

The Caricature of Love

Cleckley's lesser-known and more provocative treatise on sexuality and sexual deviance provides a good deal of insight into contemporary sexual decadence and anti-psychiatry.

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Hervey Cleckley has been described as one of the most influential psychiatrists of the 20th century¹. His seminal work *The Mask of Sanity* formed the basis of modern-day clinical-psychiatric and psychometric conceptualizations of the construct of psychopathy. It is his lesser-known work, *The Caricature of Love*, published in 1957, that is perhaps his most ambitious, thought-provoking, and philosophical work on the concept of pathological sexuality, including (as he viewed it at the time writing in the late 1950's), homosexuality. Indeed, as Harrison Koehli has pointed out in his own discussion of this book, Cleckley viewed *The Caricature of Love* as his best².

Hervey Cleckley, M.D.

The Caricature of Love

*A Discussion of Social, Psychiatric,
and Literary Manifestations
of Pathologic Sexuality*

What I found most compelling about *The Caricature of Love* was his vast survey of how pathologic sexuality, including what he termed ‘anti-sexuality’, has been historically depicted in art, especially in the literary expressive form, and how such depiction of non-normative sexual impulses and sexual practices, can become disseminated through a culture, acting inimically to healthy cultural sexual development and threatening civilizational health and stability.

“Out of theoretical and unverifiable surmises currently upheld in some schools of psychology and psychiatry, specious assumptions have emerged. Many of them promote unnecessary confusion in the immature; some, I maintain, constitute an insidious and unwarranted impeachment of orthodox sexual love.

If we define pathology as health, our search for health will be misleading. If we affirm that smallpox and typhoid fever are normal physiologic manifestations, can we consistently advocate vaccination or inoculation or even the following of ordinary levels of hygiene?”

“It is an old belief that sexual perversion thrives during the decadence of nations. Such a belief probably cannot be tested by the methods of science. No more statistical evidence for or against it is available today than a hundred, or two thousand, years ago.”

Indeed, it struck me as presaging with remarkable clarity the type of non-normative, age-inappropriate sexual content queer theorists, and queer theory genre authors, have injected into the adolescent literary space via such books as the graphic novel *Gender Queer* and *It Feels So Good To Be Yourself*. These and other similar works have understandably been the subject of intense efforts to limit or restrict in taxpayer-funded public grade schools and library venues by concerned parents and public officials. This ‘normalization’ of statistically deviant (to put it technically) gender-confusion and associated sexual behavior has been undoubtedly facilitated by professional medical, psychiatric, and psychological organizations, such as the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) and the American Psychological Association (APA), who have legitimized the dubious constructs of ‘gender identity’ and practice of ‘gender-affirming’ care, while also propagandizing both using low-quality science lacking in rigor and expert peer review. Indeed, it’s almost as if Cleckley saw the specter of gender ideology looming in the future:

“This is one of the oldest and most obvious forms of casuistry. If we juggle with words, and with facts, so loosely and romantically, is it surprising to find confident announcements, in the name of science, that tax credulity?”

When sacred dogma has been rendered inaccessible to direct test, is it not possible that insight may eventually emerge if we patiently observe this process of reductio ad absurdum?



Illustration from *Gender Queer* by Maia Kobabe



GiRL is Ruthie's gender identity.



Illustration from *It Feels Good to be Yourself* by Theresa Thron

Sexuality and Literature. In *The Caricature of Love*, Cleckley notes that the literary artists so often heralded as possessing the greatest insight into mankind and the human condition are often the ones whose work expresses deviant sexuality, disdain for women's sexuality, as well as a repudiation of healthy sexuality and the expression of love between man and woman. I pointed out above how this is reflected in contemporary children's 'gender identity' literature, but Cleckley also drew on a wide swath of sources and examples from adult artists and adult literature to illustrate how unconventional (and more strongly pathological) views on sex and sexuality have been disseminated to the wider culture, often with the imprimatur or approval of academic professional and bodies that proclaim such work as possessing immense scholarly value or human wisdom. For example, in chapter 14, entitled "The Nobel Prize and the New Hellas" Cleckley presents the example of Andre Gide who won the Nobel Prize for literature, and specifically his work *Corydon*, of which Cleckley notes:

*...Yet Gide is very serious. It is plain to anyone who reads *Corydon* that the writer is not mischievously trying to see just how far the credulity of mortals can be stretched, or how outlandish a premise a persuasive and articulate man can induce his more naive listeners to swallow as fact.*

More specifically:

Corydon insists that 'the passionate attachment' of boys and young men to older men, whether or not these older men carry out complete homosexual acts with them, is far more conducive to true virility and proper development than heterosexual love

Further, Cleckley notes that:

*Gide argues vehemently that the orientations, relations, and standards just discussed should not merely be tolerated but should be accepted officially as a natural and biologically conventional way of life. *Corydon* devoutly urges such a change 'for God's sake and for the good of the state.'* (15)

Cleckley then asks the reader:

To such a proposal, physicians and teachers of youth should have some reaction. This is the unequivocal judgment of a writer regarded by our most distinguished critics with reverent admiration, of an intellect certified, one might say, as among the greatest of our century. Should ordinary citizens and parents be too humble to challenge such a judgment? Should we assume that our distaste for Gide's proposal can be explained only by our limited capacity for artistic values? Or by our blindness to some superior esthetic standard that is plain to greater spirits? Or, perhaps, by resistance caused only by our unadmitted longings for the relations praised by Gide?

In turn, I would ask those reading this essay: Is not this state of affairs precisely where things are in our culture with respect to the anti-science madness of gender ideology? Of the passive

acceptance of the delusional notions that gender may be ‘fluid’ or ‘expansive’? Of the tacit conveyance of this message to toddlers as young as 2 years of age? Of the normalization of sexuality that is clearly non-normative or age-appropriate? Even directed at toddlers as young as 2? That such thinking legitimizes propaganda that unnecessarily confuses adolescent youth who then severely alter their physical body at the hands of willing surgeons?

Speaking further of Gide and similar literary artists, such as Oscar Wilde, who are revered for their literary contributions, especially in the humanities and social sciences, Cleckley notes:

...The modest, introspective young student of the humanities may actually suffer considerable confusion before he dares accept his own unassuming judgment as more accurate than that of a loudly acclaimed poet and man of letters, of the greatest Athenian philosopher, and of a Nobel Prize winner. Should it be discovered that the genius whose works he is studying was a homosexual, what will our undeviated but sometimes still insecure and dangerously impressionable adolescent make of such announcements that psychiatry or psychology has proved scientifically that homosexuality is normal? Is it possible that some groping and confused teen-agers may be persuaded to accept as esthetic gospel sad and cynical reactions to a specific illness?*

*Cleckley italicized the word scientifically in the above quote.

A finical disdain for the normal and natural warmth of life seems deeply characteristic of many who have become the high priests of culture in this paradoxical epoch.

Cleckley further observes, quoting Edith Hamilton in chapter 23 “The Fox and the Grapes”:

human reactivity. On this generalized reversal of ordinary evaluation, Edith Hamilton in her article on William Faulkner makes important observations:

"I detest nature," Picasso said. He is the spokesman for the art of the age, our age, for the music we are listening to, the pictures we are looking at, the books we are reading. Today the usual and the normal, which is to say the natural, is being discarded. What is called abstract art has taken a foremost place. One of the most recent prizes was given to a sculptor for her figure of an animal shape, not like any animal that ever lived, but a representation of an indeterminate animal vaguely applicable to many kinds of living creatures. The sculptor had turned away from nature to depict an image she had conceived, a form existing only in her mind. When Picasso detests nature he is doing the same thing. He shuts out the detestable world his eyes show him and takes refuge in the inner world of himself where he perceives shapes only dimly connected with things that have actual existence.

Our artists are escaping from reality. This is no new thing, to be sure. In almost all ages there have been artists who escaped. What is new in our age is the direction they are taking. In the past a detestation of nature, a determination not to be dominated by fact, led persistently to the land of heart's desire where everyone and everything was good and true and beautiful. Now it leads to just the opposite, where nothing is good or true

My X post on this passage in TCOL.

Cleckley on Homosexuality: A Critical Appraisal. On the broader topic of homosexuality, Cleckley's writing clearly indicates he viewed homosexuality as pathologic; as a *psychiatric condition*. However, I think Cleckley, ironically so, created his own 'mini-caricature' of homosexuality on which he based his larger view of pathologic sexuality. That is, Cleckley focused on a particular 'class' of male homosexual that one might describe in street language as the 'flamer' prototype; the flamboyant, the garrulous, the histrionic, excessively effeminate and sociable, rather than provide a generalized portrait of the personality characteristics and interpersonal behavior of the 'full population' of homosexuals. This may be in part due to the fact that at the time of his writing, only the former had come to the attention of clinicians and the larger public. As the gay rights movement enjoyed success, and public acceptance of homosexuality became more widespread, more and more homosexuals who otherwise may have not disclosed their orientation did so, thus allowing a fuller characterization of the personality and behavioral characteristics of the homosexual than would have been possible during Cleckley's time. I should stress here, however, that even in presenting a caricature of the male homosexual, it is clear throughout Cleckley's writing that he take a compassionate view of their deviance, emphasizing their humanity in other domains of functioning and a need to consider their condition (as he viewed it) as one deserving of compassion and humility, rather

than scorn and condescension. In short, he viewed the condition sympathetically as a practicing psychiatrist.

Renaissance Man

by Corbett H. Thigpen, M.D.*

Hervey Milton Cleckley was a master physician and instinctively practiced the art of medicine. He had the simplicity of true greatness, the open mind of true wisdom, and the meekness of true strength.

HERVEY MILTON CLECKLEY became one of only four psychiatrists in Georgia in private practice when he joined the staff of the Medical College of Georgia (MCG) about 1937. His vast knowledge, innate understanding of people, gentleness of manner, and capability of conveying the goodness of the true physician quickly endeared him to patients and students alike. He rapidly advanced to the forefront of American psychiatry. He culminated his psychiatric honors when he recently became a Life Fellow of the American Psychiatric Association. Acclamation of his talents are numerous.

To students who were at MCG in the 1940s and '50s, these were the legendary years. These were the times when it was said that, "Giants walked the halls"; Virgil Sydenstricker, Perry Volpitto, Lombard Kelly, William F. Hamilton, Richard Torpin, Robert Greenblatt, and Ray Ahlquist. Of equal stature and taller than most was Hervey Milton Cleckley. His lectures were so entrancing one could hardly take notes. He was a remarkable teacher — a living legend, and one whose reputation will persist.

No aspect of psychiatry has failed



Dr. Hervey M. Cleckley

to be graced by his learning and his pen: psychopathology, psychotherapy, psychopharmacology, electrotherapy, psychologic theory — anything dealing with functions of the mind. He wrote dozens of papers in psychiatry and wrote many chapters in textbooks.

He initially became world renowned with the first edition of *The Mask of Sanity* in 1940. He revised it several times, still of the opinion that no one knew the cause of the psychopathic personality and no one knew a cure.

In 1957, he received the Georgia Writers Association Literary Achievement Award for Non-Fiction after he co-authored *The Three Faces of Eve*. That book also became world renowned. Both of these books are to this day considered classics in psychiatry. He was one of the few people who lived to see themselves and their work adapted to motion pictures by Hollywood.

The third book, and the one which he always believed to be his best and most important, is little known. It is the study of pathologic sexuality done in a straightforward, scientific manner, without pandering. He was particularly intrigued by its influence on social, psychiatric, and literary manifestations. He did not reject the pervert as a person — indeed, he had the greatest of compassion for these unfortunates. Powerful and persuasive is his conviction that love between man and woman is among the most noble of mankind's emotions. He handled his words with the grace of a fencer, but they fell with the force of a mace. Few copies of this great study, *The Caricature of Love*, are still available.

Doctor Cleckley once said, "If ever I could have a last will and testament, I would more than anything want it said of me that I saw the utter folly of the Freudian theory and did what I could to reveal its foolishness.

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Indeed, the success of the gay rights movement to obtain equality and widespread acceptance of homosexuality as something that was not pathologic had a consequence that perhaps few saw on the horizon. As Andrew Sullivan has noted, the more fringe elements of the LGBTQ++++ (add your additional text for esoteric identity here) and radical gender ideology movements have undermined the original success of the gay rights movement by pushing the sorts of pathologic and non-normative ‘liberatory’ sexuality that Cleckley was describing under the imprimatur of the original gay rights movement (see also Janice Raymond’s The Transsexual Empire: The Making of the She-Male for a similar critique of transgender ideology).

But since Obergefell? As many of us saw our goals largely completed and moved on, the far left filled the void. The movement is now rhetorically as much about race and gender as it is about sexual orientation (“intersectionality”), prefers alternatives to marriage to marriage equality, sees white men as “problematic,” masculinity as toxic, gender as fluid, and race as fundamental. They have no desire to seem “virtually normal”; they are contemptuous of “respectability politics” — which means most politics outside the left. Above all, they have advocated transgenderism, an ideology that goes far beyond recognizing the dignity and humanity and civil equality of trans people into a critique of gender, masculinity, femininity, and heterosexuality. “Live and let live” became: “If you don’t believe gender is nonbinary, you’re a bigot.” I would be shocked if this sudden lurch in the message didn’t in some way negatively affect some straight people’s views of gays.

[Sullivan piece link](#)

Cleckley notes in chapter 19, “A Crusade to Nonsense”:

There are many styles in which life can be rejected, in which love can be portrayed in bitter and unhappy caricature. Those who come forward to enlighten us on these subjects usually seem to regard themselves as exponents of a precious freedom, as liberal thinkers who boldly dare to strike off our shackles and guide us on the road to truth and bliss.

The larger public has unsurprisingly reacted to the infusion of children and adolescents’ media, literature, and direct educational pedagogy with radical ‘liberatory’ gender ideology sentiments, in addition to the performative displays of increasingly deviant sexual behavior in children’s literature, on social media, and at ‘[Gay] Pride’ events, with strong derision, disdain, and push back.

Social Conformity to Biological Reality: The Need for Constraint. Biological reality is the recognition that there are only two sexes: man (male) and woman (female). It also is the recognition that the statistically normative expression of sexual behavior is directed between men and women. This statistical reality is, of course, grounded in evolutionary biology and the need for the human species to propagate itself. Despite the acceptance of homosexuality as socially acceptable and the recognition that it is likely mediated at least in part by genetic influences, it remains 'statistically deviant.' In some contrast, modern-day notions of transgender identity, gender fluidity, and gender expansivity are purely social phenomenon, untethered from any biological or genetical reality. They may be best characterized as personality psychology manifesting concurrent with other clinical psychopathology, especially internalizing psychopathology and autism spectrum disorder psychopathology. Accordingly, any healthy society must facilitate social conformity to biological reality in order to ensure societal stability and civic efficiency for the polity. As American sociologist and cultural critic Phillip Rieff pointed out, this is reflected in "God-Terms" that limit man to express everything he may desire in his thoughts, feelings, and imaginations:

By "God-terms" I mean values that forbid certain actions and thereby encourage others. "God-terms" express those significant inhibitions that characterize us all within a culture. They are compelling truths. To take God-terms unseriously, while admitting their existence, seemed to Wilde the main, saving "pagan idea." Wilde put himself entirely on the side of the pagans, against Jerusalem, because he knew that the terms in which our particular God was conceived could exist only so long as they limited the capacity of man to express everything; the "pagan idea" was treated, in the nineteenth century by a small group of supremely talented European minds, as the refusal of this limit.

Passage from *The Feeling Intellect*, Phillip Rieff

Such limitation is necessary for "if all that counts is the gratification of the individual...":

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The Law Becomes Deranged

which amounts necessarily to an attitude of moral relativism," that has also characterized Supreme Court decisions. Yet, Bork points out, this undercuts the very basis of law. If all that counts is the gratification of the individual, then morality is completely privatized and society may make no moral judgments that are translatable into law.¹⁶

Passage from *Madness in the Streets: How Psychiatry and the Law Abandoned the Mentally Ill*, Isaac & Armat.

The reader may note from the above the importance of classical organized religions in facilitating this social conformity (e.g., Judeo-Christianity), as well as the contemporary dangers faced by society not only in the context of an arguably post-religious culture, but also one in which, as Fr Calvin Robinson has noted, religion itself has become corrupted by an 'ideology of compassion' and a corrupted notion of inclusivity. This is especially playing out in the Catholic church where Pope Francis's new same-sex teaching and progressive views on sexuality have alienated many within the church, leading to internal dissension. This weaponized ideology of compassion and inclusivity has been used as a cudgel to abolish or mitigate traditional religious doctrine which limits the expression of statistically deviant behavior under the pretense of 'affirming one's authentic self.'

Although not expressing directly the thoughts about, it is clear in *The Caricature of Love* that Cleckley was concerned about an increasingly decadent culture in some decline due to what he perceived as a perversion of normative patterns of sexual behavior and love between man and woman, and its inculcation into society via artistic intellectuals, academic elites, and even the credentialed mental health class who all portrayed or gave appearances of such behavior "as achievements of exquisite discernment, as a precious wisdom available to only the elect, to coteries of sexually distorted and often brilliant intellectuals who in each generation are drawn together through veneration for the morbid." Expressed in present day language we might say it was intentionally meant to reflect a sort of higher state of being, a valorization of a particular lifestyle amongst the most intellectually gifted, something to aspire to, or simply as nothing more than statistically normative sexual behavior itself and completely ordinary, rather than seeing it for what it was: the perversion of normative sexual behavior; the caricature of normal sexual relations between man and woman. Cleckley writes:

This point may perhaps be worth noting: It has become the rule in psychiatric literature to use terms such as "immature" or "archaic" in referring to pathologic sexual conduct or even psychotically destructive activity in the adult. Such euphemisms may avoid implication of disrespect or condemnation of a patient, attitudes which all agree are out of place in medical relations. But sometimes real confusion is promoted by insistently implying that any and every sort of criminal or pathologic behavior is normal for the immature.

A Healthy Society Must Reinforce the Expression of Statistically Normative Sexual Behavior. Such reinforcement is not just the emphasis of normal sexual relations between man and woman, but also ensuring its normative contours are reflected in degree of expression as well. That is, as Cleckley notes in chapter 25 "Medusa":

The "wolf" or "Don Juan" who tries to have sexual relations with as many women as he can is likely to reveal himself also as antisexual in some important respects. Somewhat like the invert, he cannot really function as an adequate lover or wholehearted sexual partner, nor can he find anyone whom he genuinely accepts as a mate. So he accumulates disappointments and grows even more bitter in his convictions that love is a fraud and that sex is eventually a bitter frustration. The great promiscuity of inverters is not a contradiction, but rather a confirmation of the antisexuality that, I believe, is universal

among them.

It's remarkable to read *The Caricature of Love*, and recognize that so much of the current ascendance of transgender ideology and the disseminating and propagandizing of it to the public by radical ideologues in academia, media, and entertainment was well underway decades ago before its emergence into the public consciousness. The seeds from which the liberatory foundation of transgender ideology sprouts can be seen as a larger more profound sense of 'anti-sexuality' and the rejection of the heteronormative expressions of sexuality and love between a man and a woman that Cleckley so vividly describes.

When sensuous impulses become integrated with hate, disgust, or contempt, instead of with positive feelings, we see the beginning of a deeply pathologic process. Here we have not only a perversion of eroticism but a perversion also of other important human capacities which become enlisted in the unnatural cause.

It is imperative for parents, educators, public intellectuals, and others to continue to push back against psychopathological gender ideology and larger disdain for the normative expression of sexuality and love that is confusing young children and adolescents, leading them to make dangerous and irreversible changes to their body. More broadly, the propagandizing of gender ideology also creates a culture premised on a narcissistic liberation from both biological constraint and social convention. The recent creation of Bentkey, a subscription video service for children, by Jeremy Boreing and platformed by The Daily Wire is precisely the sort of effort that has the potential to mitigate and reverse the encroach of pathological sexuality in the larger cultural milieu. Such 'cultural righting' efforts are crucial for children and adolescents, who as Cleckley knew so well, are most vulnerable to the propagandizing of psychopathological sexuality.

1. Lilienfeld, S. O., Watts, A. L., Smith, S. F., Patrick, C. J., & Hare, R. D. (2018). Hervey Cleckley (1903–1984): Contributions to the study of psychopathy. *Personality Disorders: Theory, Research, and Treatment*, 9(6), 510.
2. Thigpen, C. H. (1985). Renaissance man [Hervey Milton Cleckley]. *Journal of the Medical Association of Georgia*, 74, 20–22.