New Storytelling: Transitions from the Past

Introduction

Celebrated American writer Gore Vidal’s early work included the publi-
cation of the novel *The City and the Pillar* in 1948 (see Figure 1.1). This
offered challenging representations of male homosexual desire as non-
stereotypical and all-American (discussed below). In the documentary
*The Education of Gore Vidal* (Deborah Dickson, 2003, US) he tells us of
his subsequent rejection by literary critics at that time, revealing a shift
in career potentials, and his development as a spokesman in support of
homosexual liberty:

TV became my medium, not only as a writer for television plays, but
as a performer, as a voice.

[Gore Vidal speaking in 1967 on CBS News]: It is as natural to be
homosexual as it is to be heterosexual, and the difference between
a homosexual and a heterosexual is about the difference between
somebody who has brown eyes and somebody who has blue eyes.

[Retort from the interviewer, off camera]: Who says so?

[Gore Vidal]: I say so! It is a completely natural act from the beginning
of time.

Despite Gore Vidal’s initial rejection in 1948 for the publication of an
audacious book, which foregrounded same-sex desire as normative, his
career developed within the medium of television. His support for the
‘normality’ of homosexual identity is indicative of his active pursuit
of confidence in self, repressing myths which contain same-sex desire.
While later in his career Gore Vidal would become an icon in American
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Figure 1.1  Gore Vidal depicted on the cover of the revised edition of his groundbreaking book *The City and the Pillar*. Reproduced by kind permission of Abacus, an imprint of Little, Brown Book Group

literature, and *The City and the Pillar* would be resituated as a defining rather than as a problematic text, he is discussed here for his potential to challenge oppressive traditions in storytelling which deny homosexual desire. Gore Vidal’s brave and robust testament is indicative not only of his career and steadfast identity (discussed below), but also of the essence of new storytelling for gay and lesbian identity, which (I argue) rejects mythologies and histories of shame.

Consequently, this chapter explores a potential framework for new storytelling within the media, revealing instances of narrative progression where gay men and lesbians reject imposed mythic identities of the past and create new, optimistic and self-focused constructions. I argue that this involves transitions in storytelling, where new storytellers break free from the containment of stigma, shame and repressive myth, in service of narrative development and recreation. Whilst later in this book, I foreground the issue of self-reflexivity (Chapter 2), and how this is a