricton Norton, "homosexuals are born and not made" (Norton). Moreover, queer is culture. It is believed by the essentialist theorists that homosexuality or queerness are biological, and not simulated. Social constructionists on the other hand perceive it as "a construct whose arbitrary foundation is determined by the builder" (Norton). By contrast, Norton, just like an essentialist would, chooses to "see culture as the cultivation of a root, and [he] shall be developing the ethnic view that queer culture grows naturally from personal queer identity and experience and is self-cultivated by queers rather than by the ideology and labels of straight society" (Norton). Even though sexual identities are biological, the culture is created. Considering these two characteristics, it can be freely interpreted as the queer theory is really a mix of essentialism and

post-structuralism since it consists of both biological and man-made features.

When it comes to literature queer critics in their works focus on searching for authors who use queer motifs in their writing. Furthermore, they also ‘read between the lines’ in works from both literary and filming industry looking for hidden queer themes and when finding one they study it in a post-structuralistic method. Following this path they also look for acts of homophobia, even if not literally, for example for skipping by critics “overtly homosexual love lyrics from selections or discussions of the poetry of W. H. Auden (Mark Milly).”(Barry, 143) Queer critics also try to expose strongly homosexual themes in older mainstream filmography and literary works, which were omitted by critics before.

Queer theorists, critics and sociologists put most emphasis on exposing homophobia and stopping the white heteronormative social model. It is important to them to show that

the logic of the sexual order is so deeply embedded by now in an indescribably wide range of social institutions, and is embedded in the most standard accounts of the world, queer struggles aim not just at toleration or equal status but at challenging those institutions and accounts. The dawning realisation that themes of homophobia and heterosexism may be read in almost any document of our culture means that we are only beginning to have an idea of how widespread those institutions and accounts are. (Warner)

Reading gay novels, such as Alan Hollinghurst’s *The Line of Beauty* in the context of queer theory, one pays attention to the ways homosexual men needed to behave in order to survive among the straight, such as saving face and keeping up appearances. These behaviors are often labeled as ‘a comedy of being English’. One also notices obvious anti-gay and homophobic feelings from the white and heterosexual environment, as well as internalised homophobia and self-deprecation. Despite the fact, that queer theorists favor literary realism for its “omniscient narrator who presents and interprets the events” (Barry, 142) as well as “a linear time sequence in which events unfold chronologically, and characters who are presented as stable essences with a personality which develops in an orderly and cumulative way” (Barry, 142) they also are interested in “its many anti-realist elements” (Barry, 142) which is applicable to *The Line of Beauty* since not all the events in the novel are explained chronologically. Examples include the unchronological explanation of Nick’s and Leo’s splitting up as well as how it is never stated why Nick would stay so many years at the Feddens, and crucially, how the result of his HIV test

is never exposed to the reader.

While using queer theory, this essay will focus on the essentialist-oriented perspective; for many would refuse to be defined as an opposition to the 'ideal' heterosexual. Rather, preference of some is to be perceived as an essence of a private idealism with its own root, which coincides with Norton's pattern of belief where he claims that "the essentialist does not say there is only *one* gay root: in fact a *diversity of roots*." (Norton)

SURVIVING THE DAY AMONG THE STRAIGHT

Coming out and homophobia

Coming out is a process of revealing one's own sexuality and/or gender to the surrounding society. This includes, school peers, work colleagues, friends, family and foremost oneself. The process cannot begin unless one has come to an understanding of one's own sexuality, or gender for that matter, which is closely explained by Jeffrey Weeks:

'Coming out' is usually seen as a personal process, the acceptance, and public demonstration, of the validity of one's homosexuality. But it can also be seen as an historic process, the gradual emergence and articulation of a homosexual identity and public presence. (Weeks)

Coming out of the closet is a broad term that reminds one of a journey. It always begins with realization of having different sexual preference than the majority of society, which usually takes place in adolescence, more rarely in later years. Following that, the discovery of the meaning of being gay is present in an individual's life, as well as 'closeted' observation of society and its attitudes towards this particular sexual minority. In that stage the individual chooses how safe it is to come out and what advantages and disadvantages are likely to occur. There are several factors influencing one's choice of coming out or avoiding such. These may include among many: religious background, legal force of the country an individual lives in, fear of prejudice, will of fulfilling family's and society's expectations and eventual homophobia (which will be explained in more detail later in the paper). Meeting one's family's expectations can be related not only to anticipation of abandonment, but also to financial matters. A case of this sort applies to Wani, Nick's lover in Hollinghurst's *The Line of Beauty*. He would not only stay in the closet, he would also have a fiancée (who later was revealed as being paid off by his mother to play the role of one) in order to keep his father happy, which led to inheriting his entire fortune, since Wani was the only son left after his older brother passed away. Another meaningful character in the novel, mainly in the first and the third chapter of the book, was Leo, his sister and their mother. Religious views in their household were the reason for the 'don't ask, don't tell' act, meaning that their mother knew about her both children being a part of sexual minority, yet pretending not to know about it, instead of accepting it. Once again refusal to adding positive details by an author to the plot is revealed and internalized homophobia is being continued.

Homophobia on the other hand is a set of hostile attitudes and behaviors towards anything that is not heterosexual. Following acts of disapproval and hostility can be noticed along while reading the novel: “jeer and horn-blast from a passing car” (Hollinghurst, 43) on Nick and Leo kissing on the street, Sir Maurice saying to Nick that mentioning homosexual intercourse “fills [him] with a physical revulsion” (Hollinghurst, 340) and claiming that they are deserving of AIDS, Leo’s mother’s refusal to accept his and his sister’s homosexuality, Nick’s observation of his mother having suffered from his orientation, and at last but not the least Barry Groom’s speech, which will be discussed later.

As mentioned in the earlier chapter, *The Line of Beauty* reveals a bit of a ‘comedy of being English’, where keeping up appearances for the homosexuals was the key to survival in the heterosexual society. Due to this phenomenon, various kinds of actions are undertaken by the characters and Wani was not the only one whom it applied to. Even though Nick Guest was not in the closet, as a matter of fact he seemed to be very accepting of his sexuality in his own mind which was the reason for why he did not hide it from his family and friends, yet he was another character who chose to live by the ‘don’t ask don’t tell’ rule. The Feddens were well aware of him being a member of the sexual minority, still Toby and Catherine were the only ones who did not feel uncomfortable talking and hearing about it. Nicholas could easily “show himself to them as a functioning sexual being” (Hollinghurst, 89) and not rarely would he tell, especially Catherine, about his conquests. However, the case was slightly different when it came to his friends’ parents, Rachel and Gerald Feddens, who were “easy about having a bender in the house [...] as long as it’s never mentioned” (Hollinghurst, 176). Even though they clearly knew about his difference from the majority and did not mind it, yet they chose living without his direct statement of his sexual ‘cup of tea’, especially Gerald, to whom “the facts of gay life had always been taboo”(Hollinghurst, 479) and “he [Gerald] and Nick had never shared a frank word or knowing joke about them” (Hollinghurst, 479). A similar situation took place with the Feddens’ friends at occasional dinner parties and other events of this sort. The upper class that they represented found it most appropriate not to mention it and Nick would make an unspoken agreement with them by not talking about this sphere of his life either. A reason for that could be that the upper class would find it derogatory to show signs of homophobic attitude, despite really having one. A case of this sort is described after announcement of Catherine’s godfather’s death caused by AIDS, which was only said out loud by Catherine and Rachel tried to convince her it

was an exotic sickness, just for the sake of avoiding a homosexual-related subject.

However, the mutually shared politeness has not been maintained by the end of the novel, following the revelation of Gerald's scandalous affair and the exposure in the newspapers of the presence of homosexual men within the upper classes. One of the most attention-catching examples of that is Barry Groom, who has never acted in an exceptionally friendly way towards Nick. Still, Barry would choose to spare himself the display of lack of sympathy towards him. However, he did not find it particularly difficult to exhibit an overtly hostile attitude at the end of the novel where he would directly call him names and show disrespect. What is more, in the light of current events he also spoke his mind about Nick's unneeded presence at the Feddens' home trying to influence Gerald into changing his mind about him. That resulted in one of the final Mr. Fedden's utterance on his unrighteous interpretation of seeking fault on Nick's party in the whole scandal:

I've been giving it some thought. It's the sort of thing you read about, it's an old homo trick. You can't have a real family, so you attach yourself to someone else's. And I suppose after a while you just couldn't bear it, you must have been very envious I think of everything we have, and coming from your background too perhaps... and you've wreaked some pretty awful revenge on us as a result. (Hollinghurst, 481)

As the examples from *The Line of Beauty* show, coming out and fear of it caused by homophobia are inseparable components of the plot of Alan Hollinghurst's novel. Lack of avoidance of these features might stand for the will of authors to expose the gay-world's 'reality' in its gloomiest spectrum. What is more, the unwillingness of replacing them with fictional happiness shows evidence for the internal homophobia in this particular sub-genre of fiction novel.

Politics and society

As mentioned earlier, *The Line of Beauty* is 'a comedy of being English'. It shows a lot of evidence for assuming that what mattered to the upper class the most was keeping up appearances and saving face; rules of social etiquette were also followed. Certain topics, like homosexuality, were rather taboo, as considered inappropriate. This section is going to help in understanding society's and politics' attitudes towards homosexuality in the novel, by giving some historical background of the situation, developing it towards the time of the novel's setting. It is also going to discuss importance of morality to the upper class and how it challenges tolerance. It is going to expose another evidence of internalized homophobia in *The Line of Beauty*.

The society has always had its certain attitudes towards homosexuality. The history of the struggles of gay men reveals that for most of the time homosexual practices were banned and punishable by the law. There are several ways in which the authorities attempted to “ban associations where homosexual information might be transmitted and homosexual inclinations encouraged” (Solomon 1980). Among them was the attempted “regulation or outright prohibition of pornography” (Ruse, 237). The presence of homosexual men was unwanted and the law was very strict towards them (Ruse, 238). For example in Medieval England consequences of homosexual practice were taken to the extreme, by commending “burying alive as the penalty for sodomy” (Ruse, 238), however, ‘luckily’ for the gays later it has changed and “the traditional punishment was burning at the stake” (Ruse, 238). Even though punishments of this sort were becoming a rarer phenomenon, still the sexual experience between two men was considered a capital offence until the late nineteenth century and no difference was recognized between sexual practice with a member of the same sex and with an animal. Later, the brutality was being avoided and only life sentences were being practiced until around 1950s when the government decriminalized sexual intercourse between two members of the same sex in private. However, practices of this sort were still prohibited in larger groups.

Society’s negative attitude, which had its effects on politics, is suggested by Lord Patrick Devlin to have its roots in a sense of morality. According to him “morality is necessary to society” (Ruse, 242) and “without it society would collapse” (Ruse, 242). His perception of morality is seen by him “as an essential underpinning of society, he believes society to be a good thing, and thus he thinks society has the right to protect itself against those who would break the moral law” (Ruse, 242). What is more he believes that not all aspects of life deserve tolerating.

According to him, the citizens have just as much the right to free speech, liberty and voting they are as much obliged to have the right to be able to display their lack of satisfaction, which leads to openness to expose intolerance. Following that example one faces the circle of mutual hatred, as consciousness of having the right to speak one's mind openly and being free opens the gate for intolerance itself, since one as a liberal being chooses to be not accepting of minorities. This is what Devlin calls the problem, saying that "morality is a sphere in which there is a public interest and a private interest, often in conflict, and the problem is to reconcile the two." (Russ, 246)

Next, perception of homosexuality and the way that the government, political class and social elite valued their sense of morality became particularly silent during the war years. Even after the World War II after all the prisoners from the concentration camps were set free, the ones who were accused for being homosexual were still being kept imprisoned. Once again, the case applied only to men. Not much more tolerance and acceptance was shown in army force. Individuals who were openly homosexual were not allowed to enter the army, because

[the] rationale was that the morale of a heterosexual servicemen would not be compromised if they were required to live and work with homosexuals, whose supposed uncontrollable and inappropriate sexual desire made them inherently untrustworthy. (Finding Out, 72)

The historical background of gay men groups discussed previously in the chapter show, that lives of homosexual men were not easy, whatever social class they were from. Alan Hollinghurst's vision of an insider's perception of homosexuality within the upper classes shows, that even political figures and members of the government could not be worry-free and had to be careful about not being revealed to the society. It was not only the fear or shame of being exposed that was keeping them in the closet, there were also their work and social positions that might have significantly suffered from the exposure of one's sexual preference. A case of such discrimination is Hector Maltby, a minister of Foreign Office in *The Line of Beauty*. After being caught in a car with a male prostitute, he was removed from his position and abandoned by his wife. Gerald's position was clear that morality would not allow one to continue in office after such exposure and that it does not do any good to live according to one's nature, despite Catherine's admiration of his acceptance of himself.

Alan Hollinghurst in his novel once again shows symptoms of internalized homophobia,

as the presented in the chapter evidence prove. Once again the author shows refusal to add joyful elements to the plot and goes on with victimizing his gay characters.

INSIDE THE QUEER WORLD- NOBODY SAID IT WOULD BE EASY

AIDS- epidemic

Alan Hollinghurst set his *The Line of Beauty* in the mid 1980's when the AIDS outbreak in England took place. Considering the age of the author and the fact that he was gay himself, we can conclude that he could have seen the outbreak of the epidemic from the "inside" of the gay scene. The characters of the novel live in fear of catching the new disease as well. Nick, the protagonist, watches his two former lovers die of AIDS, unsure of his own status. This section is going to discuss the matters related to the epidemic: both analysis of what the illness really is and the reasons of its outbreak. The epidemic's presence in the novel is also going to be discussed in the latter part.

The previous chapters mentioned that internalized homophobia in this paper should not be understood literally, as self- hatred existing within homosexuals and/or the gay novel writers themselves. Its definition in this essay relates directly to the novel itself and its structure that reinforces the view that only the most negative of expectations concerning homosexuality are likely to be fulfilled. All that mentioned may leave an reader inexperienced with the subject with an assumption that there is nothing else out there to homosexual men lives than the greyness, hopelessness as well as the helplessness. One of the main components of this internalized homophobia is constant mention of the AIDS epidemics. Even though it has successfully been declared that this issue is not only for gay men to be concerned about, Alan Hollinghurst in his novel repeatedly rejects avoiding the subject. That may leave a rather conservative part of the society with the belief that it really is gay men's stigma since no other illness is being mentioned as often as this one. However, the society's perception of the epidemics and its attitudes towards it will be discussed in more detail later in the chapter.

AIDS, also known as acquired immunodeficiency syndrome, is caused by human immunodeficiency virus, which is generally known as HIV. The virus can be transmitted from one to another in a number of ways. Firstly, through carelessly done blood transfusion, where the necessary tests were not ran. Secondly, transmittance can also take place due to simultaneous usage of the same needles (referring to illegal drugs abusers who inject the substance of their choice. Thirdly, it can also be transmitted from the mother to the child via breastfeeding, delivery or even during the pregnancy. However, the reason for why it has been that closely related to

male homosexuality is its transmittance through sexual intercourse, mainly anal sex. First medical reports on the unknown sickness that led to death reach back to 1981 in the United States (Altman, 188). The patients diagnosed with it were in majority young men, whose immune system shown serious deficit. Nevertheless, according to Grmek in his *History of AIDS*, the disease has been existing in African countries for a long time before its discovery in the west. (Grmek) The main theory on how it spread is connected with globalization and migration. Scientists believe that expansion of the fatal virus “followed the huge population movements of the contemporary world” (Altman, 188), which would be made of “truckers moving across Zaire and India, women taking up sex work [...], men seeking work on the minefields of South Africa and Zimbabwe, or tourists [...], refugees [...] and soldiers [...] moving across national boundaries” (Altman, 188). There have been attempts to stop the disease’s globalization. One of them was making stricter restrictions of crossing borders for HIV-positive people. However, this was applied to less than half of the countries in the world. There are also other factors conducive to the spread of AIDS epidemic. Among a few, “internationalization of trade in both sex and drugs, [...] social dislocation, poverty, and the absence of health services” (Alman, 188) played a significant part in the dispersal of that fatal disease. Additionally, fear of being stigmatized in a society (whose ‘friendliness’ decreased due to the outburst of the illness which was noticeable in the poll held in London in 1988 on the “support for the legislation of homosexual relations” (Weeks, 296), as well as shame to disclose the origins of infection stand against prevention of the virus spread.

The AIDS epidemic and society’s negative attitude towards it were present in *The Line of Beauty*. The mysterious illness that was drawing the life out of young men was first mentioned by Leo, when talking about his former lover to whom he referred as ‘old Pete’. Even though it has never been said directly in Leo’s speech that Pete suffered this disease, it has been said that he caught the ‘new’ illness, which was making him weaker and weaker. The first time that AIDS-caused death has really been brought up took place at the dinner party at the Feddens’ summer house during the Tippers’ visit. The news on the phone that distracted the dinner declared that Catherine’s godfather Pat passed away. Society’s unfavorable attitude towards anything gay-related, including the illness, faced the daylight when Rachel tried to hide the real cause of his death saying that “he picked up some extraordinary in the Far East [...]. No one knew what it was. It’s thought to be some incredibly rare thing” (Hollinghurst, 334), apparently assuming that

something caught due to bad luck is much more honorable than catching a fatal sexually transmitted disease. Catherine's burst out and pressure to tell the truth was denied, once again revealing the 'comedy of being English' where lying is found more appropriate when it came to rather controversial topics. It has been rather a popular view among the more conservative part of the society, that "they [homosexual men] had it coming to them" (Hollinghurst, 340). They would also believe that this particular cause of death is nothing to be sorry about and it is nothing comparable to 'actual' sicknesses. A representative of this kind of opinion in the novel would be Sir Maurice, whom his wife described as "medieval on this one, he's like Queen Victoria" (Hollinghurst, 340).

Nick's own experience with the AIDS epidemic could not be considered the most pleasant one. He would not only acknowledge old Pete's and Catherine's godfather's death. He would also face his first love's, Leo's, fatal end as well as Wani's path towards the same destination. Despite assuring those around him, like Toby or Leo's sister, that he was not infected because at first he was lucky, then he was safe (Hollinghurst, 402), he still feared the infection. He considered taking each test as "the boost, the premature relief of taking charge and agreeing to learn the worst" (Hollinghurst, 394). But even the thought of being ill made him feel "unreachably alone" (Hollinghurst, 394). Watching all this happen made him give a little bit of thought on gay life and its AIDS-based reality. He would compare it to cars, which "changed as they aged; at first they were possibilities made solid and fast, agents of dreams that kept a glint of dreams about them[...]; then slowly they disclosed their unguessed quaintness and clumsiness, they seemed to fade into the dim disgrace" (Hollinghurst, 439). That is how he perceived lives of homosexual men. At first, after accepting one's sexual preference, lives of gay men seemed to be full of possibilities: one could sleep with whomever, however and wherever they wished, being able to switch between the partners with no difficulties, making their private dream of promiscuous freedom and liberty come true. However, sooner or later the reality and consequences of the choice of the 'free' lifestyle, made one weaker, helpless and made one's light slowly fade away till its ultimate end. That leads one to believing that liberation needs not being treated as *you only live once* but rather as knowing that all the possibilities are out there, but lack of safety in exploring this kind of liberation may result in a fatal end.

The Line of Beauty shows a lot of damage that the epidemic has caused. Neither has it revealed Nick's results, leaving the reader shocked and wondering what happened to him next.

The basic knowledge of what AIDS is, as well as the outline of the events causing its outbreak and at last, its fatal effects are needed in order to understand the message of the novel well. This section provided the reader with background of the illness for better understanding of its seriousness and the chaos it caused in the novel.

Destroying oneself

Previous chapters presented how gay men face society's prejudice and unfriendliness on a daily basis. However, there is a certain amount of negativity that makes functioning more difficult within the minority group as well. Most noticeable in Alan Hollinghurst's novel are auto-destructive behaviors such as promiscuity and illegal drug abuse. What is more superficiality and narcissist behavior are present as well which lead to creation of inner subcultures and internal exclusions.

The Line of Beauty shows rather unfortunate picture of interpersonal relationships between gay men. It does not picture emotion-filled romance; what it really does is expose that the best feeling that there can be between men is a friendship with a strong sexual undertone to it. Nevertheless, what mostly does take place is a promiscuous lifestyle, where freedom and liberation are being taken overly literally and has its effects in holding sexual intercourses with people very little known, or even not known at all. There is a number of examples of this kind of attitude towards it. The first one is obviously Nick's relationship with Leo, which started off as a date in a gay bar during which the only thought on Nick's mind was having sex with his companion, which happened the same night at a local park. The main protagonist of the novel was a virgin by the time it took place, his date on the other hand was rather an experienced person. A proof of that can be found during his chat at the bar they have met, when he admitted he was well known there. It was left for an open interpretation to the reader *how* he was known, but considering the further events of his AIDS-based death one can guess what was meant by that. Another 'relationship' that was meaningful to the plot of the novel was Nick's and Wani's. That was where real promiscuity was revealed. They never were an actual couple, despite Nick claiming being in love with Wani. He on the other hand was interested only in expanding his sexual experience. Throughout the plot one can witness various sexual behaviors between the two, such as picking up random men for threesomes et cetera. Fascination in sex, or rather an addiction to it which is presented when Nick admits he "felt deliciously brainwashed by sex, when he closed his eyes phallus chased phallus like a wallpaper pattern across the dark, and at any moment the imagery of anal intercourse, his new triumph and skill, could gallop in surreal montage across the street or classroom or dining table" (Hollinghurst, 155) has pushed them to being less selective about their partners. What was more cared about was just having an actual intercourse, than whom it was with. Attitude of this sort was exhibited in Nick's description of

Tristao, a waiter whom the protagonist and his second lover had an ‘adventure’ with: “it took a little effort of lustful will to find him attractive “(Hollinghurst, 83), yet he did not give up on him. Considering the broad term of internal homophobia, which is a subject of that paper, one can start to wonder whether the promiscuous lifestyle, despite the known risk of HIV infection, was a result of unconscious belief that gay men are damned and unworthy of love, so the only kind of inter-human closeness could take place via sex.

Nevertheless loose lifestyle was not the only auto-destructive behavior that was present in gay men’s lives in Alan Hollinghurst’s prize winning novel; abuse of illegal drugs was a significant to the plot issue as well. Unspoken self-hatred was exhibited through self-sabotage. Despite being aware of consequences of drugs abuse, cocaine specifically, the characters still chose it as their personal escape from the reality: “it was beyond pleasure, it was its own motor, pure compulsion, though it gave them the delusion of choice, and of wit in making it.” (Hollinghurst, 387)

Last but not the least, inner exclusions caused by superficiality are exhibited in the story. Once again, the protagonist of the story is an ideal example of such. He did claim to want love, whether it was primarily with Leo, or later with Wani. When it came to the first one, Nick would often complain in his mind on Leo not saying he loved him back and his lack of romanticism, saying that “bumshoving” was not his idea of romance. However, that was present only at his young age, at the beginning of his ‘gay journey’, when his ideals were more naive. Later in his life though he came to discovery, that what was the most significant to him was beauty, and that was his perception of love: he did wish for the actual feeling, nevertheless he only found beautiful things and people being worth loving. That was what his relationship with Wani was based on. What also happens in the gay men’s world is that the superficiality, where one is being judged and desired only through their looks leads to creation of subcultures within the gay men’s society which exposes high exclusion of individuals not belonging to them. What these subcultures are based on is “diversity of sexual interest and erotic styles.” (Finding Out, 184) Due to this, discrimination is not only to be felt from the heterosexual surroundings, but is also to be found within the minority itself, being an argument to the assumption on internalized homophobia— one being against another. As Wayne Martino explains, this hostile attitude is especially experienced between ‘straight-acting’ gay men and the rather more feminine ones, and many in order to assimilate with them “put on weight to adopt a particular way of being

masculine that challenges the idealization of the gay male body” (Kendall and Martino, 58). One therefore can clearly see, that living in the closet in order to escape prejudice from straight society is not enough, since finding acceptance within the group where it should go without saying is also difficult.

CONCLUSION

It is rather an enigma, that the symbol of sexual diversity is a colorful rainbow. Usually the rainbow is considered a sign of hope and end of an unpleasant state, since it naturally shows on the sky at the end of a rainy weather, when sun (which often symbolizes hope) slowly starts showing and the still ongoing rainy weather is fading away. What is more, the linguistic usage of the word gay is a synonym of the group of adjectives that stand for happy feelings. Yet gay men's lives in the literature would be nothing like it, but rather a complete opposition, showing sadness, worries, hatred and lack of acceptance (self-acceptance, and one from both heterosexual and homosexual worlds). A novel, which is a part of fiction writing, has all the freedom in the world, and can easily make gay characters successful protagonists who overcome struggles in life and reach their own idea of happiness to a lesser or greater extent. Despite that, Alan Hollinghurst in his *The Line of Beauty* refuses to consider such plot being an option; his preference is to emphasize hopelessness and misery of being a gay man, perfectly framed to the homophobic view, that being gay is nothing one would wish on anyone, just like one would not wish another to die (which as exposed in the essay can be in fact taken as equal to being homosexual, since it is understood that it goes in pair with AIDS and death follows). He rejects the possibility of happiness and fulfilment for the homosexual person. That is what the term of internalized homophobia in this paper stands for. The explained features and notions within this genre and particularly within the prize winning *The Line of Beauty* should let the reader understand how it is present in this novel. Nevertheless, the times are changing a lot, with an exceptional rapidity in the twenty-first century. Every year male homosexuality is becoming more and more visible and noticeable. Homosexuals are getting more rights including gay marriage and that possibly makes the writers see that there is no need of constant victimization of the gay character. This sort of change may result in the rainbow overshadowing the greyiness of the structure of gay novel; after all today's popularity of queer topics in literature shows "a widespread acceptance of homosexuality coexists with manifest homophobia. How the gay novel will dealwith this condition is a question continually being answered."(Shanton)

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