



Universidade do Estado do Rio de Janeiro
Centro de Educação e Humanidades
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Transgenders or Transsexuals?
Identities, Sexualities and Genders in *The Well of Loneliness* and *Stone Butch Blues*

Rio de Janeiro
2009

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Dissertação apresentada, como requisito parcial para obtenção do título de Mestre, ao Programa de Pós-Graduação em Letras, da Universidade do Estado do Rio de Janeiro. Área de concentração: Literaturas de Língua Inglesa.

Orientadora: Prof^a. Dr^a. Eliane Borges Berutti

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CATALOGAÇÃO NA FONTE
UERJ/REDE SIRIUS/CEHB

H174 Fontenla, Janine de Oliveira.
Transgenders or transsexuals ? identities, sexualities and genders
in The well of loneliness and Stone butch blues / Janine de Oliveira
Fontenla. – 2009.
105 f.

Orientadora: Eliane Borges Berutti.
Dissertação (mestrado) – Universidade do Estado do Rio de
Janeiro, Instituto de Letras.

1. Hall, Radclyffe, 1886-1943. The well of loneliness – Teses. 2.
Feinberg, leslie, 1949- . Stone butch blues – Teses. 3. Transexuais –
Teses. 4. Identidade sexual na literatura – Teses. 5. Stephen Gordon
(Personagem fictício) – Teses. 6. Jess Goldberg (Personagem fictício)
– Teses. I. Berutti, Eliane Borges. II. Universidade do Estado do Rio
de Janeiro. Instituto de Letras. III. Título.

CDU 820-95

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dissertação

Assinatura

Data

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Aprovada em 29 de Setembro de 2009.

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Rio de Janeiro

2009

DEDICATION

To my sons João Marcus e José Paulo, who have given me motivation and strength to do my share in the pursuit of a better world.

To my loving husband Murillo, who has always been supportive and understanding, even when he did not agree with some of my choices.

To my parents Alfonso and Edicéia, who have taught me that everything you do comes back to you, telling me I must always be respectful and conscious in relation to others.

To cousin Petrônio, *in memoriam*, for showing me that beauty and happiness can be found in the simplest things in life.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Several people have contributed to the final result of this work. Among these, I would particularly like to thank:

My advisor Eliane Borges Berutti, for being so contagiously passionate about your research, giving me the chance to see the world from a different perspective; for your time, dedication and patience to guide my steps into this new field in which I was so ignorant; for understanding my limitations even when I was unable to measure how far they went; for consistently praising my rights and criticizing my faults. Thank you so much!

My mother Edicéia, for always helping and supporting me; for taking care of my sons so that I could study; for encouraging me to keep on fighting for what I believed was right; and above all, for showing me the good side of being different, even if it goes against some social codes. Thank you!

My professors and colleagues from UERJ, for the support, the ideas and the wonderful time we spent together. Thank you all!

When we use this constructive approach, identification becomes a shift in perspective rather than a closing of one's eyes. [...] Rather than reducing us to familiar elements, it can offer an introduction into the many layers that construct who we are. [...] Identifying myself as a lesbian shifts the emphasis, suggesting a place to begin, not a place to end.

Jewelle L. Gomez

RESUMO

FONTENLA, Janine de Oliveira. *Transgenders or transsexuals ? identities, sexualities and genders in The well of loneliness and Stone butch blues*. 2009. 105 f. Dissertação (Mestrado em Literaturas em Língua Inglesa) – Instituto de Letras, Universidade do Estado do Rio de Janeiro, Rio de Janeiro, 2009.

Este trabalho tem como propósito analisar as questões de identidade, gênero e sexualidade nos romances *The Well of Loneliness*, de Radclyffe Hall, e *Stone Butch Blues*, de Leslie Feinberg. O foco desta análise recai sobre as personagens principais dos romances, Stephen Gordon e Jess Goldberg, que vivem múltiplos conflitos por conta de sua expressão e identidade de gênero não estarem em consonância com seu sexo biológico. A dissertação fundamenta-se nos conceitos teórico-metodológicos da teoria do corpo, na conceituação pós-moderna de identidade e nos conceitos de gênero e sexualidade, assim como seus desdobramentos. Dentre os conceitos considerados relevantes desenvolvidos para essa análise estão os *transgenders* e transexuais, uma vez que as protagonistas apresentam características congruentes com ambas as categorias. Considerando-se o desenvolvimento das personagens Jess e Stephen, pode-se perceber o caráter múltiplo e processual da identidade pós-moderna, tendo toda a gama de aspectos relacionados a gênero e sexualidade como elementos (trans)formadores.

Palavras-chave: Identidade. Gênero. Sexualidade.

ABSTRACT

The aim of this work is to analyze the issues of identity, gender and sexuality in Radclyffe Hall's *The Well of Loneliness* and in Leslie Feinberg's *Stone Butch Blues*. The focus of this analysis lies in the main characters of the two novels, Stephen Gordon and Jess Goldberg, who live multiple conflicts since their gender identity and gender expression are not in consonance with their biological sex. The theoretical-methodological fundamentals of this thesis are based on the concepts of the theory of the body, on the postmodern conceptualization of identity and the concepts of gender and sexuality, as well as their unfolding. Among the relevant concepts developed for this analysis are the transgenders and transsexuals, once the protagonists display features which are congruent with both categories. Concerning the development of the characters Jess and Stephen, one can notice the multiple and processual nature of the post modern identity, which has a whole range of aspects related to gender and sexuality as (trans)forming elements.

Keywords: Identity. Gender. Sexuality.

SUMMARY

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INCLUSION AS A MATTER OF UNDERSTANDING

“Sexuality was a subject of intense interest and speculation to the intellectuals of Bloomsberry¹” (Rule, 2001, 81), still being a frequent and important subject discussed in our postmodern society, especially due to the misconceptions, misjudgments and mainly the prejudice around it. Therefore, studies concerning sexuality, gender, and other related topics must be developed in order to avoid the aforementioned problems, many times derived from lack of understanding and information on the subject.

Inclusion is also an update issue in society that apparently has recently been trying to be more tolerant, not to say receptive regarding differences in general, and here, in particular, differences in gender identity and expression as well as in sexual orientation. It is essential to point at the conceptual distinction between these two subjects, gender and sex. Although they are related to a certain extent, they are far from having similar meanings.

There are clear boundaries that classify genders, masculine and feminine, concerning social behaviors based on characteristic stereotypes. Men are expected to be masculine; so as women are expected to be feminine, consequently they must act and dress accordingly. When people do not match these stereotypes, they tend to be excluded. Instead, if one tries to take an inclusive action, it is necessary to extinguish, or at least, make those gender boundaries more flexible, in order to dissolve the existing prejudice.

Similarly, sexual orientation follows a strict pattern – a man is supposed to love and feel attracted to a woman and *vice versa* – leaving no space for diversity. There is diversity though! Therefore, people must recognize the unfolding of love and sexual attraction, making it possible to see beyond the binary sexual system imposed by the traditional western culture. In his essay entitled “Literatura, homoerotismo e pós-modernidade”, Leonardo Mendes quotes Zygmunt Bauman when he states that our postmodern times are more tolerant, expanding this idea to one of solidarity, as a path towards true inclusion. (Mendes, 2002, 81)

Moving into this direction of acceptance and understanding, it is essential to work with a more flexible and comprehensive concept of identity. Identity as a cast

¹ A group of writers, artists and intellectuals who gathered at Virginia Woolf's home, in Bloomsbury, in the early 20th century, mainly with the purpose of pursuing happiness and developing their intellects.

for the human being no longer fits man in our times. This postmodern man cannot be reduced to one single, fixed and permanent identity. Instead, his identity will be continuously changing, as long as he confronts the multiplicity of the cultural systems he is exposed to, as defends Stuart Hall in “The Question of Cultural Identity” (2005).

Both *The Well of Loneliness*, by Radclyffe Hall (1990[1928]), and *Stone Butch Blues: a novel*, by Leslie Feinberg (2003[1993]), explore the intrinsic connection among identity, gender and sexuality. These two novels present as their protagonists biological women who have masculine gender identities and expression, facing the rigidity of the system as well as the social codes. Hall and Feinberg themselves faced the same sort of troubles, as will be presented in more details.

Radclyffe Hall: Loves and Writings

The Well of Loneliness (1928) was written by Radclyffe Hall, who was born Marguerite Radclyffe-Hall, on August 12, 1880, in Bournemouth, Dorset (then Hampshire). She was the daughter of a wealthy British young man, Mr. Radclyffe Radclyffe-Hall and Marie Diehl. When she was still a baby, her parents got separated and she stayed with her mother. Her mother married again to a renowned musician, Albert Visetti. Although she lived with her mother, she would not have too much attention from her.

Hall was educated at King’s College London, then she moved to Germany where she finished her studies. When she was twenty one years old, she inherited a great fortune from her paternal grandfather becoming financially independent. Since Hall did not have a good relationship with her stepfather and was constantly ignored by her mother she decided to live on her own and moved away.

Hall was a lesbian, describing herself as a “congenital invert”, according to the terminology used by Havelock Ellis, Richard von Krafft-Ebing and other sexologists at the time. Hall remarked she was never attracted to men. She had interest in playing the piano, hunting, riding horses, driving cars and studying. The main topics she devoted herself to study and read about were psychic phenomena and lesbianism.

In the late 1800s, lesbianism was called “inversion”. Krafft-Ebing, an important sexologist then, described this congenital sexual inversion as a disorder possibly due to a familiar history of mental illness, classifying homosexuality as a disease. Going deeper in these studies, he tried to change this concept of anomaly into

differentiation, which was only possible with the works of Havelock Ellis. Contrary to considering “inversion” a disease, an immorality or a crime, Ellis proposed the idea of simply difference, nothing else. Therefore, Hall not only studied Ellis’s works but also had his words opening her most famous novel that had “inversion” as one of its main themes.

In 1907, while Hall was traveling in Germany, she met Mabel Veronica Batten, “Ladye”, an amateur singer. When they met, Batten was fifty one years old and married. She had an adult daughter and grandchildren. They fell in love with each other, starting a relationship. They decided to live together after Batten’s husband died. Batten had an important role in Hall’s life. She gave Hall the nickname John, which Hall adopted as her first name, reassuring her masculine identity. According to Sally Cline, author of Hall’s biography entitled *Radclyffe Hall: A Woman Called John* (1998), in addition to calling herself John, Hall expressed her masculinity through smoking cigars and cross-dressing in silk jackets, in a time when those were men’s prerogatives. Batten also influenced Hall to convert to Catholicism.

In 1915, Hall met Una Vincenzo, Lady Troubridge, Batten’s cousin. Troubridge was twenty one and, as well as Batten, married, being the mother of a young daughter. Hall fell in love with her what made Batten very upset. About a year after Batten’s death, they began living together, even though Troubridge only got legally separated from her husband in 1919.

Hall and Lady Troubridge lived together first in London, then in Rye. Although they had led their lives as a couple for as long as Hall lived, she had many affairs throughout the years. Lady Troubridge was not at all pleased with them; instead, she tolerated them.

In 1934, she met Evguenia Souline, a thirty-year-old Russian illegal immigrant, who became her lover and also, to a certain extent, her nightmare, as well as Lady Troubridge’s. This affair was extremely destructive to Hall, concerning both her health and her career.

On October 7, 1943, Hall died at the age of 63 due to a colon cancer.

As for her professional career, Hall was a successful British poet and novelist. She started writing poetry, as lyrics for the music she composed while developing her interest in the piano. The great many poems she wrote were collected in five volumes, published between 1906 and 1915. Most of the poems brought the usual

characteristics of poetry at the time. Occasionally some of her love poems suggested ambiguity in the erotic attractions presented.

Only in the last volume, which show a higher level of complexity in its verses, there is a series of poems, detailed in their reference to erotic desire and passion, never specifying the gender of the beloved, which was also a common practice in love poetry. However, it is possible to notice “a veiled poetic treatment of a fleeting affair with Phoebe Boare” that, according to Joanne Galsgow, must have taken place between 1913 and 1914 (Sommers, 1997, 354). Hall had a sixth collection of poems published *postmortem*.

In 1924, she started her career as a novelist, having published her first two novels. One of them, *The Unlit Lamp*, regarded by many critics as her finest work, won the French literary prize Prix Femina. This book was the first to be finished, being the second published though. Hall wrote about a girl puzzled by her mother’s manipulation over her and her wish to share a flat with a girlfriend while attending medical school. This novel is Hall’s first attempt to discuss sexual issues within her literary productions, since Joan Ogden is not conventional, despite her lack of courage to give in to her desires. Parallely and afterwards, Hall wrote two social comedies, not presenting any discussion related to the previous topic.

Hall was very successful with her fourth novel since it had a great acceptance by the critics and sold very well. *Adam’s Breed* (1926), a novel in which she told the fictional story of an Italian man who works as a headwaiter. Eventually, he gets tired of his job, changing his life into one as a hermit in the forest. This book won the James Tait Black Memorial Prize for the best literary novel in 1926.

Before writing other novels, Hall worked on a short story, in which a woman has unusual behavior in relation to what is expected from women at her time, “Miss Ogilvy Finds Herself”. Wilhelmina Ogilvy takes care of the house, not as a housewife, but as “the man in the house”. Differently from her two younger sisters, Fanny and Sarah, Wilhelmina has no interest in getting married. On the contrary, she gives up her mother’s plans for financial salvation through her marriage, clearing her sisters’ way to venture “in the matrimonial market” (Hall, 1994, 88).

Miss Ogilvy goes to the army during World War I as a nurse, manages her own and her family’s business, takes important financial decisions, takes charge when others retreat; all activities that are supposed to be performed by men, not women. She likes and trusts “men for whom she had a pronounced fellow-feeling”,

whereas she would shyly respect and admire women, often being secretly amused by them (Hall, 1994, 87). She usually feels very lonely though, for her difference. Even her mother says she cannot understand Wilhelmina because her daughter is an odd creature for her.

After leading a “queer” life, Miss Ogilvy feels tired and old, deciding to go on a trip to a small island near Devon. Ultimately she finds herself in a kind of hallucination where she sees herself as a primitive man, the defender of the island, who falls in love with a girl. This is how Miss Ogilvy can free her refrained feelings and impulses:

The sea and the marshes were become as one substance, merging, folding together, and since they were lovers they also would be one, even as the sea and the marshes.
[...] they had reached the mouth of a cave [...] he sat the girl on her feet, and she knew that the days of her innocence were over. (Hall, 1994, 102)

This experience is so intense that takes her to a point of no return, making her contemporary life impossible. Therefore, she is found dead the following morning. In this short story, Hall again dealt with homosexuality; consequently, it inspired her very much to write her most famous and controversial novel.

The Well of Loneliness (1928) tells the story of Stephen Gordon, from her birth to her adulthood, showing the difficulties she has to face in order to understand herself and embody her true gender identity. Indeed, the questions about her gender and sexuality are present before her birth. Stephen is the daughter of Sir Philip Gordon and Lady Anna Gordon. Both her parents strongly believe the coming-baby is a baby-boy. This expectation leads Sir Philip to decide for a masculine name beforehand. At her birth, her parents get surprised, not to say disgusted by a baby-girl with masculine body features. In spite of her biological sex, her father keeps his decision about naming the girl Stephen, adding a list of feminine names to it.

In her childhood, Stephen always feels odd in feminine clothes, going against her mother’s expectations. She wants to have her hair short, which was a boyish characteristic. Moreover, many times in the novel she shows clearly that she would like to be a boy. At the age of eight, she falls in love with the housemaid, consequently, suffering for not being corresponded for the first time. As she grows older, Stephen continues to have interest in things that are not appropriate for a teenager or an adult woman, such as hunting, riding horses and driving. She receives formal education with a tutor, something unusual for girls. In addition to that,

she decides to practice gymnastics and fencing, what makes her body even more masculine.

She becomes more confident in her strength and wisdom but at the same time, she faces an inner-conflict trying to discover her own identity. Maturity brings her the awareness of her self identity, which leads her to dress masculine clothes, coming to experiment love concretely later on.

At the very end of the novel, Stephen is living with her lover and companion Mary Llewellyn. However, she decides to quit this relationship once she thinks she will never be able to give Mary what a respectable woman is supposed to have: a family. She confesses then being involved with another woman to Mary, who becomes desolated and runs away to a standard marriage in Martin's arms. Her ultimate sacrifice is a consequence of her exhaustion to deal with the punishment she has been suffering in her soul. Her self-sense of non-conformity is stated when she pleads with God: "We have not denied You, then rise up and defend us. Acknowledge us, oh God, before the whole world. Give us also the right to our existence!" (Hall, 1990, 437)

The book was first published in July by Jonathan Cape in the United Kingdom, initially having good sales and critic reviews. However, on August 19th, James Douglas, editor of the *Sunday Express* labeled the story as immoral according to his article "A Book That Should Be Suppressed", printed in the newspaper Sunday issue, harshly criticizing the book.

[...] the adroitness and cleverness of the book intensifies its moral danger. It is a seductive and insidious piece of special pleading designed to display perverted decadence as a martyrdom inflicted upon these outcasts by a cruel society. [...] Fiction of this type is an injury to good literature. It makes the profession of literature fall into disrepute. Literature has not yet recovered from the harm done to it by the Oscar Wilde scandal. (Douglas, 2001, 38).

In the article, Douglas referred to the Home Secretary, demanding an action aiming at confiscating all copies of the book available to be destroyed and prohibiting further publications. As a consequence of this demand, Hall and her novel faced a trial. The judge considered the allegations about the book true and *The Well* was banned in England.

Hall's fame turned to notoriety with the publication of *The Well of Loneliness*, in which she explored in detail the attachment between a young girl and an older woman. The intense and earnest love story was condemned by the British, and a London

magistrate, Sir Chartres Biron, ruled that although the book was dignified and restrained, it presented an appeal to “decent people” to not only recognize lesbianism but also understand that the person so afflicted was not at fault. He judged the book an “obscene libel” and ordered all copies of it destroyed. [...] The British ban on *The Well of Loneliness* was eventually overturned on appeal after Hall’s death.²

Although the results of the trial in England were not favorable to the novel, it continued to be sold in other countries, such as the United States and France. By the year of Hall’s death, 1943, the book not only sold over 100,000 copies but was also translated into fourteen languages.

Barbara Gittings, in her essay “New Thoughts on Unthinkable Subjects”, tells us about her search for her own identity, followed by her need to understand what was behind being a lesbian. When seeking information in books, pamphlets, as well as any other available material, Gittings comes across Hall’s novel. The curious thing about her contact with this book is her father’s reaction after finding it among her belongings. Despite living with Barbara in the same house, he wrote her a letter. He explained “he could not bring himself to discuss it face-to-face”, also advising her about the immorality of that lesbian love story, prohibiting her “to pass it on to anybody else because they might be contaminated by its contents.” (Gittings, 1991, 158)

None of Hall’s latest novels brought controversial themes after *The Well*. *The Master of the House* (1932), which brought religious subjects as its theme, had strong sales at first; however, sales decreased for the poor critic reviews the book received. In addition to that, in the United States, the copies of this book were seized then because her American publisher went bankrupt.

Hall wrote her last novel in 1936 and many love letters she exchanged with Evguenia Souline between 1934 and 1942 were collected and edited by Joanne Glasgow in a book called *Your John: the Love Letters of Radclyffe Hall*. In the first letters selected by Glasgow, Hall tries to explain Souline her *inversion* and expresses her anguish for Souline’s reluctance in accepting her love and financial support.

[...] far better than you can I know what we are missing, but even were I free to give you this thing that you have the right to, [...] you would think it wrong. You have written: “It is emotionally wrong.” That is your conviction, [...] I have never felt an impulse towards a man in all my life, this because I am a congenital invert. For me to sleep with a man would be “wrong” because it would be an outrage against nature. Can’t you try to understand, to believe that we exist – we people who are not of the so called normal? (Glasgow, 1997, 50)

² www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/252668/Radclyffe-Hall

After she died, as she requested, the novel she was working on in her last years of life was destroyed.

Leslie Feinberg: Words in Action

Leslie Feinberg, the author of *Stone Butch Blues* (2003[1996]), was born a female, on September 1st, 1949. She was raised in a Jewish working-class home, in Buffalo, New York. Feeling odd for being frequently asked if she was a boy or a girl, Feinberg gave up studying and began to work in the factories. In addition to that, she started to go to bars at night, where she could find identification with other people like her. When getting jobs became difficult, Feinberg moved to New York City, almost at the same time she decided to shape “[her]self surgically and hormonally twice” in order to pass as a man. (Feinberg, 1996, x)

More recently, not only when asked the recurrent question “Are you he or she/man or woman?” but also in many speeches and publications, Feinberg explained the choice for the gender-neutral set of pronouns “ze” and “hir”, believing “it melds mankind and womankind into humankind”. (Feinberg, 1998, 71) Respecting this, from now on I will refer to Feinberg using those pronouns.

Feinberg is a transgender activist, a political journalist, and has been involved with groups that fight for the civil rights. Ze is a high member of the Workers World Party, being also the managing editor of the Workers World newspaper. In this newspaper, ze has been publishing articles in a column called Lavender & Red, since June 2004. “I’ve been writing this book in weekly installments in Workers World newspaper” ze states, referring to this column as “a book in progress”.³

Lavender & Red, which one can also access at www.workers.org/lavender-red, consists of Feinberg’s writings on political and historical facts concerning the Lesbians, Gays, Bisexuals, Transgenders (LGBT) movement, in many different places, like the US, Germany, Russia and Cuba, as well as in many different moments, such as the post-WWII, the pre and post Stonewall moments.

Besides, Feinberg is a national steering committee member of the LGBT Caucus of the National Writers Union, United Auto Workers (UAW) Local 1981, a

³ <http://www.transgenderwarrior.org>

member of Pride At Work, AFL-CIO as well as an associate member of the Steelworkers' Union. Ze is a member and an advisor of the National Amboyz, and an advisor of the Future of Minority Studies Research Project.

Feinberg is still a national organizer for the International Action Center and one of the founders of Rainbow Flags for Mumia, which demanded a new trial for the anti-racism activist, Mumia Abu-Jamal. Ze has also been participating in Camp Trans, as well. This event is an annual demonstration held by transwomen and their allies, who protest against the policy of excluding them from attending the Michigan Womyn's Music Festival.

Together with hir struggle as an activist, Feinberg is an award-winning author. Hir most relevant works are *Stone Butch Blues* (1993), *Transgender Warriors: Making History from Joan of Arc to Dennis Rodman* (1996), *Trans Liberation: Beyond Pink or Blue* (1998), and *Drag King Dreams* (2006). The former and the latter are fiction, whereas the other two discuss transgenders from a social, political and historical perspective.

Adding to hir books, ze wrote some essays and non-fictional texts, such as "We Are All Works In Progress". Many aspects related to the struggle transpeople have each and every day of their lives are discussed in this essay, which is the opening chapter in hir *Trans Liberation*. Feinberg points at the transpeople's fight for very practical questions, such as fair jobs and affordable health care, based on respect and dignity. "We Are All Works In Progress" is also presented in *This Is What a Lesbian Looks Like: Dyke Activists Take On the 21st Century* (1999), edited by Kris Kleindienst.

Transgender Warriors brings a historical retrospective presenting transgendered people participating in wars, being respected as deities, social and religious leaders, and spiritual healers, among the native tribes in colonized lands. Feinberg suggests that colonizing these peoples meant diminishing, slaving, dehumanizing them. They were not granted the status of citizens nor guaranteed their rights as human beings. Furthermore, this colonization suppressed their cultures, especially in terms of their particularities or diversities.

Athena Douris, lesbian sex columnist for *For Him Magazine* (FHM), considers Feinberg's "work so valuable, it becomes a debt we can repay only with our life's work" (Feinberg, 1998, cover). Although Douris refers to *Trans Liberation*, her words apply to each and every book, essay or speech of Feinberg's, since ze tries to relieve

people's anguish about who and where they have been in this world. Hir quest for finding "examples of transgendered leadership have great meaning for [hir since ze] grew unable to find [hir]self anywhere in history" (Feinberg, 1996, 81). Echoes of these words must have been heard or silently repeated everywhere by many oppressed transpeople.

Originally Feinberg mentioned Joan of Arc and RuPaul, respectively as the beginning and the end of hir history research and exposition. However, Dennis Rodman, one of the greatest NBA basketball players at the time the book was released, came out as a cross-dresser. The respect and love fans all over America and the world had and still have for Rodman pushed Feinberg to choose him to one end of her thread.

Transgender Warriors gave Feinberg the Firecracker Alternative Book Award for Non-Fiction in 1997 and was included in the list of the "100 Best Lesbian and Gay Nonfiction Books".

Trans Liberation: Beyond Pink or Blue is partly a collection of speeches Feinberg delivered at conferences and rallies in the spring of 1997. The core of these speeches is the idea that each group that represents minorities related to sex and/or gender should be fighting side by side, becoming more comprehensive, so as to gain power. Ze summoned not only transpeople but all people:

Everyone in this room is a leader. Each of us is needed as an organizer, as an activist in the decisive struggles that lie ahead.
[...] The leaders are the ones who are "doing it". And the responsibility and the role of leadership is to develop leadership in others.
In the words of African-American poet June Jordan, "We are the ones we have been waiting for". (Feinberg, 1998, 62)

Feinberg added to each of hir texts in this book one or two testimonies of important people concerning the movements, one way or another, connected to the trans liberation conceptions. As well as Feinberg, these people have felt on their own flesh the oppression either for their sexual desire or for their gender expression. Therefore, their voices stand as living examples of Feinberg's considerations.

Despite not being awarded any price, *Trans Liberation* is considered a rich contribution to the *corpus* related to transgender issues, figuring among the "Village Voice 25 Best Books".

Stone Butch Blues is Feinberg's masterpiece. Although it is informed on one of the first pages that "[a]ll characters in this book are fictitious" and "[a]ny resemblance

to real individuals [...] is strictly coincidental”, it is impossible to ignore the great many similarities between the author and his heroine, Jess Goldberg, concerning the main aspects of their familiar and geographical origins. Also, they are transgenders and lesbians, working in factories and fighting for living and loving throughout their lives. Finally, like Feinberg, Jess becomes an activist for the LGBT civil rights movement. Apart from these similarities, Feinberg states Jess is not his alter-ego, saying

I didn't put myself into this novel as a character. I am lucky to have lived a much richer, fuller life than Jess and have known allies, solidarity, victories and much more love. [...] I wanted to write about trans characters, and how their lives were intersected by race, class, and desire. I wanted to write the kind of gender theory that we all live.⁴

These statements occurred in an interview given to Julie Peters, transgender writer and activist, as well as a member of the State Executive of the Australian Democrats, from Melbourne. Still in this interview, Feinberg explains that, in spite of being a non-fiction writer, fiction, in his point of view, has more power to move the reader, since it “reach[es] down into emotional truths”.⁵

As his first novel, *Stone Butch Blues* was a very successful work and rendered Feinberg the 1994 editions of the American Library Association (ALA) Gay and Lesbian Literature and the Lambda Small Press Literary awards.

This great success does not bring Feinberg relief regarding his fight for the LGBT civil rights. His afterword for the 10th anniversary edition of the novel reveals his constant concern with this cause. He says his book should not be seen exclusively as a piece of art, adding: “[...] with this novel I planted a flag: Here I am – does anyone else want to discuss these important issues?”, describing *Stone Butch Blues* as “a call to action”. (Feinberg, 2003, 305)

His latest published novel is *Drag King Dreams* (2006). The novel tells the story of Max Rabinowitz, a transman who is working as a bouncer at a night club and numbly living a lonely life. After the murder of his friend Vickie and some other similarly astonishing events, Max feels pushed into joining his old activist fight for civil rights. The story discusses “how ideology pierces our flesh, [...] illustrat[ing] how the complications of identit[ies] overflow the apparatus of a state (and a body)”⁶, which is

⁴ <http://home.pacific.net.au/~janie/essays/feinberg96.html>

⁵ <http://home.pacific.net.au/~janie/essays/feinberg96.html>

⁶ <http://feministspectator.blogspot.com/2006/12/drag-king-dreams.html>

usually used to restrain people's freedom for expressing these identities. As in hir other books, Feinberg urges people to struggle together, in spite of one's individual needs.

According to hir domain on the Internet www.transgenderwarriors.org, presently Feinberg is working on a novel, which has *In Defense of Rainbows* as its intended title. Ze only reveals it is "about what happens when the right-wing comes to town".⁷

Feinberg and Minnie Bruce Pratt have been partners in a long term relationship. Together with Feinberg, Pratt is an activist and also a poet, having many books published. Pratt's works also bring transgender issues among the main topics focused. Julie Peters, in the previously mentioned interview with Feinberg, asked hir about family. Adding to hir words in the *Transgender Warriors* acknowledgments a quotation about the familiar bonds gay people have to their friends, Peters questions how Feinberg sees family and relates to it. Feinberg mentions hir two sons, Ben and Ransom, referred to as "loving and supporting" in that part of hir book. Ze also mentions hir youngest sister, Catherine, together with hir "chosen family", namely Star, Shelley, Robin, Brent and Wyontmusqui. Feinberg reinforces ze makes no distinction between blood or love/support bonds (Feinberg, 1996, xviii).

Eliane Borges Berutti finishes her article "*Stone Butch Blues: (Trans)gender (Re)visions*" (2005) referring to a moment in the film *About Schmidt*, when Warren Schmidt, the character played by Jack Nicholson, reflects upon his life, questioning the difference he can have made to anyone. If by any chance Feinberg comes to this moment in hir life, ze can be sure that hir writings, speeches and attitudes have made a difference to many people, including myself. Particularly to me, ze opened the possibility of seeing, not to say sometimes feeling, the world through a transgender's perspective. For "straight" people and even gays and lesbians who are not trans, it is impossible to clearly perceive the inner conflicts and the social struggles transpeople face throughout their lives, unless they generously share their real or fictional stories with us.

In the first chapter of this thesis, I will present the concepts of identity, sexuality, and gender, particularly reinforcing the distinction among them, despite their interrelationship. Discussing this triad requires directing the analysis to the body

⁷ <http://www.transgenderwarriors.org>

as the material through which these concepts speak. Sexuality and gender unfold in many sub-categories, sub-concepts such as the main focuses of my thesis: transsexuality and transgenderism. I point out at their struggle to live and guarantee their rights, culminating in the 1969 Stonewall movement and commenting about “coming out” after becoming more visible. Finally, I spot the specific lesbian relationship between butches and femmes, explaining these terms and the characteristics of this couple.

The Well of Loneliness, by Radclyffe Hall, is analyzed in the second chapter. Focusing on the protagonist, Stephen, I trace the construction of her identity, sexuality and gender. Applying the theory about the body, I compare the “awkwardness” of her body to the “perfection” of her parents’ bodies. Stephen’s non-conformity is based not only on her body’s features and sexual orientation but also, not to say mainly, on her social behavior. An important aspect in Stephen’s persona lies in her love relationships, they turn her into the lonely heroine, claimed to be a martyr for both by transgenders and transsexuals.

The third chapter presents the analysis of Leslie Feinberg’s *Stone Butch Blues*. The starting point of my analysis of Jess, the main character in this novel, are the events in her life that turn her into a stone butch, condition referred to in the title of the book. Jess is responsible for mediating the conversation and relations among the various groups she belongs to, although she lacks this sense of belonging, feeling more like an outcast in most of them. Reading Jess is not an easy task since she feels like a maze herself. The only good “readers” of her, who are able to see what is in between the lines, are her lovers and close friends. They are able to show her she is in this world to make it better. The final part in this chapter compares and contrasts the two novels, mainly in terms of their fight for freely expressing their genders.

In order to conclude my analysis, I present in the last chapter of this thesis a reflection upon the possible answers to the question asked in its title. Coming to possible instead of assertive answers does not frustrate me in terms of closure to my research. Indeed, it shows me that deciding whether the main characters in the novel are transgenders or transsexuals is relevant to understand how tenuous, not to say subjective, is the difference between them.

1 - (UN)DEFINING IDENTITY, GENDER AND SEXUALITY

Reading *Gender Trouble* (1999[1990]) by Judith Butler may raise reflections about her proposal of prioritizing the discussion of gender identity to the discussion of identity in a more general sense. Nowadays, with the advance of medical technology, the baby's gender can be "known" long before its birth, around the sixteenth week of the gestational period. It became usual then to have people asking the parents-to-be: What is it? This simple question made me think about Butler's words

It would be wrong to think that the discussion of "identity" ought to proceed prior to a discussion of gender identity for the simple reason that "persons" only become intelligible through becoming gendered in conformity with recognizable standards of gender intelligibility. (Butler, 1999, 22)

The baby only becomes a person, linguistically speaking, when "it" can be called "he" or "she". This idea matches what the psychologists Lindomar Expedito-Silva and Eliane Medeiros Vale defend in relation to the individual formation, when stating that "the individual biological organism" foundation as a subject has its basis on the impacts of the social representations this subject suffers (Expedito-Silva, 2002, 229 – My translation). Having this in mind, Butler's belief in the impossibility of analyzing one's identity without taking gender into consideration becomes a reasonable perspective.

Before discussing gender itself, it is necessary to understand how it differs from sex. According to Jamison Green, "in everyday language [...], the[se] terms 'gender' and 'sex' are used interchangeably" (Currah, 2000, 2). Actually they are related to a certain extent, being two distinct issues though. Sex refers to the biological determinism onto a body, defining it as male whenever there is a penis or a female if a vagina is present; whereas gender is the socio-cultural construct that dictates what is socially and/or culturally expected from those male and female bodies.

Simone de Beauvoir, in the very beginning of *The Second Sex* (1997), denounces the derogatory denotation of the word "female". She suggests that the term female imprisons the woman in her sex, based on biological, cultural and historical perspectives.

Females are basically differentiated from males for their reproductive function; however, depending on the species, there is not always a clear division into these

two sexes. Referring to Aristotle and Hippocrates, Beauvoir explains that among humans, women are considered to have a passive role or to be a weak seed, while men, as strong seed, contribute with the “force, activity, movement, life” in reproduction (Beauvoir, 1997, 40).

At the time Beauvoir defended these ideas, reproduction was only possible through sexual intercourse, yet she argued that the characterization of two sexes regarding reproduction was already debatable, since in some animals reproduction might take place asexually. She mentioned “that in certain species [just] the stimulus of an acid or even a needle-prick is enough” to trigger the development of an embryo (Beauvoir, 1997, 41), suggesting that males were not even necessary for reproduction some times. More recently, researches proved her right, since they were able to produce embryos by fertilizing any cell with the genetic material collected from another ordinary cell, not necessarily an ovum and a spermatozoon, respectively. Today, after all these medical achievements, one can not accept the binarism weak/strong or passive/active sexes.

Furthermore, Beauvoir refers to the occurrence of intersexed individuals. She comments on the fact that although “sex is fixed at fertilization”, environment can affect the individual (Beauvoir, 1997, 47). In fact, in the first three to four months of the gestational period, the anatomy of the baby’s sexual organ is so similar that doctors cannot state whether it is a boy or a girl. There are other parameters such as the length of certain bones that help doctors predict the unborn baby’s sex. Depending on the nutrients available and consumed, gonads, which are essential hormonal regulators, might have a mal-function; consequently, the “normal” development of the baby’s body features can be affected, causing the occurrence of different anatomy in terms of sex, such as the intersexed bodies, “born with genitals that look like most girls’ or boys’ genitals, but may have internal reproductive organs usually associated with the other sex” (Currah, 2000, 5). This “mistake” is not accepted.

The right to physical ambiguity and contradiction are surgically and hormonally denied to newborn intersexual infants who fall between the “poles” of female and male. [... D]octors [...] immediately “[fix]” infants who don’t fit the clear-cut categories male and female [...]. (Feinberg, 1996, 101)

Finally, Beauvoir focuses her discussion on the comparison of female and the male bodies specifically among human beings. She states that “[t]he female body is

wholly adapted for and subservient to maternity, while sexual initiative is the prerogative of the male" (Beauvoir, 1997, 52). In other words, it is the man who is supposed to take the lead in sex. Even when the woman wants to have sex, if the man does not, it is quite impossible for her to force him into it. Taking the sexual organ into consideration, Beauvoir suggests that the male organ is like a "tool", ready to enter its receptacle, the female organ. Right after the copulation, while the man instantly recovers his individuality becoming a stranger to his sperm, the woman's process of recovering takes much longer. The process of an egg to fully mature and leave the woman's body takes an average of twenty-eight days, which corresponds to her menstrual period. Yet, if this egg is fertilized, "it becomes attached again through implantation in the uterus" (Beauvoir, 1997, 54), putting the woman's individuality aside for at least nine months.

"The development of the male is comparatively simple. [...] he is his body" whereas, "woman's story is much more complex" (Beauvoir, 1997, 58). The female body changes constantly. Till puberty, the development of both male and female bodies is similar; however, with the maturity of the ovaries, and the secretion of hormones, "the menstrual cycle is initiated; the genital system assumes its size and form, the body takes on feminine contours, and the endocrine balance is established" (Beauvoir, 1997, 59). Nevertheless, whenever this hormonal balance is disturbed there is a risk of variations in the female body, which are considered to be abnormalities, such as when some women present facial hair or show virilism, assuming masculine features.

Being an "essential element in [their] situation in the world" (Beauvoir, 1997, 65), women's bodies are in a continuous process of change, starting at puberty, and having its end in menopause. These two ends represent, biologically speaking, moments when hormonal production is rearranged. It has already been mentioned that before puberty the bodies of girls and boys might be regarded as similar, not taking in consideration facial traits, depending basically on their resemblance on either their fathers or mothers. Dressing and behavioral codes are established by their parents according to the social and cultural rules of the groups in which they are inserted. These codes are, according to her analysis, part of how the concepts of man and woman are constructed. Therefore, one can notice that the biological basis is considered relevant but not determinant in the establishment of an individual's sexuality and gender identity. The imposition of these biologically based concepts is

what Humberto Rodrigues calls “heterosuggestion” (Rodrigues, 2004, 19 – My translation).

In fact, at developing her analysis on the conceptual construction of man and woman, Beauvoir accuses social and religious discourses of imposing some interpretations to the biological basis in this construction, in order to make them plausible and unquestionable. Those discourses are the ones that have the knowledge and the power to “create” identity and control the body; therefore, they determine the ideologies that will prevail.

In *Gender Trouble* (1999), Butler questions Beauvoir’s view of the body as an element in women’s situation because it suggests that the body is a “passive medium on which cultural meanings are inscribed” (Butler, 1999, 12). Butler sees the body as a construct too. This changeable body, which she refers to as “myriad ‘bodies’” (Butler, 1999, 13), is where the gendered subject materializes. According to her, in *Bodies that Matter* (1993), the body’s materiality is the effect, the product of this dominance by the discourse. There is this powerful unified scientific discourse that tries to reduce the individuality to a standard modeled by cultural tradition. This discourse, in order to guarantee its power, conveniently uses biological determination as an explanation to some norms and beliefs it imposes. These norms and beliefs are inscribed in the bodies, serving as “regulatory practices that generate coherent identities through the matrix of coherent gender[s]” (Butler, 1999, 23). The determinism of this matrix many times force people to assume certain identities they would not if they did not feel the need to equal themselves to their models; in other words, the discourse intends to make individuals fit into the gender binary matrix, socially constructed as well.

However, when there is power there is also resistance. Resisting is what is left for those that do not find their places in the system. Sexuality is an aspect in this system that is particularly difficult to be discussed. In a Foucaultian perspective, there is a separation of sexualities into “true” and “deviant”, which he refers to as “a dispersion of sexualities”, trademark of an epoch of “sexual heterogeneities” (Foucault, 1998, 37).

Michel Foucault calls “docile” bodies those that conform to the demands of power, being “political puppets, small-scale models of [this] power” (Rabinow, 1991, 180). In the eighteenth century, this question of docility was taken as a project, which would follow certain techniques. The first one was the comprehensiveness of the

control over the body, “the scale of control”; then, there was “the object of control”, which at that time was “the economy” (Rabinow, 1991, 181). Finally there was “an uninterrupted, constant coercion” monitoring the actions and activities of the body, which Foucault calls “the modality” (Rabinow, 1991, 181). Those techniques still work nowadays, specially having the media as a resource to have them massively applied, with results on the individual. The media provide the models (normative bodies) so regularly that they are deeply internalized, turning each and every person into an active monitor, controller for the system. These people are bodies that present “docility-utility, might be[ing] called ‘disciplines’”, important tools for domination (Rabinow, 1991, 181). The object of control is not only the economy but also the knowledge or the information.

Still concerning Foucault’s concepts, discussed by Paul Rabinow in *The Foucault Reader* (1991), the counterparts to the docile bodies are the ones that do not conform to the system’s specific requirements and expectations, those which are condemned. Condemnation is really the appropriate term since non-conformity is harshly punished socially with prejudice and exclusion, and personally with inner-conflict and self-judgment.

Butler agrees with Foucault’s argument, presented in *The History of Sexuality* (1984), that “the body is not ‘sexed’ in any significant sense prior to its determination within a discourse”, on the contrary, it is the discourse that creates on the body the reference of what Butler calls a “natural or essential sex”. (Butler, 1999, 117) It has been established that if the baby is born with masculine or feminine anatomy, it is considered respectively a boy or a girl, meaning they should fit both the social construct of what is to be a boy or a girl and the sexuality attributed to either biological bodies. This is already a questionable law, not to say the previously mentioned nature’s “flaws”!

“We are all affected by the gender stereotypes” (Silva, 2006, 16), defends Carla Alves da Silva, discussing the unfolding of the doctor’s announcement of a baby’s sex at birth and even before, as previously mentioned. A great deal of pre-established norms and patterns of behavior, clothing, habits are imposed both on parents and child so that this child will fit the fixed binarism of gender and sex.

Butler questions the existence of “‘a’ gender which persons are said to *have*, or [...] an essential attribute that a person is said to *be*” (Butler, 1999, 11). She suggests that gender goes far beyond that; it is “an open assemblage”, complex and

multiple (Butler, 1999, 22). Butler reflects upon the hypothesis that “the inner truth of gender is a fabrication [...] a fantasy instituted and inscribed on the surface of bodies” (Butler, 1999, 174). Consequently, gender is not subjected to the body; indeed, the body is an important part of the manifestation of gender, which can not be either true or false, right or wrong; gender is then an outcome, “a discourse of a primary and stable identity” (Butler, 1999, 174).

Stuart Hall, in “The Question of Cultural Identity”, discusses the evolution of the concept of identity, from its Enlightenment definition as an innate and immutable feature of the subject. Identity used to be the person’s “essential center of the self” (Hall, 1996, 597), remaining the same from birth to death, regardless of what he or she is exposed to. Thinking about identity in such an individualistic conception contradicts the English poet John Donne’s in his most famous line from “Meditation XVII”, which says that “no man is an island”. As long as people do not live their lives in isolation, interaction will take place and any interaction implies changes in everyone involved. This principle diverges from the idea of an inert immutable individual.

Contrary to this centered steady individual, identity, as an individual trait, would acquire sociological contours, having established the connections between personal and social aspects. Some sociologists reflected upon how much society would have influence and impact on the self. According to these reflections the person would still have an inner essence, modified by the internalization of social-cultural meanings and values. Hall says that, according to this sociological concept, “identity [...] bridge[d] the gap between the ‘inside’ and the ‘outside’ – the personal and the public” (Hall, 1996, 597). Therefore, identity became not only an individual manifestation, but also a socio-cultural construct, based on the models and patterns determined by the society, which should be followed by the individuals; these ruling social codes had tradition as their framework. With post-modernity, however, identity became fluid, in constant process of change.

Identity becomes a “moveable feast”: formed and transformed continuously in relation to the ways we are represented or addressed in the cultural systems which surround us. It is historically, not biologically, defined. The subject assumes different identities at different times, identities which are not unified around a coherent “self”. (Hall, 1996, 599)

Assuming that there is an influence of others onto one person's identity sets a process of de-centering the subject. This process generates a "crisis of identity". This crisis could not be avoided since evolution is making life more complex; consequently, this complexity is reflected upon people, imposing "the creation of a new mentality, to name the plurality of identities" (Berutti, 2002, 137 - My translation).

In the post-modern world, there is no room for stagnation, motionless, rigidity. "Modern societies are therefore by definition societies of constant, rapid, and permanent change" (Hall, 2005, 599). Likewise, the subject must follow this trend of changing and being changed, transforming and being transformed; one must assume identity as a "constructive expression" of the self (Gomez, 1997, 20). Identity has evolved from ever-lasting to ever-changing, "is actually something formed through unconscious [however, sometimes also conscious] processes over time, rather than being innate in consciousness at birth" (Hall, 2005, 608).

The absence of a "unified coherent self" brings us back to the variations of appearance and behavior in one individual concerning when, where and who he or she is being influenced by. If all these changes can happen in one single person, how could we expect to standardize people? According to Judith Roof, understanding identity as diverse and also "as a fabrication of unities might forestall expectations of uniformity, coherence, and compliance" (Roof, 1997, 16). Indeed, this standardization does not exactly intend to control the subject and his or her intimate practices, but it wants to dictate his or her social practices.

It is certain that the subjects are aiming at the production of their gender and sexuality in their bodies. The process, however, does not take place by chance or according to their will. [...] A heterosexual matrix determines the patterns to be followed and, at the same time, paradoxically, gives room to the transgressions. It is in reference to it that not only the bodies that conform to the norms of gender and sex are constructed, but also the bodies that subvert them. (Louro, 2004, 17 - My translation)

Corroborating Foucault's assumption of the existence of diversity, deviation, Beauvoir reminds us though, that "in nature nothing is ever perfectly clear" (Beauvoir, 1997, 56). This proposition brings reasonable doubt to the social construct of woman based only on her biological body, especially for the constant changes it goes through. This body is not capable of encompassing every aspect necessary to her definition as a woman. Therefore, it can not be taken as a cast that expresses neither her sexuality nor her gender.

Bearing in mind that the concepts of men and women are constructs, gender, which refers to a code of behavior for these men and women, can be said to be a construct as well. Butler defends that if there is actually a gender construction, it is not necessarily as “I” or anybody else, in fact this “I” “emerges only within a matrix of gender relations themselves” (Butler, 1993, 94). Gender is like the role one plays in relation to the norms imposed by the stereotypes which compose this matrix, conforming or not to these norms.

Gender refers to “the behavioral characters considered, according to the cultural group, as being masculine or feminine”, basically connected with the social roles recognized in and performed by each person (Expedito-Silva, 2002, 230 – My translation). This performatic aspect of gender is also defended by Butler. Based on Nietzsche’s claims, Butler states that “there is no gender identity behind the expressions of gender; that identity is performatively constituted by the very ‘expressions’ that are said to be its results” (Butler, 1999, 33).

Although I agree with Butler in the sense that gender identity is not behind or directly attached to the expressions of gender, or “no necessary connection between a person’s gender identity, gender expression and sexual orientation” (Currah, 2000, 9), I believe gender is not only related to social image in comparison to the established patterns but there is also self-identification facet. Jamison Green, in “Introduction to Transgender Issues” (2000), explains the intimate perception “of being male or female, or something other or in between” as “gender identity” (Currah, 2000, 3). Since Green says gender identity is something internal, not visible, it can only be known by others if the person reveals by saying or showing through his or her appearance and behavior. This INTIMATE identification usually does not bother other people, since apparently it does not disturb the order. Feminine or masculine appearance and behavior, which define one’s “gender expression”, is socially noticeable; therefore, it is what will raise judgment and prejudice by the society, probably for being considered a “threat”, as suggests Foucault in “Friendship as a Way of Life” (1996).

The conjunction of biological facts and social aspects compose sexuality. Heterosexuals, homosexuals, and bisexuals point the sexual orientation in relation to the person’s own biological sex and also how it is seen culturally. “Traces of homosexual practices, sometimes in large scale, have been found among the great division of the human race.” (Ellis, 2001, 4) Among many ancient people, like the

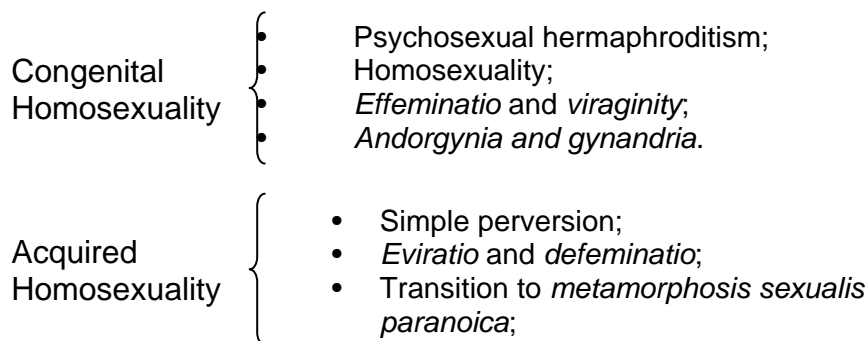
Romans, homosexual practices between two men were far beyond acceptable. They were stimulated!! So it is not always and everywhere that standard or deviant sexuality is judged the same; specially the ones considered deviant have had different interpretations ranging from genetic mal-formation to psychological pathology.

In the nineteenth century, Karl-Heinrich Ulrichs is considered to be an important scholar, not only to openly write and discuss about sexuality, particularly homosexuality, but also to publicly proclaim himself a homosexual. He considered homosexuality to be a congenital abnormality, by which “a female soul had become united with a male body” (Ellis, 2001, 34). Ulrichs called the homosexual love “Uranism”, after the mythological story of Uranos, Dione and Aphrodite.

Some years later, Richard Freiherr von Krafft-Ebing defined this congenital homosexuality as “sexual inversion”. Krafft-Ebing, who was a psychiatrist and a sexologist, wrote a book, *Psychopathia Sexualis* (1998[1886]), based on collected stories of really “sexual inverts”. His works regard sexual inversion as a functional sign of degradation, although when analyzed clinically, the sexual anatomy of those sexually inverted individuals is generally normal. Also he believes it is related to a neuropathic or psychopathic condition, usually hereditary.

This perverse sexuality appears spontaneously with the developing of sexual life, without external causes, as the individual manifestation of the *vita sexualis*, and must then be regarded as a congenital phenomenon; or it develops as a result of special injurious influences working on a sexuality which had at first been normal, and must then be regarded as an acquired phenomenon. (Ellis, 2001, 37)

According to Havelock Ellis, Krafft-Ebing classified congenital and acquired homosexuality into four stages, which I organized in the following diagram:



(Ellis, 2001, 38)

Concerning the congenital homosexuality, psychosexual hermaphroditism presents the prevailing of what Krafft-Ebing calls the homosexual instinct, admitting traces of the normal heterosexual instinct. Homosexuality refers to the situation in which this instinct is directed only toward the same sex. In the third stage, *effeminatio* and *viraginity*, there is a psychic disposition which corresponds to the abnormal instinct, whereas in the fourth, *androgynia* and *gynandria*, there is a general bodily form which corresponds in addition to the abnormal sexual instinct and psychic disposition. For the acquired homosexuality, Krafft-Ebing does not refer to a homosexual instinct but changes in the sexual instinct, evolving from perversion to personality change, then initially to occasional and eventually systematic delusions as to an actual change of sex.

Supporter of Krafft-Ebing's by providing him some of the most detailed survey material he used in his own work, Doctor Albert Moll decided to go deeper into careful studies around sexual inversion. Havelock Ellis mentions Moll's research as extensive. According to Ellis, Dr. Moll's research, published in his book entitled *Die Konträre Sexualempfindung* (1899), can be considered one of the most judicious and complete works about sexual inversion, based not only on his experience as a neurologist, but also on his knowledge as a psychologist. His analysis "clears away prejudices and superstitions surrounding sexual inversion", especially because he rejects the inconsistency argument that it is a hereditary characteristic (Ellis, 2001, 39). Moll admits the occurrence of a number of cases of sexual inversion in families with nervous or mental disorder cases, although there are many more originated from normal, regular families.

In the volume of his collection called *Studies in the Psychology of Sex*, which aimed at discussing sexual inversion, Havelock Ellis gives us a retrospective about sexual inversion, since Ulrichs, as one could see in the quotations in the previous paragraphs. In this book he devoted one chapter to present his idea about what sexual inversion actually is. Ellis questions the absolutism of the previous sexologists, who established opposing categories, suggesting the impossibility of some coexistence. Ellis is able to identify true elements both in the congenital and the acquired propositions, suggesting that they might be mingled in homosexuality definition and not separated into two categories. Ellis highlights the understanding of sexual inversion as a sign of degeneration, as suggested Krafft-Ebing, referring to those changes in the so-called sexual instinct. Ellis calls these instincts, sexual

characters, being their modification known as “stigmata of degeneration” (Ellis, 2001 189). He says that “inversion is bound up with a modification of the secondary sexual characters”. Ellis basis this statement on the ideas Doctor Hans Kurella presented in the preface to the German edition of Laurent's *Les Bisexués* (1896). According to Ellis, Dr. Kurella sees “the invert as a transitional form between the complete man, [...] or woman, and the genuine sexual hermaphrodite” (Ellis, 2001, 189).

In the twentieth century, Foucault proposes the existence of a “sexuality device”, which encompasses different discourses, institutions, laws, and morals. These elements are interconnected, playing some kind of strategic games, which throughout time became a device of control and dominance. The previous centuries saw the prevalence of either the men's or the women's sexuality, both of them fitting the social heterocentric system; however, “homosexuals are in a different position” concerning this system. Guacira Lopes Louro defends the idea that homosexuals “can be tolerated as deviant or different”, but not as part of system formed by multiple sexualities, since “multiplicity escapes the logic that rules this issue” (Louro, 2004, 66 - My translation).

Nowadays both sexuality, gender, and the terms derived from these concepts, are understood in terms of social discourse dominance. Having these concepts in mind, this chapter moves on to the “trans” definitions.

Recollecting Butler's ideas in *Bodies that Matter* (1993), I want to reinforce her statement that the body is the materialization of the norms inscribed in it through biological, religious or cultural discourse practices, being also responsible for shaping it to make it fit into the sex/gender binary matrix. Not even naturally (from birth) this materiality, the body, is all the time in accordance with this binary system, since there are some people who are born as intersexuals. Going further and taking it into consideration, the transformations a body can suffer throughout life, such as make-up resources, physical exercises, hormones, surgeries, can remodel it in such a way that the original identity gets totally shifted.

This idea of *transformation* not only presents an essential characteristic of the post-modern subject, who is plural, fragmented, changeable, but also introduces the terms *transsexual* and *transgender*. It is not by chance that these words have the same prefix “*trans*”, meaning passing through, crossing borders, moving.

Transsexual refers to everyone whose biological sex does not conform to the gender identity, or, in Leslie Feinberg's words, “*transsexual* men and women traverse

the boundary of the sex they were assigned at birth” (Feinberg, 1996, x). Most transsexuals have their bodies changed through various medical treatments, such as hormonal changes and, in more extreme cases, sex-reassignment surgeries. This kind of surgery stands for an element to classify transsexuals in three distinct categories: the pre-operative, the post-operative and the non-operative. It is interesting to mention that there is a time span between deciding and taking the surgery.

They [...] go through a medical process, including hormones and [then] surgery [...]. Part of the process [...] is called the “Real Life Test”. Prior to sex reassignment surgery, transsexuals must live for one year successfully as the desired sex. They must be identified or “read” as the desired sex by society. They must pass. (Currah, 2000, 30)

The pre-operative classification is an evidence of this time span, which includes taking hormones and showing sexual attraction to the sex that is opposite to the one matching their gender identity. The post-operative is clearly defined by its name. There is this non-operative instance which refers to those who have a desired sex different from their biological sex, although they chose other forms of living their sexuality, for the most varied reasons. Before having the medical resources we have nowadays, non-operative transsexuality was the further one could go in terms of achieving the desired sex. Choosing not to have the surgery, for medical, financial or personal reasons does not make the person any less of a transsexual. According to F. M. Chester, in “A Transgender Lesbian Speaks on Gender Identity”, it is hard “to tell a pre-operative or non-operative transsexual unless you look at their genitals” (Currah, 2000, 30).

Another classification is important to be mentioned here; a born female assuming a male identity is called a Female-to-male transsexual (FMT), the other way around is the Male-to-female transsexual (MFT).

Transgender is a much broader term that encompasses transsexuals in general, cross-dressers, intersexed people, and everyone who does not match gender identity with biological sex, regardless of sexual orientation. There are many drag queens and kings, for example, that (over)dress just to perform a role or to have fun, as in Carnival, or even to present shows, making a living out of it. Recently, “many [post-]transsexual people have been willing to take on the label of transgender” since it reflects their lives and experiences before the surgery, or right

after, in the process Green calls “their ongoing consciousness” (Currah, 2000, 4). Feinberg refers to transgenders as “people [who] traverse, bridge, or blur the boundary of the *gender expression* they were assigned at birth” (Feinberg, 1996, x).

Transgender proves to be an important term not to people who want to reside outside of categories altogether but to people who want to place themselves in the way of particular form of recognition. Transgender may indeed be considered a term of relationality [...]. (Halberstam, 2005, 49)

In *Transgender Warriors: Making History From Joan of Arc to Dennis Rodman* (1996), Feinberg tells about hir identification with Christine Jorgensen, who was one of the first people publicly known for going through sex reassignment treatment/surgery, becoming an icon among transsexuals and transgenders. Feinberg mentions people making jokes around Jorgensen’s sexuality and gender, referring to her as “a freak”, which led Feinberg to identify himself with that label as well. Being a freak, an outlaw, was not an exclusive feeling to Jorgensen or Feinberg; it sets a sense of isolation, loneliness to most people that cannot identify themselves according to the norms and patterns.

Green calls our attention to the fact that transgender and transsexual people have to deal with personal, social, legal, and medical questions which are present in gays, lesbians and other sexual minorities, being particularly difficult though in the case of transsexuals. Shame, fear, internalized transphobia, hate, violence, marginalization, and denial in many different senses are some of the problems trans people have to fight today. In fact, this struggle is not something new, as Feinberg found out in hir historical research that originated hir book *Transgender Warriors* (1996).

Many transsexuals and transgenders find in the gay bars a community “in which [they] *fit*” (Feinberg, 1996, 9); however, they might wonder about the existence and the kind of lives people “like them” have always had. Feinberg, in hir historical quest for “identity”, found registers of Native American Indians who used to have a very distinctive consideration towards women or men who would dress and act according to the opposite gender. Among Brazilian Indians, ze had references that some Tupinamba women lived like men, being accepted and respected by them. Going on in history, Feinberg comes across examples of transgendered people not so unfamiliar to our regular knowledge. I mean, everyone knows about Joan of Arc, but our transphobic minds do not want to see this heroine, and Catholic saint,

through the transgender perspective. Indeed, Joan of Arc defended at any cost her right to cross-dress, to freely express her gender identity; as Feinberg states, “Joan of Arc was burned at the stake by Inquisition of the Catholic Church because she refused to stop dressing in garb traditionally worn by men” (Feinberg, 1996, 31).

In addition to these examples Feinberg presents in his book, he seems to have found the origin of such bigotry. In a chapter entitled, “Why bigotry began”, he traces back trans/gender-phobia laws till *The Bible*. In the Book of Deuteronomy, he finds reference to the condemnation of cross-dressing and sex-reassignment surgery, particularly MTF (Male to female). Feinberg points at the historical moment in which Deuteronomy was written, reminding of the “communal society that still worshipped goddesses”, also mentioning that “ritual sex-change was a sacred path for [...] religious traditions” (Feinberg, 1996, 50).

Based on *The Bible*, which allegedly establishes God’s laws, it was a “natural, unquestionable” consequence to treat both transgenders and transsexuals as outcasts, unnatural, dooming them to exclusion, either socially, religiously, and legally. Nevertheless, as far as I am concerned, even God’s words were written by men, meaning that men are ruling twice: there are the words of those ancient men, like Moses, who supposedly registered what God commanded, then, there are words of these more contemporary men, who interpreted God’s and Nature’s laws in order to construct the social codes; therefore, constructing identity, gender and sexuality.

Butler claims that “[g]ender ought not to be constructed as a stable identity” or the source of a person’s pre-established acts (Butler, 1999, 179). Although Butler was not discussing transgender identities, I would like to suggest that “a” transgender might match this proposition of Butler; once again, I want to focus on the particle “*trans*”, in the sense that this prefix, according to the Merriam-Webster online dictionary, gives an idea of going “across, beyond, through, so as to change”.⁸ This change can be understood as an individual change, meaning that a transperson is either changing sex or gender, or even both. However, it can also be taken in a collective sense, which refers to a social movement of changing, related to what Feinberg calls *Trans Liberation* (1998).

In the beginning of these reflections, I mention a linguistic limitation when one refers to babies before their biological sex is known; Feinberg had already

⁸ <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/trans->

questioned this limitation in his books, when he mentions the lack of adequate pronouns to refer to transgendered people. Similarly to what happens with babies, “it’ is an epithet meant to strip [transgenders] of [their] humanity” (Feinberg, 1998, 71). It is not only a matter of language, but also a matter of understanding. Knowing a person’s biological sex or to label this person according to his or her gender expression is not enough to solve this problem.

“Which sex are you?’ [...] merely answering woman or man will not bring relief to the questioner. As long as people try to bring me into focus using only those two lenses, I will always appear to be an enigma.” (Feinberg, 1998, 7)

This apparently enigmatic person, concerning the sex/gender binary which pairs female-feminine and male-masculine, is “committing” a gender violation or transgression, being many times punished severely. Feinberg, agreeing with Green, points out many sorts of problems and issues transpeople have to deal with in their daily lives. Still nowadays people are arrested for having diverse sex and gender expressions. Intolerance is still a problem among us, in the twenty-first century, having been much worse in “the 1950s and 60s even in the underground scene” (Berutti, 2005, 40).

Reacting against this intolerance, those who were considered sexual and gender outlaws organized movements that ended up with the 1969 Stonewall Rebellion. Stonewall is a milestone, although it is not the first time these sexual minorities organized themselves. The organization of the gay liberation movement, “from 1869 to 1935, began in Germany”, having workers and transgender activists together in their fight for “the most basic democratic rights” (Feinberg, 1996, 95). In the 1950s, gays and lesbians organized themselves in two distinct groups, The Mattachine Society and The Daughters of Bilitis, respectively. The former was named after “the medieval-Renaissance French *Société Mattachine*, a musical secret fraternity which [...] protest[ed] against oppression” (Berutti, 1999, 59). The latter had its name based on “the poem “Songs of Bilitis”, by Pierre Louys, since Bilitis is attributed to have been Sappho’s contemporary” (Berutti, 1999, 59). These names were part of this identity as a sexual minority, being meaningful among them but not outside the groups. This way, the groups would remain quite invisible.

According to Berutti, Martin Duberman, in his book *Stonewall*, defines the homonymous movement precisely by saying that it “has become synonymous over

the years with gay resistance to oppression” (Berutti, 1999, 60). This riot was called Stonewall because it started in a gay bar with a similar name, The Stonewall Inn. This bar was famous since gays could dance there and also police raids were less frequent there. The owners of the bar, three Mafia men, use to offer bribes to the policemen, so that they would “turn a blind eye” on the “illicit” things that took place there. “However, on a summer night (June 27th) the Stonewall Inn was raided in a different way” (Berutti, 1999, 61). The police invaded the bar and the people decided to fight back. The confrontation lasted for five days. After that, “oppression, invisibility, and underground activities” have finally collapsed, exposing those sexual minorities (Berutti, 1999, 61).

In *Epistemology of the Closet* (1990), Eve Sedgwick argues that, although Stonewall is a “step ahead” in terms of recognition for those who do not conform to the sex/gender dualism, it does not open the closet completely. I particularly believe that Stonewall is responsible for the gap we may find between the two novels that will be analyzed. The protagonists have very distinct “coming out” situations. One finds herself very early but keeps it as a secret; the revelations of this secret are dramatic moments. The other one finds herself little-by-little, but there is no revelation moment. Despite sharing similar or equivalent adversities throughout life, transpeople in the 1920s must try to hide and disguise much more than those in the 70s.

Sedgwick defends a “partial” exposure after Stonewall, because there are many gays and lesbian who are still closeted mainly in order to keep their jobs and families. Some people might feel comfortable about publicly “coming out”, but most people come out within certain groups, to certain people, in certain situations. At least, after Stonewall chances are that transpeople can find their equals more easily.

Transpeople’s fight for their civil, not to say human, rights has not ended yet. They are still organized and fighting, in many ways. Feinberg is one of these fighters, inviting people to join hir in the Trans Liberation movement. Ze claims that everyone is welcome to this movement, moreover ze believes it is of everyone’s interest, joining them in order to achieve real freedom, in a broad sense.

Going back to the scenery of the gay bars, there are these two types of participants in the community who were regular visitors to these bars: the butches and the femmes. For their sexual orientation, both butches and femmes are lesbians, since their sexual desire is for women. The difference between them stands in their gender expression. Butches are very masculine women, most of the time choosing to

cross-dress. Femmes, on the other way around, are extremely feminine, usually in high-heels, skirts and dresses.

Until 1950 lesbians were butches—members of a third gender who combined elements of male and female behavior—and like third genders in other societies, they could feel that they sought their sexual partners from among the general population of ordinary feminine women. After 1950, however, [...] the lesbian world had begun to separate itself from its previous integration with the straight world, and in this context [...] femmes came to share to some degree the sense of gender difference that the butch had always had. (Trumbach, 1997, 97)

A butch is easily identified for being a gender outlaw, whereas there might be femmes all around, and one would not notice. They are biological women, dressing “like women”, behaving “like women”; their transgression lies in their sexual orientation, which do not “separate [them] from most women [...]”; only contact with the lesbian community or involvement in a lesbian relationship made them different” (Trumbach, 1997, 96).

Butches and femmes form a couple! This is a dangerous statement because people understand that butch-femme couples are trying to imitate “straight” heterosexual couples. Actually, it is not a question of imitation at all. On the contrary, it is a question of free expression of gender and sexual orientation. The two people in a couple have their roles, and since butches express themselves in a masculine way, they assume the masculine role of being tough, taking the lead in sex, despite aiming at “giv[ing] pleasure to a femme” rather than pursuing her own pleasure, as heterosexual males do (Trumbach, 1997, 95). Therefore, it is not likely to combine butches and femmes, since the coupling of two butches or two femmes means a doubling the same role in the relationship, contrary to what Judith Halberstam calls “‘top’ and ‘bottom’” positions (Halberstam, 1998, 117).

This coupling of butches and femmes is presented by Merril Mushroom, in “How to Engage in Courting Rituals 1950s Butch-style in the Bar”. This short story gives “comic treatment [to] a rather serious issue – the relationship between butch and femme” (Berutti, 1999, 61) Using the characteristic language of the typical American manuals, Mushroom points out that there are certain rules, which have some similarities with those of heterosexual couples, that might be followed in order to form this couple. Assuming the butch is the one who will approach the other woman, rule number one according to her “manual” is: the butch must be sure that her butchness is clear to the woman she is attracted to, as much as she must be at

least uncertain about the woman's femmeness. Anyway, Mushroom recommends that the butch "proceed as if she were a femme" (Mushroom, 1994, 63)

Randolph Trumbach, in his article "Are Modern Western Lesbian Women and Gay Men a Third Gender?", explains the stoneness of the butch as her "ideal [...] to be untouchable herself, to give pleasure but not to receive it, to keep her clothes on in bed, to experience spontaneous orgasm" (Trumbach, 1997, 95). Halberstam adds to this question of pleasure in Trumbach's explanation that "masculine untouchability in women has become immutably linked to dysfunction, melancholy, and misfortune" (Halberstam, 1998, 112). Halberstam stresses the complicated ambiguity found in the stone butch. She mentions that stone butches are constantly "misread", being considered either frigid, misogynist and repressed women or "bad copies of men" (Halberstam, 1998, 124).

Having these concepts in mind, the analysis can move on to focusing on the novels, their characters and features.

2- STEPHEN AND HER WELL OF LONELINESS

Nature has no prejudices, but human nature is less broadminded, and, human nature, with its deep instinct for the protection of society, can put up a powerful defense of its own limitations. "The Well of Loneliness" is not a novel for those who prefer not to see life steadily and see it whole.

— Arnold Bennett, *EVENING STANDARD*, AUGUST 9, 1928

This chapter will analyze Stephen Gordon, the protagonist in Radclyffe Hall's *The Well of Loneliness* (1928), focusing on three important aspects related to the construction of her identity, namely her body, her behavior and her relationships. This novel can be said to be a *bildungsroman*, or formation novel. Suzanne Hader defines this literary genre as a story of the growth and development of an individual within a defined social order. Hader explains that this growth process "is long, arduous, and gradual"; eventually, the novel comes to "an assessment by the protagonist of himself and his new place in that society"⁹.

The Well of Loneliness tells the story of Stephen, all the difficulties, conflicts, reflections, relationships, which lead her to finding herself. "Out of standard" concerning name, body, behavior and sexuality, Stephen pursues her identity against all odds. Hall explores the fact that the body stands for a representation of the social and cultural constructs of man and woman, making use of detailed descriptions of Stephen's body and its development, in contrast mainly to her father's and mother's bodies. Moreover, Hall shows the feelings in relation to the protagonist as well as the relationships generated and/or influenced by the features of the characters' bodies.

Stephen Gordon, the heroine in *The Well*, is very emblematic regarding Hall's writings and concerns, showing physical and personal characteristics directly connected to sexuality, gender and identity, which Hall had great interest in studying.

Concerning sexuality, Hall defines Stephen as an *invert*, term used to refer to homosexuals when the novel was written. This *inversion* is shown in the very beginning of the novel, when seven-year-old Stephen falls in love with the housemaid. Also, Stephen is often facing her mother's attempt to control and mold her life and manners, in spite of her temper and her father's complicity.

⁹ <http://www.victorianweb.org/genre/hader1.html>

Stephen's features and the kind of life she lives bring her very close to her creator. This creation could be said to be her alter ego, since Stephen fulfills certain wishes Hall was not able to do so, such as fighting in the war battle fields. According to Jane Rule, in her article "Radclyffe Hall", entitled after the author, "Stephen Gordon, [...], shares few of Radclyffe Hall's own experiences, she is Radclyffe Hall's idealized mirror" (Rule, 2001, 81).

Both Hall and Stephen lived under the strict rules of a sexist society which dictated men's and women's behavior. The social codes were based on cultural traditions, being very rigid. Creator and creation defy

[...] conventional gender expectations, and this is pointed out in many ways, such as her ambitions for formal education and for a professional life as a writer, becoming independent, at a time when women usually would be devoted to and dependent on men, be him her father or husband. (Fontenla, 2008, 2)

Male and female stereotypes were the models that should be followed respectively by men and women. In this society, acceptance and respectability would be directly proportional to how much one would live in accordance with these models. There was little room for exotism and authenticity; consequently, Stephen, with her unique characteristics, would hardly find room to fully and openly express herself. Stephen was different; therefore, she was seen as queer, not only in relation to the expression of her gender, but also in relation to her sexuality.

In *The Second Sex* (1997), Simone de Beauvoir states that biologically and historically the word "female" represents the imprisonment of a woman in her sex. Furthermore, Beauvoir suggests that there is an interpretation or even a corruption of this biological basis, so that it fits in the social and religious discourses, making them plausible and unquestionable. However, Beauvoir states that there are some things which are not "perfectly clear" in nature (Beauvoir, 1997, 56), which imputes reasonable doubt to the socially constructed concept of women, particularly when it is based exclusively on the biological "determinism" of their body.

According to Judith Butler, in *Bodies that Matter* (1993), this biological body is a materialization of norms and rules inscribed in it through discourse practices. These discourses, biological, religious or cultural, are responsible for molding the bodies in order to make them fit into the gender binary matrix, constructed under social strict rules. Discourse has the power of "creating" and controlling the body, which becomes a product of this dominance by the discourse. Michel Foucault's

concepts of the docile and condemned bodies, presented in *The Foucault Reader* (1991), referring to how much they conform to the system's specific requirements and expectations, match the discourse dominance proposed by Butler.

These ideas are present throughout the novel since conformity is cherished and respected whereas non-conformity is punished harshly. Hall's protagonist not only suffers social prejudice and exclusion, but also inner-conflict and self-judgment. This punishment is some times expressed in actions, others veiled within speeches and even in thoughts.

2.1- The bodies in *The Well*

It was previously mentioned that Hall depicted the bodies as important images in *The Well of Loneliness*, illustrating Butler's idea of the body as the materialization of the norms imposed by the power of discourses, according to the socially constructed gender binary matrix. The three main characters that compose the Gordons' family cell will be taken for this analysis. These characters clearly show the impact of the physical characteristics on them and their roles in the story. This analysis intends to reinforce the importance of these features both in fiction and actual social contexts.

Lady Anna Gordon, Stephen's mother, is the first character presented in the novel. She is "the archetype of the very perfect woman" (Hall, 1990, 11). When she gets married, Lady Anna was just over twenty. She was an Irish lovely and extremely beautiful young woman. Slim, fragile, and, as any young bride was supposed to be, she was virgin. Ageing did not diminish her beauty and slenderness. She matches perfectly the standards of the binary sex model; "not just perfect[ly], but very perfect[ly]" (Castle, 2001, 395). The house, which would become the home of the Gordons, supports the image of Lady Anna which Hall intends to construct. It presents many characteristics that will be identified in Lady Anna, such as, "dignity and pride without ostentation, self-assurance without arrogance, repose without inertia; [...] indeed like certain lovely women" (Hall, 1990, 11).

Lady Anna represents the archetype of the perfect woman not only physically speaking but also socially, for her role in the family and the house. She is perfect as a wife, since she is devoted to her husband, having him as her companion for the good and the "hard" times. She is "perfect" as a mother, at least from the perspective

that she socially accomplishes this role adequately. Finally, she is perfect as a housewife, “taking care of the house, orchestrating the servants and doing handcrafts in her free time” (Fontenla, 2008, 5).

The second character to appear in the story, Sir Philip Gordon, can also be seen as an archetype of the perfect man. Both his body and his temper stand for expressions of his masculinity. It is interesting to mention that his physical description is often associated with a subjective reading of it:

Sir Philip was a tall man and exceedingly well-favoured, but his charm lay less in feature than in a certain wide expression, a tolerant expression that might almost be called noble, and in something sad yet gallant in his deep-set hazel eyes. His chin, which was firm, was very slightly cleft, his forehead intellectual, his hair tinged with auburn. His wide-nostrilled nose was indicative of temper but his lips were well-modelled and sensitive and ardent – they revealed him as a dreamer and a lover. (Hall, 1990, 12)

At his thirties, Sir Philip gets married to Lady Anna, which also corresponds to a pattern according to the social codes, meaning that men were usually considerably older than women, so that they could properly look after and provide their wives and children. However, their marriage is unusual in the sense that it happens out of love, not out of conventional arrangements between families. Their love and happiness do not diminish with marriage or time, another uncommon aspect of their relationship.

As a result of their marriage, Lady Anna gets pregnant. Although Sir Philip is not always sexist, he shows the usual male preference, not to say exclusive wish, for having a baby boy. He also has some male projections on the unborn baby’s future, since he believes it is a boy. Sir Philip thought of the school the boy would study in, places which the boy should visit or live in; it all begins with the simple choice of its name: Stephen.

But: ‘Man proposes–God disposes’ and so it happened that on Christmas Eve, Anna Gordon was delivered of a daughter; a narrow-hipped, wide-shouldered little tadpole of a baby, that yelled and yelled for three hours without ceasing, as though outraged to find itself ejected into life. (Hall, 1990, 13)

This is how the reader is introduced to Stephen Mary Olivia Gertrude Gordon, a very controversial character, whose biologically female body presents masculine features from birth to adulthood. In addition to that, Stephen is a masculine name. Chosen before she is born, her father arbitrarily decides to keep it, being contrary to what wished Anna or the Vicar that baptized Stephen. The Vicar’s resistance to her

name, as his influence in adding a list of feminine names to Stephen, may be read as a reference to the religious attempt to interfere in the people's lives and decisions that used to be a common practice in the late Victorian era, when she is born, but still takes place nowadays.

As a girl, and even later on, Stephen does not feel comfortable wearing dresses or any other feminine accessories, such as the hats "on which Anna insisted—large hats trimmed with ribbons or roses or daisies, and supposed to be softening to the [Stephen's masculine facial] features" (Hall, 1990, 72). She would rather have her hair short, which is denied her since it is traditionally unusual for girls. Although her mother manages to prevent Stephen from having her hair as she wishes, Stephen starts wearing it in a pigtail, most of the times. Moreover, she longs to be a boy, referring to male figures as her models, such as the British Navy hero Vice Admiral Horatio Nelson, who she refers to as young Nelson, or even Mr. Williams, a servant in her house, who she imitates the gestures and voice, once in a while.

As Stephen grows older she maintains her interest in things that do not conform to a teenage and an adult woman. Her muscles are developed by practicing gymnastics and fencing. Her athletic body is handsome and her face that resembles her father's is handsome and "pleasing", yet it would not conform to the feminine hair styles her mother demands her to try.

Anna hated this fashion and constantly said so, but Stephen was stubborn: "I've tried your way, Mother, and I look like a scarecrow; you're beautiful, darling, but your young daughter isn't, which is a jolly hard on you."
"She makes no effort to improve her appearance," Anna would reproach, very gravely. (Hall, 1990, 73).

The mother, "star[ing] at [her daughter's] splendid young body" feels as if she is looking at "a stranger" (Hall, 1990, 82). Hall uses "that" to refer to this body Anna is observing, showing Anna does not feel attached to it. Anna can not recognize that body as her daughter's. Neither can she see Stephen's effort to look beautiful since she seeks for Stephen's femininity, not finding it though. "Femininity cannot be acquired through wearing clothes or accessories" said to be feminine, according to Eliane Berutti's considerations; on the contrary, it may even highlight the strangeness (Berutti, 2003, 4). This statement corroborates Stephen's perception that she might look like a scarecrow if she tries to dress like her mother.

Anna is one of the antagonists Stephen has to fight. Not only does she embody the image, the femininity, delicacy and fragility Stephen transgresses, but also she is the one who demands from Stephen that she looks and acts accordingly. She poses and imposes the norm. Although Sir Philip is a representation of the norm as much as Lady Anna is, he does not impose this norm on Stephen the same way Anna does. On the contrary, he stands by Stephen and her non-conformity to the norm, her masculine identity and expression. If there is anything that can be understood as an imposition from Sir Philip's part over Stephen, it is to (re)act like a boy or a man, being less sensitive, less emotional than women usually are.

The only body that Stephen feels strangely connected with is Miss Puddleton's, the tutor Sir Philip hires to teach Stephen. Stephen does not understand the "uncomfortable conviction [she has] that this queer little woman was going to mean something", not to say a lot for her (Hall, 1990, 68).

Puddleton is "square"! She has "square shoulders, square hips, a flat, square line of bosom; square tips to the fingers, square toes to the shoes, and all tiny; [...] suggest[ing] a miniature box" (Hall, 1990, 67). Even her face, according to Stephen is ugly "too hard and too square" (Hall, 1990, 67). Although Puddleton's body is not huge as Stephen's, this predominant angular form is not common for a female body, which usually assumes more curvilinear "feminine contours" in puberty (Beauvoir, 1997, 59).

In one of this new tutor's first appearance she is repeatedly referred to as a "little grey figure", with grey hair, grey eyes and grey outfit (Hall, 1990, 67). The color grey might convey some of the character's features; it is something between the extremes black and white, having part of each extreme in it. In addition to this in-between position of the color grey, there might be another meaning related to it: invisibility. It seems that Puddleton does not want to call attention to herself, to her queerness. Invisibility can be seen as the lesbians' stigma, as Eliane Berutti comments in her article "Gays e Lésbicas no Conto Norte-Americano Contemporâneo" (2002). Puddleton does not have a lesbian relationship in the novel, but when Stephen is suffering for moving away from Morton, Puddleton comforts her by saying

"[...] All that you're suffering at this moment I've suffered. It was when I was very young like you—but I still can remember."
[...]

Puddle put an arm round Stephen's bowed shoulders, and she said: "You've got work to do—come and do it! Why, just because you are what you are, you may actually find that you've got an advantage. You may write with a curious double insight – write both men and women from a personal knowledge. Nothing's completely misplaced or wasted, I'm sure of that—and **we**'re all part of nature [my emphasis]. Someday the world will recognize this, meanwhile there's plenty of work that's waiting. For the sake of all the others who are like you, but less strong and less gifted perhaps, many of them, it's up to you to have the courage to make good, and I'm here to help you do it, Stephen." (Hall, 1990, 205).

The contrast in terms of size between Stephen's and Puddleton's body may be a reflection of the latter's lack of strength to "stand up and fight" for recognition, which Puddleton refers to in general sense. Considering herself similarly as part of nature as Stephen, Puddleton might have chosen to hide in shades of grey. Not being so strong and masculine as Stephen is, maybe Puddleton was not able "to make good" herself, finding her way to achieve this good in encouraging and supporting Stephen.

An important matter that emerges from this issue of Stephen's masculine body is how she can be classified in terms of her sexuality and gender, since she crosses both barriers. Regarding her body, her fixed idea of developing her muscles and acquiring a mannish appearance pushes Stephen through the borders of transsexuality. "[O]nce the transsexual in *The Well* is read and diagnosed, this subject and this context provide a much better fit for the novel" (Prosser, 2001, 130). Considering Stephen a transgender or a transsexual will depend on the reading, and, according to Jay Prosser, in the statement above, once one sees this possibility, reading becomes biased. Prosser suggests that Stephen, which he considers an extreme case of "inversion", has a sense "of wrong embodiment, of a split between sex and gender; and a compulsion to live as much as possible according to the opposite sex" (Prosser, 2001, 132).

The term transsexual refers to everyone whose biological sex does not conform to the gender identity. This definition not only fits the concept of "inversion", but also can be taken as a possible reading of Stephen, who repeatedly says she wants to be a boy. There is a moment when she asks her father, "Do you think that I could be a man, supposing I thought very hard – or prayed, Father?" (Hall, 1990, 26) Much of her wish to become a man can be partially and unconsciously due to the support she gets from her father, particularly in relation to her unusual interests. She envies other boys' bodies and freedom, their possibility of living their boyhood.

Prosser vehemently states that in 1928, when the novel was written, "[s]exual inversion was gender inversion" (Prosser, 2001, 134). Taking Prosser's words into

consideration, the possibility of being a transsexual was unthinkable then. So is it too farfetched to state that Stephen represents a non-operative transsexual? Still, if Stephen is analyzed within nowadays context, may the transformation she imposed on her body, which already looked masculine, lead to the inference that having the availability of hormonal treatment and sex-reassignment surgery, she would approach her biological body to a male one even more? If there is a solution to this puzzle, it is too early to find it out.

2.2- Social disobedience

One of the primary dear issues to Hall is the question of gender identity; this might have motivated her to write *The Well of Loneliness*. It has already been discussed that gender is a construct and therefore one can or can not conform to the norms imposed by this construction. Furthermore, Butler defends that if there is actually a gender construction, it is not necessarily as “I” or anybody else, in fact this “I” “emerges only within a matrix of gender relations themselves” (Butler, 1993, 94).

In the novel, Stephen repeatedly seems to be trying to identify herself. All through the novel, she reflects upon her queerness, wondering who she is. Not being able to find a plausible answer, she concludes that she is what she is. Sometimes she faces that confidently; but, quite often she decides that she is “Stephen – but that’s being nothing” (Hall, 1990, 70).

Stephen’s gender identity affects mainly Stephen herself and people who are very close to her due to her moody personality. However, when Stephen embodies her gender identity through her gender expression, she defies the norms established by society. Sometimes she tries to fit these rules, becoming very uneasy about herself; others, she assumes her opposition to the system, feeling confidence in spite of her non-conformity.

Since her childhood she insistently expresses her wish to be a boy, imitating some of the men that work at her house. Influenced by her father, who hires a tutor for her, Stephen studies Mathematics, Science, Latin, Greek, History, Geometry, etc. At first, she does not see very clearly the necessity to expand her knowledge in such areas; she would only follow her father’s belief that devoting herself to studying and improving her knowledge would be something she would do for her own sake, “because at the best life requires great wisdom” (Hall, 1990, 61). Studying poetry

among the other subjects arises in Stephen the desire to become a writer. Her father not only encourages her but also reads and comments on her writings with her. Being a writer is Stephen's way to make a living, which for a woman at that time was unusual, not say inappropriate, since women were supposed to depend on their men.

Sir Philip also gives Stephen the opportunity of fencing and exercising, which would make her even more masculine. Although Sir Phillip himself conforms to the norms, as a father of a girl or teenager, he is quite different from the regular "fathers-of-girls". He not only tries to prepare Stephen to face the world but also he tries to understand her and comfort her. In an attempt to know what is happening to Stephen in terms of gender and sexuality, he starts reading Karl Heinrich Ulrichs's writings about sexual inversion.

In general, Sir Phillip supports Stephen in her wishes and decisions. She goes hunting with him and his friends; she rides her horse as a man; she drives his car; most of what they do together break the pattern of father-daughter activities, if there were any at the time the story takes place. From Lady Anna's perspective they are many times like "father and son". Actually, he really feels like that since he sees Stephen as "all the son" he has got the chance to have (Hall, 1990, 61).

There are two specific times in the novel in which Sir Philip gives flow to his conformity. In the beginning of the story, when Lady Anna is "sadly" breast-feeding Stephen, he tries to disguise his disappointment, examining the "perfection" of her tiny hands. Then when Stephen is eighteen, Anna comments with him about her hopes that Stephen's friendship with Martin Hallam, a rich young man from Canada, evolves to a love relationship. Although he is conscious about Stephen's "queerness", he can not "keep the great joy from his eyes, nor the hope from his heart" (Hall, 1990, 97), giving room for the internalized social expectations of having his daughter regularly married.

Martin lives an intimate relationship with Stephen, a close friendship that turns into love, at least from his part. Martin proposes to her but she gets terrified, fleeing from him. He feels insulted by her reaction, simply moving back to London. Silence is their way to deal with this situation. Hall's description of Stephen's reaction in this occasion shows clearly her uneasiness, somatizing symptoms associated with abjection, or, according to Julia Kristeva, in "Approaching Abjection", "what disturbs identity, system, order[; w]hat does not respect borders, positions, rules" (Kristeva,

1982, 4). Those symptoms, such as nausea, flush, dizziness, loss of temper, lack of words, take place in extremely embarrassing or infuriating situations.

Contrary to Lady Anna, a fragile dependant woman, whose ignorance keeps her under the control of her husband, Stephen does not stand the idea of becoming dependant and controlled. Stephen is not fit for a wife, nor does she feel attracted to Martin sexually. Esther Newton, introducing the concept of “gender dysphoria”, explains it as “a strong feeling that one’s assigned gender as a man or a woman does not agree with one’s sense of self” (Newton, 2001, 101). Newton compares masculinity and femininity to “two dialects of the same language”, which can be understood by everyone, although when it comes to speaking, masculinity is regularly the men’s dialect whereas femininity is spoken only by women; however, Stephen “grow[s] up thinking in and “speaking” the “wrong” gender dialect” (Newton, 2001, 101). It can be said then that Stephen does not “play by the book”.

Lady Anna, on the other hand, follows the social rules herself, and tries her best to make her daughter more feminine. Being unable to do so, Anna starts feeling some kind of rejection in relation to Stephen, contradicting the standard mother-daughter connection. Anna feels guilty for rejecting Stephen as much as she feels attached to Stephen for their mother/child bond, so Anna experiences a certain antagonism towards Stephen.

Anna gets really frustrated at Stephen’s birth because she has very different expectations on the child she is carrying in her womb. Stephen not only is a baby girl but also she is born with a rather “masculine” physical appearance. She grieves breast-feeding and nursing Stephen, finding comfort in observing her tiny “perfect” hands. The very same hands that cause her displeasure later on, when Stephen gets older, having big and strong hands for a girl. The more Stephen grows, the more masculine she gets; consequently, also grows Anna’s uneasiness in relation to her.

Anna would stare at that splendid young body, and would feel, as she did so, that she looked at a stranger. She would scourge her heart and her anxious spirit with memories drawn from this stranger’s beginnings: [...] Then Anna, still ruthlessly scourging her heart and her anxious spirit, would stoop and kiss Stephen, but lightly and very quickly on the forehead, so that the girl should not be awakened. So that the girl should not, wake and kiss back, she would kiss her lightly and quickly on the forehead. (Hall, 1990, 82)

This repulsion-attraction impulse, “the in-between, the ambiguous, the composite [...] immoral, sinister” is how Kristeva explains abjection (Kristeva, 1982, 4). This definition matches perfectly with how one “reads” Stephen Gordon and the way she relates to many characters in the novel. Abjection is linked to social disobedience since it is based on internalized stereotypes and patterns of behavior, which leads to the marginalization of everyone who does not fit one or the other, or none, as Stephen.

These values are so deeply fixed in people’s minds that added to being abjected by other people throughout her life, Stephen also abjects herself, “the abjection of self” (Kristeva, 1982, 5). She can not see herself as a defined being, she does not seem comfortable about her appearance, she feels uneasy about her feelings, she some times catches herself imagining how “fitting the system” would be. Kristeva says that abjection is “a precondition of narcissism”, which is usually represented in a scene that has a mirror in the setting, as it is for Stephen.

That night she stared at herself in the glass; and even as she did so she hated her body [...]. All her life she must drag this body of hers like a monstrous fetter imposed on her spirit. This strangely ardent yet sterile body that must worship yet never be worshipped in return by the creature of its adoration. [...] She began to grieve over it, touching her breasts with pitiful fingers, stroking her shoulders, letting her hands slip along her straight thighs— Oh, poor and most desolate body! [...] few words that seemed to encompass her meaning—for she did not know the meaning of herself. But she loved, [...] even unto this bitter loving. (Hall, 1990, 187)

Self-confidence and inner-conflict are always present in Stephen’s search for her own identity. She cannot avoid comparing herself to other girls and boys. Hall gives Stephen two other masculine/feminine references: Roger and Violet Antrim. These characters are the children of one of her father’s hunting fellows. Stephen is annoyed by both behaviors. Roger considers himself free and superior, being arrogant towards Stephen. On the other hand, his sister Violet represented the fragility and submissiveness which would guarantee her conformity to the norms. She envies both to a certain extent.

Roger is Stephen’s antagonist in different parts of the novel. At first, when they are children, Stephen is confronted to Roger whenever their mothers decide to visit each other. He receives formal education at a good school, having good masculine companions there; he climbs trees, plays sports, and above all he has the “right to be perfectly natural” as well as the “conviction that being a boy constituted a privilege in life” (Hall, 1990, 47).

Once again Roger is privileged when Stephen has the chance to actually live her first love relationship too. Stephen is having an affair with Angela Crossby, an American new neighbor. Angela is married; however, her husband is always traveling. Being American sets Angela free from the limits imposed by the English traditional society. Although Stephen and Angela initially get along very well, Angela starts giving excuses to refuse meeting Stephen. Then, one day Violet Antrim, Roger's sister visits Stephen and her mother, telling her that Angela and Roger are lovers. She does not believe Violet at first, but gets suspicious about Angela's refusals. After some time, Stephen realizes she has been "displaced as Angela's lover by Roger i[n] a somewhat of a narrative inevitability" (Munt, 2001, 205).

Roger has one more chance to prove his superiority over Stephen when he joins the army to go to war. Stephen wants to fight as any other man, joining the London Ambulance Column. "[...] England had taken her, asking no questions – she was strong and efficient, she [finally] could fill a man's place" (Hall, 1990, 271). Opportunistically England, society accepts her, and because of war, it gives her a chance to co-exist, at least "... at th[at] moment" (Hall, 1990, 271).

War guarantees Stephen two important things: she defeats Roger and meets Mary Llewellyn. Roger dies in the battle field, whereas Stephen survives it. She reconciles her feelings towards him when she reads about his courage, noticing that in fact, "she wished him well" (Hall, 1990, 291). And there is... Mary!

Mary and Stephen together are everything but regular, particularly in the beginning of their relationship. Despite being biological women, they feel sexually attracted to each other; although Stephen is masculine and Mary, feminine, it is Mary who takes the lead in their getting together. One can say they defy the norm of the traditional society, as well as they defy the usual butch-femme relationship to a certain extent. The relationship between Mary and Stephen will be discussed in more details later on.

By now this discussion will focus on, as I have already mentioned, one of the most important people in Stephen's life, ever since she is a teenager: Miss Puddleton. Before her, others, Mrs. Bingham, Mademoiselle Duphot, looked after Stephen, but none of them meant the same, either for Stephen or people related to her, particularly Lady Anna.

Puddle, the nickname Hall attributes to Miss Puddleton indicating her intimacy both to Stephen and her family, is hired as the tutor who will teach Stephen

“everything” Sir Philip believes she needs to know in order to survive the odds she might have to face in life. Puddle is able to accomplish her task very well as she is also a “misfit” herself. Stephen finds comfort and encouragement in her words even when everyone else fails her, especially after her father’s death.

Puddle’s personal and professional experiences enable her to predict many of the problems Stephen faces, such as when Stephen is seeing Angela Crossby. Puddle does not rely on Angela, actually believing that Angela is deceiving Stephen and using her for her own amusement. Puddle repeatedly offers to listen to Stephen since she believes she is able to understand her pupil. When Stephen moves away from her mother, Puddle follows her. At that moment, Puddle objectively expresses her awareness, her knowledge and identification in relation to Stephen’s anguishes. “All that you’re suffering at this moment I’ve suffered” are the words she utters when she finds Stephen alone at her father’s study recollecting memories and preparing to leave the house. (Hall, 1990, 205) She embraces Stephen and goes on with her speech saying

“You’ve got a work to do—come and do it! Why, just because you are what you are, you may actually find that you’ve got an advantage. You may write with a curious double insight—write both men and women from a personal knowledge. Nothing is completely misplaced or wasted, I’m sure of that—we’re all part of nature. Some day the world will recognize this, but meanwhile there’s plenty of work that’s waiting. For the sake of the others who are like you, but less strong and less gifted perhaps, many of them, it’s up to you to have the courage to make good, and I’m here to help you do it.” (Hall, 1990, 205)

Stephen and Puddle are separated “after nearly eighteen years of life together” as friends and companions (Hall, 1990, 304). This time, eighteen years might represent the period of time it takes for a person to reach his or her majority, becoming emotionally independent.

A turning point in Stephen’s life is when she achieves some sense of self identity, beginning to dress masculine clothes. Assuming her masculinity leads her to the possibility of experimenting concretely the kind of “forbidden” love she had been feeling. According to Judith Halberstam, in “A Writer of Misfits’: ‘John’ Radclyffe Hall”, “[c]lothing, indeed, becomes the means by which Stephen covers her queerness and finds a comfortable gender expression” (Halberstam, 2001, 153). Halberstam also uses the words real, potent, convincing, natural to refer to Stephen’s masculinity expressed through her tailored suits. The imagedically powerful and frequently analyzed scene of the mirror takes place in the sequence of her decision

to buy some suits in an attempt to overcome Angela's betrayal. Angela's role in Stephen's development leads us to the discussion of her love relationships.

2.3- Love and loneliness

When Stephen first falls in love, at the age of seven, it is a childish crush on a housemaid in her house, who treats her in such a way that Stephen understands their feelings are mutual. Collins, the housemaid, is a secondary character in the novel, "who is never granted an appellation beyond her presumed patronym" (Hope, 2001, 257). In the article "Of Trees and Politics, Wars and Wounds", Trevor Hope reminds the readers that only "after two years of daily, one might say ritual, contact", Stephen notices Collins, falling instantaneously in love with the maid. There is a moment in the narrative in which Collins is in pain for wounds she has on her knees, the housemaid's knees. Stephen says prayers asking God to feel Collins's pain, relieving her from her suffering. Hope suggests it is a kind of unconscious expiation for her future transgression.

Collins might be unimportant in herself, being a milestone though in Stephen's life. First of all, Collins represents the awakening of Stephen's sexual desire for women. Secondly, Stephen gets broken-hearted at seeing her love with a man. It awakens her for the "normal" coupling, man and woman.

As Collins actually does not correspond to Stephen's feelings, Stephen suffers greatly, crying desperately when she catches the couple kissing. Her desperation moves her father, who takes the responsibility of comforting her. His words to calm her down and ease her pain indicate almost directly how sexist he is, as a sample of society in general. "Being a boy" means Stephen has to act like a boy. Towards the end of his speech he shows how much he understands and knows about her queerness:

"[...] believe me, Stephen. And now I'm going to treat you like a boy, and a boy must always be brave, remember. I'm not going to pretend as though you were a coward; why should I, when I know that you're brave? I'm going to send Collins away tomorrow; do you understand, Stephen? I shall send her away. I shan't be unkind, but she'll go away tomorrow, and meanwhile I don't want you to see her again. You'll miss her at first, that will only be natural, but in time you'll find that you'll forget all about her; this trouble will just seem like nothing at all. I am telling you the truth, dear, I swear it. If you need me, remember that I'm always near you—you can come to my study whenever you like. You can talk to me about it whenever you're unhappy, and you want a companion to talk to." He paused, then finished rather abruptly: "Don't worry your mother, just come to me, Stephen." (Hall, 1990, 29)

Collins is fired, although Stephen still suffers deeply and secretly with her first love deception. When she is eight, she receives a pony as Christmas gift and she does not give it a name until, one day, she talks to it.

“Come up, horse, and let me get close to your ear,” cause I’m going to whisper something dreadfully important.’ Laying her cheek against his firm neck she said softly: “You’re not *you* any more, you’re Collins!”
So Collins was comfortably transmigrated. It was Stephen’s last effort to remember. (Hall, 1990, 39)

This is not the only situation in which Stephen uses transposition, “transmigration”, in order to overcome her sufferings. It is a kind of escape she finds once she cannot be discussing those questions with anyone, all the time. This phenomenon Hall refers to as “transmigration” is indeed a defense mechanism called cathexis. Psychologically speaking, cathexis is the process of, consciously or unconsciously, attaching “emotional feeling and significance to an idea, object or most commonly a person”.¹⁰ This is exactly what Stephen does by unconsciously transferring the “love” she used to have for Collins to the horse, which she does not expect to frustrate or hurt her the same way.

Morton, the name Hall uses to refer to where the Gordons live, plays a particularly important role in Stephen’s life since her childhood. In my reading of the novel, I understand Morton as a “character”, and a relevant one. She feels safe there, therefore she adores the place. However, its perfection causes controversial feelings in her.

The child was too young to know why the beauty of Morton would bring a lump to her throat when seen thus in the gold haze of late afternoon, with its thoughts of evening upon it. She would want to cry out in a kind of protest that was very near tears: “Stop it—stop it, you’re hurting!” But instead she would blink hard and shut her lips tightly, unhappy yet happy. It was a queer feeling; it was too big for Stephen, who was still when it came to affairs of the spirit. For the spirit of Morton would be part of her then, and would always remain somewhere deep down within her, [...] (Hall, 1990, 35)

Morton is part of Stephen’s identity. Every important person in her life is introduced to Morton. The place witnesses many of Stephen’s extremely happy moments, also being the stage of some of her most painful ones. In Morton, she sees Collins kissing a man. It is there where Martin proposes to her. Similarly to her father,

¹⁰ <http://www.reference.md/files/D002/mD002409.html>

Morton has some kind of complicity in relation to Stephen's oddness, because there she experiences her first kiss ever, when she introduces Morton and Angela Crossby to each other.

"Look," she said, "this is Morton, all beauty and peace [...] And all this beauty and peace is for you, because now you're a part of Morton."
 [...]
 "We're both filled with the old peace of Morton, because we love each other so deeply—and because we're perfect, a perfect thing, you and I—not two separate people but one." (Hall, 1990, 145)

This is the setting in which Stephen first "kisse[s Angela] full on the lips, as a lover"; Angela's flirting with Stephen starts long before that though. (Hall, 1990, 145) Stephen is intrigued by Angela even before they meet. Angela and her husband are Stephen's new neighbors, who have recently come from America. In the extremely conservative British society, coming from America means having unusual behavior, in the case of Angela, she is considered to be too extroverted and liberal. In terms of her friendship with Stephen, Angela is quite "pushy" in the very beginning, teasing Stephen, feeding her interest and expectations.

Stephen cannot avoid thinking about Angela most of the time. In a way, Angela is able to relief her sense of loss for her father's death. Sir Philip's importance in Stephen's development has already been mentioned many times. Angela and Stephen see and talk to each other almost daily. They are very present in each other's lives. Moreover, Angela is very present in Stephen's mind too; she is so much present, that the transposition which happened with Collins and the horse years before happens once more.

She drove on and left the car at the stables, then walked around to the house, and when she got there she opened the door of the study and went in, feeling terribly lonely without her father. Sitting down in the old arm-chair that had survived him, she let her head rest where his head had rested; and her hands she laid on the arms of the chair where his hands, as she knew, had lain times without number. Closing her eyes, she tried to visualize his face, his kind face that had sometimes looked anxious; but the picture came slowly and faded at once, for the dead must often give place to the living. It was Angela Crossby's face that persisted as Stephen sat in her father's old chair. (Hall, 1990, 142)

Stephen visits Angela and goes out with her many times before she can manage to take her to Morton. Stephen sees Angela in the flowers and the harmony which she can only find in Morton. Stephen identifies herself so much with Morton that seeing the connection between the place and Angela, she feels strongly

connected to Angela as well. From Stephen's perspective, they have very pleasant times together; for her, they are deeply in love with each other.

After they really get together, Angela plays with Stephen, many times using her husband as a shield or an excuse for not meeting Stephen. When Ralph Crossby is in town or at home, Stephen is not always around. In addition to that, Angela says Ralph is her savior, for marrying her ignoring that she used to be a dancer at a night club. Quite often, Angela complains about the way Ralph treats her, feeling though that she owes him her life. Stephen sometimes meets Ralph when visiting Angela; however, in spite of his rude and hostile bullying towards Angela, Stephen "must play a conciliatory role", not showing how angry and uncomfortable she is in that situation. (Hal, 1990, 182)

Then Angela meets Roger Antrim, the expression of all the masculine virility Stephen wishes to have herself. Angela tells Stephen about meeting him, omitting that they become friends. Stephen comes to know about that through Roger's sister, Violet Antrim. Although Stephen and Violet are not exactly friends, they get closer for a while, when Violet goes to Morton to talk to Lady Anna and Stephen about her engagement and the plans for her marriage. In one of her visits she tells Stephen that her brother and Angela are seeing each other quite frequently, revealing she is suspicious about a possible more intimate involvement between them. Nothing could make Stephen feel worse at that time! Roger not only possesses the body and gender she desires, but then he is also usurping her love(r).

Angela is traveling abroad with her husband, when Stephen is told that stunning piece of news. Once more, when Stephen tries to contact Angela, she answers very coldly saying her husband saw Stephen's telegram and started asking questions about it.

When Angela gets back to England, Stephen talks to her, who denies everything, except that once in a while, she goes out with Roger, just for a walk and nothing else. This is only the first time Stephen talks to Angela about that, since Stephen senses she is losing Angela, yet she believes Roger is to blame for that. He is not! In fact, Puddle is right about Angela all the time. Angela is very selfish and she wants to have company, to be entertained by someone. Feeling lonely once she moved from America to England, she accepts Stephen immediately as a shortcut for being accepted by the society. Despite being an outcast, Stephen has money and some kind of respectability because of her parents. This is what Angela needs.

Initially, Angela uses Ralph to disguise Stephen, after her affair with Roger she starts using Stephen to disguise Ralph. It is much easier to explain to Ralph she is going out and having fun with another woman, even if that woman is “queer” than explaining going around with a young virile man. That is what she does. However, Stephen demands a decision from her and Angela sees herself trapped. Angela indicates what decision she will take when she asks Stephen if she would ever be able to marry her. “If you were a man–”... (Hall, 1990, 176)

Angela leaves that statement with no ending, causing extreme fear and desolation in Stephen. Differently from Stephen, Angela wants a man; only a man can fulfill all her needs. Angela is not a lesbian at all; if there is any homosexuality in her, it is what Athena Douris refers to as “situational homosexuality”, in her article “Lesbain sex columnist falls for man – Story at 8!”¹¹ Douris exemplifies this notion of “situational homosexuality” as of a man who has sexual intercourse with other men when in prison or in any other place exclusively for men, trying to establish the counterpart of her situational heterosexuality, which is being “a lesbian sex advice columnist who's decided to marry a man”.¹²

Angela acts very badly in relation to Stephen since not only she betrays her but also she puts herself in the position of an innocent victim. Angela shows abjection towards Stephen, though based on another aspect related to it, perversion. “The object is perverse because it neither gives up nor assumes a prohibition, [... it] corrupts; uses them, takes advantage of them” (Kristeva, 1982, 15). Angela decides to put an end to her affair with Stephen, by telling her husband about Stephen’s intentions as if she did not have any kind of involvement with her.

“Ralph, I want to ask your advice. I'm in an awful mess – it's Stephen Gordon. You think I've been carrying on with Roger – good Lord, if you only knew what I've endured these last few months! I have seen a great deal of Roger, I admit – quite innocently of course – still all the same, I've seen him – I thought it would show her that I'm not – that I'm not – “ For one moment her voice seemed about to fail her, then she went on quite firmly: “that I'm not a pervert; that I'm not that sort of degenerated creature.’ (Hall, 1990, 197)

By saying that, Angela shows how selfish, opportunistic she is. It also particularly points out that Stephen is fooled by Angela, who actually cares very little for her feelings. Angela causes Stephen’s departure from Morton and definite

¹¹ <http://www.libidomag.com/nakedbrunch/archive/athena01.html>

¹² <http://www.libidomag.com/nakedbrunch/archive/athena01.html>

distancing from her mother, Lady Anna, since Ralph writes her a letter mentioning the kind of (sexual) interest her daughter has in his wife, making also clear how much prejudice he has.

Finally, Stephen exposes herself, revealing her feelings towards Angela Crossby to her mother. She does not have a sense of completeness, she does not have fully defined her gender identity; she only knows she is not a “woman”.

“[...] All my life I've never felt like a woman, and you know it – you say you've always disliked me, that you've always felt a strange physical repulsion. [...] I don't know what I am; no one's ever told me that I'm different and yet I know that I'm different – that's why, I suppose, you've felt as you have done. And for that I forgive you, though whatever it is, it was you and my father who made this body – but what I will never forgive is your daring to try and make me ashamed of my love. I'm not ashamed of it, there's no shame in me.” (Hall, 1990, 201)

On the one hand, it hurts Stephen very much having to leave Morton behind, in addition to the fact that there are no more misunderstandings or hidden things between Stephen and her mother concerning Stephen's sexuality. It is now open Stephen's sexual attraction to women.

However, on the other hand, she is finally free to live her life and her loves as she pleases, especially because she is financially independent. Stephen is never “a tragic or pathetic invert-victim”, on the contrary, she “signals a daring new direction in the twentieth-century lesbian [literary] representation” (Doan, 2001, 173). Being a talented and strong, mainly intellectually and sensitively, Stephen has enough self-confidence to lead her life independently. So she moves to France with Puddle.

As it has already been said, Stephen serves England in the war, which among other benefits gives her the chance of meeting Mary Llewellyn. When seeing her at first, “[f]or more than one minute Stephen considered the immature figure of” hers (Hall, 1990, 279). Hall uses a very detailed piece of narrative to show how attentive and careful was Stephen at that first time. Skin, hair, nose, lips, eyebrows, Stephen pays attention to each and every detail mainly on her “rather triangular face” (Hall, 1990, 278).

Mary is a new recruit in the unit and the commander asks Stephen to look after Mary, which Stephen reluctantly accepts. Stephen goes to the front, as an ambulance driver and Mary accompanies her as a second driver. Moving back and forth, in the rescue of those wounded in the battlefields, puts Stephen and Mary closer and closer. Their daily contact allows Stephen to see Mary in depth. In

Stephen's judgment, Mary is an innocent "young creature" (Hall, 1990, 287), based on her lack of parents and close relatives, her lack of formal education, and mainly, her lack of knowledge about life.

Mary does not understand how the various aspects of life are engendered. She has no experience in what is involved in the relationship between men and women, having experienced very little in life prior to joining the army. Mary is not aware of herself either, ignoring "her ardent, courageous, impulsive nature" (Hall, 1990, 284). Although Stephen has never been that "ignorant" or innocent, she identifies this impulsivity as a characteristic she used to have in her childhood and adolescence.

Mary and Stephen are together most of the time, chatting about the most varied topics. This proximity between Mary and Stephen connects them so tightly that it suggests the existence of a conspiracy to unite them; not that they do not want to be united.

Fate was throwing them continuously together, in moments of rest as in moments of danger; they could not have escaped this even had they wished to, and indeed they did not wish to escape it. They were pawns in the ruthless and complicated game of existence, moved hither and thither on the board by an unseen hand, yet moved side by side, so that they grew to expect each other. (Hall, 1990, 285)

Mary has a genuine interest in Stephen, her stories about Morton, her family, Puddle, her horse Raftery. Also Mary eagerly hears about Stephen's life in London, then in Paris, wanting to know even about Stephen's plans for her future, concerning her career and ambitions. Stephen feels good "to have won the affection of" Mary (Hall, 1990, 287). It is interesting to notice that this love between Stephen and Mary is not an instantaneous overwhelming passion as it is with both Collins and Angela. It happens little by little, giving her time to reflect upon it.

Furthermore, Mary declares being waiting for "such a dreadful long time" for "something", which now she knows is Stephen (Hall, 1990, 287). Although it is the moment in which they seal their wish to be together after the war, referring to Stephen as something unknown so far in the novel can indicate not only that Mary found Stephen, but also that Stephen, in a way, is finding herself through Mary.

Although Stephen and Mary were "liked and respected" by the other women in the Unit, "all the same the[se women] had now grown childish jealous" about the kind of companionship and complicity the two friends have (Hall, 1990, 288). These

women jealousy generated a lot of gossiping and complaints, which happen to reach “the sharp ears of Mrs. Breakspeare”, the commander of the Unit (Hall, 1990, 288). Breakspeare immediately talks to Stephen about the problem, ordering that Stephen and Mary stop working together. Stephen is not at all pleased with this decision; however, she cannot do anything about it, except for taking the responsibility of having Mary’s timesheet altered. From that day on, Mary no longer works with Stephen.

This apparent separation does not mean much for the two friends. In fact, it works the other way around, raising Stephen’s awareness of how much she thinks and cares about Mary. Sometime later, when the war is over, Stephen takes Mary with her, to Paris, home. All the awkwardness and uneasiness Stephen feels about her misfit body seems to be relieved since there is a “strange sympathy [...] between [their] two human bodies, so that a touch will stir many secret and perilous emotions” (Hall, 1990, 297). They grow closer as friends, as much as they get more and more attracted to each other. Probably due to her previous personal and “sexual” experiences, Stephen is much more precautious than Mary. The latter sees herself naturally in charge of taking all the initiative, concerning touching, kissing, flirting.

Stephen is wounded and matured by the prejudice she has faced all her life before meeting Mary. Noticing the seriousness and depth of their involvement, Stephen decides to present Mary with what Hall calls “the cruel truth”:

“I am one of those whom God marked on the forehead. Like Cain, I am marked and blemish. If you come to me, Mary, the world will abhor you, persecute you, will call you unclean. Our love may be faithful even unto death and beyond—yet the world will call it unclean. [...] You will see men and women defiling each other, laying the burden of their sins upon their children. You will see unfaithfulness, lies and deceit [...]; and then you will turn to me and will say: ‘You and I are more worth of respect than these people. Why does the world persecute us, Stephen!’ And I shall answer: ‘Because in this world there is only toleration for the so-called normal.’” (Hall, 1990, 301)

Stephen is living with Mary, her lover and companion, when she gets very much focused on her work in order to make money and guarantee Mary the kind of life she deserves. However, Stephen makes Mary feel lonely, since she can not be present for lunch and other activities they used to do together. Jonathan Brockett, who takes Stephen around Paris when she moves there, talks to her how she is treating Mary wrong, in the sense that while she is working Mary is left alone with

nothing to do or no one to talk to. Brockett suggest Stephen introduces Mary and Valérie Seymour, a lesbian salon hostess, Stephen happens to know through him.

By reapproaching Seymour, Stephen and Mary also get close to Barbara and Jamie, a couple of lesbians, with many things in common with Stephen and Mary, although lacking something essential: money. Stephen has money from her heritage and also from her writings, whereas Jamie has been poor all her life and Barbara gives up her family and their money, running away from them with Jamie. There are times in which they do not have enough food to kill their hunger. Stephen feels guilty for being rich when she thinks about Jamie and Barbara. Mary, who according to Stephen “love[s] all the humbler creatures” (Hall, 1990, 281), is always trying to help them. She invites Jamie and Barbara to have dinner sometimes, as well as to spend Christmas with Stephen and her once.

Jamie and Barbara have an extremely harsh life together, in spite of the love and devotion they have to each other. Their lack of financial solidity causes serious damage to their health, particularly to Barbara, who is depicted as a very fragile person. Barbara gets severely ill, eventually dying in the hospital. Right after her death, Jamie is desolated, in addition to feeling guilty for Barbara’s illness and death. Jamie commits suicide, shooting herself. Their tragic “fate”, after living and dying tormented by the abjection suffered for their sexual orientation, keeps haunting Stephen.

Martin reappears in Stephen’s life. In my reading of Martin and Stephen’s relationship when they are younger, there is love in it. The first time they met, “they suddenly knew that they liked each other” (Hall, 1990, 92). The spontaneity in their involvement from their first contact, putting aside the fact that Stephen has a masculine identity and feels sexually inclined towards women, resembles an overwhelming passion between a man and a woman. Nevertheless, one cannot forget about Stephen’s gender identity and sexuality! She actually has feelings for Martin, distinct from those between men and women; she feels like he is her friend, or even her brother. She sees in Martin the friendship, the good-will, the toleration, and the understanding she has longed to find in other men, not to say in people in general. Admitting she will miss him “when he’s gone”, Stephen reveals to Puddle: “I’ve grown fond of Martin – isn’t that queer [...]?” (Hall, 1990, 96)

Interestingly enough, Martin goes back to Morton in spring. The love season makes him look “into his heart and [see] Stephen [...] suddenly there as woman”

(Hall, 1990, 97). Turning the friend into the lover, as Martin wishes by asking Stephen to marry him, as well as their (re)actions after his proposal lead Stephen to reflect upon how she feels in relation to him. She concludes that she has loved him, his strength, his youth, “his honest brown face, and his slow thoughtful eyes, and his careless walk—all these things she ha[s] loved” (Hall, 1990, 101), though this love was the love of a friend, a companion, not a sexual love.

When finally Martin and Stephen meet again, she notices that Martin is interested in, or, in fact, attracted to Mary. Martin and Stephen discuss about that; he intends to shake her confidence in relation to Mary’s feelings for her, but Stephen shows firmness, provoking him to try to take Mary from her.

After this conversation, however, Stephen is intrigued by some of Martin’s words.

“Stephen, listen, I hate what I’m going to say, but by God, it’s got to be said to you somehow! You’re courageous and fine and you mean to make good, but life with you is spiritually murdering Mary. Can’t you see it? Can’t you realize that she needs all the things that it’s not in your power to give her? Children, protection, friends whom she can respect and who’ll respect her—don’t you realize this, Stephen? [...] I’d have begged and implored you to set Mary free if you love her. I’d have gone on my knees to you, Stephen...”

“[...] I have faith in my writing, great faith; some day I shall climb to the top and that will compel the world to accept me for what I am. It’s a matter of time, but I mean to succeed for Mary’s sake.”

“God pity you!” he suddenly blurted out. “Your triumph, if it comes, will come too late for Mary.” (Hall, 1990, 425)

In addition to these painful words she hears from Martin, she senses some reluctance in Mary, “torn between the two warring forces” (Hall, 1990, 428). If Mary chooses Stephen, she might regret losing “the life he could offer” (Hall, 1990, 428). On the other hand, if she decides to go away and marry Martin, she will have ungratefully betrayed Stephen, putting her life in the hands of a stranger. This uneasiness in Mary makes Martin’s words even more painful.

Stephen has been condemned throughout her life both by the others and herself, and she does not want to extinguish Mary’s vivacity. Stephen confesses her supposed involvement with Valerie Seymour to Mary, having arranged everything in advance, both with Valerie and Martin. Mary becomes desperate and runs away to a standard marriage in Martin’s arms. Although Mary truly loves Stephen, being betrayed by her is unbearable for Mary.

Valerie Seymour once tells Stephen that she is “made for a martyr!” (Hall, 1990, 434) Giving up her love, despite her suffering, is a form of impersonating this

martyrdom. It is a form of resistance, as well, since she would not force herself into fitting the system anyway. Nevertheless, she does not want her lover to be an outcast as she is. Forging an affair to push Mary away from her, she does not give Mary the chance to choose.

Her ultimate sacrifice is a consequence of her exhaustion to deal with the punishment she has been suffering deeply in her soul. Her self-sense of non-conformity is stated when she pleads with God: "We have not denied You, then rise up and defend us. Acknowledge us, oh God, before the whole world. Give us also the right to our existence!" (Hall, 1990, 437)

3- JESS GOLDBERG – THE PROCESS OF BECOMING

“[...] not one of us is free to choose the terms of our living until all of us are free to choose. [...] We know that when we join hands across the table of our difference, diversity gives us power. When we can arm ourselves with strength and vision from our diverse communities, then we will in truth, all of us – be free at last!”

—Audre Lorde, THE ANNIVERSARY MARCH ON WASHINGTON FOR JOBS AND FREEDOM, AUGUST 27, 1983

This chapter aims at discussing the development of the protagonist's identity in Leslie Feinberg's *Stone Butch Blues* (1996). Within this context of identity, this analysis focuses on the question of gender and how it relates to historical movements and fights for civil rights. Similarly to *The Well of Loneliness*, *Stone Butch Blues* can be classified as a *bildungsroman*, since it tells Jess Goldberg's quest for her own identity, from some time before her conception to her adulthood.

Throughout Jess's life, she has to face many difficulties and conflicts for the various “out-of-standard” characteristics of hers, such as her name, her physical appearance, her social relationships and her sexuality. In order to highlight the progressive (trans)formation and development of Jess's identity from her own experiences, Feinberg makes use of Jess as the narrator. Although Jess is telling the story, she is hardly ever able to notice by herself the unfolding of her identity, which is clearly shown to the reader, since Feinberg reproduces most conversations Jess has with people that impact on her, repeating their own words in direct speeches.

SBB, as the novel is many times referred to, brings to discussion not only the question of gender but also the butch-femme relationship, the oppression and violence the gender/sex outlaws faced. There are still the movements in defense of the minorities' civil rights, which generate the mingling of different communities and interests, fighting together as one. Pre and Stonewall times were stage of a huge activist organization claiming for freedom, justice and respect.

The story offers the reader the opportunity to see, through the transgressive characters' eyes, the “roller-coaster of feelings” their lives are. They experience love and hate, pride and humiliation, companionship and isolation, victory and loss, joy and sadness, all of them very intensely.

Jess is the embodiment of the contemporary subject who is living a “crisis of identity”, as part of a process of de-centralization. This crisis was a natural evolution of the complex contours life has acquired these days; consequently, complex life

generates complex people. Each subject is continuously impacting on the others' lives as much as being impacted by them. In spite of this reciprocal transformation, the person would still have his or her own subjectivity, which most of the times has to face the imposition of social-cultural values and constructs.

One of the constructs which is imposed by society is gender. Judith Butler, in *Gender Trouble* (1999), suggests that the first step into constructing one's identity is "gendering" this person according to the models society has established. Thus simply continuing this discussion about identity at a general level goes against this idea, and specifically in this novel, it is not only necessary, but essential to narrow down the focus of this analysis, because Jess Goldberg has as one of her main characteristics being a transgender.

As I have pointed out before, sex and gender are two distinct but related issues. According to Simone de Beauvoir, in *The Second Sex* (1997), the term "female" means a sexual cast for women, serving as the biological basis, interpreted in the construction of the concepts of man and woman. These constructs are created by social and religious discourses, responsible for the establishment of the previously discussed binary sex/gender matrix. Once babies are born, their bodies' anatomy will have them subjected to this matrix, the social construct of a boy or a girl. However, this body not only can bring from birth very particular and unusual characteristics, concerning those social-cultural constructs, but also is in a constant process of change. Bodies should not work as a cast since they cannot encompass gender identity, gender expression or sexuality. Jess is a clear example of this limitation of the body.

Clearly defining and distinguishing sex and gender does not suffice in this analysis, there is still the problem regarding the binary system of both sex and gender. There are two considered legitimate sexes, as well as two legitimate genders. According to the binary system, sexes are male and female, and genders are masculine and feminine. Socially and culturally speaking, it is expected that a male assumes masculine gender identity and expression, similarly being expected that a female assumes feminine gender identity and expression. The very center of this analysis is the crossing of these assumed identities and expressions.

Jess Goldberg, Feinberg's heroine, does not match the Foucaultian concept of "docility" (Rabinow, 1991, 180). She is born a female although she assumes a masculine gender identity and expression, contradicting the social and cultural

expectations. The supposed biological determinism fails in legitimating Jess's "condition", not to say existence. Jess transcends the dominant matrix of sex and gender. For differing from the norm, it becomes difficult and frightening for Jess to understand and place herself in the world as the one we live in. The only guarantee a transgender as Jess has is that there is "something" in them and that this something, which she sees initially as nameless and wrong, "made [her] afraid it was really bad". (Feinberg, 2003, 13)

Jess is not only a gender outlaw, but also she contradicts the fixed pairing of biological woman and sexual desire for man. Jess is same-sex oriented, feeling sexually attracted to women, feminine women. This brings lesbianism and the relationship butch-femme to discussion. It has already been mentioned that both butch and femme are lesbians, differing from each other in their gender expression. Halberstam explains that butches are masculine females, whereas femmes are feminine ones. Quoting Cherríe Moraga, in *Loving in the War Years* (1983), Halberstam says that this "male-identification" a butch has do not refer to "retain[ing] desires for sexual power", but to giving pleasure to other women, generally femmes (Halberstam, 1998, 121). Butches are also usually visible for their masculinity, while femmes may be mingled among heterosexual women.

Understanding a butch and a femme as two elements in a couple must be seen as a usual match, but not the only possibility. Butches and femmes complement each other in many different ways; however, regarding identity and expression, "there are indeed a plethora of categories [of lesbians] available" to vary this combination (Halberstam, 1998, 120). In the novel, we can find the example of Frankie, a butch who finds pleasure and completeness in relationships with other butches.

3.1- Sculpting the stone

Jess Goldberg is an extremely complex character; consequently, it can not be an easy and simple task to discuss her identity. Her identity is shown as a multi-layered characteristic of hers that has continuously found its various contours and particularities. Some events and abuses she suffers in her childhood and her youth have turned her into a tender stone, although this may be seen as antithetical. She herself questions the possibility of putting tenderness and toughness together, when she asks Jackie, one of the first femmes who Jess has contact and becomes friends

with: “[Butch] Al wants me to be tough. You and Mona and other femmes are always telling me to stay sweet, stay tender. How can I be both?” (Feinberg, 2003, 37) The fact is that she manages to be both and many more.

Jess’s story begins before her birth. Feinberg brings her protagonist to life within a turbulent family. Each one of her parents is not comfortable with their personal life nor are they happy in their marriage. Once her mother finds out about her pregnancy, she intends not to keep the baby; however, her father convinces her mother that having a baby will bring happiness to her life. “My mother had me to prove him wrong” remarks Jess about it, adding that she became a scapegoat for their frustrations because she was different (Feinberg, 2003, 13).

The description of nature at the moment her mother is delivering her acts as a foreshadowing of the hard times coming in Jess’s life. “Rain and wind have lashed the desert” can be read as the many tempests she will face in life. In addition to that, some Dineh women, who were next door neighbors, helped her mother at that moment. Those women have two important parts in Jess’s childhood. Seeing Jess’s mother inability and discomfort to deal with the newborn baby, they take the responsibility to look after her. This opens to Jess the sensation of growing in two worlds, “immersed in the music of two languages” (Feinberg, 2003, 14). The world she likes and feels comfortable in is not hers. The one she belongs to is “cold”.

Moreover, when her father notices how much Jess is inserted in the Indians’ (Dineh) culture, through listening to her speaking their language, he decides not to allow their presence anymore. Before her parents leave with her for the last time, those women give her a ring, as an amulet to protect her and make her strong. One of them prophesizes that Jess “was going to walk a difficult path in life” (Feinberg, 2003, 14). This prophecy is also an announcement of what is to come in her life.

One of those hard moments comes very soon, on her first day of class at school. Calling the roll, the teacher gets puzzled by her name reacting in a rather inquisitive manner. “What kind of name is that?” she utters demanding explanation, since there is not a satisfactory one, at least for her, she comments that “that’s not a girl’s name” (Feinberg, 2003, 15). Again this is a slight demonstration, of how the world would treat Jess, yet because her name was far from being the greatest problem she has to deal with. Her unusual body shape, something she cannot prevent people from noticing, is enough to cause her problems.

Based on this physical appearance, there is the persisting “Are you a boy or a girl?” question. This question appears like this or with different words conveying the same doubt or curiosity, in various moments, situations and pages of the novel. Even her mother gets tired of being asked this question, whenever her tomboyish “posture will not pass unnoticed to her parents’ embarrassment” (Silva, 2006, 45). Sometimes the question is not uttered, being implicit in the looks directed to her.

In *Trans Liberation*, Feinberg calls the readers’ attention to the linguistic attempt “to strip” transgenders from their humanity, by using the pronoun it. “Is it animal, mineral or vegetable?”, some high school colleagues ask each other as Jess passes by, loud enough for her to listen (Feinberg, 2003, 24). This question seems to me another way to exclude and dehumanize transgenders. This is how I read the passage in which Jess becomes “friends” with some dogs in a kennel near her house. Carla Alves da Silva defends that Jess’s preference for the company of those animals is based on her belief that they will not judge or try to classify her.

Jess replicates the same question she is frequently asked to one of the dogs as well as, on her way home, to a crow. The latter animal “replies” her with a “caw, caw” sound. No wonder, she emits the same sound when asked the same question some minutes after, when bullied by some boys. Unfortunately, it does not come to a good end. The bullies get angry with her and decide to check “what she is” with their own eyes.

“Let’s see how you tinkle,” one of the boys said as he knocked me down and of the two others struggled to pull off my pants and my underpants. I was filled with horror. I couldn’t make them stop. The shame of being half-naked before them – the important half – took all the steam out of me. They [...] locked me in the coal bin. (Feinberg, 2003, 18)

Jess stays there until a woman sets her free and sends her home wrapped in a towel. In addition to being exposed and humiliated, this is the first physical attack Jess suffers.

At the age of ten, Jess enters “her parents’ bedroom in order to try on adults’ clothes – a game every child likes to play” (Berutti, 2005, 39). Although she is supposedly a girl, she does not try on her mother’s clothes. Instead, she puts on her father’s suit. As she looks at her reflection on the mirror, she sees “the woman [she] was growing up to be”. She is scared and sad with that. “I wondered if I was brave enough to grow up and be her”, she thinks while her parents catch her dressed like

that (Feinberg, 2003, 21). Instead of having a moment of self-identification, Jess gets even more puzzled about herself.

All the storm clouds she predicts at the moment she is caught come right away. According to Judith Butler, in *Gender Trouble* (1999), one might understand gender identity prior to trying to fully understand identity itself. Dressing herself like a man allows Jess to see her true gender, however her parents do not see her the same way, their look is guided by the binary matrix of sex/ gender.

After seeing Jess dressed in masculine clothes, her parents cannot avoid acting consonantly to the norms. Without any conversation about that, they take her to a mental hospital, which according to Foucault was an institution determined to “heal [...] those sick of the sexual instinct” (Foucault, 1996, 234). The repressive atmosphere of the hospital is set at her arrival when she is taken from the elevator by “two **huge** [my emphasis] men in white uniforms” (Feinberg, 2003, 21).

At the hospital, Jess shares a room with a hallucinating old lady and a suicidal youngster, named Paula. This young woman is also there for her family’s prejudice. Although Paula seems to be an ordinary person, her racist family can not accept her black boyfriend. The facility does not treat the patients properly, not to say they do not worry about the interns’ dignity. Jess is soaked in her own urine one of the nights, doped with heavy tranquilizers most of the time.

Still in that facility, Jess has her first appointment with the “shrink” in charge of her case. She deceives him, pretending to be repented and promising to behave appropriately. She wisely uses the system in her favor, although it does not work for long. In another effort to make their daughter’s gender expression fit the standard, her parents and the “shrink” decide to send her to charm school.

Many actual transgendered women were sent to one or both these institutions; the ones who refused to admit being wrong suffered severe punishments, such as electroshocks. These treatments are also illustrated in films and television series, such as “Boy Crazy”, the ninth episode of the fifth season of the TV series *Cold Case*. Firstly broadcasted in the USA, on November 18, 2007, this episode tells the story of Samantha Randall.

Sam used to dress like a boy and have hair short. She did not wear make up or earrings, in a 1960s traditional society. She used to have a friend, Dom Barron, whom she talked to about her anguishes, particularly about being misjudged by the others. One evening they were having some beer and chatting by a lake when Dom

asked her why she did not act like the other girls. She just said: “Cause it’s just the way I am. I don’t know what that makes me... Just feels right, you know!” (Lovinger, 2007) On the same evening, Sam and Dom make a pact to fight for their freedom. However, this friendly contact does not have a happy ending, since Sam kisses Dom when he asks her if she felt attracted to girls.

A transgender girl was not accepted at school, which made her father send her to a mental hospital so that she would become more feminine. Refusing to wear lipstick, Sam is doped and passes through electroshocks, which lead her to a catatonic state. Eventually, Dom decides to rescue her, when she manages to say the words “make me free” (Lovinger, 2007), which made him feel responsible for relieving her from all that suffering, by killing her and taking her body to the lake where they seal their pact.

Jess’s fate is different since she pretended to have changed her mind!

Five years later, Jess convinces her parents as well as her “analyst” that getting a part-time job might work as an occupational therapy for her. At that time, she has two friends, Barbara, at school, and Gloria, at work. Gloria tells Jess about her transgender brother, mentioning a bar she went to accompany him. It takes Jess almost a year before she finds the courage to call and, finally, go to the place. The part-time job introduces Jess to the term butch, as well, since a coworker asked about her using this term, “Who’s the butch?” (Feinberg, 2003, 26) She gets very much confused at first, but this is a concept she gets familiar with as soon as she starts going to the bars, getting to know other butches like her.

Feinberg’s description of Jess’s first night at Tifka’s, the bar Gloria talks to her about, resembles ball scenes in “fairy tales”. Jess is enchanted and moved by the beauty and dance. She wants to look as if she is familiar with bars, although it is quite impossible to hide her amazement; she feels as if her most intimate dreams have been materialized in front of her.

What I saw there released tears I’d held back for years: strong, burly women, wearing ties and suit coats. Their hair was slicked back in perfect DA’s. They were the handsomest women I’d ever seen. Some of them were wrapped in slow motion dances with women in tight dresses and high heels who touched them tenderly. Just watching made me ache in need.

This was everything I could have hoped for in life.

“You ever been in a bar like this before?” the drag queen asked me.

“Lots of times,” I answered quickly. She smiled.

Then I wanted to ask her something so badly I forgot to keep up my lie. “Can I really buy a woman a drink or ask her to dance?” (Feinberg, 2003, 28)

Cops also come into Jess's life because of the bars. For being underage, initially she is just threatened, whereas other more experienced older butches, drags and femmes are usually raped and beaten by the cops.

Jess does not escape sexual assault in her teenage years, though. There is this sexist outrageous saying that a "real man" can teach a lesbian how to be a woman. Among American teenagers, the most powerful and virile boys are usually part of football teams as the most beautiful and sexy girls are cheerleaders at school. It is not different at Jess's school. Jess's appearance and behavior defy the norm; therefore, they defy the football boys' dominance. Contrary to the other girls' trend, Jess does not feel attracted to them, shaking their confidence and virility. Once they have a chance, they decide to possess her at any cost. As she fights them, they beat her, immobilize her and rape her one after the other, until the coach approaches. Being no better than those boys, the coach pretends not to see what he just witnessed. Instead of helping Jess, he just says "Get out of here, you little whore", as if blaming her for any harassment she has faced till then and could ever come to face again (Feinberg, 2003, 29).

The violence she suffered is not noticed by anyone. Neither her parents nor her sister show any interest in knowing how she is, since she asks her sister to tell her parents she is not feeling good and because of that she is going to bed early the very evening she is raped. In the following morning, she is forced to go to school, although she tells her mother she does not feel like going. Not even her "split lip or the way [she] was limping a little on [her] ankle" catches her family's attention to whatever may have happened to her (Feinberg, 2003, 41).

Contrary to her family, everybody at school seems to know about it! Not only do the other students stare at her but also some of them provoke her saying that "Bobby" and/or "Jeffrey", two of the boys involved in the rape, are after her. She needs to share her anguish with a friend, and the only one she is sure she can count on to talk to about such a thing is Karla, a black girl who can understand the true meaning of the words "minority" and "prejudice". However, once she tries, she finds herself in trouble once again.

Finally, Jess gets suspended just because she does not respect the racist sitting arrangement at the school cafeteria, when trying to speak to Karla. Therefore, Jess decides to run away. She runs away from home, from her family, from this life!! Jess starts a new life with the support of the bar community, finding refuge with those

like her. She has some really good times, even though things are usually tough for her.

Jess finds her first new place with Toni and her girlfriend Betty. In spite of her need to get some sleep, Jess spends some time of that night reflecting upon her life from that day on. She realizes she is absolutely on her own then; she makes two important resolutions: not wearing a dress nor being raped again. However, her second resolution does not exactly depend on her wish or effort; therefore, she is not able to keep it.

Jess goes to Tifka's regularly at that time. It feels like home most of the time, although the police raids are an imminent threat. Each time she hears about the raids she fears what some policemen promised her: when she is tall and old enough they would take care of her, teach her a lesson, as they did before with Butch Al, a very respected and admired old butch. The rape and exposition of Al by the cops, by removing her binder, which keeps her breasts smashed so as to make her chest flat, and also Al's helplessness, in one of the times they are arrested, have a great impact on Jess.

After a while, the cops decide her time has come. They beat and rape her, humiliate, hurt her in so many different ways. Yet, she manages to escape that suffering. "I just went away", she says forcing her thoughts out of there. She virtually escapes to the desert; as she looks around her, all she sees is beauty, a colorful landscape. Feinberg represents most of Jess's senses in this part of the narrative to make it more real and lively. There are colors to be seen, scents to be smelled, noises to be heard, and surfaces to be stepped on. She is somewhere delightful, instead of the cruel reality of being raped by cops at the police station.

This escapism to some people gets to the borders of madness, as it does to Jess; others cross the boarder of sanity, actually getting mad after facing such painful and shameful situations. In medical terms, this phenomenon is called "dissociative amnesia", a mental process in which a person loses his or her connections in thoughts, memory or sense of identity. This phenomenon appears in different forms and degrees, namely selective, generalized, continuous, and systematized amnesia.

Dissociative amnesia appears to be caused by stress associated with traumatic experiences endured or witnessed, physical or sexual abuse, rape, [...] major life stresses, abandonment, death of a loved one, financial troubles; or tremendous internal conflict, turmoil over guilt-ridden impulses, apparently unresolvable

interpersonal difficulties, criminal behaviors. Additionally, some persons are believed to be more predisposed to amnesia, eg, those who are easily hypnotized.¹³

Another consequence of this rape is the loss of Jess's amulet, the ring the Dineh women gave her, when her parents decided not to allow them to look after Jess anymore. The loss of this ring may carry an important symbolism, since this rape means the loss of her sense of safety among her equals. This sense of safety goes away with the item that is her guarantee of protection, as the women promise her parents. Indeed, the cops are a constant threat those nights at the bars, along with any transphobic persecution and violence she is haunted by, in her everyday movements. She is aware of the dangers she is exposed to until there is a change of mind among people in general. Till then, she is not completely safe.

Like most of the people who do not fit the binary sex/gender matrix, Jess goes through many of the traumatic experiences aforementioned. Some appear very directly in the novel, as the rapes, the financial problems and the internal conflict. However, others, like abandonment and "unresolvable" interpersonal difficulties, do not seem so clear in many times.

At this point of her life, Jess is already a stone. All the suffering and the wounds, physical and/or psychological, have a deep impact on her, hardening her, enclosing her, turning her into a stonebutch.

3.2- Pacifying the rivalries

Theresa is a very important character in the novel; she is one of Jess's ex-lovers. From my point of view, the importance she has either to Jess and the story is that she has an essential role in Jess's political involvement. Theresa works at the university and she brings home pamphlets and books, which rescue Jess from a certain accommodation, a bit of alienation. Although Jess joins the union long before she meets Theresa, Jess is still unaware of the comprehensiveness of the movement as a whole. Theresa envisages one of the most important characteristics Jess possesses.

"You know one of the things I liked best about you when I first got to know you? [...] You were always a **peacemaker** [my emphasis]. Whenever the butches got tanked

¹³ http://www.psychnet-uk.com/dsm_iv/dissociative_amnesia.htm

up and hot under the collar, you found a way to step in and defuse things. I even noticed that sometimes when two of the older butches would get mad at each other they would drift over to you one at a time [...] That's one of your strengths. The way you soothe people when they're mad at each other. Sticking together is really important sometimes." (Feinberg, 2003, 127)

By defining Jess as a peacemaker, Theresa catches the readers' attention to the mediation Jess is in charge of throughout the book. Jess tries hard and relates well with butches, femmes, drag queens, some straight women and some of the straight men she works with. Being a peacemaker may seem contrastive to the "unresolvable" interpersonal difficulties she actually shows sometimes. These difficulties are not from Jess's part, but towards her many times, mainly based exclusively on prejudice or, more specifically, transphobia.

Among the butches, Jess gains recognition through Butch Al, who is not only respected but also feared, in a certain way. Al "[i]s a glance at power", a tough old butch, who is in a long term relationship with a beautiful femme, Jackie (Feinberg, 2003, 28). Al feels the need to give Jess tips on how to act in order to have the others' respect. One of the most important things in Al's opinion is to show strength, bravery, for she believes this way Jess might be able to face the upcoming difficulties; therefore, she advises Jess to harden up. Al and Jackie teach Jess "everything" they have learned by themselves, starting from the most basic things, such as clothing.

Jess comes close to lose both butches' and femmes' respect. A femme called Monique, who according to Jackie "used sex like a weapon", begins flirting with Jess, one night at the bar. Then, some time later, they go out to Monique's house; when they are about to have some intimacies, Jess leaves her behind, all of a sudden. This is seen as cowardice both by Monique and other femmes and butches. A butch, to whom Monique whispers something, decides to ridicule Jess, who pretends not to listen.

Al interferes in this pretense quarrel, taking the responsibility over Jess, as if she was her pupil, her baby-but. So Al and the other butch start a fight. Al calls Jess in, so that she defends her honor, but she refuses fighting. Her respectability is shaken for a while, until she is very tender and considerate to Yvette, a lonely femme who worked as a "pro" – a prostitute. Yvette arrives at the bar after a tough night, wanting to feel respected and protected. Reading Yvette's signs right, even if it has

Jackie's support, makes butches and femmes recognize Jess respectively as a sexual competitor and a tender lover.

Jess is always naturally tidying small quarrels up, either among the butches, or between the butches and their femmes. It is an unconscious move; in fact, she just tries to be fair and do the right thing. Jan and Edna are a couple, respectively a stonebutch and a femme. Both of them are Jess's friends. When they break up, Jess feels attracted to Edna, which is reciprocal. Noticing how hurt Jan is, Jess sensitively refuses flirting with Edna, who recognizes it is too early for her to get involved with someone else too. Although she agrees with Jess about giving up their first impulse, Edna reveals her admiration and attraction to Jess. Jess receives a compliment for her rectitude; Justine, a drag queen in the bar, after seeing it, states that according to her "book", Jess must have done the right thing.

In the gay/lesbian community, Jess comes close to get "to some sense of acceptance, protection, family, home" (Silva, 2006, 52). Finding equals is the only way "outlaws", like Jess, can feel comfortable expressing themselves.

Out of her community, Jess can count on Duffy, a man she works with in one of the factories. Duffy has very generous and respectful attitudes towards Jess. I dare to speculate that his sympathy for Jess might be due to the fact that he is considered to be a communist, raising some hostility and prejudice in relation to him. "You know that guy is a communist?" Jess is asked about him. She refuses to believe that and decides to ask Duffy himself, expecting he would deny vehemently. Instead of that, "he had a sad look in his eyes", answering with another question: "[d]o we need to talk about it now?" (Feinberg, 2003, 98)

The companionship which exists between Jess and Duffy is not at all shaken by Duffy possibly being a communist, although Jess would have liked to hear a straight "no" as an answer for her question. From Duffy's part, there are many situations in which his attitudes in relation to Jess can be observed. Three of them are very important since strengthen Jess, mainly among her coworkers, meaning many other men.

Duffy is forced, on sexist basis, to give a promotion to a man, when, from his point of view, Jess not only wants it, but also deserves it. He feels the need to explain that to her, saying that "[n]o woman in th[at] plant has ever gone higher than a four, and none of the guys, except one, have ever worked lower than a five." Duffy encourages Jess to fight for her rights together with him and the other men, inviting

her to “[s]tick with [him] on this one [...]. It is really important for the union right now”. He urges her to unite forces with him, promising to take the butches to the union meetings, which means a lot for the butches. It stands for their chance to join the fight for their professional interests and rights, and, consequently, that gives them room to fight for their civil rights too (Feinberg, 2003, 83).

The second situation I would like to point out is the episode with Jim Boney, a sexist man who also works with Jess. Boney does not like Jess because not only she is a butch but also she is Jewish. He openly shows prejudice in relation to her. Jim Boney provokes but is ignored by Jess. After he almost fights another man for standing by her, he finally has her attention, hence his chance to actually fight her. Jess takes to her all the responsibility for Boney’s anger, saying “Your fight’s with me, Jim Boney”. Although she calls this a “bust of bravado”, she invests some more provocative words in it. Boney “pretends” to be willing to fight, as well as he allows himself to be held back by other two men. Ending his performance, he gives up the fight saying “she is not worth it”. Duffy watches everything, replying this statement with a striking one: Jess “is a better union man than” Boney (Feinberg, 2003, 85).

Eventually, Jess has her finger chopped off in a sabotaged machine, prepared specifically at harming her. Duffy takes Jess to the hospital, getting desperate and, furthermore, desolated for the recklessness with which Jess is treated. He helplessly claims proper human treatment for her. Jess has her hand operated, and her finger is saved. Duffy tells Jess on the phone the following night that one of the men removed the safety device from the machine, right before she is put particularly there. Once he finds out about the sabotage, he decides “to organize a union investigation of the ‘accident’”. When Duffy talks to Jess about proving and demanding punishment for the involved in the case, she “marvel[s] at the idea that straight people would stand up for [her], or for any he-she” (Feinberg, 2003, 85).

One could question how I intend to establish Jess as a peacemaker through that forthcoming fight with Jim Boney. Although she “invites” him to fight her, she does that to prevent a confrontation between him and another man who criticized Boney’s sexist behavior towards Jess. Yet, this impulsive reaction of hers surprised not only herself but also everybody else. Other two men held Boney back but Jess could notice he was faking his will to get to her. Therefore, instead of keeping this provocation, she demands that he leave her alone. Jess really manages to get over this situation with Boney in a baseball game. She teases him saying she will win the

game, and he bets she will not. If he wins she has to kiss him on the mouth; otherwise, she gets this special glove of his. The butches, led by Jess, and counting on Duffy's support, will finally gain not only Boney's but also all the other men's respect, as they won the game "fair and square" (Feinberg, 2003, 90).

These moments in the story show the conciliatory character of Jess very clearly; however, there are some situations in which her mediational intervention is more subtle.

In one of her jobs at the plants, Jess feels happy and comfortable, "flirting with Yvonne, listening to Muriel's stories, waiting for the next social" (Feinberg, 2003, 79). At that factory, the women, "from many different nationalities and backgrounds", work and sing together, talk and listen to each other (Feinberg, 2003, 78). Jess feels welcomed among them.

Every morning, usually "one of the Native women" starts singing, followed by the others (Feinberg, 2003, 78). One day, Muriel, one of the eldest coworkers, invites Jess to start singing. Jess gets very embarrassed, thinking how little she wants to have people's attention focused on her. Therefore, she refuses to start singing by saying she cannot. They keep working in silence, making Jess uncomfortable. She initially tries to convince herself that inviting her to "start the song" that day is an attempt to expose and ridicule her (Feinberg, 2003, 79); however, Jess knows those women are in fact honoring her, by calling her "voice to join theirs" (Feinberg, 2003, 79). Despite being nervous, she decides to face this challenge and reciprocate their consideration.

This was it. I would try to find my voice and be proud of it. After several false starts my voice began to rise, singing the song I loved most—the first song I'd learned. Almost immediately the other women lifted their voices up with mine to spare me any pain. We all smiled at each other and sang with tears in our eyes. (Feinberg, 2003, 80)

That is one of the situations in which Jess has the chance to play her conciliatory role among women. Then, again she proves her intention to establish harmony, even if that means having to leave people she loves behind.

When Jess begins taking hormones, she meets Gloria, the first person to tell Jess about the gay bar. Gloria lives with her two children, Kim and Scotty, and invites Jess to stay at their place. The children do not judge her appearance, becoming

greatly emotionally attached to Jess. They seem to be able to see beyond the binary, perhaps because they have not “been taught [long enough] to hate people who are different” (Feinberg, 2003, 255). In their simplicity, they are not interested in her gender or sexuality, but in the love and care she has in relation to them, which Bernadette Lyra calls “the socializing emotion of love” (Lyra, 2002, 258 – My translation).

It takes a couple of months to have noticeable changes in her body and voice. As they come, Jess decides to leave Gloria’s house, even knowing her departure will bring suffering to the kids, who have already lost their father. Jess tells them very gently and patiently she is leaving because she needs to get a job and find a safe place to live. She says she is going to live “[u]p in the sky, where the wind blows”, promising to keep “watching over [them]” (Feinberg, 2003, 167). The children do not want Jess to go away and their wish to have her around is clearly present in Scotty’s line: “When I’m the wind I could be in the sky with you” (Feinberg, 2003, 167). Jess loves the children and she believes that leaving them is still for their own good.

Ruth, Jess’s transgender next door neighbor in New York, represents an exercise of Jess’s reconciling abilities. Jess has to insist to get into Ruth’s life since the latter is “stoned” for seeing people she loves suffering. In one of their conversations about Ruth’s hometown in the countryside, Jess compares her hair with red “wild sumac in early autumn” (Feinberg, 2003, 249). Sumacs, a characteristic vegetation of warm regions, are scrubs and small trees that, depending on the type, may have red flowers and fruit, which can be used to produce ink and spice.¹⁴ This comparison shows Ruth how special Jess is, because for her “the color of [her] hair is [her] declaration to the world that [she’s] not hiding” (Feinberg, 2003, 254). What usually embarrasses people, according to Ruth, is beautiful in Jess’s eyes.

From those talks about Ruth’s childhood, Jess can notice she misses her family and the place where she was raised. Ruth tells Jess she was not all the time, nor by everyone, understood when she was a child. Yet, those who seem to be the most important people for her, her mother, her grandmother and her uncle would be able to see and understand “[her] nature” (Feinberg, 2003, 261). Sensing Ruth’s homesickness, in addition to her need to go over “things unfinished in [her] life”

¹⁴ <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sumac>

(Feinberg, 2003, 271), Jess is determined to persuade Ruth to join her on a trip into their past, their roots. Ruth does not like the idea initially since she believes “two people like [them] in public are more than double the trouble” (Feinberg, 2003, 255).

Finally, Jess manages to convince Ruth and they leave New York together heading toward Buffalo, stopping over in Canandaigua Lake. This trip also means the culmination of Jess’s quest for internal peace. Jess has always been uncomfortable about herself, being unable to find out “who” she is, “not a man or a woman”, or according to Edna “more than just neither” (Feinberg, 2003, 218). She is convinced that being a “he-she” is dangerous, deciding to take hormones in order to pass as a man.

According to Susan Bordo, in *Unbearable Weight: Feminism, Western Culture and the Body* (1995), people in general are usually “obsessed with [their] bodies, but [they] are hardly accepting of them” (Bordo, 1995, 15). Jess is not exactly following that trend, but rather suffering with this obsession with the perfect stereotyped body, since hers is not in accordance with this perfection. After the hormones, which are her first step in direction to matching body and gender expression, Jess decides to have a breast reduction surgery in order to feel “good in [her] body once again”, since having an even more masculine body and colorful beard on her face made her “hate [her] breasts more than ever” (Feinberg, 2003, 175). Although she is happy about the body achieved after the hormone shots and the surgery, she is still reluctant about “who” she is.

Although Jess does not “regret the decision to take hormones”, she stops the treatment (Feinberg, 2003, 224). Once again “[her] body [is] blending gender characteristics”, assuming its “neither-both” ambiguity (Feinberg, 2003, 224). Ruth prepares a surprise to Jess painting a starry sky on the ceiling of her bedroom, using colors in such a way that Jess cannot “tell if it’s dawn or dusk” (Feinberg, 2003, 269). Ruth explains that this in-between situation is something she is very familiar with because she sees herself in the same position.

[...] “It’s the place inside of me I have to accept. I thought it might be what you need to deal with, too.”

I sighed. “I really do have trouble not being able to figure out if what you’ve painted is about to be day or about to be night.”

Ruth rolled toward me and rested her hand on my chest. “It’s not going to be day or night, Jess. It’s always going to be that moment of infinite possibility that connects them.” (Feinberg, 2003, 270)

Through Ruth's eyes, Jess can see diversity not as being "out" of the two possible positions, but "in", as being their intersection. Jess occupies this intersection not only for her difference, but also for "refigure[ing] her sex, [by] crossing and recrossing" the boundaries between butch lesbians and female-to-male transsexuals (Prosser, 1998, 179).

Jess tells Ruth that in her search for identity, she has looked over the past finding out that not only there have been people like them, but also that these people have not been always hated as they are. This contact with the universal past makes Jess reflect upon her own past, pushing her to her journey to Buffalo.

During this journey, and even before, Jess is able to meet her old butch and femme friends, including those with whom she feels like having problems unsolved. The first person she meets is Frankie, a butch who used to work with Jess and Duffy. Frankie is attracted to other butches, which is incompatible with Jess's perception of butchness. "What makes you think you're still a butch?" Jess asks Frankie, who repeats the same question to Jess, based on the fact that she is passing as a man (Feinberg, 2003, 207). They do not see each other until Jess calls her, to apologize and to ask her information about her old friends in Buffalo. Living and reading give Jess understanding that "lesbian masculinity [butchness, according to Halberstam] has always encompassed a multiplicity of forms" (Halberstam, 1998, 120). Therefore, Jess can see that Frankie is not any less of a butch than she is.

Frankie helps her to get in touch with the others, beginning with Jan. Jess and Jan's friendship is shaken when Jan sees Jess dancing with Edna, her ex-lover. Although Jess and Edna get together years after the latter breaks up with Jan, Jess still feels uncomfortable about it. Jess feels the need to recover Jan's friendship. Once they meet, Jan is together with Edna again, apparently knowing nothing about the time Edna and Jess really dated. After Jess's visit, Edna tells her about that, which revives her anger in relation to Jess. When they meet again, Jess and Jan come close to having an argument, but Jess tries to show Jan she has never been disloyal to her, since she only actually dates Edna years after Jan and Edna break up, which makes Jan a little more comfortable about their situation.

Another person Jess goes after is Butch Al. Al has been in an asylum for quite some time. Ignoring people's advice that Al has been absent-minded, Jess goes there to visit her. Al does not recognize Jess immediately; according to another patient, Al has lapses of lucidity, although "[s]he doesn't talk to mortals" (Feinberg,

2003, 286). Jess believes she is a “ghost” who will be able to bring Al back (Feinberg, 2003, 286).

Jess in fact manages to awaken Al from her catatonic state; however, Al asks her not to bring her back, which she reluctantly respects. Jess leaves the hospital, after thanking Al for teaching her “enough to keep [her] alive all these years” (Feinberg, 2003, 289). Jess goes back to Jan and Edna’s house to tell them she has seen and talked to Al, and also to say goodbye.

On her way back to New York, Jess stops over to pick Ruth up. Jess gets to meet Ruth’s mother and aunt. They are cooking and Ruth Anne, the mother, invites her in, offering her something to eat. Ruth is happy and Jess can notice how understanding and supportive Ruth’s family is in relation to her. After hearing some more stories about Ruth’s childhood, Jess, together with Ruth, goes on with their journey; both of them profit from this opportunity.

Stressing that being a peacemaker is ONE among other features of Jess’s shows the multifaceted and/or multilayered character of her identity. It indicates the possible existence of many more features, as there really are. Also Jess is not aware of this ability she has; it is Theresa who finds this in her. Many other people who enter Jess’s life, relating to her in many different ways, notice “things about her” (Feinberg, 2003, 13). However, they are not those things she refers to in the beginning of the novel. In her childhood, whenever people look at her they notice her queerness, which “made them knit their eyebrows and frown” though (Feinberg, 2003, 13). Her friends and lovers are able to really see through this matter of gender and sexuality, finding and pointing at her virtues, such as generosity, bravery, rectitude, humbleness, among other simply HUMAN characteristics she has. Then, my analysis comes to the point of discussing her relationships and how fruitful they are concerning her identity.

3.3- Solving the puzzle

I would like to point out that this section of my work will not strictly follow the sequence in which the characters meet Jess. Although they can be separated in two main groups (her lovers and her friends), there are other people to be considered, like her teacher at high school, Mrs. Noble.

Feinberg's choice for Mrs. Noble, as the name of this person refers to, truly indicates her character as a human being. When Jess decides to drop out of school, Mrs. Noble teaches her important lessons for life. Jess was not able to grasp what she said then, although those pieces of advice were internalized in a way. "What do you want for your life?" (Feinberg, 2003, 45) Mrs. Noble could not have chosen a stronger combination of words to throw Jess as a question. As a teenager, Jess would never give a satisfactory answer. Mrs. Noble does not intend to get one either, she is planting seeds on Jess's unconscious mind, by asking that as an introduction to confessing her great expectation that Jess would "help change the world" (Feinberg, 2003, 45). Mrs. Noble gives consistent foreshadowing of Jess's identities.

"When you do something out of your conviction, my dear, it should be because you think it's the right thing to do. If you look for approval from everyone, you'll never be able to act." [...] "Do you know what it takes to change the world, Jess?" I shook my head. "You have to figure out what you really believe in and then find other people who feel the same way. The only thing you have to do alone is to decide what's important to you." (Feinberg, 2003, 45)

Doing the right thing and finding equals are important issues in Jess's everyday life. At the time she has this conversation with Mrs. Noble she lives quite an isolated life, having basically one or two real friends.

Before Mrs. Noble, the most constructive experience Jess has is among the Dineh women. They participate in her birth and rescue her from being neglected, abandoned by her mother, who "was afraid to touch [her]" (Feinberg, 2003, 14). These women mean a lot in Jess's life since they are her early chance to live within diversity. They represent a different culture, with a different language; therefore, they have more acceptance in relation to her unusual appearance. Noticing that Jess has learned their language, her father gets worried about this strange connection, which makes he feel as if Jess is being kidnapped by the Indians. This use of another language reminds me of the aforementioned idea Esther Newton defends comparing masculinity and femininity to two distinct dialects. Once again, one sees a person, Jess, supposedly speaking an odd, "wrong" dialect.

Butch Al and Jackie, the first butch-femme couple Jess relates to, teach her a lot of things. When they first meet, Jess makes a mistake by asking Jackie to dance. Despite this potentially troublesome beginning, Jess does not find hostility from Al's

part. Al says she foresees hope for Jess, and in fact, she helps Jess find it. By observing and listening to Al, Jess learns what being a butch really means. Al not only wants to make sure Jess will be able to face the hard times, but also she wants Jess to give a good impression for everyone, including her sexual partners. When they are talking about sex, one night, Al asks Jess if she knows how to use a “rubber dildo” (Feinberg, 2003, 30), explaining to her that there are certain “rules” in its use.

Jackie gives her more subtle tips about how to please a femme. She talks about respecting, caring. Jess wants to know what a butch needs to know and do in order to be a good lover, which Jackie lovely and patiently explains. One of the most revealing, but at the same time, subjective tips Jackie gives is that being a good lover depends on “listening to [the femme’s] body”. Jackie and Al, together, represent two important sides of Jess: the former stands for her tenderness, whereas the latter, her toughness.

Some of the drag queens that go to Tifka’s also contribute to unveiling who Jess is. Mona, one of the drags, helps her out of the situation with Jackie and Butch Al, at her first night at the bar. Some nights after that, Mona is caught by the cops. Jess holds Mona and treats her with the usual delicacy she treats friends, mainly when they are in trouble. Mona tells Jess how much the cops and life in the streets change both femmes and butches, forcing them to harden up, so that they get less sensitive to the violence they are exposed to in their every-day life. Mona regrets that eventually these changes are going to reach Jess also; someday Jess will lose her sweetness, hardening too.

Peaches, Justine and Georgetta, all drags who performed in a show, invited Jess to be the “Master of Ceremonies of the Monte Carlo Night Drag”, taking her to a fancy masculine clothing store to buy her a new suit. The store adjusted it in less than one hour so that those transgenders would not be moving around the store for a long time. Wearing a suit gives Jess a great deal of confidence, which is taken from her on the very night of the show, since the cops invaded the place, acting as usual, and finally raping Jess as they promised sometime before.

Angie, one of the “pros”, is able to see through Jess’s armor. She discovers a great deal of Jess in one single night. Angie is very sensitive and she inspires Jess to give flow to a torrent of feelings, from memories to a hot sweet love experience. When Angie gently tells Jess she is taking the lead, “those were the most comforting

words” Jess could have heard. Before they get to sleep, Angie reveals to Jess a little more from what she can see about Jess, adding some important advice to it.

“You’re a stone already, aren’t you?” I dropped my eyes. She lifted my chin up and looked me in the eyes. “Don’t be ashamed of being stone with a pro, honey. We’re in a stone profession. It’s just that you don’t have to get stuck in being stone, either. It’s OK if you find a femme you can trust in bed and you want to say that you need something, or you want to be touched.” (Feinberg, 2003, 73)

Let us get back to Theresa. She is the one among Jess’s lovers who most affect her, before, meanwhile and after their time together. As it was already discussed, it is Theresa who sees the peacemaker in Jess. Likewise it is she, Theresa, who is able to do what Angie talks about in the quotation above. Theresa and Jess fit perfectly not only physically or sexually speaking, although the latter is a relevant issue. Jess loves and trusts Theresa a lot; therefore, sex between them is perfect. Their “tongues discovered a silent language to express [their] needs” (Feinberg, 2003, 123).

Jess realizes how hurt she is, and so does Theresa, who is able to sense Jess’s intimate feelings, also being able to take actions to relax Jess’s tension, as well as to keep her excited. Whenever Jess is petrifying, turning into stone, Theresa softens her with her bed-time stories. Jess knows that this ability Theresa has is not easily found, what makes this femme particularly special. “Only you could melt this stone” confesses Jess in the letter she writes Theresa in the first chapter (Feinberg, 2003, 11).

This letter is Theresa’s suggestion. “Write me a letter someday” (Feinberg, 2003, 153), says Theresa, since Jess can not find the words to tell her the much Jess has unsaid, at the moment of the break up. The end of their relationship is a crossroads to Jess. She loves Theresa, but she needs to survive, seeing no other form to achieve that except for passing as a man. Passing as a man means taking hormones, becoming more masculine in biological traits as well. Theresa is a femme and an important point she loves about Jess is her butchness. According to Prosser, “as butch Jess *is* a woman” (Prosser, 1998, 182); however, Jess sees herself as a transgender, which puts her in a much more complicated position.

Theresa can not stand the idea of becoming “some man’s wife, even if that man’s a woman” (Feinberg, 2003, 149). However, Theresa actually sees and

understands Jess's necessity to take "the hormones and pass" or she will "probably be killed on the street or take [her] own life out of madness" (Feinberg, 2003, 153). For her masculine gender expression, Jess cannot be a closeted lesbian, so, based on the "heterosexist prejudice", which Adrienne Rich explains in "Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence", "[h]er job [not to say, her life] depends on her pretending to be [...] heterosexual", in other words, passing as a man (Rich, 1993, 235).

One night, Jess is walking back home, about to lose her senses because of a high fever, believing it is a sore throat. When she finally arrives home, she falls asleep, waking up sometime after with Theresa "by her side". It is suggested that in fact she is having feverish dreams; first Theresa appears and disappears mysteriously, second Feinberg does not use quotation marks in her utterances, just writing her words in Italics. Anyway, Theresa is there to support Jess one more time and encourage her to go to the hospital, something that terrifies her. Theresa has always had so much faith in Jess that she is the only one able to make her overcome her fears, although at that very moment, Jess just thinks "Theresa ha[s] overestimated [her] strength—physically and emotionally" (Feinberg, 2003, 233).

Jess can not manage to get to the hospital at that time, buying medicines from a stranger in the street. Some months later, she has a vaginal infection, feeling compelled to go to "a women's health clinic", where she faces constraints among the nurses and the other patients, when finally the doctor intervenes (Feinberg, 2003, 234). After telling the doctor about her infection, Jess refuses to be seen and touched in her intimacy, which is part of the medical procedure. The doctor can perceive her desperation and prescribes her a medicine to "stop the itching and burning sensation" (Feinberg, 2003, 236). Although she never comes back to the clinic as the doctor advises her to do so, Jess recognizes how caring and respectful that doctor is.

Jess earns and learns a lot from all the love relationships she has, especially because her lovers are usually more experienced than her. When she meets Milli, her first real date, for example, she has the opportunity to pay attention to Milli's body language while flirting with her. Seeing Milli, in her smooth walk towards her, affects Jess so deeply that she can keep this image as a mental photograph.

Although they get along very well in the beginning, they end up in little struggles quite regularly. Jess also concludes she is unable to actually protect Milli, and that it is part of life. After a fight, Jess goes after Milli in a club where she works

to apologize. Despite her intentions, Milli feels offended and leaves Jess, not because of that; in fact, she can predict their fights are getting worse, seeing no way they can get better.

Edna, initially butch Jan's femme and a friend, comes and goes as Jess leads her life. Jess feels very attracted to Edna. They do not have a butch-femme love relationship, although this attraction is reciprocal. Edna helps Jess in a very delicate moment in her life. Jess is taking hormones and passing as a man. She feels completely lost and shallow as if she only existed after she started passing, having "no past, no loved ones, no memory, no me" (Feinberg, 2003, 213). Jess believes she can find some answers to "the dramatic complexity" of the situation she is living in through Rocco, an old butch Jess admires who happens to be Edna's ex-lover (Berutti, 2005, 42). Jess asks Edna for help, so that she can get in touch with Rocco, getting relieved of her anxiety. Edna helps her but not the way she expects. Edna makes Jess see she has nothing less than Rocco to survive but a "leather jacket", an armor which Edna gives Jess. Now she is once more ready for the fight for survival. Edna restores Jess's self-confidence.

Before she has this conversation with Edna, Jess cannot fight this emptiness for many reasons. The most important one is Edwin's suicide. Ed, nickname people currently use when talking to or referring to Edwin, starts taking hormones sometime before Jess. Ed is the one who convinces Jess about the benefits of taking these hormones and passing as a man. When she analyses her body after starting the treatment, despite seeing the body she wanted to have, she does not feel good, wondering how hard it was to achieve that. Jess calls Ed and hears she shot herself some weeks before. Jess remembers that Ed gave her a book, mentioning "she'd marked a page in the book [...] that summed up what she was struggling with" (Feinberg, 2003, 178). Jess decides to read it in order to relieve her suffering about Ed's suicide, and she reads

It is peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his twoness—an American, a Negro/ two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings, two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder. (Feinberg, 2003, 178)

This passage reveals a lot not only about Ed but also about Jess; it makes Jess reflect upon her life, particularly about taking hormones. She does not feel comfortable about being “cute” as a man, but “twisted and sick” as a he-she. Being a he-she is how she identifies herself. Her image about herself is as a transgender and a lesbian; accepting herself “as a he felt like an ongoing indictment of [her] as a he-she” (Feinberg, 2003, 178). Although she is still “odd” having a man’s body, she does not look that “odd”, which makes people more comfortable about her. Anyway, she is different.

Jess’s neighbor, Ruth, is as different as Jess. Different in a similar “opposite” way, meaning Jess is a masculine woman while Ruth is a feminine man, a drag queen. This makes Jess feel comfortable about Ruth, although the latter is very hostile towards Jess the first times she attempted approaching. Jess feels so comfortable she exposes herself the second time they talked.

“I’m sorry to bother you,” I said, “but I didn’t make a very good impression before. I know you’ think I’m a man, but I’m not. I’m a woman.”
She sighed and unhooked the chain. “Listen,” she opened her door a little wider, “I don’t need a gender identity crisis on my footsteps.” (Feinberg, 2003, 248)

Curiously her mentioning of “a gender identity crisis” occurs at a time when Jess is coming to the recognition of her gender identity more comfortably!

As I have already mentioned, Ruth and Jess become best friends. As Sumac, the bushes Jess uses to illustrate her impression about Ruth’s hair, Ruth brings color, warmth and spice into Jess’s life. In addition to that, Jess can find “hope” with Ruth, literally and metaphorically speaking. Through Ruth, Jess meets Esperanza, something Jess has been searching for “for such a long time [, she] can’t believe [she has] finally found” (Feinberg, 2003, 267). Having Ruth and her close friends around also gives Jess a sense of family.

Their friendship is greatly important when Jess suffers an attack at the subway station, when going home at dawn. Three teenage boys are vandalizing the place and harassing an old man, when Jess moves getting trapped at one end of the station. Although Jess notices she is in danger, she gets ready for the fight. They start punching her, right after the leader asks what she is. She beats them but she is beaten, getting seriously injured. The boys punch her so hard, they break her jaw. Jess goes to the hospital and has a surgery to reconstruct her jaw, running away

from the emergency room as soon as she can manage to walk. She goes home and stays in bed for days. Ruth looks after her all the time. Trying to help, Ruth calls her in sick so that she can keep her job, but “the shot backfires”. Unconsciously, Ruth refers to Jess as “she”, although Jess at work was taken to be a man. Ruth apologizes, being immediately forgiven. Because of this incident, Ruth reminds Jess of Duffy. Now Jess can know better that Duffy has never intended to cause her any harm.

Duffy is the only biological man who has a positive impact on Jess. He is responsible for her engagement in the union. Duffy demands Jess is treated with respect and dignity inside and outside the factory. His greatest contribution to her is when she decides to “change the world”, as Mrs. Noble wishes. After Jess experiments going up on stage, on a street in New York, in front of a crowd and speak about her oppression, she asks for Duffy’s help, who promptly invites her to work with [him] as an organizer”, promising to back her up all the way (Feinberg, 2003, 299). Duffy, as most of the other characters mentioned, has always had faith in Jess, it just takes her a long path to find this faith herself.

In this analysis of the development of Jess Goldberg’s, the protagonist of *Stone Butch Blues*, by Leslie Feinberg, we can clearly perceive how complex human beings are. In Jess, her gender expression is just one aspect of her complexity. Going through Jess’s friends and lovers, we see that all the characters are complex, from her mother to Ruth. Regardless of their sexual orientation or gender identities and/or expressions, they deal with anguish, pain, prejudice, persecution. Jess proves that identity is not fixed. Identity has this ever-changing condition. It is a multifaceted and multilayered characteristic we unfold, unconsciously or consciously, throughout our lives.

I can say I have been changed by this book. Jess’s story altered my identity concerning my awareness about the hardships she goes through. As much as *Stone Butch Blues*, the other Feinberg’s writings and speeches I have had the chance to come across so far, made a difference to many people, including myself. Particularly to me, ze opened the possibility of seeing, not say feeling, the world through a transgender’s perspective. It is impossible to clearly perceive the inner conflicts and the social struggles transpeople face throughout their lives, unless they generously share their real or fictional stories with us.

3.4- Stoning the well

Judith Halberstam states that *Stone Butch Blues* “is the obvious counterpart to Radclyffe Hall’s *The Well of Loneliness*” (Halberstam, 1998, 292). The novels have many similarities in terms of the narrative itself and the themes developed in the stories. As I have already mentioned, *The Well*, as well as *SBB*, can be considered *bildungsroman*, for telling the protagonists’ quest in search of their identities. Since they are children, they have faced many hardships in life, learning from their experiences and being constantly transformed by them and the people that they relate to.

Jess is the narrator of her own story, differently from Stephen who has an omniscient narrator telling hers. Despite this distinction, both authors repeatedly give voice to their characters throughout the novels, by using direct speech whenever conversation between characters take place, as well as, when the protagonists reflect upon their lives. In addition to that, the use of richly detailed descriptions raises in the reader a sense of visualization of the story, also making possible for those who have not lived any similar experience to envisage how intense and varied the emotions transpeople deal with in their daily lives are.

Most themes presented in the novels are the same. Gender identity, gender expression, sexuality are a framework for the development of both stories. These major issues are unfolded in other more or less directly related topics, such as transgression, prejudice, oppression, butch-femme relationship, and social-economical hierarchy.

Both sagas start before the protagonists’ birth; however, these moments in their lives are quite different. Stephen’s mother, Lady Anna, not only expects and cherishes her pregnancy but also she fully counts on Sir Philip’s love, support, companionship and complicity. Stephen is supposed to add more happiness to their already perfect life. Jess’s parents’ marriage is exactly the opposite, since her parents seem frustrated with what their lives become after it. Jess is a crossroads in their intentions towards each other. Whereas her father believes she can save them and give meaning to her mother’s existence, her mother wants to prove he is not right about that, wishing to extinguish any hope he could have.

The suffering in Jess’s childhood begins then, followed by a strong rejection when she is born, being “left” in a bassinet. Although Stephen’s mother does not feel

truly pleased with having a “boyish” baby girl, she takes the responsibility to look after her daughter; Lady Anna is more concerned about the society’s judgment in terms of her role as a mother. In addition to that, Stephen is born within a wealthy family, which guarantees servants to help Lady Anna with the girl. Jess’s mother only finds some help among her Dineh neighbors. Still the two of them are judged because of their daughters’ appearance and behavior, but Lady Anna is spared of being questioned about that all the time.

In my understanding, Jess is more exposed to other people’s inquisition also because she relates to more people. Jess goes to school and has contact with some children in their neighborhood, especially among the Dineh, although she does not have friends then. Jess considers some pets, particularly dogs, which are in a shelter next to her house, the only friends she has. In a more financially stable familiar environment, Stephen has a private tutor and stays most of the time playing around and talking to her horse in Morton. The further she gets in terms of relating to people is observing the servants while they are doing their chores. Even when she has the chance to have contact with other girls and boys, or teens, she prefers to stay isolated or near her father.

As they grow up, Stephen still relates basically to her parents and Puddle, in addition to a couple of friends; professionally she dedicates herself to an “isolating” career as a writer. Reversely, Jess has an active social life, going to Tifka, the gay bar, and is compelled to some interaction at work in order to “survive” in it, which enlarges her circle of friends. Concerning love relationships, Stephen and Jess are extremely intense and passionate; although the latter varies her partners much more than the former; whereas Stephen actually falls in love three times in the novel, only dating and having sexual intimacy with one, Mary Llewellyn, Jess has many more love experiences.

Fathers play very distinct roles in Stephen’s and Jess’s lives. Jess’s father is mentioned three or four times when she is still a child, being repressive in relation to her when he sees her wearing his suit, and also prejudicial in relation to gender outlaws, clearly expressing his opinion about a “weirdo” he-she they met in the street (Feinberg, 2003, 20). Seeing herself as a he-she as well, Jess feels “nauseous and dizzy” not only in self-abjection but also for knowing what her father might think about her. Jess’s father simply wants her to fit in the system, regardless of what she wants, feels and says, even if it means sending her to a psychiatric clinic. Jess’s father’s

absence is shown through the very isolated moments in which he (negatively) interferes in her life.

Contrary to that, Sir Philip, Stephen's father, is supportive, careful and very present in everything that happens to his child, mainly in the problems she has to face. In a way, Stephen does not frustrate Sir Philip's expectation for a son, being that what she represents to him due to her masculinity both physical and behavioral. Sensing she is going to face hard times in her life, Sir Philip wants Stephen to be well prepared to overcome these hardships.

"Walk[ing] a difficult path" is not a privilege to any of them (Feinberg, 2003, 14). In fact, it happens to Jess much more frequently, being predicted by the Indian women. Those difficulties begin with their names. Jess and Stephen are unusual names for girls. Stephen is particularly masculine, which is questioned by the vicar in the local church, while Jess seems to be a nickname for Jesse or Jessica; it can be said that they have trans-names. Living in a more traditional society and time, Stephen is saved by the formality of being generally called by her family name, Miss Gordon, including in the army. This does not happen that regularly to Jess, who is still asked about the "meaning" of her name as an adult. Jess is called Goldberg sometimes, in the factories, but in the gay bar community she becomes friends with people, therefore the use of first names and nicknames is more frequent. This formality is also expressed in their usual "armors"; while Stephen often wears suits, Jess wears a leather jacket.

Odds are almost always part of the girl's lives. Their gender identity and gender expression are treated as if they are medical issues. Jess is taken to a mental hospital to get healed of her "disease". Although Stephen is never sent to any medical facility, the author uses the concept of "inversion", which basically deals with homosexuality as something abnormal, normally based on genetic factors.

Jess and Stephen live in very different historical moments. As I have just mentioned, England in the twenties, where and when Stephen lives, has very traditional and strict social codes, especially in higher social-economical levels, such as Stephen's. This works on Stephen's behalf since her parents are very respected and honorable, particularly her father. It is objectively portrayed in the novel, when Stephen goes to a jewelry store in London and the salesman notices the resemblance between her and her father. As Sir Philip was a regular customer in his

store, having bought even her mother's engagement ring there, he accepts her cheque without any reference.

The social-economical context in which they live also makes difference in the kind of violence they suffer. Stephen deals with verbal and mainly psychological "attacks"; the violence she suffers is more veiled, disguised. People usually talk about her, but not to her. The expression of their reproof is on the way they look at her. Even Lady Anna, who is constantly demanding more feminine manners from Stephen, does not do that using aggressive words, except for the moment she knows about Stephen's affair with Angela Crosby. Stephen does not give people the chance to exclude her, since she retracts herself from interaction; despite being visible for her apparent distinction, Stephen tries to protect herself setting a comfort-zone among the people she knows and even trusts.

Jess is physically attacked at least five times in the novel, the first when she is still a child on her way home. She is raped twice and beaten almost to death towards the end of the novel. In addition to that, Jess is clearly and objectively attacked with derogatory and intimidating words and questions. Jess also has some kind of comfort-zone among the butches and femmes from the bars; however, these people are targets of similar attacks as well. In fact, being with them, I would say, is collectively defying society, which led others, including cops to collectively attack them!

As I understand, this great difference in the way Stephen and Jess relate to the world, and *vice versa*, refers mainly to the Stonewall movement. Stephen has a delicate internal conflict for being neither "in" nor "out of the closet". She cannot be closeted since she is a transgender, which "is based on a stigma that is visible" (Sedgwick, 1990, 75); neither does she come out to people, except for her lovers, her mother and few friends. Although Stephen can manage to find people which share the same kind of difference she has, they are not politically organized to fight for their rights. The sexual minorities are still not institutionalized.

When Jess is a young adult, the social-political scenario is much different from that. These sexual minorities not only are organized but also they are taking actions to claim for their civil rights getting together with other minorities. Being frequently persecuted and harassed by the cops in the bars, gays, lesbians, and transpeople, decide to rebel against those police raids which triggered the Stonewall riots. The burden of "coming out" does not happen to Jess the same way. While she is a butch

she cannot avoid being noticed as one; however, when she decides to pass as a man, she needs to acquire invisibility. At this point of her life, she cannot come out or be exposed, as she is both by Duffy and Ruth.

Whenever Jess and Stephen are dealing with people that are equally part of the sexual minorities, they feel comfortable, being fully understood because the others share their anguishes as well. However, heterosexual people cannot perceive their everyday fight for life, except Duffy and Martin. The sexist society in which we live simply empowers men as the strong sex, subjugating women as weak and dependant. Lesbians (butches in particular) are seen as women trying to imitate men. Duffy and Martin are sensitive enough to see beyond this stereotyping, becoming friends with Jess and Stephen, respectively.

Martin points at many aspects implicated in a long-term lesbian relationship, when he tries to convince Stephen that Mary would live better with him. However, Duffy's desperation in claiming that Jess is not treated with respect and dignity when he takes her to the hospital reminds us about humanness towards another human being. It is interesting to mention that Duffy is able to put himself in Jess's position, understanding, at least in part, her daily struggle.

On the other hand, there are Roger Antrim and Jim Boney in the stories as well. Roger embodies all masculinity and virility Stephen wishes to have. As a boy, he teases and provokes Stephen not only by saying she is an awkward girl but also by being free to climb trees and perform other simple activities exclusive for boys. Boney tries to subjugate Jess in the factories, by shaking her confidence. Roger and Boney might represent the great majority of the sexist heterosexual men, not to say they show how prejudicial and exclusory society is.

In addition to these men characters, in my opinion, there are similar ones in terms of features and roles in relation to the protagonist all through the stories. Mrs. Noble can be seen in Mrs. Puddleton, as Ruth and her friends, in Brockett and Seymour. In different ways, Butch Al and Jackie teach Jess, as Barbara and Jamie teach Stephen. The two couples show, consciously or not, that life can be even more difficult and unfair than the life they have known, particularly Stephen, for having inherited enough money to have a stable and comfortable life. Jess has always felt on her flesh the hardship of overcoming poverty, in addition to prejudice, which Stephen is only able to see through relating to Barbara and Jamie.

Stephen and Jess learn a lot from the people they relate to, especially their lovers and the suffering for the “breaking-ups”. These moments of harsh suffering, added to the physical and/or psychological abuses turned the two protagonists into stones, stone butches. Jess reveals that “there’s a place somewhere inside of [her] where [she has] never been touched before”, being petrified by Ruth coming close to “touch [her] there” (Feinberg, 2003, 270). Similarly, Stephen’s isolation and commitment to her writings are indications of this untouchability. In my reading, their stoneness goes beyond avoiding others’ physical touch in their intimacy. They also wish to keep emotionally protected, untouched.

Self-protection might mean attack in certain situations. Although both Stephen and Jess are very impulsive and sometimes aggressive, they tend to avoid quarrels and fights. Whenever they are provocative or truculent they are reacting against offenses, attacks. Despite their reactive aggressiveness, at a certain point in both stories, they are referred to as peacemakers. In my point of view, they really are peacemakers trying to do what Feinberg suggests as the only way to achieve better lives to everyone: fighting together, not against each other. With different resources and approaches, Stephen and Jess want to change the world, sensitize people about the difficulties they have to face in order to survive, so that we can actually achieve freedom.

4- TRANSWHAT?!

Reaching the end of my thesis drives me back to some questions that puzzled my mind at first place, since I started my research. How are the identities of the main characters in *The Well of Loneliness* and *Stone Butch Blues* formed, developed? How much their sexuality and their gender expression impact on their identity? Do their bodies have any influence in the development of their identity? And finally, are Stephen and Jess transgenders or transsexuals?

After reading the novels and knowing their authors' lives, at least in the relevant details all those questions teased my curiosity and interest which moved me into my research. With so many doubts, my first step was to understand the distinction between two concepts that are usually considered the same – sex and gender. Simone de Beauvoir, Judith Butler and Michel Foucault are hallmarks in the studies of these two issues, therefore, becoming my starting point.

Beauvoir introduced me to the Theory of the Body, raising my awareness to how the biological body is related to the person's sex, since the binarism man/woman is attached to the male/female biological sex. However, Beauvoir calls our attention to the limitations of the body in determining what a man or a woman is. Butler reinforces that by stating that men and women are constructs, which use the bodies as arguments to the elaboration of these constructs, the bases that generate the concepts of men and women. Those concepts are created by the dominant discourses that stereotype what is considered masculine and feminine, concerning social behaviors. Masculine refers to a male feature as well as feminine refers to what is expected from women. These models dictate what a man or a woman must wear, how they must act, whom they must "love".

Not matching these stereotypes means being excluded, segregated, as forms of being punished. This idea of fitting the system or being punished is explained by Foucault, who also defends the dominating discourses. The discourses establish the rules, which consequently result in people breaking these rules. Those who break these laws are, according to Foucault, "condemned" bodies, since the stereotypes are based on the biological distinction between male and female (Rabinow, 1991, 176).

Butler suggests that gender is related to one's performance in accordance with the social determinations or not. These variations of the norms give room to the

diversity I have been studying for the last two years. I got to know that there are two categories of gender, namely gender identity and gender expression. The first is related to a personal perception of one's own gender; whereas the second refers to how the person is seen by the others. When a person's gender identity does not fit the biological sex, the person is not necessarily seen as a gender outlaw; however, if gender expression and biological sex do not obey the norms, we have the transgenders. Transgenders suffer a lot of prejudice because they cannot be invisible, since their difference can be seen in their bodies and behavior. With Jamison Green's explanation of what being a transgender means, I learned that this concept applies to everyone "whose appearance or characteristics are perceived to be gender atypical" (Currah, 2000, 3). Being a transgender is directly related to one's gender expression then.

Understanding transgenderism in these terms led me to study sexuality as well. I focused my research on two concepts I was dealing with: lesbian sexual orientation and transsexuality. The former is how the two protagonists are considered for being biological women sexually inclined towards women. The latter is a concept that may match or not Stephen and/or Jess. A transsexual person lives within a conflict between his or her physical sex and gender identity, according to Green (Currah, 2000, 3). Not all transsexuals choose to have sex-reassignment surgeries and hormone therapy, which makes it difficult to decide if a person is a transsexual or not unless he/she states it.

Since both protagonists are lesbians, I detailed my studies in this category, particularly the butches and their usual partners, the femmes. Whereas butches display a masculine gender expression, femmes are as feminine as or even more feminine than most heterosexual women. Although the butch-femme relationship may resemble the heterosexual system, according to Randolph Trumbach, among butches and femmes there is an establishment of roles without the power relations present in the heterosexual couple. Jess and her relationships illustrate the butch-femme coupling since she relates to femmes, which does not happen to Stephen, who relates to "women". In the 1920s, "coming out", exposing one's sexual orientation was something unusual, except when invisibility was not possible. This is a crucial distinction between a butch and a femme, based on their gender expression.

Butler claims that a person's gender must be prioritized in relation to the development of this person's identity. That called my attention because mothers and even people in general currently want to know about a baby's sex months before he or she is born; having this information triggers many definitions about that person's life, such as the name, the color of the clothes, the decoration of the bedroom, the kinds of toys he or she will be allowed to play, not to say about some further projections, like the professional career.

All those expectations happen very clearly in relation to Stephen. Believing she is a boy, her parents choose a masculine name, and make plans for the school she will study. Stephen is a biological woman who feels sexually attracted to women which makes her a lesbian, as I have previously mentioned. With a very masculine body, a masculine behavior, wearing masculine clothes and performing some masculine roles, such as hunting, driving and exercising, she is a butch, being read as a man, which makes her a transgender too. But, can Stephen be considered a transsexual?

In fact, this is how I read Stephen: a non-operative transsexual. Although being a transsexual does not exclude being a transgender, according to Green (Currah, 2000, 3), many aspects directed my reading towards this conclusion. Stephen says she wants to be a man; in fact, she is identified as a boy/man many times, since she is a child.

[...] Doesn't Miss Stephen look exactly like a boy? I believe she must be a boy with them shoulders, and them funny gawky legs she's got on her.
And Stephen would say gravely: 'Yes, of course I'm a boy. I'm young Nelson [...] I must be a boy, 'cause I feel exactly like one [...]' (Hall, 1990, 20)

Furthermore, Stephen uses all the resources she has at that time in order to change her body. Physical exercises and clothing, also wearing short hair were the available steps towards adapting her body to her gender identity. In addition to her childish desire of becoming a boy, her apparent intentions to combine accordingly body and gender expression, "the category of inversion [is] in fact [a] key to the emergence of the transsexual—to the interlinked literal and literary construction of the transsexual" (Prosser, 2001, 130).

Although, similarly to Stephen, Jess is considered a butch lesbian, consequently also a transgender, she is far from being that assertive about her masculine identity. Jess questions if she is a boy or a girl, a man or a woman, most of

the time from the beginning of the novel. Her feelings are always ambiguous or doubtful about that.

“I was in a place that felt very old, [...] I felt like I belonged with them, you know?”
 “[...] In my dream I had a beard and my chest was flat. It made me so happy. It was like a part of me that I can’t explain, you know?”
 [...] “I’m not even sure I felt like a woman.”
 The moonlight illuminated Theresa’s frown. “Did you feel like a man?”
 I shook my head. “No. That’s the strange part. I didn’t feel like a woman or a man, and I liked how I was different.” (Feinberg, 2003, 143)

Again when Jess decides to undergo the hormonal treatment in order to pass as a man, it is merely a question of surviving. Theresa breaks up with her for seeing this medical intervention as a manner of “becoming a man”. Although she is able to understand Jess’s reasons for taking this decision, it does not change the fact that both hormones and the breast reduction surgery will adjust the combination between sex and gender. Jess sees in passing AS a man her only choice and counter-arguments that “[she]’d still be a butch, [.. e]ven on hormones” (Feinberg, 2003, 151). Hormones may change her body but they will not change her gender identity.

Like the fictional character, F. M. Chester, a nurse from Louisville, refers to the difficulty of living “as ambiguously gender” (Currah, 2000, 31). Like Chester, Jess rejects the idea of “becoming a man”, despite all the discrimination she faces for “present[ing herself] as gender deviant” (Currah, 2000, 31); therefore, she quits taking the hormone shots getting back to her in-between position.

Jess’s transsexuality, or the closer she gets to it, can be considered an analogy to the previously mentioned concept Athena Douris calls “situational homosexuality”.¹⁵ Hormone shots in Jess’s life are a similar situation to the homosexual relationships among men in prison, example given by Douris in her article; both actions take place due to a momentary need.

Besides these reflections upon transgenderism and transsexuality, there is another concept that I would like to develop a little further: the stone butch.

Stone butch does not have only one meaning, in fact, this concept varies according to the theorists who define the term. I particularly agree with Judith Halberstam’s ideas. Halberstam defines stoneness as “the literalization of castration” (Halberstam, 1998, 112); in other words, stoneness functions refraining the impulse of having pleasure, in order to guarantee pleasure to the partner. According to

¹⁵ <http://www.libidomag.com/nakedbrunch/archive/athena01.html>

Halberstam, there may be stoneness in any sex, in and out of the binary. The stone butch is a mannish woman, in terms of behavior, style, and identity. Another element that turns butches into stones is suffering.

I myself see suffering as something inherent to the butch condition, since her gender expression cannot be disguised or hidden. It is my personal belief that becoming a stone is also based on their sensitivity, meaning most butches suffer in a way or another; however, those who are more sensitive, being more severely hurt by their suffering, become stone. I see Jess and Stephen as extremely sensitive and humane people; therefore, although they suffer in very distinct manners, the two protagonists in the novels become stone butches.

The same process that turns them into stone also turns them into brave heroines, since they feel the necessity of doing something in order to change the world. Either becoming a writer or an activist, each one of them finds a way to talk to people, to make these people aware about the hardships they have to face for being different.

This issue of being different drives my thought to the meaning of identity. Am I what I am, and “that’s all”! Throughout my research and my life experience I have noticed that I actually am what I am, but I may unfold in many other Is. Flexibility, versatility are current words nowadays, contrary to this idea of I in an unchangeable position. Every aspect of our lives is getting so instantaneously mutable, forcing us to follow this trend.

Although Stephen does not live in our times, even then, maturity, experience, contact with other people changes her. Jess is a person who lives this accelerated post-modern times, which exposes her to the constant changes of the world, including, in her case, Stonewall. Stonewall is a milestone for the sexual minorities for giving them the opportunity to feel part of a numerous minority. They were not one single voice which would not have the chance to speak. As a group, they are able to show the world they are here, have always been and always will be, deserving respect and consideration as anybody else.

This time of being considered equal has not come yet, but with people like Leslie Feinberg, Judith Halberstam, Jamison Green and many others, it will come. Feinberg calls us for fighting for our rights as human beings. Then I move back to how much Jess and Stephen can be identified as transgenders or transsexuals concluding that it does not matter, in fact. They are transpeople; they are crossing

boundaries, “what [they have] got between their legs” does not make any difference in terms of their humanity (Feinberg, 200, 2006, 1).

I can say that Feinberg, together with the representations Jess and Stephen stand for, has moved me from my comfort-zone. I am positive that his writings and words have on many people, regardless of their sexuality, the same impact they had on me. It is just a question of time!! And communitarian effort!!

In the end: “Everyone is different”, in a way (Feinberg, 2006, 31)!

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