" THE FUTURE OF LATINO
INDEPENDENT MEDIA "

CHON A. NORIEGA, ed.

Stereotyping and Resistance:
A Crash Course on Hollywood's Latino Imagery

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The history of Latino images in U.S. cinema is in large measure a pageant of five basic stereotypes. Sometimes the stereotypes were combined, sometimes they were altered superficially, but their core defining—and demeaning—characteristics have remained consistent over more than a century and are still evident today. But there have also been exceptions to this rule: studio-made films that went against the stereotyping grain, stars who managed to portray Latinos with integrity despite a filmmaking system heavily reliant on stereotyping, and, more recently, a growing number of Latino filmmakers who began consciously breaking with the stereotyping paradigm of classical Hollywood.

This essay seeks to provide the reader with a broad overview of Latino images in U.S. film, delineating the main currents of representation—from gross stereotyping to resistance of different sorts. But to fully appreciate Hollywood's Latino imagery, in both its predominantly denigrating and occasionally more positive aspects, one needs to understand the narrative and cultural logic of Hollywood's filmmaking and storytelling paradigm, so we will begin there.

The Cultural and Narrative Dynamics of Hollywood Cinema

The stereotyping of U.S. Latinos and Latin Americans, and the defamatory stereotyping of many other socially

marginalized groups (gays, Native Americans, African Americans, Asians and Asian Americans, the working class, the poor, immigrants, women), is largely a result of entrenched Hollywood storytelling conventions. If one of the distinguishing features of the Hollywood cinema is its goal-oriented protagonist, we can say with a high degree of certainty that, sociologically speaking, that goal-driven hero will be a white, handsome, middle-aged, upper middle-class, heterosexual, Protestant Anglo-Saxon male.

This great white hero is the sun around which the film narrative revolves, and the rationale of a typical Hollywood story is to demonstrate how moral, resourceful, brave, intelligent—in a word, *superior*—he is. It follows that the rest of the characters must necessarily be shown to be *inferior* in various ways and to varying degrees. In order to prop up the protagonist, characters of different cultural/ethnic/racial/class backgrounds from the hero are generally assigned sundry minor roles: villains, sidekicks, temptresses, the "other man." Their main function is to provide opportunities for the protagonist to display his absolute moral, physical, and intellectual preeminence.

In addition, we can schematically chart the standard Hollywood story in which this WASP male hero usually appears. Viewed strictly dramatically, it is a formulaic narrative that proceeds from equilibrium (a tranquil status quo) to disruption (a threat to the status quo) to the ultimate restoration of the status quo (the Hollywood happy ending). Looking at such a framework culturally, however, one sees it in a slightly different light. The status quo that is posited as the best of all worlds is one that is safe, peaceful, and prosperous all right, but also one that is upper-middle class, white, protestant, English-speaking—one that conforms to Anglo norms of beauty, and so forth. This WASP way of life is asserted as the norm, and this is what is fought for and must be regained if the film is to deliver its happy ending. In such a scheme, not only Latinos but all people of color represent an inherent threat to the status quo simply because they are markedly different from the established WASP norm.

The Five Latino Stereotypes

The five Latino stereotypes listed below exist within such a movie-making paradigm and are part of its story telling

conventions. With that in mind, here is a brief rundown of the most commonly seen Latino stereotypes that have appeared in the first century of Hollywood cinema:

El Bandido. Most familiar is the Mexican bandit in countless Westerns and adventure films. His roots go back to the villains of the silent "greaser" films (*Broncho Billy and the Greaser* [1914]), but his appearance continues in a long list of Westerns and adventure films (for example, the two guides who betray Indiana Jones at the beginning of *Raiders of the Lost Ark* [1979] and the demented antagonist [Manuel Ojeda] who pursues Joan Wilder [Kathleen Turner] in *Romancing the Stone* [1984]). El bandido is dirty and unkempt, usually displaying an unshaven face, missing teeth, and disheveled, oily hair. Scars and scowls complete the easily recognizable image. Behaviorally, he is vicious, treacherous, shifty, and dishonest; psychologically, he is cruel, irrational, and overly emotional, quickly resorting to violence. His inability to speak English or his heavy Spanish accent is Hollywood's way of signaling his feeble intellect, a lack of brainpower that makes it impossible for him to plan or strategize successfully.

Though the Western genre is far past its heyday, el bandido lives on in contemporary Hollywood films in two incarnations. The first is the Latin American gangster/drug runner, such as Andy Garcia's sadistic Cuban-American gangster in *Eight Million Ways to Die* (1986), Al Pacino's mobster in *Scarface* (1983), and Joaquín de Almeida in both *Clear and Present Danger* (1994) and *Desperado* (1995). He is slicker of course, and he has traded in his black hat for a white suit, his tired horse for a glitzy car, but he is still compelled to satisfy his savage cravings—for money, power, and sexual pleasure—and routinely employs vicious and illegal means to obtain them.

A second *bandido* variant is the inner-city gang member seen in numerous urban thrillers and crime dramas. If the story takes place in New York, he is the volatile Puerto Rican (the toughs in *The Young Savages* [1961] and *Badge 373* [1973]); if in southern California, he is the East LA homeboy (the gang members in *Colors* [1988], the two hoods who taunt D-FENS [Michael Douglas] in *Falling Down* [1993]). What is important to note with both the drug runner and East LA Latino gangstas is that these newer images make only superficial changes to the external details of the stereotype; at their core, these characters are the same inarticulate, violent, and pathologically dangerous bandidos.

(2)

The Harlot. The corresponding female stereotype is a stock figure in the American cinema, particularly in Westerns. Like the bandit, she is a secondary character, lusty and hot-tempered. Doc Holliday's woman, Chihuahua (Linda Darnell), in John Ford's *My Darling Clementine* (1946) is an archetypal example of this type. Without a man, she is a leaf in the wind, so when Doc (Victor Mature) is out of town, she fixes her amorous attentions on Wyatt Earp (Henry Fonda). When Earp, decent WASP hero that he is, ignores her flirtations, she responds the only way she can—getting even by helping a card shark cheat Earp during a poker game.

A slave to her passions, the harlot's character is simplistically caused by her inherent nymphomania. In true stereotypical fashion, we are never provided with any deeper motivation for her actions—she is a sex machine innately lusting for a white male. A notable recent example is the character of Angelica (Jacqueline Obradors) in *Six Days, Seven Nights* (1998). She is the traveling companion of a small-time airplane pilot, Quinn Harris (Harrison Ford), and obviously romantically involved with him. But as soon as he is forced to leave her at an island resort on some business, she has no qualms about sleeping with the nearest available Anglo, Frank Martin (David Schwimmer). Angelica is an interesting example of a stereotyping blend, exhibiting characteristics of both the harlot and the female buffoon, and I will discuss her and the film in more detail below.

The Buffoon. The second banana comic relief, this stereotype can be of either sex. Classic male buffoons from television include Pancho in "The Cisco Kid," Sgt. Garcia in Walt Disney's "Zorro" series, Ricky Ricardo in "I Love Lucy," and in films, Leo Carrillo's characters in many of his roles in the 1930s. What is funny about this character, what audiences are given to laugh at, are the very characteristics that separate him from Hollywood's vision of the WASP American mainstream: his simplemindedness (the bumbling antics of Sgt. Garcia), his failure to master standard English ("Let's went, Cisco!" and "Lucy, you got some splainin' to do!"), his childish regression into emotionality (Ricky's explosions into Spanish).

In the 1980s, the Mexican comic actor and director Alfonso Arau (*Like Water for Chocolate* [1992]) played two roles based on this type: the romance-novel-reading Colombian gangster in *Romancing the Stone* (1983) and the bandit leader El Guapo in *¡The Three Amigos!* (1986). It may be argued that these are

parodies of the stereotype and, thus, healthy in breaking down stereotypes. But another view might be to question whether *any* use of such an oft-repeated and well-known stereotype can exist without in some ways serving to reinforce it. Are audiences laughing at the movie because of how cleverly it makes fun of Hollywood stereotyping? Or because it presents yet another ignorant Mexican who knows the word "plethora"? My guess is more the latter than the former.

The Female Buffoon is the comic counterpart to the male clown and, like the harlot, exemplifies a common way that the Hollywood narrative neutralizes the screen Latina's sexuality. This is a necessary requirement because the hero must have a reason to reject the Latina in favor of the Anglo woman and thereby maintain the WASP status quo. For that to occur, the Latina's sexual allure must somehow be negated. Generally, her character is smeared (she is made promiscuous and criminal, as is the case with the harlot stereotype) or ridiculed (portrayed as sexually "easy" or simply silly and comical, as with the female buffoon).

This is exactly what happens in *Six Days, Seven Nights*. The romance that Harrison Ford's scruffy and ultimately noble and heroic pilot has with the WASP leading lady, Robin Monroe (Anne Heche), perfectly conforms with Hollywood's storytelling and cultural purity logic. Once it has been demonstrated (to the audience, not to pilot Quinn since he and Robin are stranded on a deserted island) that Angelica, his Latin bombshell of a girlfriend, is promiscuous and has been unfaithful, he is morally off the hook and a free romantic agent. He can pursue a romance with Robin without the guilt of being unfaithful. Thus Angelica's sleeping with Frank, the secondary Anglo male character, is framed as casual sex and paints her as sexually frivolous. Quinn's falling for the WASP woman, Robin, however, is "more serious." It's one more illustration of Latino stereotypes being used to demonstrate the moral rectitude of Hollywood's WASP film heroes. Though Anglo heroes may stray and have sexual diversions with Latinas, they can still "redeem" themselves from this moral and racial transgression if they a) reject the Latina and b) are faithful in the "important" relationship—that is, the one involving an Anglo woman.

The antecedents to Angelica's female buffoon stretch back to the golden age of the studio system and is well illustrated by the striking Mexican actress Lupe Vélez, a comic star in

Hollywood from the late 1920s to the early 1940s. Best known for her role as the ditzy "Mexican Spitfire" in a series of eight films, she also starred in a number of other comedies. Vélez's Mexican Spitfire was an attractive dingbat, whose antics caused baroque plot complications that were not unraveled until the last reel.

Another well-known female buffoon is Carmen Miranda, who provided many colorful portrayals of Latin American women in numerous films in the 1940s. What is operative in Miranda's case is exaggeration to the point of caricature, another way to elicit derisive laughter and belittle the Latina Other. Miranda's multicolored costumes and fruit-covered hats donned to perform splashy "Latin" musical numbers (most notoriously, "The Lady in the Tutti-Frutti Hat" number from Busby Berkeley's *The Gang's All Here* [1943]) instantly mocked the folkloric costumes—and customs—of Latin America. This tradition of the exotic, comical, and oversexed show biz performer lives on with Angelica in *Six Days, Seven Nights*, a dancer whose Latin exoticism and eroticism are once again played for laughs.

The Latin Lover. This male stereotype we owe to one star: Rudolph Valentino. An Italian immigrant, by 1921 he had worked his way up from minor movie parts to a starring role as the protagonist in *The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse* [1921], a story of the effect of World War I on young Argentinean men. In a famous scene, Valentino dances seductively with a cantina woman (again, the cantina harlot) and finishes by flinging her to the ground. With this and other film roles as the dashing and magnetic male Other (in *The Sheik* [1921], *Son of the Sheik* [1926], and as the rising bullfighter in *Blood and Sand* [1922]), he defined a new kind of screen lover. Valentino's smoldering presence in these films created the basis for the Latin Lover as the possessor of a primal sexuality that made him capable of making a sensuous but dangerous—and clearly non-WASP—brand of love.

Since then, the Latin Lover has been a continual screen character, played by a number of Latin actors, from Cesar Romero, Ricardo Montalbán, and Fernando Lamas to Antonio Banderas in films like *Never Talk to Strangers* (1995). All of these actors found themselves playing roles that Hollywood gave them to perform, reiterating as they did the erotic combination of characteristics instituted by Valentino—eroticism, exoticism, tenderness tinged with violence and danger,

adding up to the promise that, sexually, things could very well get out of control.

Beyond the Latin Lothario character itself, however, there are less obvious residual effects of the stereotype. For example, in *Internal Affairs* (1990) straight-arrow cop Raymond Avila (Andy Garcia) investigates a crooked cop, Dennis Peck (Richard Gere). Somehow, Gere's bad cop intuitively knows he can manipulate Garcia by preying on his sexual pride by attacking his weak spot—his jealousy concerning his wife. Without explanation, and evidently based solely on the fact that Avila is Latino, Peck knows that Avila will become unhinged by his intimations about his wife's infidelity. And he's right—it works all too well. The implication: Latin males, even "good" ones, are different when it comes to sex; they are irrational and can't help it. Furthermore, Latin males will invariably regress to their basic bandido instincts, irrationality, and violence.

One more example: why did the screenwriter (Stu Silver) feel the need to make Mama's lover (at her Hawaiian home!) a *Mexican* gardener (played by Stu Silver) in *Throw Mama from the Train* (1987)? Presumably the gag lies in the fact that this stern matron would sexually let herself go in her advancing years with—what else?—a Latin gigolo.

Dark Lady. The female Latin Lover is virginal, inscrutable, aristocratic—and erotically appealing precisely because of these characteristics. Her cool distance is what makes her fascinating to Anglo males. In comparison with the Anglo woman, she is circumspect and aloof where her Anglo sister is direct and forthright, reserved where the Anglo female is boisterous, opaque where the Anglo woman is transparent. The characters that Mexican actress Dolores Del Río played in a number of Hollywood films in the 1930s and early 1940s exemplified this stereotype well. In both *Flying Down to Río* (1933) and *In Caliente* (1935), for example, she played fascinating Latin women who aroused the American leading men's amorous appetites the way no Anglo woman could.

A contemporary incarnation of the Dark Lady is María Conchita Alonso's character in *Colors* (1988), another stereotype blend. She is the Dark Lady for the first half of the film (where she is the love interest for Sean Penn's Anglo cop), then suddenly reverts to the harlot (when she becomes the mistress of one of the gang leaders to spite the cop and to demonstrate how little he understands the realities of the

barrio). According to Hollywood, then, beneath every Latino is a savage, a Latin Lover, or both and in every Latina heart is a Jezebel.

Bucking the Paradigm and Countering the Images

Although the vast majority of Hollywood films used these stereotypes when Latinos were portrayed, Hollywood cinema is not as simple, static or ideologically one-sided as *that*. Some films and filmmakers contested the simplifications of Hollywood's filmmaking conventions (and I'll discuss some Latino actors who resisted stereotyping in the next section). It's important to remember these films, not just out of fairness, but to recognize their creative courage, to counter the claim that it is impossible for Hollywood filmmaking to break with stereotypes, and perhaps to learn something about how stereotyping may be avoided. In the classical Hollywood cinema, Latino counter-stereotypes most often resulted from two kinds of filmmaking decisions: 1) in casting Latino actors to play Latinos, and 2) in the choice of ideologically oppositional subject matter.

In the first instance, without adopting the essentialist stance that holds that only members of a group can play that group, it is still true that standard Hollywood casting practice has most often had Anglo actors play Latinos, usually in brown face and complete with a thick Spanish accent (Eli Wallach's bandido in *The Magnificent Seven* [1959]; Robbie Benson's Emilio Mendez in *Walk Proud* [1979]). But striving for ethnic authenticity in casting not only makes sense in terms of realism, it often has a beneficial side effect on characterization too, allowing for a cultural shadings that might not have occurred otherwise. For example, in John Ford's *Fort Apache* (1948), the respected Mexican character actor Miguel Inclán plays Cochise, and he speaks Spanish and his *indio* dialect, bringing to his depiction a cultural resonance and authenticity that an Anglo actor would have been hard-pressed to provide.

The film also cast Pedro Armendáriz as Sgt. Beaufort, a Mexican American with a intriguing ethnic background. Once an officer in the Confederate army, he then acquits himself admirably as a capable frontier soldier. It amounts to probably

the most interesting, complex and fully realized portrayal of a Chicano in any studio era film. Other memorable portrayals include Katy Jurado's Helen Ramírez in *High Noon* (1952) and Anthony Quinn's "Mex" in *The Ox-Bow Incident* (1943), two performances so rich in cultural texture that it's impossible to think of any other actors playing those roles. Lesser known but still impressive examples are found in *Crisis* (1950), the story of a couple (Cary Grant and Paula Raymond) caught up in a South American civil war. Director Richard Brooks made what could have been a cardboard view of Latin America three-dimensional by his inspired casting of Latinos in key roles: Puerto Rican-born José Ferrer as the egotistical dictator, silent film star Ramón Novarro as his chief military henchman, and Gilbert Roland as a rebel leader.

Films in the second, ideologically oppositional, category need not necessarily be radical in content or form; it is enough that they question the status quo, rather than blindly accepting it as perfect. A case in point is John Huston's *The Treasure of the Sierra Madre* (1948), which at first glance looks like nothing more than another Hollywood foray into stereotypical Mexico. After all, its lead bandit character, Gold Hat (Alfonso Bedoya), is the quintessential bandido, and he does deliver that classic line, "Badges, we don't need no stinkin' badges." But Huston's Mexico is more than simply a haven for bandits, and he depicts a broad sampling of Mexican society, from village administrators to Mexican *indios*, most of them (Robert Blake's shoeshine boy being the notable example) played by Mexicans who speak Spanish to one another.

Yet the film's most impressive counter-stereotyping aspect by far is its critique of U.S. imperialism in Mexico, beginning with the American oil company's exploitation of its workers. In this light, the quest of the three prospectors for gold becomes a cautionary tale condemning North American greed for Mexico's natural resources. In more recent cinema, there are the exposés of U.S. covert Latin American operations in Oliver Stone's *Salvador* (1986) and Roger Spottiswoode's *Under Fire* (1983).

Resisting the Stereotype

Throughout U.S. film history there have always been Latino actors who have resisted stereotyping, resisted as much as they could while being caught within the grip of Hollywood's

stereotypical filmmaking conventions. Lupe Vélez, for example, possessed a talent so vast it couldn't be completely contained by the Hollywood stereotyping machinery. In an early film like *The Gaucho* (1927), she puts in a great performance starring alongside Douglas Fairbanks. Her beauty and vivaciousness are matched by an athleticism that makes her the equal of the acrobatic Gaucho (Fairbanks). Though relegated to the B-movie side of the studio tracks by the end of her career, she single-handedly carried the tired Mexican Spitfire comedies with her sheer enthusiasm. Vélez is an example of an actor who is bigger than the stereotype.

Gilbert Roland, who evolved from a matinee idol in the late 1920s and early 1930s to a fine character actor, was another. His considerable screen presence bowled over stereotypes and replaced them with fleshed-out characters. In roles a lesser actor would have let slip into stereotype, like the Mexican rebel general in the Robert Mitchum vehicle *Bandido* (1956), he created a suave, smart, and self-assured military leader. And where the debunking of the stereotype was called for, as with the womanizing but insecure Latin star "Gaucho" in Vicente Minnelli's *The Bad and the Beautiful* (1952), he played the part with brio.

Another actor who defied stereotyping was Raul Julia, who never let himself be cornered into a type, even when it seemed there was no way out. In *Tequila Sunrise* (1988), for instance, he played the Mexican drug runner and deftly escaped the bandido stereotype by creating the most interesting character in the film. Sharp, witty, charming, and possessing a healthy, self-deprecating sense of humor, Julia played a fascinating rogue in the tradition of Orson Welles' Harry Lime in *The Third Man* (1949). And, like Welles in that film, Julia steals the picture from the rest of the cast, in this case superstars Mel Gibson, Michel Pfeiffer, and Kurt Russell.

Jennifer Lopez may be a contemporary example of an actor's persona overwhelming stereotypes. Though still early in her career, she has managed to steer clear of predictable stereotypes (save for the disastrous *U-Turn* [1997]). The most notable example thus far has been her portrayal of Terri Flores in *Anaconda* (1997), where she does for Latinas in action adventure films what Sigourney Weaver's Ripley did for women in science fiction in *Alien* (1980). Just as Weaver took command of a male genre and thereby forced viewers to reconceptualize it, so too Lopez is a modern-day Latina

adventure heroine (following in the footsteps of Lupe Vélez's fearless woman in *The Gaucho*). With grit and perseverance Terri ultimately triumphs over the giant snake, while the handsome, virile Anglo lead, Dr. Steven Cale (Eric Stoltz), who would normally be the take-charge hero of such adventure films, lies unconscious for half the film. Her heroism therefore seriously undermines the entire genre's raison d'être: the ritual commemoration of WASP male heroism in hostile territory (and, ideologically, of U.S. imperialism in the Third World).

Obviously, the increasing presence of Latino filmmakers in the last two decades has also led to changes in Hollywood's stereotyping practices, but this topic is vast enough for its own article, if not a book. Suffice to say that one of the biggest challenges facing filmmakers of color today is how to enter the movie making mainstream without compromising their culture. Since, as a whole, Hollywood's treatment of Latinos has been largely though not entirely, stereotypical and since these degrading stereotypes are so intertwined with the type of stories Hollywood typically chooses to tell, it behooves any filmmaker, not just Latinos, to find creative ways to portray those on the social margins. For in the last analysis, breaking stereotypes is not just the morally responsible thing to do, it's smart filmmaking.

(6)

"SALT OF THE-EARTH"

MAKING THE FILM

Contemporary Accounts

BREAKING GROUND

by Paul Jarrico and Herbert J. Biberman

I. When our company was formed two years ago, we were agreed that our films must be based in actuality. Therefore, we were entering an arena of art to which we as craftsmen brought little experience and in which we found little precedent to guide us. It was clear that the best guarantee of artful realism lay not in fictions invented by us but in stories drawn from the living experience of people long ignored by Hollywood—the working men and women of America.

And so we searched for stories that would reflect the true stature of union men and women. We dug into material dealing with minority peoples, because we believed that where greater struggle is necessary, greater genius is developed. We looked for material that might record something of the dynamic quality women are bringing to our social scene.

Salt of the Earth, originally the third project on our schedule, seemed the best embodiment of the elements for which we had been striving. A true account of the miners of the Southwest and their families, predominantly Mexican-Americans, begged to be told without the hackneyed melodramatics which so often destroy honesty in the name of excitement. It was not the many abuses and hardships suffered by these

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people that loomed so significantly out of the material—it was their humanity, their courage and accomplishment. We decided that these Americans, at once typical and exceptional, could best be realized on the screen by the simplest story form of motion picture: a love story of two mature and decent people.

Michael Wilson, author of the story, had come to know these New Mexico miners during a long and bitter strike they waged against a powerful zinc company in 1951 and 1952. The story idea was born out of his first visit there, and he then wrote an extended outline, or, in movie parlance, a treatment of the story. Mr. Wilson returned to the mining community with this treatment, where it was read, discussed and criticized by a score of miners and their wives. With this guidance in authenticity he proceeded to write the first draft screenplay. When it was completed, again we followed the procedure of group discussion and collective, constructive criticism. By rough estimate, no less than four hundred people had read, or heard a reading of, the screenplay by the time we commenced production.

Perhaps it was our determination that the people in this film be life-size that led to our second decision. We asked the miners and their families to play themselves rather than be enacted by others.

These decisions brought the writer, director, crew and cast face to face with intricate problems of realistic form and content. How could we by-pass the pitfall of naturalism—a mere surface record of actual events—and emerge with an imaginative work of art that was still true in detail? How could we best blend the social authenticity of documentary form with the personal authenticity of dramatic form? What range of characterization should be given individual roles whose enactment would be undertaken by non-professionals? How could we capture the quality of speech of these bilingual people and yet make the picture completely intelligible to an average English-speaking audience? How could we make the amazing heroism of these people not only stirring, but *believable* and *inevitable?*

This last problem was particularly important to us, because only if we solved it could our picture help engender in an audience a belief in its own capacities, a confidence that what these people had done could be done again. We hoped that our film might become a cultural stimulus to other trade unions and minority groups, and convince them that they could tell their own stories through the medium of film.

High hopes! And vast problems. Certainly we cannot boast of having solved all these aesthetic questions. But we do think we have broken new ground. If our film can illuminate the truth that the lives and struggles of ordinary people are the richest untapped source of contemporary American art, and if it can demonstrate that such films can be made by these people themselves, then it will have achieved a basic purpose.

II. It is against this background of intention and dedication that the attacks upon this picture during the course of production must be seen. We had been shooting *Salt of the Earth* since January 20th, Inauguration Day. The production was sponsored by the International Union of Mine, Mill and Smelter Workers, and our cast included hundreds of its members and their families. Even after a storm of hysterical publicity burst over us, thousands of our neighbors and associates in the Silver City area assumed we had a right to be there.

A false assumption, said Congressman Donald Jackson. On February 24th, this California Representative delivered a speech in the halls of Congress, in which he said:

> ...Mr. Speaker, I have received reports of the sequences filmed to date... This picture is deliberately designed to inflame racial hatreds... [It] is a new weapon for Russia. For instance, in one sequence, two deputy sheriffs arrest a meek American miner of Mexican descent and proceed to pistol whip the miner's very young son. [They] also imported two auto carloads of colored people for the purpose of shooting a scene depicting mob violence.

As a direct result of Congressman Jackson's speech, our leading lady was arrested, members of our cast and crew were physically assaulted, and a vigilante committee warned us to leave "within twelve hours or be carried out in black boxes." We defied the deadline, demanding and receiving the protection of the New Mexico State police, and finished our work on March 6th. After we did depart, however, and the protective police as well, the attacks on our Mine-Mill brothers and sisters continued. Two union halls were set afire, one of them burning to the ground. Also razed by arson was the home of a union leader, Floyd Bostick, who

had played a role in the film. His three young children narrowly escaped the flames.

Without reading the script, or asking to, without seeing the film, or waiting to, an incendiary Congressman had spoken.

His fury can be understood only if one recognizes how unprecedented it was for manual workers and cultural workers of our country to collaborate, and what promise for a more truly democratic future such a collaboration holds. In organizing for independent production, we had one basic aim: to place the talents of the blacklisted (both those who had worked in films and those who had never been given the opportunity) at the service of ordinary people. There were indeed Negroes in this production: an assistant to the director, an assistant cameraman and two technicians—all in categories of work never available to Negroes in Hollywood.

Simon Lazarus, a respected motion picture exhibitor, had formed Independent Productions Corporation to back us. Money was borrowed from liberal Americans, it being understood that none of us who wrote, directed or produced the film would receive any remuneration until the loans were repaid.

In the wake of the Silver City storm, Mr. Lazarus was himself hailed before the Un-American Activities Committee and asked to divulge who the backers were. He refused to answer personal questions and thus could not be forced to inform on others. He did, however, volunteer to tell the Committee what our film was about. But the investigators were not interested. They did not want to investigate, but to prejudge and censor.

The efforts to prevent *Salt of the Earth* from being made began long before the spectacular assaults in Silver City, and continued long after our location shooting was completed.

Consider, as a pre-production problem, a crew. In Hollywood, most motion picture technicians belong to the International Alliance of Theatrical and Stage Employees (AFL). West coast head of the IATSE is Roy M. Brewer, who inherited his protectorate over Hollywood labor from two gangsters, William Bioff and George E. Browne. A zealous adherent of Congressional witch-hunters, Brewer has understood that his civic responsibility to enforce the blacklist goes far beyond his trade union responsibility to see that his men get jobs. That, no doubt, is why he refused to let us hire an IATSE crew. As a trade paper reported it later:

> Simon Lazarus, named as prexy of the company, approached Roy M. Brewer, the chairman of the AFL Film Council, about nine months ago, seeking assurance from him that he could make a motion picture using the "Unfriendly Ten." Brewer yesterday recalled he flatly told Lazarus he would prevent such a project in every legal way possible. —*Daily Variety, February 25, 1953*

"Legal" was an afterthought. What Brewer said was that he would see us in hell first.

We gathered a union crew despite Roy Brewer. Some were members of his own IATSE. Some had been expelled from the IATSE for opposing Brewer's rule. There were Negroes, denied membership in the IATSE because of its Jim Crow policies. Every member of our crew carried a union card.

As for post-production problems, the would-be censors of the picture have tried to sabotage it in every way. They have demanded that all laboratories close their doors to us, warned technicians not to help us—lest they find themselves blacklisted. Failing here, we expect they will extend their intimidation to film exhibitors when the picture is ready for release. Meanwhile, Congressman Jackson has been needling the Departments of State and Commerce to find some obscure statute which might forbid the export of this picture. No such statute exists, but we would be naive to think that the legality of our endeavor will give the bigots pause.

III. Will the film be shown? We have no illusions about the fight that lies ahead. Of this we are certain—the harrassment will continue, and we will need many allies to defeat the censors and saboteurs. Naturally, the degree of support we eventually get will depend on the end product—the finished film. If trade unionists someday discover that this picture is the first feature film ever made in this country which is of labor, by labor and for labor; if minority peoples come to see in it a film that does not tolerate minorities but celebrates their greatness; if men and women together find in it some new recognition of the worth and dignity of a working class woman—then this audience, these judges, will find ways of overcoming the harrassment.

But to reach these judges, we must first get past the *pre-judgers.*

(9)

To reach these eventual allies, we need immediate allies—for whether the people are to praise this film or damn it, they must first have the right to see it. That is why we appeal to everyone who is morally concerned with free communication to help provide the atmosphere and the place in which *Salt of the Earth* can be shown and judged on its own merits.

REFLECTIONS ON A JOURNEY

by Rosaura Revueltas

I don't remember much of that flight from Mexico City to Ciudad Juárez. As the plane droned north toward the border, I was oblivious of the passengers around me, completely absorbed in my thoughts of the experience that lay ahead—the making of *Salt of the Earth*. I had waited so long to do this picture; production had been postponed several times because of various difficulties—but now at last I was on my way to Silver City.

In a way it seemed I had waited all my life to do this picture. My own mother was a miner's daughter. As a child I learned of the miners' hardships, their joys and sorrows; and I grew up wondering why these people on whom the wealth of nations depended were among the worst paid workers in the world. From the day I became an actress I longed to play a role that would honor my people. And now such a role had been offered to me—for these miners of New Mexico were *my people*, even though they lived across the border.

The plane droned on. I closed my eyes and thought of Esperanza, the miner's wife I was to portray in the picture. I was still thinking of her when we landed, and took the airport limousine to El Paso.

There were several Mexican students with me in the limousine. At the border we handed over our documents to the U.S. inspector. He glanced at our vaccination certificates, seemingly the only thing that interested him, returned our documents and waved to the driver to proceed. That was all.

I spent the night in an El Paso hotel, and the next morning, when checking on my plane reservation to Silver City, showed my papers to the airport clerk to make certain that they were perfectly in order. It seemed a little strange to me that my passport had not been stamped at the time of entry. I was assured that this technicality was of no importance; I could always prove my date of entry with my validated airplane ticket, as well as the fact that I had crossed the border in an airport limousine with other passengers (whose passports also had not been stamped).

So I gave the matter no further thought. From the moment I stepped off the plane at Silver City, to be met by a delegation of miners' wives, I was engrossed in the creative work before us. Even when the first attacks against our picture appeared in the press I felt no danger to my own status. We were within a week of our goal when two agents of the Immigration Department visited the lodge in Silver City where the cast and crew were staying. They wanted to see my passport. I showed it to them. In their cold, polite manner they told me they needed to inspect it and would return it to me in a few days.

Work on the picture went forward as usual for the next three days. On the fourth day, returning to the lodge from our location set, I found the same two agents waiting for me. This time they had a woman with them—a matron. They had come to arrest me on the grounds that my passport lacked an admission seal. They told me it was nothing serious, that I could return to work the next day if a $500 bond were posted in El Paso. Nevertheless, they forced me to leave immediately in their car, without dinner, and all the way to El Paso they kept interrogating me. Was I a Communist? Weren't the people I was working with Communists? Wasn't this a Communist picture? For the first time I began to feel frightened. Not for myself, but for the picture. Some powerful man or men were out to kill our picture.

Paul Jarrico, our producer, had followed us to El Paso in his car in order to post my bond. But no sooner did the authorities see that I was about to go free again than they revoked the original warrant of arrest, issuing a new one that stated I was to be held without bail.

That first night I was installed in a hotel room, and two guards set their chairs right outside my door. For the next ten days and nights these two "shadows" or their replacements never left me. I drew small comfort from the thought that this arrangement was preferable to jail. In a way, these shadows made the situation more ominous; I had committed no crime, yet I was their prisoner nonetheless.

But by the time of the first hearing I had regained my hope of an early release. I had great confidence in my attorney, Mr. Ben Margolis, and felt that as long as I had him at my side nothing could go wrong. But the first bad sign was the exclusion of my friends from the hearing. Many of them had come from Silver City and other towns, and although the hearing was supposed to be public, they were not admitted. Then, in the hearing itself, I saw my attorney win argument after argument and yet lose on the basic plea—that I be released on bond pending a formal judgment on my status. And I began to realize that the forces trying to stop the completion of our picture were more powerful than I had imagined.

Those last days in El Paso I recall only as a confused and evil dream. There were other hearings, protests, appeals—much of them in a legal jargon I didn't understand. But this much I did understand, and remember:

I heard a government attorney describe me as a "dangerous woman" who ought to be expelled from the country. At other times he referred to me as "that girl." Since he had no evidence to present of my "subversive" character, I can only conclude that I was "dangerous" because I had been playing a role that gave stature and dignity to the character of a Mexican-American woman....

I remember the face of the government attorney, or "prosecutor" I guess you would call him, and the nervous smile that contorted his lips, and the way his hands trembled. And I thought it strange that he, who represented Law and Authority, should be so frightened—while my friends in Silver City, who were undergoing intimidation and violence, were not nearly so scared as he....

Perhaps that is why I did not feel a sense of defeat when the decision was made that I return voluntarily to Mexico. My attorney and friends still believed that I would be vindicated in the higher courts—but a further appeal would take time. Meanwhile, production in Silver City had been completed except for a very few scenes involving me, and the company could not afford to keep the crew waiting indefinitely for my release. And so I agreed to re-cross the border.

It wasn't a happy leave-taking. There were bitter memories I could not leave behind. But I also carried home with me the spirit that had made this picture possible, the determination that would see it completed, and the inner assurance that a handful of ignorant and frightened men could never prevent its being shown to the peoples of the world.

ON LOCATION

from a Crew Member's Diary, by Jules Schwerin

Silver City, Jan. 13, 1953. Flew in from El Paso Sunday... this is a beautiful country of rugged mountains, semi-arid tableland and the bluest sky I've ever seen... weather is ideal for shooting now but old timers here say it's capricious and we may have snow or wind-storms without warning....

Jan. 16th. The miners and their families have given us a warm welcome... for them it has been a difficult year, waiting for this picture to get under way... some of them doubted that they would ever get to tell their story, but now it can be told, by *them,* playing themselves....

Jan. 20th. Most of the crew has arrived... I am struck by the remarkably high level of capacity of these men, many of them distinguished technicians with long records of outstanding achievement... the relationship developing between the crew and the miners is a wonderful thing to watch... a real spirit of brotherhood, each group learning from the other... every day more miners pitch in to help the crew, some of them after a grueling eight-hour day in the mines. Our construction team can take pride in the fact that the miners find our mine-head set authentic. They are amused by the film technique of building "wild" walls and partially constructed rooms, but they are quick to catch on to all the technical phases of movie-making....

Jan. 21st. The first scene with dialogue was shot today, the scene of the beef between the mine foreman and the men. Everyone was tense. One miner kept muffing his lines. He apologized, explaining that the actor-foreman reminded him of a real foreman he had known, and added: "He gets me so damn mad I forget my lines." If we can sustain this kind of reality, a few muffed lines won't matter....

Jan. 30th. The local theatre was filled yesterday with union people, coming to see the first "rushes" of the picture. When the mining families saw themselves on the screen, they howled and cheered and laughed ... it was a catharsis... many of them tell us now, "we're not going to be alone anymore." And we of the crew know how deeply they feel this and are glad we are with them....

Feb. 4th. We're having real difficulty in casting "Anglo" roles. Two remarkable men have been cast as the principal deputy sheriffs in the picture. They are friends of the union, and hate to play these parts,

although recognizing the necessity of someone being a heavy. They resent wearing the garb of the typical deputy, lest some union man mistake them for the real McCoy. Casting strikebreakers is even more difficult. "Anglos" sympathetic to the miners simply don't want to play these roles, while those who are "neutral" are afraid to sign up for work as extras lest local employers accuse them of being sympathetic to the union.

Feb. 10th. Our schedules must undergo daily changes to accommodate for the mobilization of actors, particularly in mass scenes. Most of the families have no telephone service... distances are fantastic... they live in various mining communities, ten, fifteen, twenty miles apart... organizing a baby-sitting-and-jitney-service for a hundred people is really something... and it would be impossible without the Ladies' Auxiliary of the union... we are all impressed by the stamina and courage of the women and the relaxed nature of their children... as a result of the strike, the women have moved closer to equality in the home and a fuller participation in union affairs. The results of that victory are seen now in the way women assume responsibility for matters formerly reserved to men....

Feb. 16th. Despite the provocations and slanders of Congressman Jackson and the local vigilantes the community is surprisingly calm ... many people in Silver City in no way connected with the union continue to offer us gratuitous services... the Catholic priests have been friendly and helpful... the union men say they expected these attacks would come... what a marvelous experience to work with such confident, courageous people!

Feb. 20th. Attacks on the picture are becoming more vicious... the local union-haters are beginning to mutter about mob action... tradespeople in Silver City who have been friendly to us are starting to retreat a little... some of those who have extended service to us are receiving anonymous threats by telephone....

Feb. 24th. It isn't enough that we're in the vortex of a political storm whipped up by creatures who don't know what the picture is about —even the weather's against us. A snow blizzard swoops in on us, and trying to be flexible, we adapt the scene to shoot it with snow. Suddenly the sun comes out and the snow melts before we can even get a master scene. So we return to the original plan. Suddenly a wind storm comes up that makes the set look like the Gobi Desert. And so it goes....

Feb. 27th. Immigration agents arrested Rosaura last night. As they led her off, we all stood around feeling angry and helpless, and tried to act brave and unconcerned, assuring one another that she would be

back tomorrow... but today we all worked harder than ever, with a new zest and a new grimness... the bond between the crew members and the union cast is stronger than ever... nothing can stop us now from finishing this film... our responsibility is great....

March 1st. The union has decided to send Joe Morales to Washington to state the union's case, to see what can be done to stem the hysterical flood of lies, free Rosaura, and restore law and order... Joe, a charter member of the local, was chosen unanimously in a most unusual meeting, which was held on location, while shooting of the film continued in a nearby ravine... the meeting lasted all afternoon, with men slipping away from the deliberations to take their places before the camera ... and because a few important voices were missing, the plan was submitted to one of the brothers who was sick at home, and another at work in one of the mines... conducted in the most parliamentary manner, this meeting was a demonstration of direct democracy... militant miners acting with calm and assurance, aware of the historic importance of what they had undertaken....

March 4th. Today is "super-patriot's" day in Silver City. The vigilantes' campaign of intimidation is at last having its effect on the business community. All morning the loud-speaker in front of the leading theatre blared martial music, and toward noon the doors were opened for the showing of an anti-communist movie. All commercial establishments in town were "advised" to close shop and attend the movie—*or else*. All the same, stores kept their side doors open—to us.... The flag-waving hoodlums are threatening to lynch us, our star is still under arrest, and the weather stinks. So what do we do? We keep right on shooting the picture.

March 6th. The production is finished. We have a complete picture, except for a few shots of Rosaura... maybe when the picture is cut the editor can find a way of getting by without those shots of her... It was difficult to say goodbye. The usual guitar, the usual song, the usual laughter were absent. There was almost a fear of looking at one another —a look might have to start a farewell... the last scene was completed and our crew turned to face the miners and their families, our brothers and sisters, and all our affection, all of our admiration and respect for each other was shown in our embraces and unashamed tears... we had shared so much together, learned so much together... I hope that when the film is seen it will bring something of this closeness and understanding to other people....

UNION MADE

by Juan Chacón

When our Union set out to make a movie about the lives of our people, most of us had an idea it might be attacked. My father has a little farm in this County, and I was born there. A lot of our great-grandfathers worked the mines here in the Southwest and had little farms of their own. My people, the Mexican-Americans, have tended the big crops, built the railroads and dug the ore that makes all this big, bare looking country so rich today.

In our Union here, Local 890 of the Mine, Mill and Smelter Workers, a lot of old timers remember the twelve hour day in the dusty wind of the open copper pit, or the heat of the underground zinc mine—twelve hours for two or three dollars a day. They remember the way the companies built houses for the Anglos while we were given shacks with water outside and no comforts inside except what we made with our own hands. They remember the way the miners who spoke Spanish would be put to work as "helpers" to the "skilled" Anglos—doing the same work for which the Anglo was paid twice as much. They remember the separate pay windows, separate washrooms, the separation even in the movies.

My own company, Kennecott, now admits this was the way things were, but they say, "Our policy has changed. Now it's separate, but equal." But don't ever believe it. There's no such thing as "separate but equal."

I never dreamed of being before a movie camera, much less of being a leading actor. But I was willing to play the role of Ramón in *Salt of the Earth* because this picture would give the world at least a little of the background of our past conditions. But this picture isn't *against*—it's *for!* It shows what we can do when we organize and we and Anglo workers organize together. The companies around here have always been afraid of Anglo-Mexican unity. For a hundred years our employers have played up the big lie that we Mexicans are "naturally inferior" and "different," in order to justify paying us less and separating us from our brothers.

Salt of the Earth helps to expose that lie. It shows that workers can get along regardless of religion, color or politics. It shows the gains we have made through the work of our Union. We don't have separate pay-rates anymore, and now we can move up to skilled jobs except where the craft unions keep us out. A lot of segregation still exists, because here in Arizona Kennecott keeps our housing apart from the English speaking miners—and that keeps a wall between us. They even have our kids go to different grammar schools.

But thank God for our Union and for the men who organized it. Back in the thirties, they were blacklisted, thrown off company property, and told to take their houses with them in thirty days or else. The funny thing is that's how the town of Bayard was born. Bayard was a junction in the highway and the jobless Spanish speaking miners dragged their wrecks here and started all over again. Later our Mine Mill Union won recognition and reinstatement for these workers. But what I meant was funny is that today Bayard is the center of the attack against our Union—and it all comes from some Anglo-American business men who settled here to "service" the town we built.

Since those early organizing days we have had many struggles for equality, the longest and bitterest of which was a recent strike against a zinc mining company that lasted fifteen months. The company seemed determined to make this strike a test, a show-down, an attempt to drive us "back into our places." When the company saw it couldn't starve us out, after eight months on the picket line, it got its anti-picketing injunction from a judge here. That's when our wives took over—and it was their idea. We finally won that strike, thanks to the courage and devotion of our women folks.

No movie in the world could tell the full story of those terrible months—and *Salt of the Earth* was not intended to be a documentary record of that particular strike. But I will say this—it is a true account of our people's lives and struggles.

One thing our picture won't show is the fun we had making it. And the headaches. After all, none of us here knew beans about movie making. But we did manage to lick most of our problems. Here's how we did it:

We organized a Production Committee composed both of people from the local union, the Ladies' Auxiliary and the motion picture company. This committee took up everything: the feeding of hundreds of people on the set, publicity, transportation, baby-sitting, equipment. But that was not all. This committee was a policy-making body, with the

responsibility of seeing that our picture ran true to life from start to finish. Occasionally there were meetings in which the union people pointed out to our Hollywood friends that a scene we had just shot was not true in certain details. When that happened we all pitched in to correct the mistake. Most of these mistakes were made because the movie craftsmen had not lived through all our struggles; but they had all the heart and the good will in the world and that is how we managed to stand together and overcome the difficulties of making a movie with little money and many amateurs.

One of the most surprising things to us was that we found we didn't have to "act." El Biberman, as we came to call him, was happiest when we were just ourselves. So after a while, we stopped pretending and then, from the "rushes" we saw, the movie began to look better. We even picked up some Hollywood slang and got so we weren't surprised at all when El Biberman said, "Magnificent! Do it again!"

In making this picture we've shown again that no attacks or falsehoods can break our Union spirit, our willingness to work for what's right. We hope our picture will lead the way for other unions to do the same thing. Movies are the main form of entertainment for most people. That's why we figured the big-shots in the movie industry and the mining industry must have something in common—the need to keep alive the big lie about people. If ordinary people told their stories on the screen, think how the walls between us would be broken down! *Salt of the Earth* is our attempt to break through. We hope you see it.

MAKING THE FILM

Documenting the Opposition

LETTER FROM HOWARD HUGHES

March 18, 1953

Congressman Donald L. Jackson
House Office Building
Washington, D.C.

Dear Congressman Jackson:

In your telegram you asked the question, "Is there any action that industry and labor in motion picture field can take to stop completion and release of picture and to prevent showing of film here and abroad?"

My answer is "Yes."

. . . Before a motion picture can be completed or shown in theaters, an extensive application of certain technical skills and use of a great deal of specialized equipment is absolutely necessary.

Herbert Biberman, Paul Jarrico, and their associates working on this picture do not possess these skills or the equipment.

If the motion picture industry—not only in Hollywood, but throughout the United States—will refuse to apply these skills, will refuse to furnish this equipment, the picture cannot be completed in this country.

(14)

Biberman and Jarrico have already met with refusal where the industry was on its toes. The film processing was being done by the Pathe Laboratories, until the first news broke from Silver City.

But the minute Pathe learned the facts, this alert laboratory immediately refused to do any further work on this picture, even though it meant refunding cash paid in advance.

Investigation fails to disclose where the laboratory work is being done now. But it is being done somewhere, by someone, and a great deal more laboratory work will have to be done by someone, before the motion picture can be completed.

Biberman, Jarrico, and their associates cannot succeed in their scheme alone. Before they can complete the picture, they must have the help of the following:

1. Film laboratories.
2. Suppliers of film.
3. Musicians and recording technicians necessary to record music.
4. Technicians who make dissolves, fades, etc.
5. Owners and operators of sound recording equipment and dubbing rooms.
6. Positive and negative editors and cutters.
7. Laboratories that make release prints.

If the picture industry wants to prevent this motion picture from being completed and spread all over the world as a representative product of the United States, then the industry and particularly that segment of the industry listed above, needs only to do the following:

—Be alert to the situation.
—Investigate thoroughly each applicant for the use of services or equipment.
—Refuse to assist the Bibermans and Jarricos in the making of this picture.
—Be on guard against work submitted by dummy corporations or third parties.
—Appeal to the Congress and the State Department to act immediately to prevent the export of this film to Mexico or anywhere else.

Sincerely,
Howard Hughes

CHRONOLOGY OF EVENTS

The following excerpts are direct quotations from Paul Jarrico's 1955 chronology, except for explanatory comments in brackets.

Mar. 19, 1953—Congressman Jackson has printed in Congressional Record letters he has received from Howard Hughes, Roy Brewer, and officers of the Commerce and State Departments. These letters constitute a public blueprint of the conspiracy to destroy our property.

[Over the next few weeks, seven laboratories either ignored the filmmakers' registered letters requesting their services in processing *Salt* or rejected the requests outright.]

April 1, 1953—Secret cutting room established at secluded house in Topanga Canyon.

June 28, 1953—Move cutting room to a closed theatre in South Pasadena, still trying to maintain secrecy. Work proceeds, primarily in ladies' room of theatre.

July 18, 1953—Move cutting room to a small, vacant studio in Burbank, still trying to maintain secrecy.

July 21, 1953—Barton Hayes quits as chief editor. . . . We receive confidential information that Hayes has told the executive board of the editors' local of IATSE that he has worked on "Salt" in order to provide information about our product to the FBI.

During Oct., 1953—We continue putting film through various laboratories under various pseudonyms. . . . General Film Laboratories recognizes the actual identity of some of our film and refuses to continue working on it, ordering us to remove it from their premises.

Nov. 17, 18, and 19, 1953—Full orchestra under direction of Sol Kaplan records music for "Salt" at Reeves. Neither musicians nor Reeves technicians are told the true identity of the film. (The secrecy under which we felt compelled to work prevented our having the advantage of projecting the film while recording the music for it.)

Nov. 29, 1953 thru Dec. 7, 1953—Re-recording done at an inadequate sound studio in Los Angeles with an insufficient number of IATSE sound

(15)

technicians. So fearful are they of reprisals by the IATSE and the motion picture industry that they will work only in utmost secrecy, primarily in the dead of night.

During Dec. 1953—Since no experienced negative cutter has been found, members of our regular editorial staff proceed with negative cutting. They are not qualified to handle the specialized problems involved and make many errors.

Summary of Post-Production Period

Work that normally would take three or four months has taken more than a year. Approximately $100,000 . . . has been added to budget.

Feb. 13, 1954 (approximate date)—Tentative agreement reached for our rental of the Squire Theatre for world premiere of "Salt."

Feb. 18, 1954 (approximate date)—Just as the contract for the Squire is to be signed, Zipperman and Fingler [the operators] back out of the deal. We are told privately that they have been fightened by the pressure of the major motion picture distributors. [Jarrico lists five other exhibitors in New York who expressed appreciation for *Salt* but refused to book it.]

Mar. 2, 1954—Sign contract with Philip Steinberg to exhibit "Salt" at the 86th Street Grande Theatre starting Mar. 14, and at the New Dyckman Theatre starting Mar. 26. . . . During the following days representatives of the major motion picture distributors with whom he normally deals tell him he may have trouble booking future pictures if he honors his contract with us. Steve d'Inzillo, Business Representative of the Projectionists Union (Local 306, IATSE) tells Steinberg his theatres may be stink-bombed if "Salt" is played, and hints the possibility of physical violence against Steinberg.

Mar. 9, 1954—The first of five press previews scheduled at the Preview Theatre is held at 11:00 A.M. When invited guests arrive for second showing at 3:30 P.M., IATSE projectionists refuse to run film, acting . . . under instructions of their union. . . . We are not only forced to cancel that screening but five other screenings scheduled at the Preview Theatre.

Mar. 15, 1954 thru April 10, 1954—Despite good reviews and excellent business, no other New York exhibitors ask us to book the film, and we can find no distributor willing to handle it nationally.

May 12, 1954 thru Aug. 11, 1954 (approximate dates)—Every metropolitan paper in Los Angeles, with the exception of the *Daily News*, refuses our ads.

May 13, 1954 thru May 25, 1954—Major motion picture distributors refuse to allow us to book their short subjects to play with "Salt." . . . Even the United Nations Film Commission withdrew a short they had promised us.

May 19, 1954—National Americanism Commission of the American Legion is reported to have put out a special edition of its publication, "The Firing Line," declaring "Legionnaires Must be on Guard Against One of the Most Vicious Propaganda Films Ever Distributed in the U.S."

July 3, 1954—"All Out for All-American Day" in Silver City area. Attended by Roy Brewer, Seaborn Collins, Chairman of American Legion's Security Commission, Actors Anne Doran and Pedro Gonzales-Gonzales, as a demonstration of Hollywood's opposition to "Salt."

During Sept., 1954—Film has short run at the Guild Theatre in Menlo Park, California. . . . This was the last theatrical booking the film had in the U.S. to date. . . . Its total theatrical distribution in the U.S. has been limited to two theatres in New York, one in Los Angeles, one in Silver City, one in Arvada, one in La Habra, and seven in Northern California.

MI FAMILIA / MY FAMILY: Filming the Chicano Family Saga

An Interview with Gregory Nava

The independent film *El Norte* (1983) was the first U.S. feature in the 1980s to portray believable and well-rounded Latin American characters attempting to take charge of their own troubled lives. In his debut feature, writer-director Gregory Nava first shows his brother and sister protagonists in violence-torn Guatemala and then follows their adventures as they emigrate north to El Norte, the U.S., in search of peace and a better standard of living. After illegally entering the United States, the pair take menial jobs in Los Angeles in order to survive. The greatest strength of the film lies in Nava's profound understanding and appreciation of his characters and their travails, and his ability to show their humble but determined humanity. The original screenplay for *El Norte* was written by Nava and Anna Thomas, who received an Academy Award nomination for their efforts.

This screenwriting team again examines the themes of Latin immigration to the U.S. and the Latino family in their new feature, the New Line Cinema release *My Family*. The tale begins with the teenager Jose Sanchez leaving his Mexican village in the 1920s in search of his only living relative who, it is said, lives in the city of Los Angeles. After reaching Los Angeles on foot, Sanchez starts his new life and raises a family. The film then examines the clan's problems, triumphs, and tragedies as they live the immigrant and Chicano experience in East L.A. in the Twenties, the Fifties, and the Eighties. The ensemble acting features many of the leading contemporary Latino players, including Jimmy Smits, Edward James Olmos, and Esai Morales.

Nava's stylistic approaches in *My Family* are conventional, but, as he did in *El Norte*, the director succeeds in eliciting strong, realistic performances from his actors and in creating a powerful drama that is appealing both for its social conscience and the sensitivity with which the individual characters are portrayed. *Cineaste* spoke with Nava about his Chicano family saga in May 1995 at the Seattle International Film Festival.

Cineaste: What generation Mexican-American are you, and how does your ethnicity affect your writing and filmmaking?

Gregory Nava: That's a complex question because my family has been in southern California since the 1880s, so it's an old southern California family. I came from a border family, so although I was born and raised in San Diego, I have lots of aunts and uncles and cousins who were born and raised in Tijuana. Even though I'm a third generation native Californian, some of my immediate relatives, who live just a few miles from the house I was raised in, are Mexican. So I've always been raised in that border world, with that tremendous clash between the cultures.

Cineaste: I understand that *My Family* contains considerable autobiographical material.

Nava: The inspiration for the film is obviously based on my family, but I would say that the influence is more inspirational rather than specific. A lot of the specifics came from other families when I was doing research for the film in East Los Angeles.

Cineaste: How did you go about the research? Did you select certain families and try to investigate their histories somewhat and then put together a composite?

Nava: I think the creative process is a very complex one in which you try to see things that are universal about family experiences and stories, the threads that run through these families, so that you can capture that reality. Research is entirely creative; you don't

know what image, what moment, is going to inspire you for a scene or sequence or a character. It kind of all goes in there and then, like a dream, it all comes back out, and I think the less you analyze it, the better. The more you analyze it, the more it goes away [laughs]. You kind of have to not question things too much. I like to put everything in there and then just start to write, and normally - as with *Ed Norte* - what comes out has a resonance.

Cineaste: The theme of immigration to the U.S. is central to both *El Norte* and *My Family*. What is the continuing importance of this theme for you?

Nava: We are a nation of immigrants, and the process of immigration is very interesting to me. I come from an immigrant family, and therefore I find that the problems that immigrants have - the problems of acceptance and assimilation in a country that is based on its diversity and yet the central mainstream of which is Anglo - are all the things of great drama and great conflict. So it is my own experience which inspires me to tell these stories.

Cineaste: Was your decision to write and direct a Latino family saga inspired by that ultimate Latin American family saga, *One Hundred Years of Solitude*?

Nava: Well, it was partly inspired by *One Hundred Years of Solitude* - I like its dream-realist style, I like the idea of family through generations, and the idea of family as protagonist. All these things strike me as being very Latino, and I want to bring that to the screen. By the same token, it's also an aspect of the universal human experience that has been very beautifully captured in *One Hundred Years of Solitude* and other novels that have the same style and concerns. So these are things that I wanted to capture in the film, to tell a Latino story in that style and with that kind of tapestry.

Cineaste: Do you see *My Family* as a means to teach Chicano audiences about their own history?

Nava: I see *My Family* as a film to entertain people, not to teach them. I think that films need to entertain us, and I mean entertain in the broadest sense of the word, which is partially to enlighten us about who we are. So it is designed to be inspirational to people but it's also designed to give people a good night out at the movies. It makes you laugh, it makes you cry, it makes you feel dignity or pride, if you're a Chicano, to be Chicano.

Cineaste: *My Family* deals with certain important events in Mexican-American history such as the mass deportations in the 1930s but not with other important events that happened in Los Angeles, such as the Sleepy Lagoon case and the so-called Zoot Suit Riots from the early 1940s. Why select certain events and not others?

Nava: I was trying to tell a story of this particular family, and I felt that if I made every single incident in the movie revolve around some public issue, that it would just become a catalog of all the stuff that this community has had to deal with throughout the years. I wanted to give a flavor and a feeling of that, but not make it a catalog of all the social injustice that has been suffered; that didn't fit into the scheme of this particular story. The deportations did, very beautifully, and I think that even though we don't include the specific Sleepy Lagoon issue, a lot of what happened with Sleepy Lagoon is echoed in the story about Chucho and the police relationship to the community.

That kind of injustice was prevalent at that time, and in the Fifties, and really continues down to today. So I thought that that more personal story was a better way of dealing with those particular issues, rather than actually dealing with the specific Sleepy Lagoon case. I thought it would be a little bit too much to have one of the kids of the family be a

member of the Sleepy Lagoon thing [laughs]. It would get a little ludicrous - you know, the mother is deported, and one of the sons is a Sleepy Lagoon defendant.

Cineaste: Don't you introduce the Chucho character ironing the pants and suggesting the care that the Pachuchos had in terms of dress as a way to refer to some of those issues?

Nava: Well, that's meant to be funny. He's ironing this tiny pair of pants for his kid who's going to be the ring-bearer in the wedding. Ironing is a big issue with Pachuchos, and was in the Forties and Fifties, as it is today. I mean, these guys, these vatos, they iron their T-shirts! And they do it themselves because nobody else is going to be able to do it right. I find that very amusing, and I wanted to capture that in the film.

Cineaste: Did you feel that this type of family portrait was important to get up there on the screen as opposed to more stereotypical Hollywood images of Chicanos?

Nava: I do think more new kinds of images and films need to be made, I really do. I hope that, as the society develops and more films like *My Family* get made, they will continue to be successful and we will be able to see more images up on the screen that are, as you say, not stereotypic but that are positive, that place us in the society and with our communities, put family in the center of our culture, which it is. Images that allow us to retain our culture - one which is thousands of years old, with very deep roots, and which has something very beautiful to contribute to the nation.

Cineaste: Speaking of how old the culture is, pre-Columbian spirituality and motifs such as the milpa (the corn patch) and the buho (the owl) are fundamental aspects of the film's worldview.

Nava: I think the film has a strong pre-Columbian mythic structure, which does include the milpa and the buho, but also Jimmy includes many others things. We have the spirit of the river; we have the buho, which of course references Tezcatlipoca [the Aztec God of the Smoking Mirror - DW]. The images of the four Tezcatlipocas are mirrored in the stories of the four brothers. And the Ometeotl, the creator couple, are mirrored in Jose and Maria. So you have a tremendously strong and deep pre-Columbian spirituality that comes from the film, a concept of Olin [an Aztec concept/motif of cyclical movement - DW], the movement around the center, that it is in what you do in life that you find your spirituality. The house represents that concept in a sense because it's centered yet it's always moving and changing colors, and they keep adding on to it. And of course the corn field which is regeneration and cyclical. All of these things are very powerful and form a mythic structure to the film.

There is also this syncretic relationship, because this is about a Mestizo family, between the pre-Columbian and the Catholic, so I reflect that in the mythic structure of the movie. Therefore Ometeotl and the Tezcatlipocas become at the same moment Jose and Maria, which is Joseph and Mary, and Chucho is Jesus; and so there's the Catholic sacrifice of the Jesus character in the film, which forms the central traumatic moment of the family. So there is a syncretic, mythic, logical structure to the movie that is at once pre-Columbian and Catholic.

Cineaste: One of the daughters originally takes a traditional route in terms of religion and becomes a Catholic nun and then later leaves that for a more politically activist role, specifically in relation to Central America. Do you have personal feelings about that?

Nava: I just did a talk radio show in Santa Barbara and this woman called up and said, "I am the nun that married the priest!" [laughs]. She was a Latina who had become a nun and married a priest. I also got a question, "Was this based on the so-and-so-family of

East L.A. who had a daughter who became a nun who married a priest?" And of course I based it on someone I know who was a nun who married a priest. It turned out to be more of a common thing than I realized.

What I had in mind was that Toni was a very smart character and for her, in the Fifties, the only alternative to getting married and having kids and being a mother, which she didn't want to do, was going into the religious order. It's kind of like a Sor Juana Ines de la Cruz [a brilliant poet-nun in seventeenth-century Mexico - DW] type choice. She felt intuitively that she wanted to get an education and expand her horizons. And I think that she felt the only way she could do that was to become a nun, because what she could look forward to if she stayed in the barrio was not what I think she finally felt fit for. But, then, as times change, and women's roles change, she changes as well. I think she really finds out who she is in the film, and she really becomes herself and is a success story with what she does. She's doing what she believes in; she becomes a very well-educated woman who's very smart and who does a lot of good in the community as a political activist. If we did a sequel, she'd run for Congress.

Cineaste: Does Central America hold a particular place in your heart in relation to the political strife and the political problems that were such a terrible situation in the 1980s?

Nava: Yes, I deal with this both in *El Norte* and *Mi Familia.* I think that Central America is incredibly important. I don't think that people realize how important it is in terms of the history of the Americas and what happened in the Eighties down there and how it affected, how it changed, the United States. I still don't think it's been recognized or understood by the Anglo population in the U.S., but it is an event of central importance to Latinos in the New World.

Cineaste: Your film also doesn't avoid dealing with some of the more unpleasant aspects of family life.

Nava: Yes, the family has to deal with a lot of real tough issues. You see domestic violence due to heavy drinking, you see the trauma that ensues with the death of Chucho and how that becomes the kind of family secret that no one talks about but which becomes the most powerful thing that changes the family structure and people's lives in the second half of the film. These are all very tough things, hard things to admit to and accept, but that do happen in families.

At the same time, there's great joy and humor in the film. The film is not only sad but it's also very funny at times. Family life, and Latino family life, is like that. It's like a tremendous roller coaster ride. I remember that my family would go from tragedy to comedy in the course of a day, from morning to afternoon [laughs], and this is what life is like. It's extreme when survival issues are in question.

So the film wants to express all of these kinds of things and be a real celebration of the beauty of Latino culture without sugarcoating any of the tough things that are going on in the barrio, and the difficulties that people have in surviving in the barrio. I wanted to ultimately be life-affirming, because I think that ultimately Latino culture is a life-affirming culture, and, despite all the tragedy and discrimination and injustice, that people endure.

I'm reminded of the beautiful work of Frida Kahlo, who was massively wounded as a young girl by an accident and lived her whole life in tremendous pain and suffering. If anyone had a right to be bitter, it was Frida Kahlo, and yet she wasn't. Her last painting was a very beautiful painting of watermelons, and a few days before she died she wrote "Viva la Vida" ["Long live life" - DW] across the bottom of those watermelons. I evoke

that in the film with the pan around the table. You see the watermelons in the center of the table, and that's the feeling that I wanted to convey when at the end the father says "We have had a good life." It's kind of sad, almost pathetic, when he says that because they've been through so much and suffered so much tragedy and yet there is acceptance. This is a beautiful thing that he does and I think it is very Latino. You know the beautiful poem by Machado [a Spanish poet of the Generation of 1898 - DW], "Caminante, no hay caminos." Everybody has their own road, and in a way you can't question those things too much, and must accept them as they are because, finally, that is your life.

I also wanted to show redemption in the film for a character like Jimmy. Jimmy is an angry man, he's a veteran, and yet I think we're very quick nowadays, even people within the community, to dismiss this person and banish him almost. But I wanted to redeem him because I feel that nobody is beyond redemption. Our young men are valuable and important to us and we cannot abandon them, and we have to know the trauma that they came from, and the wounds that they carry with them.

Cineaste: Just as he cannot abandon his son.

Nava: Yes, ultimately, we do not want him to abandon his son, that's right. And if we don't, then he won't, and that's important. To keep the cycles going.

One more thing that I wanted to show: the film is very much about bridges - the bridges that bridge Los Angeles with East Los Angeles. The people from East Los Angeles cross the bridge, but the people on the western side don't cross into East Los Angeles. And the bridges need to be crossed in both directions. But the image of the bridge extends beyond that. It is the bridges that exist between us and our past, as Latinos, our roots, and the bridges that then, understanding that, lead us to our future. The bridges that we have to build between people and members of the family, between fathers and sons, and mothers and daughters, and brothers and sisters. So the images of the bridges have tremendous use in the film to show all kinds of things within the family, the community, the neighborhood, and, finally, the city of Los Angeles.

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"FRIDA: BRINGING FRIDA KAHLO'S LIFE & ART TO FILM"

Foreword

An Artist by Default

by Hayden Herrera

> Astonished she remained seeing
> the sun-stars and the live-dead
> world and being in the shade
>
> —FRIDA KAHLO

When a friend gave Frida Kahlo (1907–54) her first exhibition in her native Mexico, most of those who attended the opening came out of loyalty to Frida, not out of admiration for her paintings. Since that time, the originality and power of Kahlo's work have been recognized, and she has become an international cult figure. Very likely she would have both laughed at and reveled in the attention: by painting her own image again and again Kahlo tried to attach people to her and to make her reality known.

Frida Kahlo became an artist by default. She planned to be a doctor, but in 1925 the bus she was riding home from school was rammed by a streetcar, and Kahlo almost died from injuries that left her a partial cripple and unable to bear children. While convalescing at home the following year she began to paint. Her self-portraits, many of which show her encased in orthopedic corsets, undergoing a surgical operation, or even having a miscarriage, helped Kahlo to confront and to exorcise pain. Painting the image she saw in the mirror also reinforced what she felt to be her tenuous hold on life.

In 1929 Kahlo began to suffer another kind of pain when she married the renowned muralist Diego Rivera, a man nearly twice her age and size. Although he adored Frida and was a great support for her art, the anguish prompted by his constant philandering would reappear in her paintings. Usually Frida scoffed at Rivera's affairs, but when he seduced her younger sister, she left him for several months in 1935. Then in 1939 Rivera divorced Kahlo for a year before remarrying her in San Francisco. To record this kind of suffering, Frida portrayed herself weeping, cracked open, and with her heart extracted and bleeding. In one painting cupids seesaw on a ferrule that penetrates the gap left by her extracted heart. Other times she painted herself with a miniature portrait of Rivera on her forehead: he was the constant intruder in her thoughts. Frida Kahlo retaliated with love affairs of her own, most notably with the Russian revolutionary Leon Trotsky.

LEFT: Self-Portrait with Monkeys, *1943.*

Miramax's choice of Julie Taymor to direct a film about Frida Kahlo was a brilliant stroke. Here was a director with the same fierce energy and intelligence as Kahlo herself, and Taymor also had just the right mixture of imagination and sardonic wit to keep Frida's story from turning into a melodrama. For all my confidence in Taymor, I attended a preview of *Frida* full of trepidation. What if I didn't believe in the Kahlo that Taymor and the actress Salma Hayek had invented? What if the screenplay, based on my biography of Frida, gave a false picture of Kahlo's life? As I watched the film, all my fears dissolved. The Frida who came to life on film was separate from the Frida in the pages of my book; she was a new creation, and so I was free to be deeply moved by her story. I also laughed: Taymor gave the film a light touch without losing depth and without ignoring Kahlo's dark side. Most important, she had the wisdom not to try to convey the crucial action of Kahlo's life—making paintings—by placing the artist before her easel and having her look intense as her brush slowly brought forth an image. Instead, Taymor suggested the creative process by moving imaginatively between Kahlo's paintings and the events and feelings that prompted them. Going beneath the skin of Frida's story, Taymor conveyed the meaning of Kahlo's fantastical imagery from the inside out. As a result we actually see and feel the vital link between Frida Kahlo's art and life.

(22)

Introduction

Director's Notes

by Julie Taymor

I am writing to you with my eyes.

—FRIDA KAHLO

A biopic about Frida Kahlo was not a project that instantly attracted me as a director. Most films on artists' lives drown in angst, grotesque behavior and impossible suppositions on how and why the artist creates. On delving into the screenplay and the biographies of Kahlo, however, I found a different kind of story that offered unusual insight into not only the creative impulses of a truly unique woman artist, but also into one of the most passionate and complex love stories of our time. Another draw to the project was the character of Frida herself. Contrary to popular theories that chose to latch on to the icon of Frida as a victim, a St. Sebastian for the "feminist" movement, I discovered an exuberant woman: humorous, foul-mouthed, erotic, tenacious, fearless and entirely feminine without sacrificing a potent sense of self-determination. Frida created herself as an icon with whatever means she had. She celebrated her lament with humor and irony as she blended her physical and emotional landscape into a way of living.

Thirty years of Frida's life are covered in the span of a two-hour film. Many choices had to be made on what to include in this epic tale of love, art and politics.

THE PAINTINGS

The question of how to show the artist creating her paintings was helped by the fact that most of Frida's work is autobiographical; you can place it to the specific events of her life; her relationship to illness, love, death and traditional Mexican folk art. She has said that her paintings were her reality, that they tell the truth as thoroughly experienced.

In conceptualizing the film, I envisioned juxtaposing period realism with a naïve and surreal approach to what could be called 3-D live paintings. Elements of her paintings would unfold before your eyes as Frida was experiencing them in a both literal and subconscious manner. An example of this blending is evident in the New York sequence.

First, I decided to establish New York, and in fact what "America" meant to Diego and Frida, in a black-

LEFT: Diego and Frida at their home in San Angel, April, 1939.
RIGHT: Salma Hayek and Julie Taymor on location during filming.

(23)

and-white photographic collage. Not having the budget to shoot in New York (the entire film was shot in Mexico) pushed us to be creative in the Frida style. With the help of Amoeba Proteus, a special effects company, we designed a scroll like Russian constructivist poster art, emblematic of the period. Frida's scribbling as she orates her letter to her sister highlights the collage in the manner of her diary doodles. We used documentary photos as well as film footage of the actual trips they took to Detroit, for example, to create the breadth of their journey with minimal means. This collage technique was used in Frida's painting, *My Dress Hangs There.*

In discovering through the biographies that Frida was attracted to the movies, especially the horror and comic genres, I decided to use a trip to the movie house to see *King Kong* as a metaphorical way of expressing her experience with Diego in New York. Diego's conquering of New York as well as his subsequent demise after the Rockefeller mural disaster is enacted first in a fantasy invasion of the actual film, *King Kong*, where, through her imagination, she plants herself as the unwitting femme in the hands of the monster. Through this device we experience, through humor and irony, Frida's ambivalence over the tremendous success and subsequent transformation of her husband in New York. Later, in Frida's daydreams that were drawn from the two paintings, *The Suicide of Dorothy Hale* and *What the Water Gave Me*, we see the outcome of that New York experience via her singular imagination. As she soaks in her tub, a primitively animated vision of King Kong falling from the top of the Empire State Building completes the tale of Diego's fall from grace. As Diego storms out the door, after a violent argument with Frida about returning to Mexico, we follow her eyes as they take us outside of their New York tenement apartment window. Hanging from a clothesline in the midst of a snowy, bleak New York City skyline floats Frida's brightly colored tehuana dress. The surreal aspect of this vision is that the dress seems to be inhabited by an invisible but dimensional body, a reference, again, to *My Dress Hangs There.*

In essence, we have experienced aspects of three of Frida's paintings as they played themselves out in her

story while the actual paintings themselves will not make their appearance in the film until many scenes later, when Trotsky and Breton peruse the canvases in her studio. Hopefully, at this moment, the audience will see the paintings on a much deeper level having experienced the abstract seeds of their creation. *Frida and Diego Rivera (The Wedding Portrait), Self-Portrait with Cropped Hair, The Two Fridas, The Broken Column* and *The Dream* are some of the other works that I charted during the course of Frida's tale. Each was approached with a different style and makes its way into the film from a specific emotional event that serves as a catalyst. These events of her life's narrative are a surface reality, barely hinting at a subtext far more complex and harrowing as revealed in the paintings.

LEFT: Diego and Frida in Mexico City, 1938. RIGHT: Salma Hayek and Alfred Molina as Frida and Diego. PREVIOUS PAGES: Annie Leibovitz photograph, shot on location in Mexico. From left: Salma Hayek as Frida, production designer Felipe Fernández del Paso, first assistant cameraman Arturo Casteñada, director of photography Rodrigo Prieto, director Julie Taymor, and producer Sarah Green.

In spite of my long illness, I feel immense joy in LIVING.

—FRIDA KAHLO, FROM HER DIARY, FRIDAY, 30 JANUARY 1953

I didn't want to do another painter-angst movie. Pain is there but pleasure is equally there.

—JULIE TAYMOR, *VOGUE*

DIEGO AND FRIDA

The love story of an "elephant and a dove," who at other times, were called "sacred monsters" is a turbulent ride through passion, abuse and dedication. Frida and Diego, on the surface, couldn't be more at odds, outrageous in their physical scale and age differences. Artistically, he was a muralist, chronicling the political and social milieu of the times, while she was a miniaturist, painting the interior landscape of her soul. They were perfect complements to one another and instead of the potential competition between artist couples, these two admired and supported each other.

The crux of the conflict, then, in this unusual love story can be summed up in the concept of "loyalty versus fidelity." Frida willingly married a man whom she knew could not be sexually faithful. She, instead, demanded "loyalty," and he promised to deliver. This subtle difference between these two principles is rarely delineated in contemporary Western society, particularly American, where a presidency practically fell to issues of infidelity. Frida managed somehow to deal with Diego's protean sexual appetite; she even took some of his lovers as her own. But the question of loyalty was breached when it came to Diego's affair with Frida's sister, Cristina. The relationship was severely damaged, almost irreparably. And yet, the power of the Frida/Diego story is that the true depth of their love managed to transcend the broken promises, the numerous infidelities on both parts, the tempests, the separations and ultimately a divorce. In the last years of Frida's life, when she was sick, bedridden and dependent on morphine—even then Diego came back to her. They truly couldn't live without one another.

ABOVE: Julie Taymor and her close friend and colleague, film editor François Bonnot, on location in Mexico. RIGHT: Cast and crew filming in the courtyard of the Blue House. The scene takes place following Frida's catastrophic accident.

25

THE PERIOD AND THE PLACE

Mexico in the twenties, thirties and forties is an exciting backdrop to Frida's story. The avant-garde artists were socially committed, cosmopolitan and at the forefront of international debate on the role of the artist in politics and culture. Diego and Frida bridged the European movements with a newly found appreciation for the indigenous Mexican forms of ceremony, music and art. Though communist, Frida was drawn to the religious folk art, the retablos, for inspiration, even though her approach was irreligious. Tina Modotti, David Siqueiros, Leon Trotsky, and Nelson Rockefeller are just a few of the major figures of the time woven into the film's drama.

THE SHOOT

Though the story travels from Mexico City in 1922 to New York and Paris through the next two decades, we shot the entire film on location and constructed sets in Mexico. The Art Nouveau architecture of the city of Puebla was perfect to suggest Paris. Art Deco sets of Rockefeller center and other New York locals were built at Estudios Churubusco Azteca. San Luis Potosi doubled for old Mexico City in the bus crash sequence. The actual locations of the preparatory school, Chapingo Chapel, the pyramids of Teotihuacán, the house at San Angel, the Ministry of Education, and so on were used with the permission and tremendous support of the Mexican authorities.

We had ten six-day weeks to shoot the film, an exhausting but thoroughly exhilarating experience. The almost entirely Mexican crew was brilliant, hard working and, most importantly, fun. The actors who came from all corners of the earth were impassioned and talented. The post-production team in the editorial, sound and music departments delivered beyond my expectations. But it is Salma Hayek who made me truly want to do this film and whose performance and passion, both on and off the set so inspired me. Her grueling six-year saga of bringing Frida's story to the screen is a testament to her vision, tenacity and faith that she could make it happen. I am proud to have joined her for the ride.

26

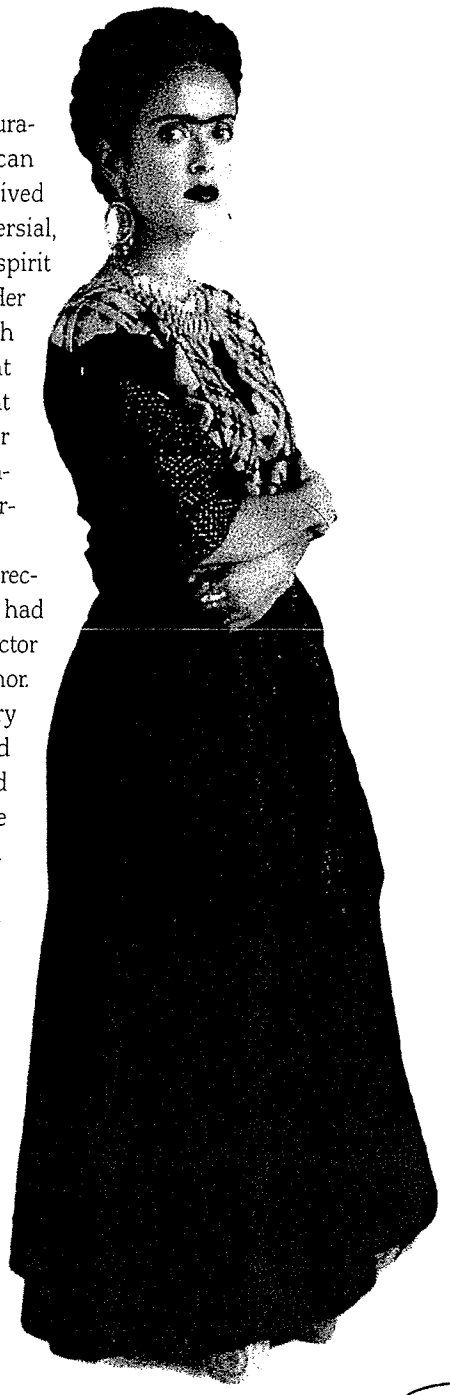
Introduction

The Passion of Frida Kahlo

by Salma Hayek

Frida tells the story about a courageous and fascinating Mexican woman who wholeheartedly lived every second of her controversial, unique and tormented life. Her colorful spirit inspired me; her passion made me passionate. Her provocative and unconditional relationship with Diego Rivera and her unusual and vibrant vision, as seen through her art, are testament that Frida Kahlo was and still is ahead of her time. Her life story is not only cinematic; it transcends time and captures the essence of her surrealistic approach to art and life.

To film this story, we needed a visionary director. Finding that person took many years. I had always hoped that we could find a female director for the film, and I was always a fan of Julie Taymor. I knew that Julie would make a beautiful and very visual film but after our first meeting, I realized that she understood Frida's vision of the world more deeply than anyone else I had met. Julie also understood Mexico. I was impressed with her knowledge of my country—our culture, music, folklore, and even our food. The more time I spent with her, the more I was convinced that Julie Taymor was the perfect director for the film I had dreamed about for so many years. Julie, like Frida, is a passionate artist with conviction, not afraid to have an unconventional vision and definitely not afraid to fight for it. I was convinced that combining Frida



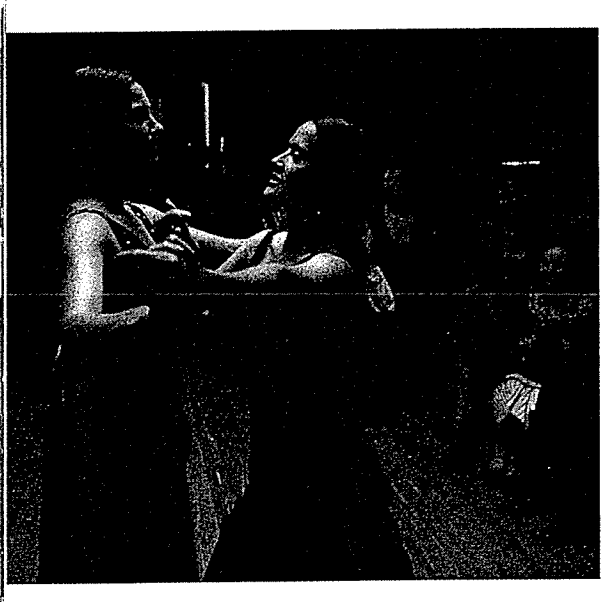
LEFT: Photo of Frida Kahlo showing her elaborately braided hair, an image that appears in many of her self-portraits, 1944.

27

Introduction

Kahlo's life story with the extraordinary cast that came together, the wonderful crew we assembled in Mexico, the support of Miramax and Julie's genius would result in a provocative, touching and visually stimulating film. My dream came true—a dream that started years ago, although my adoration of Frida began long before that.

The first time I saw a painting by Frida Kahlo, I was fourteen years old. A friend of mine showed me a book with these bloody paintings, which I thought were just horrendous. But the images haunted me, and I would return to my friend's house and ask, "Can you show me those horrible pictures again? I want to see that one with the head sticking out of the vagina." And so, in the beginning, I was both horrified and intrigued; then slowly, I fell deeply in love with Frida Kahlo and her work, and she has been in my life ever since. She has also ignited the fascination of those closest to me.



When the script needed to be re-written, we were challenged to find a writer who would bring together all the disparate elements of Frida's story. It was a love story, but one that took place in a specific time and place—socially, politically and artistically. Edward Norton stepped in and delivered a brilliant screenplay. Julie and Edward had a great working relationship of mutual respect and understanding. He was clear on her vision of the film and was able to integrate her innovative visual images organically in the story. He wrote at night since he was acting in another movie during the day. He hardly ever slept. It was a very difficult task, and although he was familiar with Frida Kahlo and Diego Rivera, he undertook a great deal of new research. In addition to Edward's uncredited role as screenwriter, he also plays a cameo as Nelson Rockefeller.

I expected to make a movie that would say something fantastic about Mexico, a movie about an extraordinary woman. However, I did not know *Frida* would surround me with the love and support of artists and friends whose talent and grace touched me in ways I will never forget. In a very personal and profound way, that gift was more fulfilling than the realization of my original dream.

(28)

"RECONSTRUCTING GENDER"
Estelle Disch, ed.

12

BEAUTY IS THE BEAST

Psychological Effects of the Pursuit of the Perfect Female Body

ELAYNE A. SALTZBERG AND JOAN C. CHRISLER

Ambrose Bierce (1958) once wrote, "To men a man is but a mind. Who cares what face he carries or what he wears? But woman's body is the woman." Despite the societal changes achieved since Bierce's ime, his statement remains true. Since the height of the feminist movement n the early 1970s, women have spent more money than ever before on prod-ıcts and treatments designed to make them beautiful. Cosmetic sales have ncreased annually to reach $18 billion in 1987 ("Ignoring the economy . . . ,"

From *Women: A Feminist Perspective*, Jo Freeman, ed. Copyright © 1995 by Mayfield Publishing Company. Reprinted by permission. The authors thank Jo Freeman, Sue Wilkinson, and Paulette Leonard for their helpful comments on an earlier version of this paper and Barbara Weber for locating the business and industry statistics.

1989), sales of women's clothing averaged $103 billion per month in 1990 (personal communication, U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis, 1992), dieting has become a $30-billion-per-year industry (Stoffel, 1989), and women spent $1.2 billion on cosmetic surgery in 1990 (personal communication, American Society of Plastic and Reconstructive Surgeons, 1992). The importance of beauty has apparently increased even as women are reaching for personal freedoms and economic rights undreamed of by our grandmothers. The emphasis on beauty may be a way to hold onto a feminine image while shedding feminine roles.

Attractiveness is prerequisite for femininity but not for masculinity (Freedman, 1986). The word *beauty* always refers to the female body. Attractive male bodies are described as "handsome," a word derived from "hand" that refers as much to action as appearance (Freedman, 1986). Qualities of achievement and strength accompany the term *handsome;* such attributes are rarely employed in the description of attractive women and certainly do not accompany the term *beauty,* which refers only to a decorative quality. Men are instrumental; women are ornamental.

Beauty is a most elusive commodity. Ideas of what is beautiful vary across cultures and change over time (Fallon, 1990). Beauty cannot be quantified or objectively measured; it is the result of the judgments of others. The concept is difficult to define, as it is equated with different, sometimes contradictory, ideas. When people are asked to define beauty, they tend to mention abstract, personal qualities rather than external, quantifiable ones (Freedman, 1986; Hatfield & Sprecher, 1986). The beholder's perceptions and cognitions influence the degree of attractiveness at least as much as do the qualities of the beheld.

Because beauty is an ideal, an absolute, such as truth and goodness, the pursuit of it does not require justification (Herman & Polivy, 1983). An ideal, by definition, can be met by only a minority of those who strive for it. If too many women are able to meet the beauty standards of a particular time and place, then those standards must change in order to maintain their extraordinary nature. The value of beauty standards depends on their being special and unusual and is one of the reasons why the ideal changes over time. When images of beauty change, female bodies are expected to change, too. Different aspects of the female body and varying images of each body part are modified to meet the constantly fluctuating ideal (Freedman, 1986). The ideal is always that which is most difficult to achieve and most unnatural in a given time period. Because these ideals are nearly impossible to achieve, failure and disappointment are inevitable (Freedman, 1988).

Although people have been decorating their bodies since prehistoric times, the Chinese may have been the first to develop the concept that the female body can and should be altered from its natural state. The practice of foot binding clearly illustrates the objectification of parts of the female body as well as the demands placed on women to conform to beauty ideals. The custom called for the binding of the feet of five-year-old girls so that as they

grew, their toes became permanently twisted under their arches and would actually shrink in size. The big toe remained untouched. The more tightly bound the feet, the more petite they became and the more attractive they were considered to be (Freedman, 1986; Hatfield & Sprecher, 1986; Lakoff & Scherr, 1984). The painful custom of foot binding finally ended in the twentieth century after women had endured over one thousand years of torture for beauty's sake (Brain, 1979).

In the sixteenth century, European women bound themselves into corsets of whalebone and hardened canvas. A piece of metal or wood ran down the front to flatten the breasts and abdomen. This garment made it impossible to bend at the waist and difficult to breathe. A farthingale, which was typically worn over the corset, held women's skirts out from their bodies. It consisted of bent wood held together with tapes and made such simple activities as sitting nearly impossible. Queen Catherine of France introduced waist binding with a tortuous invention consisting of iron bands that minimized the size of the waist to the ideal measurement of thirteen inches (Baker, 1984). In the seventeenth century, the waist was still laced, but breasts were once again stylish, and fashions were designed to enhance them. Ample breasts, hips, and buttocks became the beauty ideal, perhaps paralleling a generally warmer attitude toward family life (Rosenblatt & Stencel, 1982). A white pallor was also popular at that time, probably as an indication that the woman was so affluent that she did not need to work outdoors, where the sun might darken her skin. Ceruse, a white lead-based paint now known to be toxic, was used to accentuate the pallor.

Tight corsets came back into vogue in Europe and North America in the mid-nineteenth century, and many women were willing to run the risk of developing serious health problems in order to wear them. The tight lacing often led to pulmonary disease and internal organ damage. American women disregarded the advice of their physicians, who spoke against the use of corsets because of their potential to displace internal organs. Fainting, or "the vapors," was the result of wearing such tightly laced clothing that normal breathing became impossible. Even the clergy sermonized against corsets; miscarriages were known to result in pregnant women who insisted on lacing themselves up too tightly. In the late nineteenth century, the beauty ideal required a tiny waist and full hips and bustline. Paradoxically, women would go on diets to gain weight while, at the same time, trying to achieve a smaller waistline. Some women were reported to have had their lower ribs removed so that their waists could be more tightly laced (Brain, 1979).

In the twentieth century, the ideal female body has changed several times, and American women have struggled to change along with it. In the 1920s, the ideal had slender legs and hips, small breasts, and bobbed hair and was physically and socially active. Women removed the stuffing from their bodices and bound their breasts[1] to appear young and boyish. In the 1940s and 1950s, the ideal returned to the hourglass shape. Marilyn Monroe was considered the epitome of the voluptuous and fleshy yet naive and

childlike ideal. In the 1960s, the ideal had a youthful, thin, lean body and long, straight hair. American women dieted relentlessly in an attempt to emulate the tall, thin, teenage model Twiggy, who personified the 1960s' beauty ideal. Even pregnant women were on diets in response to their doctors' orders not to gain more than twenty pounds, advice physicians later rejected as unsafe (Fallon, 1990). Menopausal women begged their physicians to prescribe hormone replacement therapy, which was rumored to prevent wrinkles and keep the body youthful, and were willing to run any health risk to preserve their appearance (Chrisler, Torrey, & Matthes, 1989). In the 1970s, a thin, tan, sensuous look was "in." The 1980s' beauty ideal remained slim but required a more muscular, toned, and physically fit body. In recent decades the beauty ideal has combined such opposite traits as erotic sophistication with naive innocence, delicate grace with muscular athleticism (Freedman, 1988), and thin bodies with large breasts. The pressure to cope with such conflicting demands and to keep up with the continual changes in the ideal female body is highly stressful (Freedman, 1988) and has resulted in a large majority of American women with negative body images (Dworkin & Kerr, 1987; Rosen, Saltzberg, & Srebnik, 1989). Women's insecurity about their looks has made it easy to convince them that small breasts are a "disease" that require surgical intervention. The sophisticated woman of the 1990s who is willing to accept the significant health risks of breast implants in order to mold her body to fit the beauty ideal has not progressed far beyond her sisters who bound their feet and waists.

The value of beauty depends in part on the high costs of achieving it. Such costs may be physical, temporal, economic, or psychological. Physical costs include the pain of ancient beauty rituals such as foot binding, tattooing, and nose and ear piercing as well as more modern rituals such as wearing pointy-toed, high-heeled shoes, tight jeans, and sleeping with one's hair in curlers. Side effects of beauty rituals have often been disastrous for women's health. Tattooing and ear piercing with unsanitary instruments have lead to serious, sometimes fatal, infections. Many women have been poisoned by toxic chemicals in cosmetics (e.g., ceruse, arsenic, benzene, and petroleum) and have died from the use of unsafe diet products such as rainbow pills and liquid protein (Schwartz, 1986). The beauty-related disorders anorexia nervosa and bulimia have multiple negative health effects, and side effects of plastic surgery include hemorrhages, scars, and nerve damage. Silicone implants have resulted in breast cancer, autoimmune disease, and the formation of thick scar tissue.

Physical costs of dieting include a constant feeling of hunger that leads to emotional changes, such as irritability; in cases of very low caloric intake, dieters can experience difficulty concentrating, confusion, and even reduced cognitive capacity. The only growing group of smokers in the United States are young women, many of whom report that they smoke to curb their appetites (Sorensen & Pechacek, 1987). High heels cause lower

30

ack pain and lead to a variety of podiatric disorders. Furthermore, fashion rends have increased women's vulnerability in a variety of ways; long hair nd dangling earrings have gotten caught in machinery and entangled in lothing and led to injury. High heels and tight skirts prevent women from unning from danger. The *New York Times* fashion reporter Bernardine Morris was alarmed to see in Pierre Cardin's 1988 summer fashion show ight wraps that prevented the models from moving their arms (Morris, 988).

Attaining the beauty ideal requires a lot of money. Expensive cosmetics e.g., makeup, moisturizers, and hair dyes and straighteners) are among the nost popular and are thought to be the most effective, even though their ngredients cost the same (and sometimes are the same) as those in less xpensive products (Lakoff & Scherr, 1984). Health spas have become fash-onable again as vacation spots for the rich and famous, and everyone wants o wear expensive clothing with designer labels. Plastic surgery has become o accepted and so common that, although it's quite expensive, surgeons dvertise their services on television. Surgery is currently performed that an reduce the size of lips, ear lobes, noses, buttocks, thighs, abdomens, and reasts; rebuild a face; remove wrinkles; and add "padding" to almost any ody part. Not surprisingly, most plastic surgery patients are women Hamburger, 1988).

Beauty rituals are time-consuming activities. Jokes about how long vomen take to get ready for a date are based on the additional tasks vomen do when getting dressed. It takes time to pluck eyebrows, shave egs, manicure nails, apply makeup, and arrange hair. Women's clothing is nore complicated than men's, and many more accessories are used. lthough all women know that the "transformation from female to femi-ine is artificial" (Chapkis, 1986, p. 5), we conspire to hide the amount of ime and effort it takes, perhaps out of fear that other women don't need as nuch time as we do to appear beautiful. A lot of work goes into looking like "natural" beauty, but that work is not acknowledged by popular culture, nd the tools of the trade are kept out of view. Men's grooming rituals are ewer, take less time, and need not be hidden away. Scenes of men shaving ave often been seen on television and in movies and have even been ainted by Norman Rockwell. Wendy Chapkis (1986) challenges her read-rs to "imagine a similar cultural celebration of a woman plucking her eye-rows, shaving her armpits, or waxing her upper lip" (p. 6). Such a scene vould be shocking and would remove the aura of mystery that surrounds eautiful women.

Psychological effects of the pursuit of the perfect female body include nhappiness, confusion, misery, and insecurity. Women often believe that if nly they had perfect looks, their lives would be perfectly happy; they blame heir unhappiness on their bodies. American women have the most negative ody image of any culture studied by the Kinsey Institute (Faludi, 1991). Dissatisfaction with their bodies is very common among adolescent girls

(Adams & Crossman, 1978; Clifford, 1971; Freedman, 1984), and older women believe that the only way to remain attractive is to prevent the development of any signs of aging. Obsessive concern about body shape and weight have become so common among American women of all ages that they now constitute the norm (Rodin, Silberstein, & Striegel-Moore, 1985). The majority of women in the United States are dieting at any given time. For them, being female means feeling fat and inadequate and living with chronic low self-esteem (Rodin, et al., 1985). Ask any woman what she would like to change about her body and she'll answer immediately. Ask her what she likes about her body and she'll have difficulty responding.

Those women who do succeed in matching the ideal thinness expected by modern beauty standards usually do so by exercising frenetically and compulsively, implementing severely restrictive and nutritionally deficient diets, developing bizarre eating habits, and using continuous self-degradation and self-denial. Dieting has become a "cultural requirement" for women (Herman & Polivy, 1983) because the ideal female body has become progressively thinner at the same time that the average female body has become progressively heavier. This cultural requirement remains in place despite the fact that physiology works against weight loss to such an extent that 98 percent of diets fail (Chrisler, 1989; Fitzgerald, 1981). In fact, it is more likely for someone to fully recover from cancer than for an obese person to lose a significant amount of weight and maintain that loss for five years (Brownell, 1982). Yet a recent study (Davies & Furnham, 1986) found that young women rate borderline anorexic bodies as very attractive. Thus, even the thinnest women find it nearly impossible to meet and maintain the beauty ideal.

The social pressure for thinness can be directly linked to the increasing incidence of anorexia nervosa and bulimia among women (Brumberg, 1988; Caskey, 1986). There are presently at least one million Americans with anorexia nervosa, and 95 percent of them are women. Between sixty thousand and 150,000 of them will die as a result of their obsession (Schwartz, 1986). Although cases of anorexia nervosa have been reported in the medical literature for hundreds of years (Bell, 1985), it was considered to be a rare disorder until the 1970s. Today's anorexics are also thinner than they were in the past (Brumberg, 1988). It is estimated that at least seven million American women will experience symptoms of bulimia at some point in their lives (Hatfield & Sprecher, 1986). A recent study (Hall & Cohn, 1988) found that 25 to 33 percent of female first-year college students were using vomiting after meals as a method of weight control. An accurate estimate of the number of women who are caught in the binge-purge cycle is difficult because women with bulimia are generally secretive about their behavior and the physical signs of bulimia are not nearly are obvious as those of anorexia nervosa.

Exercise has become for many women another manifestation of their body dissatisfaction. Studies have found that most men who exercise

egularly do so to build body mass and to increase cardiovascular fitness; most women who exercise do so to lose weight and to change the shape of their bodies in order to increase their attractiveness (Garner, Rockert, Olmstead, Johnson, & Coscina, 1985; Saltzberg, 1990). Exercise has lost its status as a pleasurable activity and become yet another way for women to manipulate their bodies, another vehicle for narcissistic self-torture. Reports of the number of women exercising compulsively are increasing and may become as widespread as compulsive calorie counting and the compulsive eating habits of anorexics and bulimics.

Beauty ideals are created and maintained by society's elite. Racism, class prejudice, and rejection of the disabled are clearly reflected (Chapkis, 1986) in current American beauty standards. For example, women from lower socioeconomic groups typically weigh more than women in higher socioeconomic groups (Moore, Stunkard, & Srole, 1962); they are thus excluded by popular agreement from being considered beautiful. The high costs of chic clothing, cosmetics, tanning salons, skin and hair treatments, weight loss programs, and plastic surgery prevent most American women from access to the tools necessary to approach the ideal. Furthermore, the beauty standard idealizes Caucasian features and devalues those of other races (Lewis, 1977; Miller, 1969). In recent years, Asian American and African-American women have sought facial surgery in order to come closer to the beauty ideal (Faludi, 1991), and psychotherapists have noted increased reports from their black women clients of guilt, shame, anger, and resentment about skin color, hair texture, facial features, and body size and shape (Greene, 1992; Neal & Wilson, 1989; Okazawa-Rey, Robinson, & Ward, 1987). Obviously, women with visible disabilities will never be judged to have achieved "perfection." Whoopi Goldberg's routine about the black teenager who wrapped a towel around her head to pretend it was long, blonde hair and Alice Walker's (1990) essay about her psychological adjustment after the eye injury that resulted in the development of "hideous" scar tissue provide poignant examples of the pain women experience when they cannot meet beauty standards.

The inordinate emphasis on women's external selves makes it difficult for us to appreciate our own internal selves (Kano, 1985). The constant struggle to meet the beauty ideal leads to high stress and chronic anxiety. Failure to meet the beauty ideal leads to feelings of frustration, low self-worth, and inadequacy in women whose sense of self is based on their physical appearance. The intensity of the drive to increase attractiveness may also contribute to the high rate of depression among women.[2]

Insecurity is common even among beautiful women, and studies show that they are as likely as their plain sisters to be unhappy about their looks (Freedman, 1988). Beautiful women are all too aware of the fleeting nature of their beauty; the effects of aging must be constantly monitored, and these women worry that the beauty ideal they've tried so hard to match may change without warning. When such women lose their beauty due to illness

or accidents, they often become depressed and are likely to have difficulty functioning in society and to believe that their entire identity has been threatened.

Given the high costs of striving to be beautiful, why do women attempt it? Attractiveness greatly affects first impressions and later interpersonal relationships. In a classic study titled "What Is Beautiful Is Good," psychologists Kenneth Dion, Ellen Berscheid, and Elaine Walster Hatfield (1972) asked college students to rate photographs of strangers on a variety of personal characteristics. Those who were judged to be attractive were also more likely to be rated intelligent, kind, happy, flexible, interesting, confident, sexy, assertive, strong, outgoing, friendly, poised, modest, candid, and successful than those judged unattractive. Teachers rate attractive children more highly on a variety of positive characteristics including IQ and sociability, and attractive babies are cuddled and kissed more often than unattractive babies (Berscheid & Walster, 1974). Attractive people receive more lenient punishment for social transgressions (Dion, 1972; Landy & Aronson, 1969), and attractive women are more often sought out in social situations (Walster, Aronson, Abrahams, & Rottman, 1966; Reis, Nezlek, & Wheeler, 1980).

Furthermore, because unattractive people are more harshly punished for social transgressions and are less often sought after social partners, failure to work toward the beauty ideal can result in real consequences. Television newswoman Christine Craft made the news herself when she was fired for being too old and too unattractive. Street harassers put women "in their place" by commenting loudly on their beauty or lack of it. Beauty norms limit the opportunities of women who can't or won't meet them. Obese women, for example, have experienced discrimination in a number of instances including hiring and promotion (Larkin & Pines, 1979; Rothblum, Miller, & Gorbutt, 1988) and college admissions (Canning & Mayer, 1966). Obese people even have a harder time finding a place to live; Lambros Karris (1977) found that landlords are less likely to rent to obese people. Even physicians view their obese patients negatively (Maddox & Liederman, 1969).

There is considerable evidence that women's attractiveness is judged more harshly than men's. Christine Craft was fired, yet David Brinkley and Willard Scott continue to work on major television news shows; their abilities are not thought to be affected by age or attractiveness. Several studies (Adams & Huston, 1975; Berman, O'Nan, & Floyd, 1981; Deutsch, Zalenski, & Clark, 1986; Wernick & Manaster, 1984) that asked participants to rate the attractiveness of photographs of people of varying ages found that although attractiveness ratings of both men and women decline with age, the rate of decline for women was greater. In one study (Deutsch, Zalenski, & Clark, 1986), participants were asked to rate the photographs for femininity and masculinity as well as attractiveness. The researchers found that both the attractiveness and femininity ratings of the female photographs diminished with age; the masculinity ratings were unaffected by the age or attractiveness

32

of the photographs. Women are acutely aware of the double standard of attractiveness. At all ages women are more concerned than men about weight and physical appearance and have lower appearance self-esteem; women who define themselves as feminine are the most concerned about their appearance and have the lowest self-esteem (Pliner, Chaiken, & Flett, 1990). In fact, women are so concerned about their body size that they typically overestimate it. Women who overestimate their size feel worse about themselves, whereas men's self-esteem is unrelated to their body size estimates (Thompson, 1986). In a review of research on the stigma of obesity, Esther Rothblum (1992) concluded that the dieting industry, combined with Western attitudes toward weight and attractiveness, causes more pain and problems for women than for men.

Thus, the emphasis on beauty has political as well as psychological consequences for women, as it results in oppression and disempowerment. It is important for women to examine the effects that the pursuit of the perfect female body has had on their lives, challenge their beliefs, and take a stand against continued enslavement to the elusive beauty ideal. Women would then be able to live life more freely and experience the world more genuinely. Each woman must decide for herself what beauty really is and the extent to which she is willing to go to look attractive. Only a more diverse view of beauty and a widespread rebellion against fashion extremes will save us from further physical and psychological tolls.

Imagine an American society where the quality and meaning of life for women are not dependent on the silence of bodily shame. Imagine a society where bodies are decorated for fun and to express creativity rather than for self-control and self-worth. Imagine what would happen if the world's women released and liberated all of the energy that had been absorbed in the beautification process. The result might be the positive, affirming, healthy version of a nuclear explosion!

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33

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NOTES

1. Bras were originally designed to hide breasts.
2. Statistics indicate that women are far more likely than men to be diagnosed as depressed. The ratio is at least 3 : 1 (Williams, 1985).

"HEAVENLY BODIES:
FILM STARS & SOCIETY"

RICHARD DYER

1:

Monroe and Sexuality

The denial of the body is delusion. No woman transcends her body.
Joseph C. Rheingold

Men want women pink, helpless and do a lot of deep breathing.
Jayne Mansfield

Stars matter because they act out aspects of life that matter to us; and performers get to be stars when what they act out matters to enough people. Though there is a sense in which stars must touch on things that are deep and constant features of human existence, such features never exist outside a culturally and historically specific context. So, for example, sexual intercourse takes place in all human societies, but what intercourse means and how much it matters alters from culture to culture, and within the history of any culture. The argument in this chapter is that, in the fifties, there were specific ideas of what sexuality meant and it was held to matter a very great deal; and because Marilyn Monroe acted out those specific ideas, and because they were *felt* to matter so much, she was charismatic, a centre of attraction who seemed to embody what was taken to be a central feature of human existence at that time.

My method is to read Monroe through the ideas about sexuality that circulated in the fifties, ideas that I centre on two strands, the one most forcefully represented by **Playboy** magazine, the other concerned with comprehending female sexuality. I want to use the term discourse for these strands, to indicate that we are not dealing with philosophically coherent thought systems but rather with clusters of ideas, notions, feelings, images, attitudes and assumptions that, taken together, make up distinctive ways of thinking and feeling about things, of making a particular sense of the world. A discourse runs across different media and practices, across different cultural levels – from the self-conscious Playboy 'philosophy' to the habitual forms of the

35

pin-up, from psychoanalytic theory through psychotherapeutic practices to the imagery of popular magazines and best-selling novels.

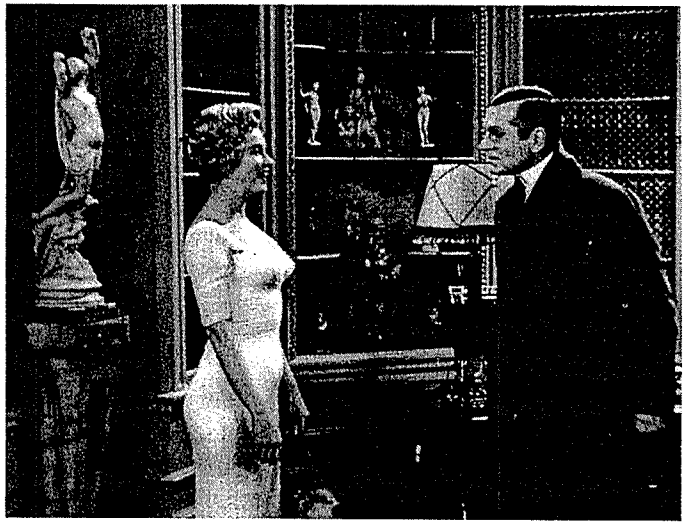
To a large extent, the analysis which follows stays 'within' discourse. Though I do make some reference to the material world which discourse itself refers to, I don't really analyse it in any detail. As far as my argument goes, Monroe is charismatic because she embodies what the discourses designate as the important-at-the-time central features of human existence. In this way I want to avoid a simplistic correlation between Monroe and either the actual social structures of the fifties or the lived experience of 'ordinary' women and men. However, this is a limitation of my approach and I wouldn't want to give the impression that there is no correlation between discourses, structures and experiences. If the discourses (and Monroe) did not in fact have some purchase on how people lived in the social and economic conditions of their time, I do not see how they can have in any sense worked or been effective; I don't think people would have paid to go and see her. But I do not show here just what the precise nature of the connections between discourses, social structures and experiences are in this case.

In stressing the importance of sexuality in Marilyn Monroe's image, it might seem that I am just another commentator doing to Monroe what was done to her throughout her life, treating her solely in terms of sex. Perhaps that is a danger, but I hope that I am not just reproducing this attitude to Monroe but trying to understand it and historicise it. Monroe may have been a wit, a subtle and profound actress, an intelligent and serious woman; I've no desire to dispute this and it is important to recognise and recover those qualities against the grain of her image. But my purpose is to understand the grain itself, and there can be no question that this is overwhelmingly and relentlessly constructed in terms of sexuality. Monroe = sexuality is a message that ran all the way from what the media made of her in the pin-ups and movies to how her image became a reference point for sexuality in the coinage of everyday speech.

She started her career as a pin-up, and one can find no type of image more single-mindedly sexual than that. Pin-ups remained a constant and vital aspect of her image right up to her death, and the pin-up style also indelibly marked other aspects, such as public appearances and promotion for films. The roles she was given, how she was filmed and the reviews she got do little to counteract this emphasis.

She plays, from the beginning, 'the girl', defined solely by age, gender and sexual appeal. In two films, she does not even have a name (**Scudda Hoo! Scudda Hay!** 1948 and **Love Happy,** 1950) and in three other cases, her character has no biography beyond being 'the blonde' (**Dangerous Years,** 1948; **The Fireball,** 1950 and **Right Cross,** 1950). Even when any information about the character is supplied, it serves to reinforce the basic anonymity of the role. For instance, when the character has a job, it is a job that – while it may, like that of secretary, be in fact productive – is traditionally (or cinematically) thought of as being one where the woman is on show, there for the pleasure of men. These jobs in Monroe's early films are chorus girl (**Ladies of the Chorus,** 1948 and **Ticket to Tomahawk,** 1950), actress (**All About Eve,** 1950 – the film emphasises that the character has no talent) or secretary (**Home Town Story,** 1951; **As Young As You Feel,** 1951 and **Monkey Business,** 1952). There is very little advance on these roles in the later career. She has no name in **The Seven Year Itch** (1955), even in the credits she is just 'the Girl'. She is a chorus girl in **Gentlemen Prefer Blondes** (1953), **There's No Business Like Show Business** (1954), **The Prince and the Showgirl** (1957) and **Let's Make Love** (1960), and a solo artiste of no great talent in **River of No Return** (1954), **Bus Stop** (1956) and **Some Like It Hot** (1959). She is a model (hardly an extension of the role repertoire) in **How to Marry a Millionaire** (1953) and **The Seven Year Itch** (1955), and a prostitute in **O. Henry's Full House** (1952). Thus even in her prestige roles, **Bus Stop** and **The Prince and the Showgirl,** the social status of the person she plays remains the same (this does not mean, of course, that there is no difference between these characters or their portrayal). The tendency to treat her as nothing more than her gender reaches its peak with **The Misfits** (1961), where, from being the 'girl' in the early films, she now becomes the 'woman', or perhaps just 'Woman' – Roslyn has no biography, she is just 'a divorcee'; the symbolic structure of the film relates her to Nature, the antithesis of culture, career, society, history . . .

There is no question that Monroe did a lot with these roles, but it is nearly always against the grain of how they are written, and how they are filmed too. She is knitted into the fabric of the film through point-of-view shots located in male characters – even in the later films, and virtually always in the earlier ones, she is set up as an object of male sexual gaze. Frequently too she is placed within the frame of the camera in such a way as to stand out in silhouette, a side-on tits and arse positioning obsessively repeated throughout her films. One of the most sustained



Marilyn Monroe and Laurence Olivier in **The Prince and the Showgirl** (1957)

treatments of her as sexual spectacle is **The Prince and the Showgirl,** a film produced by her own company and directed by Sir Laurence Olivier, a film you might expect to be different in approach. Superficially it is – the lines more theatrically witty, the sets more tastefully dressed than in her 20th Century-Fox extravaganzas. Yet the film constantly plays with our supposed desire to see Monroe as sexual spectacle. The first few minutes of the film concerning the Monroe character, Elsie, are set backstage at 'The Cocoanut Girl', in and around the showgirls' dressing room. Such settings always raise voyeurs' hopes, and the film teases them. One shot follows the call boy along the passage to the dressing room that Elsie shares with the other girls; he knocks and enters, leaving the door open, but from where the camera is positioned we can't see the girls; after a moment, however, the camera cranes round so that it/we can see in on the girls, but the tease is also a cheat – they are all fully dressed. Later in the film Monroe and Olivier are posed on either side of the screen. Olivier is face-on, in a shapeless dressing-gown against a dark background of bookshelves – his figure is not clearly visible and the *mise-en-scène* identifies him with the intellect (books). Monroe is posed side-on, in a tight dress that facilitates another tits and arse shot as in earlier films. Behind her is a nude female statuette. Her figure is thrust at us, and the *mise-en-scène* identifies her with woman-as-body, woman-as-spectacle.

Hardly surprisingly, the reviewers also saw her over-

*All quotations of reviews taken from Conway and Ricci (1964), unless otherwise stated.

whelmingly in terms of sex.* Typical of the early period are descriptions of her as 'a beautiful blonde' in **The Asphalt Jungle** (1950), 'curvey Marilyn Monroe' in **As Young As You Feel,** as having a 'shapely chassis' and being 'a beautiful blonde' in **Let's Make It Legal** (1951). Just on the brink of full stardom (and after having, as we now suppose, made a mark, beyond that of sex object, in **The Asphalt Jungle** and **All About Eve**), a critic writes, à propos of **We're Not Married** (1952), 'Marilyn Monroe supplies the beauty at which she is Hollywood's currently foremost expert.' Barbara Stanwyck recalls the gentlemen of the press, when they visited the lot of **Clash By Night** (1952), announcing that they were not interested in her, Stanwyck, the star of the film – 'We don't want to speak to her. We know everything about her. We want to talk to the girl with the big tits.' Again, even as late as **Some Like It Hot** and **Let's Make Love,** the same kind of remarks are found among the reviews – of the former: '. . . Miss Monroe, whose figure simply cannot be overlooked . . .' and of the latter: '. . . the famous charms are in evidence'. Thus the direct physical presence of Monroe is never lost sight of behind other later emphases, such as her wit or acting abilities, though it is true that there is a certain jokey defensiveness about much of the later reviews' harping on sex appeal, as if in acknowledgement of the other claims made for Monroe in the period.

Given this emphasis in the pin-ups, movies and reviews, it is not surprising that Monroe became virtually a household word for sex. It is, for obvious reasons, harder to marshall the evidence for this. I recall it myself and many people I have spoken to remember it too. A couple of quotations may bring it to life.

The first, in the sociological study **Coal Is Our Life** by Norman Dennis, Fernando Henriques and Clifford Slaughter, records the impact of Monroe's appearance in **Niagara** (1953) on a group of miners and their wives in the north-east of England. This is particularly interesting. So much is Monroe part of the coinage of everyday speech, she can be used to exemplify quite different ways of thinking and feeling about sex:

In the bookie's office or at the pit they made jokes about the suggestiveness of Miss Monroe, about her possible effect on certain persons present, and about her nickname, 'The Body'. Indeed any man seemed to gain something in stature and recognition if he could contribute some lewd remark to the conversation. On the other hand, in private conversation with a stranger the same

37

men would suggest that the film was at best rather silly, and at worst on the verge of disgusting. Finally, the men's comments in the presence of women were entirely different. In a group of married couples who all knew each other well, the women said that they thought Miss Monroe silly and her characteristics overdone; the men said that they liked the thought of a night in bed with her. The more forward of the women soon showed up their husbands by coming back with some remark as 'You wouldn't be so much bloody good to her anyway!' and the man would feed awkward (Dennis *et al,* (1969) p.216).

The second quotation is from Marilyn French's novel, **The Women's Room.** Much of this book is set in the fifties, among a group of newly-weds on a suburban estate. In one section, the narrator (who is also one of the characters) discusses their feelings about sex. This is revealing not only for the inevitability of the Monroe reference, but also for the way it touches upon aspects of sexuality that I'll be dealing with in the rest of this chapter.*

Sex was for most of the men and all of the women a disappointment they never mentioned. Sex, after all, was **THE thing that came naturally,** *and if it didn't – if it wasn't for them worth anywhere near all the furtiveness and dirty jokes and* **pin-up calendars and 'men's' magazines,** *all the shock and renunciation of hundreds of heroines in hundreds of books – why then it was they who were inadequate . . . Probably because most people have an extremely limited sexual experience, it is easy for them, when things are wrong, to place the blame on their partner. It would be different if, instead of graying Theresa with her sagging breasts, her womb hanging low from having held six children, Don were in bed with – Marilyn Monroe, say.* (French, 1978, pp.106-7, my emphasis).

*French is writing retrospectively about the fifities; so am I. The fact that our emphases are similar (besides, I learnt a lot from her novel) should alert us to the possibility that this may be the post-sixties way of constructing the fifties. We should always be aware of the way in which we make over the past in the concerns of the present; but there is a reductio ad absurdum whereby any investigation of the past is held to be *only* a reflection of the present. The relation is more dynamic. French (and I) may be emphasising aspects of the fifties out of post-sixties interests, but that doesn't mean that what is being emphasised was not also a fact of the fifties.

As **The Women's Room** makes clear, sex was seen as perhaps the most important thing in life in fifties America. Certain publishing events suggest this: the two Kinsey reports (on men, 1948; on women, 1953), the first issues of **Confidential** in 1951 and **Playboy** in 1953, both to gain very rapidly in circulation; best-selling novels such as **From Here To Eternity** (1951), **A House is Not a Home** (1953), **Not As a Stranger** (1955), **Peyton Place** (1956), **Strangers When We Meet** (1953), **A Summer Place** (1958), **The Chapman Report** (1960), **Return to Peyton Place** (1961), not to mention the thrillers of Mickey Spillane. Betty Friedan in **The**

Feminine Mystique quotes a survey by Albert Ellis, published as **The Folklore of Sex** in 1961, which shows that 'In American media there were more than 2½ times as many references to sex in 1960 as in 1950' (Friedan, 1963, p.229), and she considers that 'From 1950 to 1960 the interest of men in the details of intercourse paled before the avidity of women – both as depicted in these media, and as its audience' (Ibid: p.230). Nor is this just a question of quantity; rather it seems like a high point of the trend that Michel Foucault has discussed in **The History of Sexuality** as emerging in the seventeenth century, whereby sexuality is designated as the aspect of human existence where we may learn the truth about ourselves. This often takes the form of digging below the surface, on the assumption that what is below must necessarily be more true and must also be what causes the surface to take the form it does. This is equally the model with the psychoanalytical enquiry into the unconscious (peel back the Ego to the truth of the Id), the best-selling novel formula of 'taking the lid off the suburbs' (**Peyton Place** 'tears down brick, stucco, and tar-paper to give intimate revealing glimpses of the inhabitants within', said the **Sunday Dispatch**), or in the endless raking over the past of a star, like Monroe, to find the truth about her personality. And the below-surface that they all tend to come up with in the fifties is sex.

The assumption that sex matters so much is granted even by writers who attacked the directions that they saw sexuality taking. Howard Whitman in his book **The Sex Age,** published in 1962, declares in his foreword:

Of all areas, sex is perhaps the most personal. But it is also a reflection of all of life and of the whole of a culture.

He quotes a Midwest minister as saying:

When men and women come to me with their problems, nine times out of ten as soon as we scratch the surface we find that sex is involved'. (Whitman, 1963, p.3).

Whitman's message is a familiar enough anti-promiscuity, anti-sexual variety, anti-pornography package, but its starting point is that sex is the key to life. For this reason he is anti the wrong kind of sex, but very far from being anti-sex altogether. He quotes H.G. Wells on his title page –

The future of sex is the center of the whole problem of the human future.

38

Hard to get a clearer declaration than that of how much sex was held to matter in the fifties.

Probably the most lucid interpretation of the fifties' discourses on sexuality remains Betty Friedan's **The Feminine Mystique,** first published in 1963 and clearly a major influence on everything since written about the fifties. Friedan suggests that sexuality at that time became constructed as the 'answer' to any of the dissatisfactions or distress that might be voiced by women as a result of living under 'the feminine mystique', or what Friedan also calls 'the problem that has no name'. Time and again in interviewing women, she would find that they would 'give me an explicitly sexual answer to a question that was not sexual at all' (Friedan, p.226), and she argues that women in America 'are putting into the sexual search all their frustrated needs for self-realisation' (p.289). Similarly, in her survey of some films of the fifties, **On the Verge of Revolt,** Brandon French argues that the films 'reveal how sex and love were often misused to obscure or resolve deeper sources of female (and male) dissatisfaction' (B. French, 1978, p.xxii). If in Foucault's account sexuality is seen as a source of knowledge about human existence, Friedan and French show how that knowledge is also offered as the solution to the problems of human existence. All argue that sexuality, both as knowledge and solution, is also the means by which men and women are designated a place in society, and are kept in their place.

In line with these wider trends in society, sexuality was becoming increasingly important in films. One of the cinema's strategies in the face of the increasingly privatised forms of leisure (not only television, but reading, do-it-yourself, home-based sports, entertaining at home, and so on) was to provide the kind of fare that was not deemed suitable for home consumption – hence the fall of the family film and the rise of 'adult' cinema. Though the huge increase in widely available pornography does not come until later, even mainstream cinema became gradually more 'daring' and 'explicit' in its treatment of sex. Taboos were broken, not only in underground cinema and the rather anti-sex 'hygiene pictures' of the period, but in big Hollywood productions too. Monroe was herself a taboo breaker, from riding the scandal of the nude **Golden Dreams** calendar to showing her nipples in her last photo session with Bert Stern and doing a nude bathing scene in the unfinished **Something's Got To Give,** unheard of for a major motion picture star. Perhaps the most telling manifestations of this more explicit concern, and anxiety, about sexuality are in the characteristic comedies, romances and musicals of the period,

which no longer define the problems of hero and heroine in terms of love and understanding, but starkly in terms of virginity – will she, won't she? should I, shouldn't I? As Howard Whitman (1962, p.183) puts it in his 'Why Virginity?' chapter, 'The question is *how far to go*'. What concerns these films is what 'going far' means, because the act of sex is seen as the way to understand the worth and nature of the most privileged of human relationships, the heterosexual couple.

Monroe's image spoke to and articulated the particular ways that sexuality was thought and felt about in the period. This thought and feeling can be organised around two discourses, that of the 'playboy', crystallised by **Playboy** magazine but by no means confined to it; and that of the 'question' of female sexuality itself, at the clinical level revolving around notions of the vaginal orgasm but in popular culture centring more upon the particular, and particularly mysterious or mystifying, nature of female sexual response. These two discourses draw into them many others, and are united by the notion of 'desirability' as the female sexual characteristic that meets the needs of the playboy discourse. Monroe embodies and to a degree authenticates these discourses, but there is also a sense in which she begins to act out the drama of the difficulty of embodying them.

Playboy

It was in 1953 that Monroe was first voted top female box-office star by American film distributors. She was a centre of attraction, in films, promotion and publicity. The first three films in which she had the starring role were released (**Niagara, Gentlemen Prefer Blondes, How To Marry a Millionaire**); she appeared on the cover of **Look** magazine; she walked off the set of **The Girl in Pink Tights;** and, in 1954, she married Joe di Maggio in January and visited the troops in Korea in February. The year 1953 was a time when the most directly sexual of stars was also the star of the moment, and it was also a year of extraordinarily compelling significance in the history of sexuality. In August, the Kinsey report on women was published, with the most massive press reception ever accorded a scientific treatise, and in December the first issue of **Playboy** appeared. The very publication of a sex report on women, and with an attendant publicity far in excess of that surrounding the male report in 1948, focused the 'question' of female sexuality, even if the way in which this question continued to be viewed was actually at considerable variance to Kinsey's

'Golden Dreams' (photo by Tom Kelley)

findings. I'll come back to this, and the relation between Monroe and the question of female sexuality. The **Playboy** connection is more direct.

Monroe was on the cover of the first edition of **Playboy** and inside her **Golden Dreams** nude calendar photo was the magazine's first centrefold. When Molly Haskell observes that Monroe was 'the living embodiment' of an image of woman 'immortalised in **Esquire** and **Playboy**' (Haskell, 1974, p.255)* this is no mere suggestive link between Monroe and **Playboy** – the two are identified with each other from that first cover and centrefold. (Compare also Thomas B. Harris' (1957) discussion of 20th Century-Fox's conscious promotion of her as 'the ideal playmate'.) **Playboy** elaborates the discourse through its developing house style, in copy and photography, and, eventually, in its 'philosophy'. As a star, Monroe legitimates and authenticates this, not just by being in the magazine – though there can be no question of the boost she gave it – but by enacting, as no one else was doing at the time, the particular definitions of sexuality which **Playboy** was proselytising.

Some idea of the double impact, of Monroe on **Playboy**,

*Haskell compares Monroe to the *cartoon* image in these magazines of the showgirl with the old man, but the connection is also with the photographic centrefold image.

and **Playboy** on Monroe, can be gained by considering that **Golden Dreams** centrefold. It was already an object of scandalous interest. The photo had been taken in 1948 by Tom Kelley, and been used for several different calendars, one of hundreds of such images. However, in March 1952, the fact that this image was of an important new Hollywood star became a major news story. At this point, despite the wide circulation of the calendars, relatively few people had actually seen the photo except in small, black and white reproductions accompanying the news item about it. Its scandalousness made it still, in December 1953, an object of much interest, and printing it in a full colour two-page spread in the first issue of a new magazine was a marketing coup.

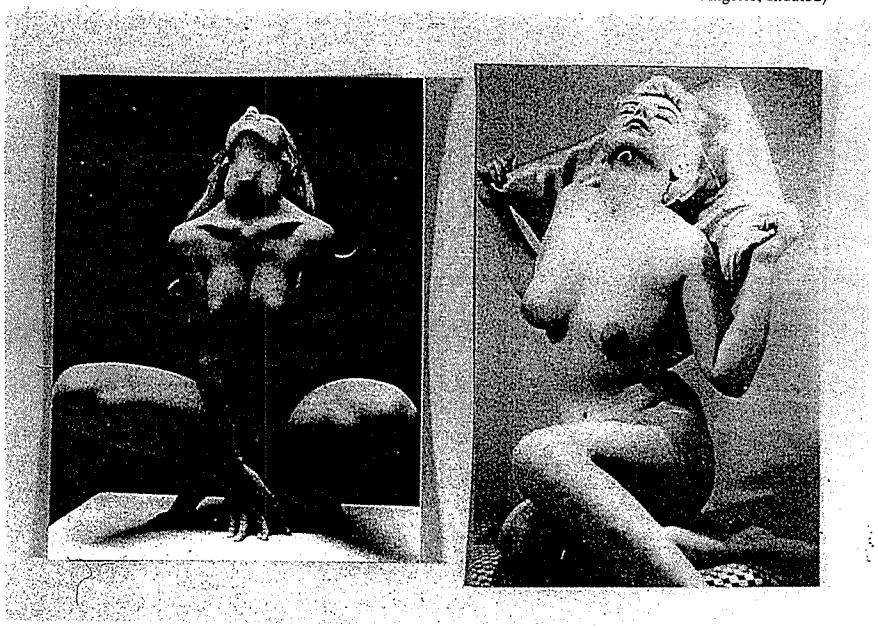
What is important here is the nature of the scandal **Playboy** so unerringly turned to. On the one hand, there was the fact of a Hollywood star doing a pin-up like **Golden Dreams;** and on the other, there was the widely reported reaction of Monroe when the scandal broke.

The early pin-ups of Monroe belong not to the highly wrought glamour traditions of Hollywood, associated with photographers such as Ruth Harriet Louise and George Hurrell; they belong rather to a much simpler and probably far more common tradition, both in style and choice of model. The style is generally head-on, using high-key lighting, few props and vague backdrops; the model is always young, generally white, the 'healthy, American, cheerleader type' (Hess, 1972, p.227), and not individualised. The key icon of this tradition, certainly in the forties and fifties, is the one-piece bathing costume, whose rigours make all bodies conform to a certain notion of streamlined femininity. But **Golden Dreams** is not like these pin-ups or the Hollywood glamour type; it belongs rather to a tradition known as 'art photography' (since it was ostensibly sold to artists, whose responses to naked women were supposedly less coarse than other men's). In this tradition the model is invariably nude and, though the lighting and camera position are often quite straightforward, the model is usually required to pose in wilfully bizarre positions that run counter to most established notions of classical grace and line. Clearly few were fooled by the art label for this unpleasantly dehumanising tradition of photography – and it was indeed a disreputable form, associated, quite correctly, with the dirty talk of men's locker rooms and toilets.

The scandal was that a Hollywood star had become associated with this tradition, but Monroe's reported reaction took the sting out of the scandal and made the photo just the one **Playboy** needed for its 'new' ideas about sex. In an interview with

Marilyn Monroe in one-piece bathing costume: 'streamlined femininity'

Typical 'art' photography of the fifties: (l.) Photo by Andre de Dienes!(r.) Photo from **Sprite** (Los Angeles,-undated)



Aline Mosby, Monroe said that she'd done the photo because she needed the money, that Kelley's wife was present at the time, and besides, 'I'm not ashamed of it. I've done nothing wrong' (quoted in Zolotow, 1961, p.105). This sense of guiltlessness is picked up by **Time** magazine, whose wording is, as we'll see, significant – 'Marilyn believes in doing what comes naturally' (**Time,** 11.8.52). They also quote her reply when asked what she had on when the photo was taken – 'I had the radio on.' A classic dumb blonde one-liner, it implies a refusal or inability to answer the question at the level of prurience at which it was asked – indeed, it suggests an innocence of prurience altogether.

Guiltless, natural, not prurient – these were precisely part of the attitude towards sexuality that **Playboy** was pushing. **Playboy's** 'philosophy' – not formally articulated as such until 1962, but clearly developing through the magazine in the fifties – combined two reigning ideas of the twentieth century concerning sexuality. The first is what Michel Foucault has called 'the repressive hypothesis', namely, the idea that sexuality has 'been rigorously subjugated . . . during the age of the hypocritical, bustling and responsible bourgeoisie' (Foucault, 1980, p.8). The second has been termed by John Gagnon and John Simon (1974) a 'drive reduction model' of sexuality, positing the sex drive as 'a basic biological mandate' seeking 'expression' or 'release'. It is common enough to see this 'biological mandate' as a fierce and disruptive drive which really needs repression, but **Playboy's** view of it was benign – only repression itself turns the sex drive malignant, and left to its own devices it will bring nothing but beauty and happiness:

There are a great many well-meaning members of our own society who sincerely believe that we would have a happier, healthier civilization if there were less emphasis upon sex in it. These people are ignorant of the most fundamental facts on the subject. What is clearly needed is a **greater** *emphasis upon sex, not the opposite. Provided, of course, we really do want a healthy, heterosexual society.*

A society may offer negative, suppressive, perverted concepts of sex, relating sex to sin, sickness, shame and guilt; or, hopefully, it may offer a positive, permissive, natural view, where sex is related to happiness, to beauty, to health and to feelings of pleasure and fulfilment.

Sex exists with and without love and in both forms it does far more good than harm. The attempts at its suppression,

41

however, are almost universally harmful, both to the individuals involved and to society as a whole.

The force of these ideas for the mid-twentieth century, and especially American, common-sense thought lies in their appeal to the idea of naturalness, the idea that you can justify any attitude or course of action by asserting it to be in accord with what people would really be like if they lived in a state of nature. Sexuality is peculiarly amenable to this kind of argument, since it is at first glance (our habitual first glance, anyhow) so 'biological', so rooted in the flesh. Monroe, so much set up in terms of sexuality, also seemed to personify naturalness. Her perceived naturalness not only guaranteed the truth of her sexuality, in much the same way as imputed qualities of sincerity and authenticity, spontaneity and openness, guarantee the personality of other stars; it was also to define and justify that sexuality, exactly in line with the **Playboy** discourse.

The assertion of Monroe's naturalness in relation to sexuality has been made so often that I do not need to establish it at length. At the time, critics and observers referred to it constantly, and retrospectively many of the people involved with her have ascribed it to her. Jayne Mansfield, when asked to appear nude at a nudist colony in Rio de Janeiro, refused, reportedly saying:

It's too bad I'm not Marilyn Monroe. She's a naturalist. But I would not feel right.

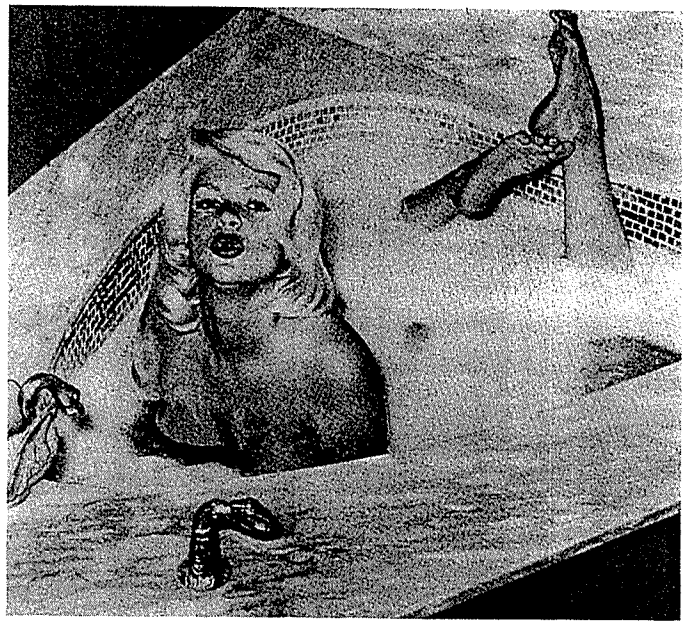
Though always thought of as an also-ran Monroe, Mansfield clearly recognised the particular ingredient in Monroe's image that she herself did not have. The pose and expression of each in otherwise similar star bath tub photos clearly captures the difference. Immediately following Monroe's death, Diana Trilling (1963, p.236) wrote an article on her which is in many ways emblematic of this widely held view of Monroe:

None but Marilyn Monroe could suggest such a purity of sexual delight.

And Monroe herself said in her last interview:

I think that sexuality is only attractive when it is natural and spontaneous.

Marilyn Monroe in bath-tub (photo Sam Shaw)



Jayne Mansfield in bath-tub

We have to tread carefully here, since ambiguities crowd in: for instance, most of those who ascribe 'natural' sexuality to her are in fact describing their *response* to her. There is also present, in so much of the writing, an endless raking over of the possible perversities (= unnatural nature) of Monroe's 'real' sexuality. What we need to keep in focus is the degree to which the Monroe image clearly offered itself to be read in terms of (benign) naturalness and with the impact of being something new. A promotion photo, a gag and a couple of films will serve to illustrate this.

In 1950, when Monroe had been signed to a seven-year contract with 20th Century-Fox, she was photographed for the studio with a group of other contract players by Philippe Halsman. It is not only with hindsight, because she is the only one we now recognise, that Monroe stands out. We may ascribe to Halsman the fact that Monroe is placed at the front and in the centre and looks straight to camera (rather than in the various off-screen or self-absorbed directions of the other players) and thus seems to make a direct contact with the viewer's eyes. We

20th Century-Fox contract players in 1950 (photo Philippe Halsman)

could go on to ascribe the very simple, relaxed pose to Halsman, the tousled, apparently naturally falling, uncoiffed hair to an expert hair stylist, the unfussy blouse to the wardrobe department and so on. But of course we have no way of knowing who made such decisions, Monroe or someone else; the evidence in the biographies suggests that even if others did make the decisions, it was because they had already ascribed naturalness to her in their minds; and, most important, it is unlikely that anyone seeing this photo in 1950 would have sought to identify those responsible for constructing her in an image of naturalness. Indeed, what is striking about the photo is the contrast between the very obviously contrived poses of the other players, though each a very recognisable female stereotype of the period, and the apparently artless look of Monroe that makes the others seem constructed but her seem just natural. Many other Monroe pin-ups from around this time have a similar quality, and the contrast between Monroe and the others in this one photo encapsulates the more general contrast that was beginning to be apparent between her pin-ups and the other available cheesecake.

This may seem like a laborious treatment of the question, but it is I think important to state it as precisely as possible. Monroe did appear natural in her sexiness and with an originality that necessarily had an impact among the stream of conventionally pretty starlets and pin-ups that the studios continually produced. It may only have been appearance, but we are dealing in appearances and what they are taken to mean. To put it another way, it seems reasonable to suggest that the quality of naturalness, so crucial for **Playboy** in its first centrefold, would probably not have been conveyed by any of the other players in the Halsman photo, nor indeed by any of the Monroe lookalikes such as Jayne Mansfield or Mamie Van Doren – and not merely because the **Golden Dreams** centrefold expressed it, but rather because the Monroe image of naturalness was, by the time the calendar photo was reprinted in 1953, already powerful enough to make the effect one of 'naturalness'.

There had been female star images that suggested naturalness before, but usually in a context that said very little about sexuality. The woman sitting on the floor next to Monroe in the Halsman photo has that asexual (or perhaps just covertly sexual) naturalness of which June Allyson was one of the most charming exponents. Monroe combined naturalness *and* overt sexuality, notably in a series of gags that became known as Monroeisms. Though in form typical of the dumb blonde tradition to which she in part belongs (cf. Dyer, 1979), they are different in

being nearly always to do with sex. One of the most striking is one delivered to the troops in Korea in February 1954:

I don't know why you boys are always getting excited about sweater girls. Take away their sweaters and what have they got?

Though overtly referring to other women stars, she effectively refers to herself, her own body and perhaps even her own breasts so recently exposed in **Playboy.**

Though a clever gag, it is also, in context, dumb, because Marilyn Monroe is a dumb blonde. The dumbness of the dumb blonde is by tradition natural, because it means that she is not touched by the rationality of the world. She is also untouched by the corruption of the world; a figure out of Rousseau, but some way from his conceptions of the essential nature of the human being before civilisation gets to her or him. The dumb blonde's ignorance of the world is brainless, seldom the superior wisdom of Rousseau's 'natural' women; and her innocence is above all a sexual innocence, a lack of knowledge about sexuality. She is a figure in comedy, because she is also always extraordinarily and devastatingly sexually attractive – the comedy resides either in the way her irresistible attractions get men tied up in her irrationality or else in the contrast between her sexual innocence and her sexual impact. The most interesting play on these comic possibilities comes about when ambiguities are acknowledged – maybe (as with Judy Holliday in **It Should Happen To You**) the dumb blonde's irrationality is the wisdom of the Holy Fool; maybe (as with Carol Channing in the stage version of **Gentlemen Prefer Blondes**) she is using the dumb blonde image to manipulate men. But Monroe's image does not really follow either of these directions – rather she fundamentally alters the dumb blonde comic equation. Rationality hardly comes up as a question in the comedy of her films at all, it is sexual innocence that's the core of the gags – but it is no longer a contrast between sexuality and innocence, since with Monroe sexuality *is* innocent. So the sweater girl gag is not funny because the blonde is being dirty about herself without knowing it, but because it is a play on words that cheerfully acknowledges her sexual impact. Monroe knows about sexuality, but she doesn't know about guilt and innocence – she welcomes sex as natural.

Several Monroe films play on this innocent/natural attitude to sexuality. **The Misfits** is a sustained equation of

Marilyn Monroe and Cary Grant in **Monkey Business** (1952)

Marilyn Monroe pin-up: 'she throws her head back . . . she opens her mouth' (photo Michael Conway and Mark Ricci)

44

Monroe/Roslyn with nature, including in this an easy attitude towards sex. **Monkey Business** and **The Prince and the Showgirl** are in some ways more interesting. The plot of **Monkey Business** concerns a rejuvenation drug. When middle-aged people take it, they become young again, meaning both uncivilised (like the monkeys in the research laboratory) and sexy. For the Cary Grant character (Barnaby Fulton), this is realised through his change in response to the Monroe character (Miss Laurel). When earlier she shows him her leg (in order to display her new stockings), he is merely embarrassed; but after he has inadvertently taken the drug he embarks on a free-wheeling, spontaneous, youthful (= natural) escapade with Miss Laurel – but whereas the joke is that this is him letting his hair down, she is clearly just getting into it because that's the way she is normally. Tearing along the highway in a sports car he has impulsively (= naturally) bought, she throws her head back, her hair flutters in the breeze, she opens her mouth and giggle-laughs. It is *the* Monroe image, here exactly placed to mean the natural enjoyment of sensation. That this enjoyment includes sexuality is made clear elsewhere in the sequence.

The Prince and the Showgirl makes a Jamesian equation between Monroe as American, child-like, emotional, direct, and Olivier as European, adult, rational, sophisticated. When Olivier (the Regent) makes a flowery, melancholy speech about being 'a sleeping prince that needs the kiss of a beautiful young maiden to bring him back to life', Monroe (Elsie) says, 'You mean you want me to kiss you'; to which he wearily replies, 'You're so literal'. Elsie/Monroe here straightforwardly accepts the sexual, without coyness, embarrassment or sniggering. But the film is actually rather incoherent in relation to Elsie's innocence. At the beginning, Elsie/Monroe is repeatedly given lines that indicate she doesn't know why the Regent has invited her to the embassy – 'Tough question that, all right', says her flat mate, in precisely the kind of dry, knowing, wise-cracking voice that Monroe would never use. However, when she sees the dinner for two brought in, Elsie/Monroe says that she knows 'every rule' in the sex game and starts to walk out. Such contradictions, with Elsie at one moment ignorant of sexual game-playing and at the next more than conversant with it, run through the film, so that most often it misses that combination of knowledge of sexuality without loss of innocence which is one of the keys to Monroe's image.

Naturalness, which Monroe so vividly embodied and thereby guaranteed, was elaborated in **Playboy** above all at the level of its 'philosophy', its overt and proclaimed Weltanschauung. At this level, it's an attitude that sees itself as socially

progressive, taboo-breaking. The feeling it conveys is exactly that noted by Michel Foucault (1980, pp.6-7) as characteristic of those committed to 'the repression hypothesis':

> *We are conscious of defying established power, our tone of voice shows that we know we are being subversive, and we ardently conjure away the present and appeal to the future, whose day will be hastened by the contribution we believe we are making.*

Foucault's irony stems from his proposition that we should not think so much in terms of sexuality being repressed, but rather in terms of its form being constructed, and with an ever renewed insistence, as an instrument of power. Similarly the feminist critique of the **Playboy** discourse points out that what it is concerned with is new definitions of male power within sexuality. Yet **Playboy's** own retrospective view of itself may not be so wide of the mark either, in suggesting how its emergence felt to many people at the time:

> **Playboy** *came out of aspects of the same energy that created the beat crowd, the first rock-'n'-rollers, Holden Caulfield, James Dean,* **Mad** *magazine – and anything else that was interesting by virtue of not eating the prevailing bullshit and being therefore slightly dangerous* (**Playboy,** January 1979).

Playboy was not only its declared philosophy, it was the whole package, and especially its playmate centrefolds. If overtly **Playboy** wanted to overthrow a hide-bound society, much of what it did in its pages seems an attempt to integrate its sexual freedom into suburban and white-collar life – itself pretty well taken as the norm in fifties' iconography (hence the popular success of the symptomatically titled novel, **The Man in the Grey Flannel Suit,** 1955). **Playboy's** greatest success was to get itself sold in the most ordinary newsagents and drugstores, taking a sex magazine out of the beneath-the-counter, adult-bookshop category. Its success in doing this resulted partly from attracting name writers and other such strategies, but the centrefolds also played their part. What **Playboy** succeeded in doing was making sex objects everyday.

David Standish, writing in **Playboy's** twenty-fifth anniversary edition, suggests that **Playboy's** aim was to present 'a pin-up as something other than a porno postcard', as, in fact, 'the girl next door' (art photography meets June Allyson = Marilyn Monroe), and he takes the July 1955 centrefold of Janet Pilgrim as the turning point in this project.

45

At the time, the idea that a 'nice' girl would appear in the four-colour altogether was shocking! . . . Suddenly, here were girls, **a** *girl, Janet Pilgrim, who looked like a good, decent human being and worked in an actual office . . . not some distant, bored bimbo with her clothes off but, perhaps, if God were in a good mood, she might one day be that girl you see on the bus every day who's making your heart melt* (ibid.).

The Seven Year Itch, made in 1954, works off just this fantasy. Monroe is the never-named girl upstairs, the kind of girl who appears in art photo magazines of the kind that Richard Sherman (Tom Ewell) buys, and who just happens to move into the apartment upstairs. It's the **Playboy** dream come true. At the end of the film, as he is leaving to rejoin his wife, he calls after the girl, 'What's your name?' 'Marilyn Monroe,' she jokes back, the film thus signalling that it knows how inextricable are the Monroe and playmate images.

Janet Pilgrim, the July 1955 centrefold, is almost, in the way she is written about, a re-run of Monroe's career. To quote Standish again, she is 'an engaging blonde' (more on blondeness later) 'shown first at work slaving beautifully over her typewriter' (Monroe had played a secretary in **Hometown Story,** 1951; **As Young As You Feel,** 1951 and **Monkey Business,** 1952), 'then sitting two pages later wearing mostly diamonds at a fancy dressing table' (Monroe's biggest number in **Gentlemen Prefer Blondes** (1953) was *Diamonds Are a Girl's Best Friend,* so big that it is also used for her appearance at the fashion show in **How to Marry a Millionaire,** 1953). Pilgrim/Monroe normalises sex appeal (in the secretary image) whilst still associating it with something to be possessed, like a mistress bought with diamonds.

Let's pause, though, on the secretary image. When secretarial work first developed towards the end of the nineteenth century, it was a prestigious job for women that could be looked on as both interesting work and a source of advancement; by the fifties, it had become a routine job. This is reflected in fiction aimed at women, where, according to Donald R. Maskosky's (1966, p.38) survey of women's magazine stories, in the fifties 'the image of the secretary . . . is often of a competent employee who should, however, not expect advancement. Her hope for advancement lies instead in matrimony'. In films of the fifties not aimed specifically at women, the dynamic of 'advancement' does not appear at all. Secretarial work is almost totally unseen; secretaries are there for the men in the office to look at (compare Jo Spence's (1978/79) discussion in her article 'What Do People

Do All Day?'). There is a scene in **As Young As You Feel** where two policemen come into an outer office where Monroe (Harriet) works. We see her working, standing looking at herself in front of the mirror; she shows the policemen into her boss's room and then returns to her desk to work – combing her hair. As the films construct the function of the secretary, this *is* her work, preparing herself to be looked at. In **Monkey Business** the fact that she can't do secretarial work is underlined, to be dismissed with the gag – as Cary Grant and Charles Coburn's eyes follow her out of the door – 'Well, anyone can type'. Later Ginger Rogers (Edwina) refers to her jealously as 'that little pin-up', once again establishing the playboy conflation of secretary and sex object.

Such a woman is there for men. This is the nub of the playboy discourse; its unstated assumption is that 'sex is for the man', in the words of the working-class married couples interviewed by Lee Rainwater in his 1960 study, **And The Poor Get Children.** Women are set up as the embodiment of sexuality itself. As Hollis Alpert (1956, p.38) put it at the time – and presumably without any intended feminist irony:

Hollywood has given [audiences] the Hollywood Siren – the woman who simply by existing, or at most sprawling on a rug or sauntering up a street – is supposed to imply all the vigorous, kaleidoscopic possibilities of human sexuality.

Women are to *be* sexuality, yet this really means as a vehicle *for* male sexuality. Monroe refers to her own sexualness – her breasts in the sweater girl gag, or her buttocks in the line near the beginning of **The Seven Year Itch,** 'My fan is caught in the door' – but read through the eyes of the playboy discourse, she is not referring to a body she experiences but rather to a body that is experienced by others, that is, men. By embodying the desired sexual playmate she, a woman, becomes the vehicle for securing a male sexuality free of guilt.

The sexuality implied by the playboy discourse and Monroe (in so far as the two are to be equated) can seem like something out of Eden, and the idea echoes around the fifties and early sixties. Maurice Zolotow, in his prurient biography **Marilyn Monroe the Tragic Venus** (1961, p.94), cuts through any sense of the complexity of human sexual response with

There are few pleasures as immediate and uncomplicated as the sight of a comely naked girl.

(46)

When Monroe came to England to film **The Prince and the Showgirl** in 1956, the **Evening News** wrote, 'She really is as luscious as strawberries and cream', and in his 1973 **Marilyn,** very much written out of a fifties sensibility, Norman Mailer (1973, p.15) endlessly reaches for similar imagery:

Marilyn suggested sex might be difficult and dangerous with others, but ice cream with her.

. . . on the screen like a sweet peach bursting before one's eyes . . .

. . . so curvaceous and yet without menace . . .

Mailer here makes explicit what others had sensed without knowing, that the Monroe playmate is an escape from the threat posed by female sexuality. For, as the **Readers' Digest** pointed out in 1957, 'What Every Husband Needs' is, simply, 'good sex uncomplicated by the worry of satisfying his woman' (quoted by Miller and Nowak, pp.157–8).

Desirability

Monroe not only provided the vehicle for expressing the playboy project of 'liberating' sexuality, she was also the epitome of what was desirable in a playmate. 'Desirability' is the quality that women in the fifties were urged to attain in order to make men (and thereby themselves) happy. In 1953 Lelord Kordel, for instance, declared in **Coronet:**

The smart woman will keep herself desirable. It is her duty to herself to be feminine and desirable at all times in the eyes of the opposite sex' (quoted by Miller and Nowak, 1977, p.157).

'In the *eyes* of . . .'; the visual reference is striking despite being also so commonplace.

Monroe conforms to, and is part of the construction of, what constitutes desirability in women. This is a set of implied character traits, but before it is that it is also a social position, for the desirable woman is a white woman. The typical playmate is white, and most often blonde; and, of course, so is Monroe. Monroe could have been some sort of star had she been dark, but not the ultimate embodiment of the desirable woman.

To be the ideal Monroe had to be white, and not just

white but blonde, the most unambiguously white you can get. (She was not a natural blonde; she started dyeing her hair in 1947.) This race element conflates with sexuality in (at least) two ways. First, the white woman is offered as the most highly prized possession of the white man, and the envy of all other races. Imperialist and Southern popular culture abounds in imagery playing on this theme, and this has been the major source of all race images in the twentieth century. Thus there is the notion of the universally desired 'white Goddess' (offered at the level of intellectual discourse, in 'anthropological' works such as Robert Graves' **The White Goddess,** as a general feature of all human cultures), and explicitly adumbrated in Rider Haggard's **She** and its several film versions. There is the rape motif exploited in **The Birth of a Nation** and countless films and novels before and since; and there is the most obvious playing out of this in **King Kong,** with the jungle creature ascending the pinnacle of the Western world caressingly clutching a white woman. (In the re-make Jessica Lange affects a Monroe accent for the part.)

Blondeness, especially platinum (peroxide) blondeness, is the ultimate sign of whiteness. Blonde hair is frequently associated with wealth, either in the choice of the term platinum or in pin-ups where the hair colour is visually rhymed with a silver or gold dress and with jewellery. (We might remember too the

Marilyn Monroe pin-up: 'the ultimate sign of whiteness'

47

title of Monroe's nude calendar pose, **GOLDEN Dreams.**) And blondeness is racially unambiguous. It keeps the white woman distinct from the black, brown or yellow, and at the same time it assures the viewer that the woman is the genuine article. The hysteria surrounding ambiguity on this point is astonishing. **Birth of a Nation** comes close to suggesting that congressman Stevens' mulatto housekeeper was a major cause of the civil war; the fact of being half-caste makes Julie into a tragic character in **Show Boat;** and the *thought* that she might be half-caste sends Elizabeth Taylor mad in **Raintree County.** (All these films, one might add, are based on best-selling popular novels.) The film career of Lena Horne is also instructive: as a very light-skinned black woman, she was unplaceable except as the ultimate temptress in an all-black musical, **Cabin in the Sky,** where the guarantee of her beauty resides in the very fact of being so light. Otherwise she could not really be given a role in a film featuring whites, because her very lightness might make her an object of desire, thus confusing the racial hierarchy of desirability.

The white woman is not only the most prized possession of white patriarchy, she is also part of the symbolism of sexuality itself. Christianity associates sin with darkness and sexuality, virtue with light and chastity. With the denial of female sexuality in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century (except as by definition a problem), sexuality also becomes associated with masculinity. Men are then seen as split between their baser, sexual, 'black' side and their good, spiritual side which is specifically redeemed in Victorian imagery by the chastity of woman. Thus the extreme figures in this conflation of race and gender stereotypes are the black stud/rapist and the white maiden. By the fifties, such extremes were less current, nor did they necessarily carry with them the strict moral associations of sexual = bad, non-sexual = good; but the associations of darkness with the drives model of masculine sexuality and of fairness with female desirability remained strong. The central sexual/love relationship in **Peyton Place** (the original novel), between Connie Mackenzie and Michael Kyros, works very much through such an opposition. Connie's character is established through the admiration of her daughter's friend Selena (dark-haired, lower-class, soon deflowered): Selena wishes that she too had 'a wonderful blonde mother, and a pink and white bedroom of her own' like Alison, Connie's daughter (Metallious, 1957, p.39). As for Michael, the narrator explicitly defines him as 'a handsome man, in a dark-skinned, black-haired, obviously sexual way' (ibid., p.103). The townspeople refer to the couple as 'that big, black

Greek' and 'a well-built blonde' (ibid., p.135). Their relationship is sealed when he makes love to her 'brutally, torturously' (p.135), that is, when this desirable woman is taken by his male drive. Thus in the elaboration of light and dark imagery, the blonde woman comes to represent not only the most desired of women but also the most womanly of women.

Monroe's blondeness is remarked upon often enough in films, but only the first saloon scene in **Bus Stop** seems to make something of it. Beau storms in and at once sees Cherie on stage, the angel that he has said he is looking for. His words emphasise her whiteness – 'Look at her gleaming there so pale and white.' He finds in her the projection of his desires, and the song she sings might be her acknowledgement of this – '*That old* **black** *magic that* **you** *weave so well*'.

Besides blondeness, Monroe also had, or seemed to have, several personality traits that together sum up female desirability in the fifties. She looks like she's no trouble, she is vulnerable, and she appears to offer herself to the viewer, to be available. She embodies what, as quoted at the end of the last section, 'Every Husband Needs' in a wife, namely, good sex uncomplicated by worry about satisfying her. Once again, Norman Mailer articulates this way of reading Monroe – 'difficult and dangerous with the others, but ice cream with her'. Monroe, an image so overdetermined in terms of sexuality, is nevertheless not an image of the danger of sex: she is not the femme fatale of film noir and of other such hypererotic star images as Clara Bow, Marlene Dietrich, Jean Harlow and even Greta Garbo, all of whom in some measure speak trouble for the men in their films. Round about the time Monroe was becoming a major star, 20th Century-Fox did put her in two such roles – as a psychotic baby-sitter in **Don't Bother to Knock** in 1952 and as an adultress in **Niagara** in 1953. Though commercially successful (almost any film with her in it would have been at this point), they were clearly not right for her,* as the reviews for **Niagara,** especially, register. Denis Myers in an article on Monroe in **Picturegoer** (9.5.53) clearly sees how her appeal is separate from any sense of her being dangerously sexual:

In **Niagara** *she has to convince us that she is desirable. Marilyn does. But – a* **femme fatale?** *We-ell . . .*

Several of the big 20th Century-Fox vehicles seem, at script level, to give her a role with some castrating elements – as a gold-digger in **Gentlemen Prefer Blondes** and **How to Marry a**

*This is not meant as a judgement of her acting capacities. Many people, both at the time and subsequently, consider her performance in **Don't Bother to Knock,** in particular, to be extremely 'good' (this is not the place to debate what criteria are in play here). What's at issue is not whether Monroe, as actress, could play 'dangerous' women, but whether her image allowed these roles to make sense if she played them. I'm arguing that on the whole it did not.

Millionaire she sets out to manipulate male sexual response for money, while in **There's No Business Like Show Business** she plays a showgirl who uses Tim's (Donald O'Connor) interest in her to further her career. But she's simply too incompetent, 'dumb' and, to add to it, short-sighted in **How to . . .**, winding up with a bankrupt, and in **There's No Business . . .** the plot makes it clear that she wasn't really two-timing Tim. **Gentlemen . . .** is a more difficult case, but it seems to me that Monroe doesn't play the part as if she is a manipulator. (But see my discussion in **Stars,** pp.147-8 and Pam Cook's different reading in **Star Signs,** pp.81–2.)

In the later roles the disruption that any introduction of a highly sexual (almost the same thing as saying *any*) woman into a male character's life always involves, is defused; indeed it almost becomes the point of the films that Monroe takes the sting out of anything that her sexuality seems likely to stir up. So Richard (Tom Ewell) in **The Seven Year Itch** goes back happily to his wife, Beau (Don Murray) in **Bus Stop** gets his girl (Cherie/Monroe) and goes back to his ranch, Elsie (Monroe) in **The Prince and the Showgirl** reconciles the King (Jeremy Spenser) and his father, the Regent (Olivier), and so on. It's a standard narrative pattern – a state of equilibrium, a disruption and a return to equilibrium through resolution of the disruption; only here the cause of the disruptions (Monroe, just because she *is* sex) and the resolution are embodied in one and the same person/character (Monroe).

If Monroe's desirability has to do with her being no trouble, it also has to do with being vulnerable. Susan Brownmiller (1975, pp.333) in her study of rape, **Against Our Will,** suggests there is 'a deep belief . . . that our attractiveness to men, or sexual desirability, is in direct proportion to our ability to play the victim'. Women live 'the part of the walking wounded' and this is something that 'goes to the very core of our sexuality'. Brownmiller quotes Alfred Hitchcock saying that he looked for 'a certain vulnerability' in his leading ladies, and she points out that the dictionary definition of 'vulnerable' is 'susceptible to being wounded or hurt, or open to attack or assault' (p.334). Thus what made Hitchcock's women stars right was that 'they managed to project the feeling that they could be wounded or "had"'. Brownmiller adds, 'And I think Hitchcock was speaking for most of his profession'. She names Monroe as perhaps 'the most famous and overworked example' of 'the beautiful victim' syndrome (p.335).

Monroe is not generally physically abused in films. She is, rather, taken advantage of or humiliated. Very often this

means little more than putting her in situations where she is exposed to the gaze of the male hero, but in two of the films that are also considered her best, **Bus Stop** and **Some Like It Hot,** this goes much further. In **Bus Stop,** she plays Cherie, a show girl who wants to get out of the cheap bar-rooms where she works, to be a success and 'get a little respect'. But even though this was the film set up for her return to Hollywood (after walking out and going to study at the Actors' Studio in New York), and she is undoubtedly the star of it, the project that carries the narrative is not Cherie's, but Beau's (Don Murray). He is looking for his 'angel' and finds her in Cherie/Monroe; the trajectory of the narrative is the defeat of her project in the name of his (getting her to marry him). One of the turning points in the film – and one we are obviously meant to find funny – occurs when Beau, an expert cowboy, lassoes Cherie as she is trying to escape him on a bus. It is not just that the narrative shows her as helpless before the male drive to conquer; the film invites us to delight in her pitiful and hopeless struggling.

Some Like It Hot is even more insidious, for its comedy depends upon plot strategies whereby Monroe/Sugar makes herself defenceless because she thinks she's safe. She is trying to escape men because of all the rotten deals they've dealt her – this is why she's joined an all woman band. Because she is trusting (and because, like any farce, **Some Like It Hot** depends upon characters in the film believing in disguises that are transparent to the audience), the film gets her into situations where she drops her guard; notably in a scene with Joe (Tony Curtis), who's in drag, in the ladies' toilet on the train to Florida. Precisely because she thinks she is in the safety of woman's space, she does not protect herself from him. Before his ogling eyes (and, of course, ours), she lifts her skirt to take a brandy flask out of her garter and titivates her breasts in front of the mirror. Because they are actions a woman would not make in front of a man, Joe/Curtis and the assumed male audience are violating both Monroe and women's space. Moreover, she then sets up the means for further violation. She tells Joe that she wants to marry a rich man who wears glasses, and, armed with this information, he changes his disguise from drag to a short-sighted oil millionaire. In one of the most remembered scenes in the film, on board 'his' yacht, he also pretends to be impotent. Once again, believing she is safe, Sugar/Monroe drops any defence against his sexual harassment, drapes herself over him and kisses him long and languorously. The pleasure we are offered is not just that Marilyn Monroe is giving herself to a man (a potential surrogate for the audience), but that her defences are down, we've got her where we

(supposedly) want her.

Monroe's vulnerability is also confirmed by aspects of her off-screen image, which could, indeed, be read as a never-ending series of testimonials to how easily, and frequently, she is hurt. A brief list of the main points that were so often raked over in the publicity surrounding her will suffice to indicate this, always bearing in mind that some of these never happened or are very exaggerated:

born illegitimate to a mother who spent her daughter's childhood in and out of mental hospitals;
fostered by several different couples;
time spent in an orphanage (sometimes presented in Dickensian terms in the biographies, articles and interviews);
indecently assaulted at the age of nine;
an habitual sufferer from menstrual pains;
three unsuccessful marriages;
unable to bear children, having a succession of miscarriages;
a nymphomaniac who was frigid (oh, the categories of fifties' sexual theory!);
a woman so difficult to work with Tony Curtis said kissing her was like kissing Hitler;
a suicide, or murdered, or died of an overdose of the pills she habitually took.

It's a threnody so familiar that all retrospective articles, and references to her, invoke it, and most find quotations from Monroe to do so. Take, for instance, two books on famous people of the twentieth century who have died young. Marianne Sinclair, in **Those Who Died Young,** quotes the poem written by Monroe and published posthumously in **McCalls** in 1962:

Help! Help!
Help! I feel life coming back
When all I want is to die.

Patricia Fox Sheinwold (1980), in **Too Young to Die,** uses another quote:

I always felt insecure and in the way – but most of all I felt scared. I guess I wanted love more than anything in the world.

Thus the image insists that Monroe suffered, and experienced her suffering vividly throughout her life.

The appeal of this biographical vulnerability necessarily involves the power of the reader, but we need to get the emphases right here. Vulnerability may call forth any number of responses, including empathy and protectiveness as well as sadism. It is the way that the Monroe biography is ineluctably associated with sexuality that is significant – not just sexual experience itself, but the inter-relations of sexuality with menstruation, childbirth, marriage, and so on. Monroe's problems are repeatedly related (often using her own words) to the need for love, meaning in the vocabulary of the fifties (hetero)sexual love.

Unthreatening, vulnerable, Monroe always seemed to be available, on offer. At the time, and even more subsequently, many observers saw her career in terms of a series of moments in which she offered herself to the gaze of men – the **Golden Dreams** calendar, **The Seven Year Itch** subway gratings pose, shot before

At the première of **The Prince and the Showgirl** with Arthur Miller: 'revealing and fetishistic gowns'

50

passing crowds in a Manhattan street, her appearances at premières in revealing and fetishistic gowns, her final nude photo session with Bert Stern and nude scene for **Something's Got to Give . . .** All these were taken as done by Monroe, the person, at her own behest. Each one a dramatic news story, they were read not as media manipulation but rather as a star's willing presentation of her sexuality to the world's gaze. Interviews could also be raided for corroborations. Maurice Zolotow (1961) quotes Monroe's words in 1950 to Sonia Wolfson, a publicity woman at 20th Century-Fox, on the subject of the first time she put make-up on:

This was the first time in my life I felt loved – no one had ever noticed my face or hair or me before.

In her last interview, with **Life,** she told of the effect wearing a sweater had had on the boys at school, an effect she revelled in. So many incidents, so many remarks in interviews – if Monroe was a sex object she was not only untroublesome, vulnerable but also seemed to enjoy and promote her own objectification. She was the playboy playmate who wanted to be one.

Wanted to be . . . In the light of the women's movement and its exploration of the formation of human desire, the idea that anyone simply 'wants' to do something, out of a volition untouched by social construction, is untenable. Monroe appeared at a moment when feminism was at its lowest ebb in the twentieth century, and both her career decisions and remarks in interviews could and were read as confirming the male-serving myth of the desirable playmate. But so great an emphasis on her own purported involvement in the production of her sexy image is *also* an emphasis on the will and desire of the person who inhabits and produces the sexy image. It actually raises the question of the person who plays the fantasy, in other terms, the subject who is habitually the object of desire.

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Are Women Directors Different?*

Molly Haskell

If they do not exactly constitute a feminist renaissance, or even a *naissance*, the simultaneous success of Liliana Cavani's *The Night Porter* (1973) and Lina Wertmuller's *The Seduction of Mimi* (1972) at least affords a chance to analyze in the plural that rarest of birds, the woman director. I mean, of course, the woman as director of commercial, or narrative films. Although the area of independent filmmaking has attracted women in numbers equal to men, as have most of the other arts, commercial filmmaking remains the last stronghold—a stag nation of male supremacy. Supremacy is the right word, for it is from a lordly position that the director, like the preacher or the orchestra conductor, must give orders to groups composed largely of men. And naturally, the larger and less flexible the crew, as in American filmmaking, the less likelihood of finding a woman in their midst, and a head or two above them.

If anything, the representation of women behind the scenes—and in front of the camera, too, but that is another story—has dwindled from previous decades. With financial risks what they are, and with wheeling and dealing and bluffing and massaging consuming at least ninety percent of preshooting activity, a director must have the

* Reprinted from *The Village Voice*, February 3, 1975.

52

stomach of an L. B. Mayer rather than the soul of a P. B. Shelley to survive.

Is there, then, among those who have broken through—Wertmuller, Cavani, Nelly Kaplan, Elaine May—such a thing as a "woman's point of view," a distinctly "feminine" approach to filmmaking? (This question, applied to the various arts, was the burning topic on the college symposia circuit several years ago. The fact that in literature and painting it has gone the way of the consciousness-raising session, that is, served its purpose by becoming obsolete, suggests to me that women have entered these fields in sufficient numbers to make classification by sex impossible. Not so—alas!—in film.)

Is there anything we might say of Elaine May's *The Heartbreak Kid* (1973) or the upcoming *Mikey and Nicky* (1976) that might also be true of Cavani's *The Night Porter*, or Wertmuller's *The Seduction of Mimi* and *Love and Anarchy* (1973)? Although I don't know any more about *Mikey and Nicky* than you do, I think it's safe to say these films are not about war, or football games, or motorcycles. But they *are* about men! So much for the notion that women will automatically create great parts for other women.

My own feeling, however, is that although distinctly "feminine" qualities can be discovered in each of these directors, we cannot generalize from these to a "feminine sensibility." Elaine May—witty, cerebral, puritanical, even (in the accepted comic tradition) misogynistic—actually has more in common with such male compatriots as Mike Nichols or Woody Allen or Brian de Palma than with her European "sisters," both of whom are more sensual, in their physical response to the world as well as in their gravitation toward sex as a theme.

I'd be willing to bet odds that Elaine May will never make a film exploring the sensual side of love, and that her goofy men and gullible women will sublimate sex into the various guises and disguises of comedy, or of a certain kind of farce that in a more ruthlessly unequal and antagonistic form may become the screwball comedy of the 1970s. (Those critics who hail the "adult" attitudes of contemporary films as advances in sexual maturity over the Doris Day films had better think again. People don't seem to realize the

extent to which the Production Code was an expression of the norm rather than the exception, the voice from within the puritan conscience rather than an alien force. One function of both the nostalgia and disaster cycles is to avoid sex altogether.)

Wertmuller, on the other hand, tackles sex with uninhibited gusto. A well-educated Italian radical with populist instincts, she exposes, through her bumblingly yearning hero, the rearguard totems and taboos of the Sicilian working class. Cavani, too, feels no hesitation in building an entire film around a sexual relationship—the sadomasochistic love born in a concentration camp between a guard and a prisoner that is fatally rekindled thirteen years later. Wertmuller deliberately exaggerates sexual dichotomies within a raunchy, Marxist framework tending toward caricature. Cavani, dealing with it in a delirious, dreamlike manner that has confounded our more literal-minded critics, incorporates sexual psychology into a rhapsodic view of human obsession tending toward mysticism.

As different as they are, what both directors share, it occurs to me, is a certain attitude toward, and treatment of, sex that distinguishes them from their male counterparts and that—using the word with all due caution—might be characterized as *feminine*. Neither of these films—and if you don't believe me, ask the nearest man in the street—is a "turn-on." At least not in the commonly understood sense of the term in what is ultimately a masculine context. They pander to men's fantasies on neither the simple level of pure titillation, nor on the more insidious level of woman hating to which the violent forms of sex—rape, physical torture—address themselves. In fact, a man of admittedly outré tastes in these matters complained to me that he disliked *The Night Porter* not because he was morally (or aurally) outraged, but because its "kinky" sex didn't excite him. Both directors deal with sex in scenes as gamy and explicit as anything concocted in this department by men (which of course is why *these* films, and not their directors' previous ones, are box-office successes), but within total contexts—one psychological, one social—that have little to do with immediate audience gratification . . . or punishment.

Moreover, although both films place women in what, at first

(53)

Lucia (Charlotte Rampling) and Max (Dirk Bogarde) re-create the sadomasochistic relationship they shared in a World War II concentration camp in Liliana Cavani's *Night Porter* (1973). (Courtesy Avco Embassy Pictures)

glance, might be thought degraded positions—the baroquely monumental nude who engulfs Giancarlo Giannini in their lovers' tryst, Charlotte Rampling as the pale and emotionally stunted "little girl" who must obey her Nazi keeper (Dirk Bogarde)—a closer look reveals that neither film performs the ultimate act of degradation, which is to rob women of their autonomy, and both equalize, in subtle ways, the positions and responsibilities of their men and women.

Charlotte Rampling chooses to survive by surrendering to the "unspeakable" requirements of her enemy-guardian. By falling back on what is traditionally a woman's way of surviving, she reinforces with her submission his dubious sense of power. In this original act of bad faith, a perversion of the marriage of equals, she makes him, this impotent Lucifer, her lord and master, but in so doing she condemns herself to remain a little girl, a half-person consigned to the shades. Somewhere a character, another survivor, says that "to save your skin, no price is too high." But the Cavani protagonists, pitted against those who would eradicate their own guilt and start afresh, know that once they paid that price, they have acted irrevocably, and their lives must take a different course from that of other people.

The contract of love entered upon by Bogarde and Rampling—psychotic, born of weakness rather than strength—is a contract of death. It awaits only their reunion to be completed. But, as the multiple ironies of the Papageno-Pamina duet (in the "Magic Flute" scene) suggest, in the very midst of depravity, there is ecstasy and tenderness and the selflessness that is also found in "normal" love. It is this acceptance that to me gives the film its power. But it is this, and the sense of reciprocity—in love, in doom—that has apparently outraged audiences. They find that Cavani is "sympathetic" to Nazism, or "exploits it for cheap effects." But the Nazis are far less threateningly exciting than the homosexual blackshirts in Visconti's *The Damned* (1970). And the effects of a scene like the one in the cabaret are not cheap or seductive, and they are remote—distanced through the blue-gray filters of a nightmare past that holds its dreamers in thrall. Far from giving us even a perverse erotic thrill, the events of the concentration camp have a cold clamminess, coming like tentacles of the past to encircle two people in a viselike grip. Nothing less than a similar sense of consequence—but in a comic context—marks Wertmuller's film, and her treatment of the gargantuan nude.

On a purely physical level, this grandiose, lecherous woman is exaggerated to the point that she is not a sexual creature at all, a woman in whom other women are ridiculed, but an almost impersonal figure of lust. As her posterior is magnified, through lens distortion, into a jiggling mound of flesh, it becomes an abstract sculpture-in-motion. Nor does this particular part of the body seem to activate the glands in the manner of, say, the opulent uppers of Fellini's whores. The latter serve simultaneously as grotesques, projections of male fears, and overpowering mother figures for those members of the audience with lingering mammary fixations.

And Wertmuller's fat lady, apparently "abused" by the man who wants only to cuckold her husband in revenge, turns the tables triumphantly by getting herself pregnant and denouncing both men in a magnificent "aria" on the church steps! A Pyrrhic victory, perhaps, but a victory nevertheless.

(54)

It stands to reason that women, with the biological fear of pregnancy that every one of us must grow up and live with, will harbor and eventually give expression to a sterner sense of the consequences of love. This may take the form of an explicit and obsessive fear of pregnancy (the one-night-stand-and-you're-ruined-for-life fables of the old Hollywood "women's films") or merely a generalized sense of anxiety.

For instance, the most unusual occurrence in Roberta Findlay's rather routine porn film, *Angel Number 9* (1975), is not the plot device of having a man come to earth as a woman to discover "what suffering really is" (in escapades that turn out to be as boringly androcentric as ever). It is the fact that two women greet their lovers with the unwelcome news that they are pregnant. For those who are not blue-movie aficionados (as I am not; I got my information from a self-designated "historian"), pregnancy is a no-no in sexploitation movies, a definite downer to Don Juan fantasies of quickie, no-fault sex. Of course, like so many things in life, the wages of sin are exacted too late, and paid by the wrong people: the obligation of hard-core films to show what once was only simulated makes the possibility of conception considerably weaker than in old Hollywood.

What further "feminine" characteristics can we note in Cavani and Wertmuller? Are they more emotional, more intuitive? More sensitive to surroundings and decor? And while we're at it, do we observe anything—a wobbly camera, mismatched shots—that might explain why other women have such a hard time getting backing as directors? Do we notice a sudden lapse of continuity that might be explained by infirmities of a cyclical nature?

I would say that both of them, but especially Cavani, are extraordinarily sensitive to decor, to textures (remember the nubby wool of Bogarde's sweater, the material of Rampling's dress), to tactile sensations, and to architecture, but as part of a total vision. The Viennese hotel, for instance, is more hallucinatory than real, a Dantesque inferno of tiers, with its doomed inmates that Bogarde watches over and services. The awkward English dialogue that critics have objected to would be more disturbing if Cavani were operating within the laws of realism. Wertmuller, in the consciously

vulgar burlesque tradition of low comedy, pushes her characters into social caricature that many people resist. But neither woman works within the narrowly realistic or autobiographical modes that we might have expected from women directors. With fully developed styles, these women will nevertheless be likely to yield a good many surprises in careers that I hope and pray can be sustained.

I catch myself, and slap my hand for using the word *expected.* For it is expectations that are at the root of the problem, prescriptive definitions of masculine and feminine that have become self-fulfilling prophecies. Better not to expect or ask for, only observe and describe. Polarities do exist, but they don't necessarily correspond to gender. All we can do is hope that women filmmakers become, like their counterparts in the other arts, merely *filmmakers.*

55

"Screened Out:
Playing Gay in Hollywood
from Edison to Stonewall"

Richard Barrios

SIX

Legions and Decency

"Cockeyed philosophies of life, ugly sex situations, cheap jokes, and dirty dialogue aren't wanted. Decent people don't like this sort of stuff, and it is our job to see to it that they get none of it."

Joseph Ignatius Breen, 1934

SCENE: *A popular Paris nightclub.*
The orchestra launches into a lively fox-trot and the dance floor fills up. A handsome young man makes his way over to one couple.
YOUNG MAN: May I cut in?
WOMAN: Why, certainly.
Without skipping a beat the man dances off with the woman's partner, an equally attractive young man. The club's owner (Al Jolson) observes the scene from the bandstand.
CLUB OWNER (*Pursing his lips, rolling his eyes, and making a mincing wave with his arm*): Boys will be boys—woooo!

The film is *Wonder Bar,* a musical melodrama produced by Warner Bros. in early 1934. In the intimate annals of early gay film history this scene holds a special place, and not simply because it was selected to lead off the documentary film *The Celluloid Closet.* Like a few other emblematic moments from little-known films, the *Wonder Bar* male-male dance resonates in a way that no one at the time could have realized. It sums up 1930s Hollywood's easy comfort with homosexuality. It evokes the end of the pansy craze, when films were moving away from cartoons toward more naturalistic images of gay men and women: these two are, in essence, a serious romantic couple. In its brevity and in the fact that we know nothing of these men and their lives besides this one dance, it conveys the fleeting quality of so many gay images on film. It

Out on the dance floor: Demetrius Alexis cuts in on John Marlowe in *Wonder Bar.* Dick Powell looks on, while Al Jolson prepares to make a mincing observation. *Photofest*

reminds us that homosexuality was often used in films of the time as a scene-spicing condiment. Al Jolson's leering comment forces our recollection that mockery and casual bigotry have always been with us. And in its timing—it was shot in January 1934, and the film was released two months later—we may note, ominously, that a precipice was awaiting gays in the movies. This was the year of the newly strengthened Production Code, and of the Roman Catholic Legion of Decency. Six months after these two young men danced off in *Wonder Bar,* their like was effectively banned from movies for the better part of four decades.[1]

It is well known that for many years a series of moral codes regulated what could and, more to the point, what could not be shown onscreen. The effects of

[1] *Wonder Bar* has another, less conspicuous gay character who manages to pack in two stereotypes for the price of one. In the notorious "Goin' to Heaven on a Mule" sequence—perhaps the blackface number to end 'em all—Al Jolson arrives in heaven and is measured for wings by a big sissy angel. Musical comedian Eddie Foy, Jr., who normally appeared high up on cast lists, picked up some quick money for this unbilled and unrecognizable bit.

these laws on the movies of the later thirties, forties, and fifties are equally familiar: married couples were forced to sleep in twin beds, navels were eternally hidden from sight, no immoral or illegal acts went unpunished, and on and on. For those who wonder about how the Code and the Legion were given the power to change the movies so radically, their saga runs, in its most concise form, something like this:

> Grumblings over the content of film had existed ever since minute-long strips began to weave through boxes with eyepieces and cranks attached. Some public-minded people began to look upon such things as exotic dancers and kissing scenes as public menaces, and by the 1910s a number of states had instituted censorship boards to cushion the citizenry from whatever outrages this or that observer felt obliged to target. By 1923 a series of Hollywood scandals brought into question the morality of movies as well as moviemakers, and to stave off government regulation the industry selected former postmaster general Will H. Hays to serve as its spokesman and regulator. When protests grew, the 1930 Production Code came into being with high principles and ultimate unenforceability. In its wake, films trafficked in more adult and daring content with gangster films, unwed-mother tales, and the like. The arrival of Mae West as a full/overblown movie star in 1933 seemed to gather all the protests into one vociferous voice, and the Roman Catholic Church began to gear up for a crusade. While its earlier battle over *The Callahans and the Murphys* had been successful, later efforts, such as the attempted boycott of *The Sign of the Cross*, seemed as ineffective as the Production Code itself. By late 1933 there were calls in upper Church circles for drastic measures, and in April 1934 the Legion of Decency came into being. The Legion would name names: it decided which films were fit for Catholic consumption and which (the "Condemned" category) were not. Along with the regulations and boycotts, there were heightened threats of possible government intervention. Attempts to regulate the industry through the National Recovery Administration proved unsuccessful, and the ongoing pressure led the film industry's self-regulating body, the MPPDA, to make a crucial decision. Its 1930 Production Code would be strengthened, extended, and made more specific. Its enforcement would now be mandatory and strictly controlled. Hays associate Joseph I. Breen was appointed head of the new Production Code Administration, with the industry-given power to rule on the suitability of all film content. From July 1934 onward, all mainstream films would be given PCA seals to show their fitness for public exhibition. The Production Code's effectiveness was such that, with minor alterations and challenges, it survived until its replacement by the ratings system of the late 1960s.

So runs the nutshell history. Yet the Code's evolution hinges on forces vastly greater than a recitation of "a group of priests met on such-and-such date to discuss . . . ," and its influence and consequence are too vast to be easily contained. As with so many moralist and legalist causes, the move toward the Code is one of the most forthright demonstrations ever of an eternal truth of

modern history: a relatively small minority, if sufficiently vocal, empowered, and well organized, can impose its will on a large majority. The public taste, even the public good, is in the opinionated hands of a few.

The Production Code became far more than a way to keep cleavage and vice out of movies. It was, literally, the American public's own imposed design for living. Its existence enabled the movies not only to reflect and influence the audience's culture, but to begin to dictate it. Two decades before the denial-feels-good Eisenhower era, five decades before the don't-worry-be-happy Reagan years, the Code forcibly eliminated life's franker ambiguities from movies and bade viewers do the same in their own lives. It was a document cast in black and white, limiting and simplifying the movies and those who saw them. It discouraged diversity, exalted conformity, and cast judgment ruthlessly. In 1936 there was a memorable line in the film *To Mary—With Love:* "They say the movies should be more like life. I say life should be more like the movies." But by the time Myrna Loy spoke those words, their sentiment was a tautology; two years earlier, the Code had already seen to it.

The Production Code, 1934 incarnation, did not emerge from nowhere. Nor was it an anomaly: in its genesis and ramifications lay the refractions of various currents of history, culture, and psychology. In the extremity of its effects upon creativity and candor in film, the Code tempts the historian toward polemic and righteous anger and ridicule. Even so, as someone was once wise enough to observe, "Both sides must be given, even if there is only one side." It might be difficult to deal dispassionately with the coming of the Code, yet to attach to it too slanted a reading is to perform a disservice. History, after all, is infinitely open, and has "many cunning passages, contrived corridors / And issues." (Thank you, T. S. Eliot.) Each person's path through those gnarly halls might best be served in this case by an examination of events and circumstances weighing on the Code's advent. The story of the Code is about far more than movies. It tells of colliding national trends, anti-Semitism, heterosexism, religious fervor, institutionalized spirituality, social crusades, corporate fear and miscalculation, and the force of an individual's will. Facts and trends and trivia, opinions and ideas, coincidences and paradoxes are all determinants here, along with the propulsive flow that ensures that history will ever and ever repeat itself. All these things form a buffet, a feast that enables us to draw our conclusions about the birth of the Production Code. Through this bounty, each of us may ultimately compose our own histories.

Noble Experiments

Paradoxes are as wondrous to the historian as they can be annoying to the spouse or pedant confronted with them. Prohibition and its repeal form, at least

on the surface, one of history's great contradictory moments. In terms of moral behavior as well as alcohol consumption, "the Noble Experiment" had had precisely the reverse effect of what had been intended. Defying the law, as epitomized by the ban on alcohol, became a trendy national pastime. Through bootlegging and related activities crime became a far greater influence than ever before, also far better known and, sometimes, better appreciated. The morality of the Prohibition era, as reflected in the country's popular culture, was one of exuberance, daring, defiance, and general laissez-faire. This was the time of the first flourishing of jazz, which seemed impossible without high living and the enhancements of alchohol and drugs. Sex and sensuality became more visible in theater, film, music, dance, advertising. With all this, too, there was a public exploration of homosexuality in fiction, on the stage in plays such as *The Captive* and *The Green Bay Tree* and on film. In New York and a few other cities, the flourishing of the pansy craze was one of the most visible extensions of this go-to-hell enthusiasm.

As temperance people had done before Prohibition, there were the moralists who decried the sin of the movies and Hollywood's seeming insistence on presenting sex and crime as appealing and attractive. Accordingly, the film industry was given its equivalent of the Volstead Act, the 1930 Production Code, which had precisely the same effect as the ban on alcohol: it existed to be defied. Slowly at first, then with increasing boldness, the studios ignored the Code's directives. *Scarface* and *Red-Headed Woman* and *The Sign of the Cross* were clearly products of a time when film immorality, like drink, was supposedly banned, and yet rampant. The two were conjoined, of course, in the scores of movies in which drinking was shown to be the most appealing and desirable pastime imaginable.

Although the repeal of Prohibition was not a major item on President Roosevelt's agenda, it was ultimately part of the change sweeping the nation after his inauguration. For many, the return of sanctioned drinking was an indicator that better times were indeed part of the New Deal. It also carried a sizable price: it was as if the general sense of public good deemed itself a finite vessel, and when booze came back, other forms of permissiveness were expunged. There could, apparently, be room only for so much vice in the United States. It was at this time that drug laws began to come into effect. Early 1930s films had mentioned drugs frequently and even had songs about them; drugs were kinky, possibly, but not illegal. In 1935 this changed. So, even earlier, did policies concerning homosexuality: government officials and moralists bent on suppressing (or eradicating) homosexuality came out in force. With the hastened end of the pansy craze, there began the retreat of whatever meek advances homosexuality had made in the sphere of public acceptance. Police departments worked mightily to eradicate the public presence of homosexuality

through a crackdown on otherwise unenforced loitering laws. Much of the remainder of the retreat came as a direct result of the new laws regulating drinking. In New York, all sales of alcohol were licensed through the State Liquor Authority, which monitored bars and other establishments to ensure that behavior therein would not be "disorderly." That one broad-based word became the authority's mandate to keep lesbians and gay men out of public establishments. Through their very existence homosexuals were presumed to be disorderly, and since they lacked the resources to combat the suppression, the SLA and similar organizations continued the arrests and harassments without cease. By the middle of the decade, it was clear that various forces had coalesced to put a big padlock on the closet door.

The great movie cleanup of 1934 was a continuation and extension of all these effects of repeal. The price the public paid for legal drinking was a further monitoring of "disorderly" behavior as done in actuality and as reflected onscreen. Through the proper spin-doctoring and propaganda, and through the righteous pronouncements of church leaders, film frankness was put on the same level as organized crime and poverty. It was, according to this party line, a national ill needing to be expunged, in fact, a major contribution to Depression misery, part of the "fear itself" that Roosevelt had stated. Just as drinking could be made to seem a good thing when properly monitored, so was filmgoing considered an evil because it was not being regulated appropriately. The New Improved Full-Strength Production Code, then, functioned as the film industry's Twenty-first Amendment, a symbol of supposed national well-being hailed by most as a needed boost to national morale. And just as the deliberately vague words *loitering* and *disorderly* became mandates to rid the public sphere of lesbians and gays, the simply worded (and slightly ungrammatical) phrase added to the 1934 version of the code in section II, no. 4, would be all the license required to kick the queers out of the movies for the next thirty-five years:

SEX PERVERSION or any inference to it is forbidden.

Movie-Made Children

On September 27, 2000, a congressional panel, chaired by Sen. John McCain (Rep., Arizona), convened a day of hearings in which the heads of major film studios were compelled to defend their marketing practices. A series of school shootings in the late 1990s, climaxing with the horrifying tragedy of thirteen dead students at Columbine High School in Littleton, Colorado, had compelled some members of Congress to shine an unforgiving glare on the industry. In the aftermath of Littleton, the American film industry served as an eye-catching

and easily attackable target—the great corrupter of the young—and the themes continued to resound in Congress and in the concurrent presidential campaign. Specific and heavy criticism was directed toward the guidelines by which R-rated films could be advertised to children under seventeen. "I don't understand this language," McCain complained to the executives, referring to the studios' marketing policies. "I think it's filled with loopholes. . . . Why don't you just simply say that you will not market to children this kind of R rated material, that you will not market it to children under seventeen, period." As the attacks raged, some observers noted that, while the studios were certainly culpable, some of the attention might have been better focused on the easy accessibility of handguns. There was, however, no equivalent hearing involving an assembly of gun manufacturers or officers of the National Rifle Association.

The Motion Picture Research Council had taken five years to perform its research, and the results reflected poorly upon the American film industry. The findings were scathing: "A treacherous and costly enemy let loose at the public expense [and] subversive to the best interests of society," it said. The council was in no way connected with Senator McCain or his committee; it predated them, in fact, by more than seven decades. With funding by a Cleveland philanthropic group, the Payne Fund, the Research Council had conducted the study from 1928 to 1933, with its stated intention to examine the movies' corrupting effects on the young. The council's head, Rev. William H. Short, was a longtime advocate of government regulation of film content, and with the Payne grant he oversaw testing and interviews that in hindsight seem to have been geared to prove to everyone that the movies were contaminating America's youth. The study was conducted with commendable rigor, innumerable charts and figures, and some truly crackpot methodology, such as a device that measured the tremors of bedsprings to show the troubling dreams some movies gave the young. According to the council's all-but-preset findings, the new American generation was emotionally damaged, prone to emulation of movie violence, and overwhelmingly susceptible to lustful or aberrant behavior.[2] Gangster and crime films, of course, were the most decried culprits, with Jimmy Cagney's make-crime-seem-attractive appeal coming in for special attack. Eroticism in film was also a trouble spot, as were horror movies, although the Love That Dare Not Speak Its Name was all but absent from the findings.

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[2]It belabors the point to find too many parallels between the Motion Picture Research Council and such later groups and advocates as the Family Research Council and Rev. Donald Wildmon. Nevertheless, some types of moral opportunism are eternal. In 1933, as many years later, the same techniques seem to work: pick your enemy, shade the findings in your favor, assume a righteous air, assume a higher ground than those who disagree with you, wave flag and Bible, and overlard with the phrase "for the good of our children." Works every time.

59

If the Council's findings lacked a certain objectivity, they were the acme of neutrality in comparison to the way in which they were presented to the public. An ambitious provocateur named Henry James Forman compressed the nine-volume results of the study into one tidy package of dynamite entitled *Our Movie-Made Children.* The relative caution of the council gave way to the ringing of a thousand alarms in the Forman book as he averred, in essence, that every movie ticket sold moved America's children one step closer to hell. Some critics did attempt to note that Forman made his points by wildly slanting findings that had often been quite debatable to begin with. Voices of reason generally tend to get lost in the frenzy surrounding "Save our children!" fervor, and such was the case here. In a cross-country book tour, Forman cried wolf, denounced the movies, preached to the converted, and exhorted the masses to press for government censorship of film. He also sold enough copies of *Our Movie-Made Children* to make it one of the best-selling books of 1933. With few in the media or academia willing to contradict him, Forman became an ad hoc moral spokesman for right-thinking (and Right-thinking) people. His words, and the council's more extreme findings, were fodder for newspaper editorials around the country. Hollywood was the corrupter of the young, the evil empire, the ultimate source for all the nation's ills.[3]

While Forman and the populace raged, Will Hays trembled. Although he had little to say publicly about *Our Movie-Made Children,* it was known that the Payne study was referred to around the Hays Office as the Payneful Study. It seemed a graphic and reproachful billboard for the failure of the Production Code, Hays, and his lieutenants. Nor was it a coincidence that the Motion Picture Research Council was headed by a clergyman, for while *Our Movie-Made Children* was a secular work, the fervor driving it was bona fide Old Testament wrath. And behold, in very short order the church would be taking on the argument over the movies.

Christian Soldiers

Despite Cecil B. DeMille's protestations to the contrary, the movies were a profoundly secular institution, and the pleasures they proffered were never going to sit upon the right hand of those making pronouncements from the pulpit. It was just Reverend Short's good fortune (or blessing) that the Motion Picture

[3]Everything Old Is New Again Department: Senator John McCain's words, all these years later, seem quite in tune with the days of the Payne study and *Our Movie-Made Children*: "I'd love to be the Super Censor," he told an interviewer following his committee's hearings. "I'd love to sit and watch movies every day and say which ones are suitable and which ones are not."

Research Council's findings were greeted by an America besotted, as it periodically is, with a renewed religious zeal. In the eighteenth century there had been the fervor of the Great Awakening, and the 1830s saw a flurry of evangelistic passion and revivalism in the American middle class. Such waves of interest are recurring, and many of them are long-lasting: the 1970s call to be Born Again started as a spiritual rebirth and over the course of two decades moved into the political arena with the rise of the Religious Right. In the 1920s and 1930s, the American soul was beset by fevers of similar intensity from two different factions declaiming piety and redemption. The Roman Catholic Church was one of them, here in one of its most powerful and public influential moments. The other contained, barely so, the evangelical enthusiasm bestowed by Aimee Semple MacPherson, Billy Sunday, and so many others. Both the Catholic Church and the evangelists had showbizzy aspects of their own, of course, and in their calls to repentance and devotion it frequently suited them to decry the movies.[4] For Protestants this tended to not carry a great deal of weight, despite Mr. Short and *Our Movie-Made Children;* the Mae West films, for example, racked up notably high grosses in the Bible Belt. The Catholic Church, however, preferred to lay its hands more firmly upon the pursuits of its parishioners, and not only in its pronouncements on such matters as marriage and birth control. The Church's officers regarded clean entertainment as a moral imperative and did not shy away from telling their flock about specifics. In sermons and editorials they constantly ripped into the licentiousness of popular entertainment, and the intensity of their fury frequently reaped benefits: witness MGM's humiliated withdrawal of *The Callahans and the Murphys*, which many Irish-Americans had regarded as personally slanderous. The 1930 Production Code, created largely by Catholics, was mainly an attempt to placate the Church, but as its ineffectiveness became clear to all, the hostilities resumed, and in a higher key.[5] *The Sign of the Cross*, with its torturous interlocking of spirituality and sex, was just the right kindling for Catholic flames. While the clergy's call for a boycott went mostly unheeded, the controversy instilled in some priests and bishops a sense of holy mission.

The mission began to find its destination in late 1933, following a discussion of cinematic corruption at the annual meeting of U.S. Catholic bishops. When they returned to their home dioceses, some of the bishops were sufficiently

[4]Billy Sunday did tend to give the movies more leeway than many of his fellow brimstoners. He even paid a good-humored and well-publicized visit to Mae West on the set of her seminal sinfest, *She Done Him Wrong.*

[5]This was not a time for hard feelings to go unmentioned, and the senior officers of the church were not afraid to lay the blame on the movie people. In Chicago, George Cardinal Mundelein wrote an open letter to his parishioners: "We believed we were dealing with moral gentlemen. We were mistaken."

(60)

inflamed to oversee the compilation of lists of objectionable films. Unlike the complaints lodged in *Our Movie-Made Children* the objections were nearly all made on grounds of sex. In Detroit, Msgr. John Hunt complained that 90 percent of Hollywood films were unfit for public viewing. Accordingly, the *Michigan Catholic* began to print lists of both commendable and—longer list!—undesirable movies. The first one it targeted was *Queen Christina*, noting that the queen's propensity for male attire made her a "perverted creature." Gradually the various movements coalesced into one major organization, the Legion of Decency, which formally came into existence in April 1934. Over 11 million good Catholics took the Legion's pledge:

> I wish to join the Legion of Decency, which condemns vile and unwholesome moving pictures. I unite with all who protest against them as a grave menace to youth, to home life, to country, and to religion. I condemn absolutely those salacious motion pictures which, with other degrading agencies, are corrupting public morals and promoting a sex mania in our land.
>
> I shall do all that I can to arouse public opinion against the portrayal of vice as a normal condition of affairs. . . .
>
> I unite with all who condemn the display of suggestive advertisements. . . .
>
> Considering these evils, I hereby promise to remain away from all motion pictures except those which do not offend decency and Christian morality. I promise further to secure as many members as possible for the Legion of Decency.
>
> I make this protest in a spirit of self-respect and with the conviction that the American public does not demand filthy pictures but clean entertainment and educational features.

It was promptly made clear that the strong wording of the pledge was not a mere gust of righteous hot air. Early in June Dennis Cardinal Dougherty of Philadelphia ordered a boycott of all films, and film receipts promptly plummeted to non-brotherly-love levels. In other areas, priests took to stationing themselves prominently outside movie houses running objectionable titles, casting a baleful eye on any parishioners coming in and out.

In a matter of a few weeks the forcefulness of the Catholic campaign had become a matter of national note. The outcries were given added urgency by the anger of certain influential Protestant and Jewish leaders, and the flames were further stoked by the ersatz irrefutable proof of *Our Movie-Made Children.* The pressure grew most intense, naturally, within the film industry, and was made more so by the fact that Joe Breen and publisher Martin Quigley were Roman Catholic in politics as well as faith: neither made a secret of his feelings about the state of the cinematic art and the character of those who created it. Here, in sum, was the faith community at its most vehement, assuming a moral high ground for the nation. In anger, righteousness, and pressure, this went far beyond anything seen before; next to this the furor over *The Callahans and the Murphys* was as a mild disagreement at a Knights of Columbus meeting. No, this holy crusade had all the fire of the original Religious Righter, Father Charles Coughlin, and a peremptory moralistic wrath unmatched until the abortion wars later in the century. An anger that was initially directed toward protecting Catholics from baser urges would, eventually, encompass film audiences all over the world.

Much of the take-no-prisoner zeal was directed toward Will Hays, whose terminally bland surface—folksy, phlegmatic, and conciliatory—masked the craft of the true player. His efforts to bridge the gap between the religious groups and the go-for-broke movie people left him in a lose-lose position. The 1930 Code had had the precise opposite effect of its original intent, and to the crusaders it seemed a Bastille-like symbol of all the country's ills, both moral and bureaucratic. The Legions of Decency set up in various cities operated on an independent basis, at least temporarily, to set aright the Code's weakness and irregularities.[6] Gradually they coalesced into a unified movement, with their activities closely supervised by Martin Quigley. Quigley's insider connections in the film industry were equaled, perhaps even overshadowed, by his close personal association with Father (soon to be Cardinal) Francis Spellman. Along with Quigley, the Legion operatives did their work with such rigor that a number of congressmen were sufficiently motivated to introduce bills calling for the regulation of film content. Seldom has the separation of church and state become so perilously and publicly blurred.

Successful boycotts, threats of government intervention, cacophonous public protests—alongside these, the film industry had little recourse. On June 22, 1934, the board of directors of the MPPDA met in New York. The purpose of the meeting was less discussion or negotiation than simple imposition. As the most powerful men in the business listened anxiously, Will Hays announced that the film industry now had "a police department." Then he introduced the department's new chief. As he accepted his appointment as Code administrator, Joseph I. Breen defined himself with characteristic élan: "I come from a race of people," he said, "who have a long history of committing suicide—on the other guy!" For the remainder of the meeting, and over the following two weeks, the scope of his suicidal power became manifestly clear as the Code was

[6]They operated in somewhat uncoordinated fashion, depending on the tastes of their administrators in each city. In Detroit *Murder at the Vanities* and *The Thin Man* were on the condemned list, while in Chicago they were given a B rating—neither approved nor forbidden for adults—and *Of Human Bondage* was passed in as many cities as it was condemned. The clearest directives, in fact, were issued in Philadelphia, courtesy of Cardinal Dougherty: if you were Catholic, you were forbidden to see any movies at all.

(61)

transformed from a suggested advisory to an ironclad proposition. Items vaguely mentioned in the 1930 Code, including sexual perversion, were made more specific; the new Code would be sufficiently detailed to offer its administrators nearly unlimited scope. The production and distribution of films would now be filtered through the moral and artistic vision of the Production Code Administration, and appeals filed against PCA decisions would no longer rest in the incestuous hands of the producers. In essence, all decisions related to Code matters would be administered by the ungloved iron hand of Joe Breen.

One of the Finest Women Who Ever Walked the Streets

Perhaps it's too easy, seven decades later, to bewail the changes/havoc/damage wrought by the coming of the 1934 Code. The litany of objections unfolds readily: anything that makes for less openness and honesty, that inhibits the integrity of a true artist (and some pre-Code filmmakers were that), that deigns to protect large groups of people from things to which they're entitled . . . the Code and the Breens who pushed for it seem, from a standard twenty-first-century liberal perspective, to merit stormy oceans of umbrage. And after decades without a Code, with sexual openness and excessive violence in films and all public media, the targets of the 1934 crusade seem staggeringly innocuous, far less coruscating a moral linchpin than, say, Robert Mapplethorpe. Outrages over something as sublime as *Queen Christina* seem as artistically indefensible as they are morally unnecessary. How dare anyone be offended?

Nevertheless, a bit of perspective-morphing makes it possible to see why the churches and others were getting so upset by 1933. While the frankness of most pre-Code films seems appealing to many of us now, there did arise, occasionally, the gratuitous rotten apple. Some things in some movies went unsettlingly far beyond the borders of good taste, and occasionally some low blows were struck. *Call Her Savage*, for example, is fun precisely because it strives, in depicting Clara Bow's odyssey, to leave no sexy or scorching stone uncovered. One scene, nevertheless, truly does go too far: an interlude that serves no other purpose than to show Bow wrestling playfully with her Great Dane. What seems tame to modern observers was far less so to some spectators in 1932, who knew of the scabrous tales (circulated in pornographic tattle-sheets) of Bow's purported romantic trysts with said canine. *The Sign of the Cross*, in certain senses the ultimate pre-Code movie, can still have a queasying effect on viewers with its arena brutality, and its effect on 1933 audiences was that much stronger; an exhibitor noted at the time, "I don't think anybody liked it because it is so very cruel and depressing." In certain 1933 films in particular, the gratuitous touches of sex or titillation seem akin to something on the Fox TV network in the 1990s. In some ways they were abusing their freedoms. Even in the most insubstantial trifles, the *So This Is Africa* type of seedy studio product, there is often a palpable sense that they're pushing to see just how much they can get away with. In the silly *Meet the Baron* (1933) there's a production number called "Clean as a Whistle" that exists for the sole purpose of allowing the MGM chorus line to shower onscreen and taunt viewers with the possibility of a nipple or two glimpsed through the spray. Harmless fun, sure, but in the face of growing religious and government ire it seemed a clear invitation for trouble. Then came a fleshy target around which all the anger could be draped.

In the history of movies, as everywhere else, there are occasionally dangled before us irresistible and somewhat lazy generalities: *The Jazz Singer* as the first sound film ("You ain't heard nothing yet!"); D. W. Griffith as the inventor of cinematic syntax and father of the closeup; 1939 as the greatest year in the history of Hollywood history; *Citizen Kane* (and later, perhaps, *Star Wars*) as the Event That Changed American Cinema. And . . . Mae West as the last straw responsible for bringing about the Production Code. How tempting it is to latch onto these icons, even while the truth is that they are seldom accurate, usually little more than the tip (if that) of their respective icebergs, concealing more than they reveal. Mae West, however, was nothing if not generous, and in her case there is more historical validity than is usual with history's shortcuts. A force as attention-grabbing as she would naturally take center stage in any controversy, and her name, effect, and outsized popularity turn up again and again in the articles and papers documenting the birth of the enforced Code. If she was not the moralists' ultimate nightmare, she was certainly the lush embodiment of most of their worst fears.

The reasons for West's notoriety are not necessarily imprinted on celluloid. As funny as she was, especially in her pre-Code vehicles *She Done Him Wrong* and *I'm No Angel*, and as suggestively sexual, her films do not appear, all these decades later, to be the most licentious of the Hollywood output. Rather, it was what she represented that posed the biggest threat. She was something the American public has always found troublesome: an independent, smashingly successful, sublimely egotistical, self-created woman. From Amelia Bloomer to Madonna, such people are moving targets, and West was more conspicuous, and self-assured, than most. Even after doing jail time for her frankness, and brazenly attempting to push the gay envelope with her play *The Drag*, she always managed to come out on top. That in itself would be enough to draw a fearful response from conservative quarters; still worse, atop the whole was the fact that her fortune and fame derived from her treating sex as a joke. Not a secret and sacred thing, nor a treasure saved for lawful wedlock—but something to be openly enjoyed, used, shared, and mocked. In so doing, she blithely appropriated the leading edge in the battle of the sexes. She could refer to

(62)

herself as "one of the finest women who ever walked the streets," sing "A Guy What Takes His Time" to her panting admirers, and inform Cary Grant "You can be had." She could also, as demonstrated in her "Cherry Sisters" scene in *She Done Him Wrong*, be on easy terms with gays. Many millions of Americans were willing to share the joke, to the extent that *Wrong* and *Angel* exceeded even *The Sign of the Cross* in their grosses and rescued Paramount Pictures from receivership in 1933. Critics mostly raved, and as the clergy leaned toward descriptions such as "demoralizing, disgusting, suggestive, and indecent," West basked luxuriantly in the glare of worldwide awe.

In early 1934 West prepared for her third starring assault on American prudery, the provocatively titled *It Ain't No Sin.* After Joe Breen rejected the two submitted scripts, West and Paramount proceeded oblivious and undeterred. The advance ads for the film bore an unintentionally ominous air: a looming hourglass silhouette was captioned with the legend, "Coming events cast their shadows before." While production was still underway, the Legion of Decency was founded, its establishment due in no small part to the sensation West had created and to fearful anticipation of her next effort. Before *It Ain't No Sin* had run on any screen, the Legion denounced the movie and its star. It and she *were* sins, according to the Legion, and the new Production Code Administration concurred. For Joe Breen and his associates, *It Ain't No Sin* would be a test case to show how the rules had changed. The title was the first thing to go, followed by a good portion of West's cheerful amorality. Cut and partly reshot, the retitled *Belle of the Nineties* was an artistic letdown and a financial disappointment. The slow decline of West's career was now underway, and as her image grew more forcibly denatured, her scripts became ever more bland and she herself far less funny. Thus muzzled, she continued her battles against the Legion and the PCA for several years. The curves remained, but the impact was gone.

Of Bigotry and Breen

In one of her first radio broadcasts Eleanor Roosevelt hailed the ascendancy of Joe Breen, thus setting a certain imprimatur upon the whole Production Code process and crowning the new czar of the movies. Breen's entitlement to this crown was, in his and many minds, unquestionable. He knew how to deal with the studios, he knew film, and his stern tenacity got results. To his role as unofficial national arbiter of morals he brought the energized implacability of the true believer, a vitality readily apparent in a newsreel Breen appeared in shortly after assuming leadership of the PCA. As he intones the credo of the new Code, the forcefulness and terrible sincerity are as unquestionable as the self-

The changing face of movie morality: Production Code Administrator Joseph I. Breen. *Photofest*

righteousness and the bad grammar: "The vulgar, the cheap, and the tawdry is out! There is no room on the screen at any time for pictures which offend against common decency—and these the industry will not allow."

One of the most powerful constituents of Breen's belief in both God and self was an enormous amount of bigotry. In the voluminous Breen correspondence, external as well as internal, there is a major paper trail describing precisely what he thought of the people in the film community. His extreme anti-Semitism was sadly common at the time, his homophobia was all but de rigueur, and these opinions would inform film content, and a large part of American culture, for many years. His feelings were only strengthened by the fact that the film people he reigned over were primarily Jewish and occasionally gay. Everything wrong with the movies was due to Them, as he wrote to an ally, Fr. Wilfred Parsons, in 1932:

> [The Jewish moguls] are simply a rotten bunch of vile people with no respect for anything but the making of money. . . . Sexual perversion is rampant [and] any number of our directors and stars are perverts. . . . These Jews seem to think of nothing but making money and sexual indulgence [and] are [also] the men and

63

> women who decide what the film fare of the nation is to be. They and they alone make the decision. Ninety-five per cent of these folks are Jews of an Eastern European lineage. They are, probably, the scum of the earth.

Given his self-appointed status as the only moral person in the film industry, Breen made his personal beliefs—religious, moral, ethical, political, social—a major factor in his duties as chief Code administrator. Post-Code cinema, in the Breen's-eye view, had no truck with moral ambiguities or criticism of established institutions like government, law enforcement, and big business. Virtue would always find some compensation, sanctity could not be attacked, and any type of wrong was duly and visibly punished. Ethnicity had been a frequent subject of early thirties films, with stories about Jewish life (*The Heart of New York*, *The Symphony of Six Million*) and with black characters occasionally treated with something approaching respect (*Baby Face*, *This Day and Age*). Such things were now out (along with the vulgar, the cheap, and the tawdry). Post-Code cinema was a predominantly white and Gentile and heterosexual world, innocent wherever possible: the first big post-Code movie star was, after all, Shirley Temple. When the ethnic images couldn't be erased, they were made more subservient, and here was born the bleak golden age of Hollywood's racial insensitivity.

Breen's was the final word on what was included or omitted in films. He and his staff read and approved (or rejected) scripts before filming and then would give the necessary code certificate to the finished product. His opinions on acceptability naturally precluded any inclusion of a gay element; he had, after all, been an engineer of the revised Code that specified sex perversion as a no-no. In film after film after film he cautioned and warned against any inclusion of what he termed "a 'pansy' flavor," threatening that inclusion of such elements would render an entire film unacceptable. A finished film could and would be recut or reshot, as Breen's hated Jews and perverts trembled before his power and complete lack of self-doubt. Some years after his death one of his later associates in the Production Code Administration, Jack Vizzard, precisely encapsulated the essence of Joe Breen, and thus of the Code in general: "The mainspring of his vitality was the fact that he nurtured not the slightest seed of self-doubt regarding his mission or his rectitude. He was right, the moviemakers were wrong, and that was that."

100 Percent Pure

Even before the Legion of Decency turned up the heat, the movie industry had felt sufficient pressure to start an unofficial cleanup. Except for some startling moments here and there—*Wonder Bar* is a good example—most early-1934 movies seemed to pull back from the excesses and Ernests of the previous year. The Hollywood fascination with literary prestige (laundered as needed) had already begun in 1933 with Fox's *Cavalcade* and *Berkeley Square*, and then late in the year with a hit adaptation of *Little Women* and a flop version of *Alice in Wonderland*. Nevertheless, this drift was obviously deemed insufficient, for the fervor in 1934 was such that even the more denatured movies were put on the hit list. However mild Wheeler and Woolsey's *Hips Hips Hooray* seems, especially alongside the seedy *So This Is Africa*, it was one of the biggest targets early in the year. So were *Jimmy the Gent* and *He Was Her Man*, both with Jimmy Cagney, a presence almost as much of a flashpoint as Mae West. Most crucially, a trio of films in production in mid-1934 seemed to be positioned to bait the Code. Mae West's *It Ain't No Sin* (a.k.a. *Belle of the Nineties*) was joined by two other sensual-woman sagas: MGM's Jean Harlow vehicle *Born to Be Kissed* and Warners' *Madame DuBarry*, as embodied by the stunning and ahistorical figure of Dolores Del Rio. All three were excoriated while still in production, all added fuel to the censorship fires, and all were extensively reshot after July 1934, when the new Code was established. The Harlow film was retitled, in a burst of Breen-pleasing optimism, *100% Pure* . . . then ultimately given the noncommittal label *The Girl from Missouri.*[7] In all three cases the tampering was fairly evident, with plotlines that made hairpin turns in order to transform three sexually forward women into incomprehensibly nice girls. In the coming years, when suggestive scripts were run through the PCA maw, such alterations would be standard issue, albeit with the seams usually less visible.

Earlier films still in release after July 1934 suffered even greater indignities. Even as Breen maintained an aura of equability with the studios, a take-no-prisoners mentality was in the air. The other guy, or the industry's largest studio, would indeed be the one committing suicide. Remembering all too well the futile battles he had waged with studios over the previous months, Breen ordered the recall of dozens of titles for PCA-ordered cuts. Each print would be shipped back to the film exchange, the offending footage would be carefully excised, and the print returned to the theater. The censorious zeal of the time was nothing if not contagious. After MGM's *The Merry Widow* was given a Code seal and allowed to open, Martin Quigley and Will Hays took up the gauntlet. Mindful that MGM production head Irving Thalberg had won the appeal battle on *Queen Christina*, they professed outrage that Breen had passed such a dirty

[7] One relatively suggestive aspect of *The Girl from Missouri* that did escape the shears was the presence of a possibly gay character—a melancholy millionaire, played by the terminally dignified Lewis Stone, who makes friends with Harlow and then commits suicide. It's not there in the script, but there are hints for those wishing to read beneath the surface, thus setting the trend for gay and lesbian movie characters (and theorists) for decades.

64

picture as *The Merry Widow.* Following threats and recriminations on all fronts (including some dark hints from Quigley that the Catholic Church would enter the fray), Breen capitulated. The saucy, expensive, and essentially innocuous operetta was temporarily withdrawn, over Thalberg's heated objections, for twelve cuts.

In this age of Breen, particular micromanaging would be reserved for the recycling of previously filmed material. Stories remade after mid-1934 would be made to conform to the new rules of morality, regardless of whatever hash was made of plot sense or dramatic effectiveness. Thus, the otherwise accomplished 1940 version of *The Letter* forced Bette Davis to pay, through her murder, for shooting her lover, whereas the 1929 original (like the Maugham story and play) had cast its heroine (Jeanne Eagels) into a darker hell—living in a loveless marriage with the knowledge that she will always love the man she murdered.[8] In 1938, when James Whale remade his provocative 1933 *The Kiss before the Mirror* as *Wives under Suspicion*, the material was so denatured that one can sense Whale's dejection in every frame of the film.

One of the indisputably rotten aspects of the PCA agenda concerned the fate of pre-Code films given a theatrical reissue after 1934. In those pretelevision days it was fairly common practice for studios to recycle well-remembered titles to augment their new output, and with the Code now in effect old movies were subjected to the same strictures as new ones. The luckiest films were those Breen refused to reissue under any circumstances, such as *Design for Living*, *The Cat and the Fiddle* (Ramon Novarro living in sin with Jeanette MacDonald), and *She Done Him Wrong.* For many more, the reissues were permitted, after cuts were made of material deemed unsuitable for the post-Code world. *Mata Hari* lost most of Garbo's exotic dance and her postcoital love scene with Novarro; *Love Me Tonight* came out missing two songs and some dialogue; and varying degrees of indignity were inflicted on such important films as *A Farewell to Arms*, *Arrowsmith*, *Animal Crackers*, *The Public Enemy*, and *King Kong.* The PCA was only too happy to approve the prestige-laden *Cavalcade* for reissue two years after its release, but only after the removal of the shots of the lesbian couple. (Save for one quick flash, they remain missing from all surviving prints, an abrupt cut surviving to show where they once had been.) Not unexpectedly, Breen reserved a special portion of wrath for *The Sign of the Cross.* In 1935, notified that Paramount was considering a reissue, he immediately informed the studio that "The Naked Moon" (or, as he referred to it, "Anacaria's [*sic*] dance") had to go. It did go, finally, when *Cross* was rereleased in 1938 and (with a "modern" prologue) in 1944. For more than fifty years, all anyone saw of the sequence was the first line of the song, followed by the loud hymn-singing of the Christians.[9]

[8] *The Letter* (1940), fine film that it is, is a textbook case of the changes forced by the Code on filmmakers—who were able in this case to triumph over them. Not only did Davis's character pay for her crime, but it was then necessary to show her executioner, the murdered man's wife, being arrested. None of this was part of the original, in which the Eurasian wife of the remake was portrayed, as Maugham intended, as a Chinese mistress.

For nearly a year prior to the watershed cleanup, there had been somewhat of an unconscious prelude: the soft-pedaling of gay characters had begun in the middle of 1933 in reaction to the excesses of *Our Betters* and *The Warrior's Husband.* Rouge and lipstick on men were out, and so were obvious partners, as gay and lesbian characters continued onscreen in a notably more subdued, if still visible, light. The industry's most dependable purveyors of lavender, Bobby Watson and Franklin Pangborn, each turned up numerous times onscreen in 1934. Watson and his elaborately flailing wrists were conspicuous in two mid-level MGM films: in *The Gay Bride* he snipped his way through the role of a patronizing luxury car salesman, and in *This Side of Heaven* his interior decorator nattered about floral upholstery to Mae Clarke, who replied that the design in question struck her as "a bit too gay." Pangborn, back to solo-act status for 1934 (and thereafter), had one of his larger and more peculiar roles in *Tomorrow's Youth* (Monogram). In this micro-budgeted predecessor of *Kramer vs. Kramer*, Mr. P. costarred as the private tutor of young Dickie Moore, forever chasing after his "little man" and scrubbing him just a bit too hard in the bathtub. "I don't need any help to take a bath," Dickie protests. "What do you think I am, a sissy?"

Clean as a Whistle

By the autumn of 1934 the Code was in action, the Church officials were, if not satisfied, at least a great deal happier, and the profile of American movies had been vastly altered. There had not been such a chaotic time, or one fraught with such sweeping artistic change, since the beginning of sound. A short time prior to the coming of the enforced Code, the father of "The Naked Moon," Cecil B. DeMille, had made some pious utterances about the threatened cleanup. "All of Hollywood is under indictment for the sins of a few," he declaimed. "How can this be fair? . . . Do you chop down a tree because one of its branches is

[9] *The Sign of the Cross*, original version with lesbians, skewered pygmies, and hungry crocodiles, survived because DeMille retained a print. Other cut titles—some of them—were restored in later years because collectors or studios possessed the cut footage. Some, alas, will never be seen in their original forms; one of the most notorious of pre-Code titles, *Convention City*, seems to have disappeared completely.

decayed?" A few months later, as the tree was being made into kindling, DeMille had no choice but to hew to the same line as everyone else in the film community. And in its first few months, through interconnected layers of intimidation and relief and good public relations, the appearance was that the Code really had helped the movies. Grosses, always the bottom line, were clearly on the rise, aided in large part by the elimination of expenses incurred by the interference from state and local censorship boards, as well as the costly Philadelphia boycott. Code proponents such as Breen and the opportunistically adaptable Will Hays painted a glowing Technicolor picture, quickly citing the financial figures as proof that the new "wholesome" film wave was responsible for the crowds. In their proselytizing enthusiasm they neglected to report that the grosses had been on the rise ever since Roosevelt's election. Nor was it mentioned that the profits had been propelled in part by such no-no titles as *She Done Him Wrong*, *George White's Scandals*, and *The Sign of the Cross.*

Moviegoers had no choice but to go along with the Code: like medicine, it was supposed to be good for you. Even so, some fun-loving filmgoers vented their disapproval in movie houses. All PCA-approved films sported an onscreen Code seal and certificate number, and it was reported that in such cities as Chicago, Detroit, New York, Cleveland, and heavily Catholic Boston, the seal was loudly booed. Liberal members of the press and arts community likewise said no, and film critic Richard Watts of the *New York Herald Tribune* set forth an argument against the Legion of Decency that may seem, all these decades later, to best frame the whole situation:

> With the Western World showing more than an occasional sign of collapse, and everything from German terrorism to strikes and rumors of war darkening the horizon, you might think that the Legion of Decency could find some more serious matter to fight against than Mae West's terrible influence over the ten-year-old mind.

As 1934 ended, all in Hollywood seemed streamline-shiny, sterile and censor-proof. The year had begun, in this present account of, with a highly successful musical featuring gay characters out—truly and genuinely out—on a dance floor. It ended with an even more profitable musical featuring another gay character on another dance floor. The differences between the earlier and later characters, and between the dances, told the whole story. The character was now closeted to the point of sexlessness, and his dance partner was a woman. On the stage, the Cole Porter musical *Gay Divorce* had dealt mockingly with adultery and divorce. With such matters exceedingly unwelcome in a post-Code world, RKO and the Code people went back and forth with arguments and compromise until the script and the title were viably laundered. *The Gay Divorcée*, as it was now known, was scrutinized exhaustively by the PCA, still informally

EDWARD EVERETT HORTON

Born Brooklyn, N.Y., March 18, 1886; died Encino, Calif., September 29, 1970

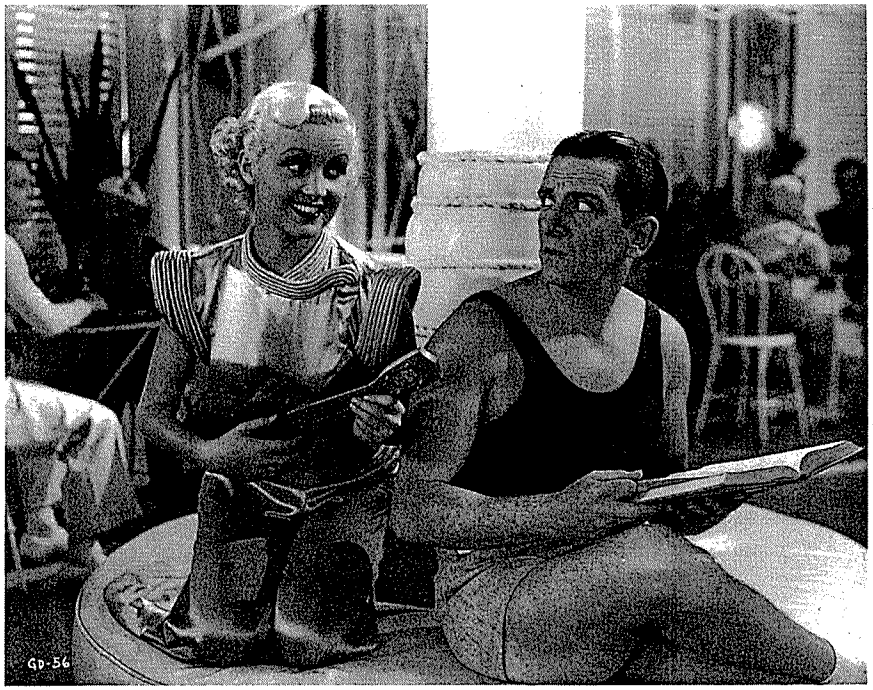
A great character actor's prime asset is a unique voice. It's fitting, then, that millions of baby boomers first experienced Edward Everett Horton through his voice alone—as the mordantly decorous narrator of "Fractured Fairy Tales" on the *Rocky and Bullwinkle* TV series. Even without his elegantly gangling figure and spooked countenance, EEH had no trouble establishing his presence.

For years, Mr. Horton was Hollywood's highest-paid character actor, a dependable and welcome and unchanging presence. In leads and more frequently in scores of supporting roles, he embodied aristocratic befuddlement and bungled composure. He existed, it seemed, in order to be startled, a Sisyphus for the world's irregularities. It took almost nothing to rattle him, after which the skinny 6'2" frame would cringe and the rubber face would instantly assume its perennially contorted affect: even more than Pangborn or Johnny Arthur, EEH was most compelling when flustered.

He also embodied the complete inverse of sex appeal. Although he played some romantic roles early on and was frequently cast as husband or father, one could hardly think of him in terms of sex. Consequently, he was in many ways the ideal gay persona for a post-Code age, as duly demonstrated in late 1934 in *The Gay Divorcée*. In films such as *In Caliente* (1935) and *The Gang's All Here* (1943), he would find himself dancing with another man, and as he registered shock with his standard cry of "My word!," you could tell that this would indeed be his preference, were sexuality his lot. Like all great character actors, he had decades of stage experience, coming to film in 1923 as a quirky leading man and easily settling into the supporting niche he maintained for over forty years. His defining moment came with the play *Springtime for Henry*—even the title evokes him—in which he starred as a Milquetoast who learns about love. Oddly, he did not appear in the film version; if he had, the pantywaist portions would have been, as always, far more convincing than the romantic aspects. But then, Mr. Horton knew his audience well enough to know that it loved and remained faithful to him for one thing above all: his sheer, and eternally enduring, improbability.

known as the Hays Office, but one character managed to stir little attention. The second male lead, Egbert, spent the entire film fussing, fretting, and fending off women's advances. As played by Edward Everett Horton, Egbert was high-strung, persnickety, supercilious, and notably lacking in masculine airs. Egbert, in sum, was gay, but in Horton's hands, in a Code-mandated Hollywood, he was so desexed as to pass undetected under the Breen radar. One of his central moments was a musical sequence called "Let's K-nock K-nees," in which a

66



Pert in satin pajamas (worn previously by Dolores Del Rio in *Flying Down to Rio*), Betty Grable seems unaware that Edward Everett Horton (as "Aunt" Egbert) is completely uninterested. It's all part of *The Gay Divorcée. Photofest*

young Betty Grable exhorted Horton to prance on the dance floor and make some innocuous whoopee. Throughout the entire number, Horton reacts and dances with an abashed unwillingness so palpable as to form a closet without walls. Such, for some years, would be the fate of gays on film—present yet weirdly invisible, just as in life, and incapable of carnal feelings or, sometimes, simple human contact. With or without Al Jolson's condescending "Woooo" boys would still be boys, and girls would still like girls, in this post-Code world. Those insiders wishing or needing to locate them in the movies would, however, need to work quite a bit harder.

67

"THE CELLULOID CLOSET"

Vito Russo

Frightening the Horses

out of the closets and into the shadows

68

The original ad campaign for William Friedkin's The Boys in the Band *(1970).*

***The Children's Hour* is not about lesbianism, it's about the power of lies to destroy people's lives.**

—William Wyler, 1962

***The Sergeant* is not about homosexuality, it's about loneliness.**

—Rod Steiger, 1968

***Windows* is not about homosexuality, it's about insanity.**

—Gordon Willis, 1979

***Staircase* is not about homosexuality, it's about loneliness.**

—Rex Harrison, 1971

***Sunday, Bloody Sunday* is not about the sexuality of these people, it's about human loneliness.**

—John Schlesinger, 1972

It was the first film in which a man said "I love you" to another man. I wrote that scene in. I said, "There's no point in half-measures. We either make a film about queers or we don't."

—Dirk Bogarde on *Victim*

In America we don't; that was the message of the MPAA barely a month after its decision to revise the Code to allow homosexuality onscreen. Audience and critical reaction to Tony Richardson's *A Taste of Honey* (1961) and Basil Dearden's *Victim* (1961), both of which had opened in England by the time of the American ruling, swiftly indicated the direction that American films would take on the subject of homosexuals. In the spring of 1962, the two British imports became the first films to apply for a seal of approval under the new Code guidelines.

A Taste of Honey, adapted from Shelagh Delaney's play, presented its unkempt characters winningly. The friendship between Jo (Rita Tushingham), a pregnant and deserted working class waif, and Geoff (Murray Melvin), a lonely, effeminate homosexual, was portrayed with lyric tenderness. The appealing ugly duckling of a girl and the odd young man who acts "just like a woman" are cast as society's freaks, two unwanted creatures who enjoy their brief taste of honey together before being swallowed up again in the pain of being different in the real world. Geoff is pathetic, sexless, childlike. A nervous nellie with frightened eyes, he is the perfect nonthreatening male to help a shy girl on the road to womanhood—a man who will not mistreat her.

Geoff was harmless. Thus the film had no problem with the Code, and it was released immediately with a seal of approval. However, it was handled nervously in America. A study guide, prepared with the help of a church-affiliated film society and reprinted in *Life* magazine, quoted psychiatrists on the "causes and cures" of homosexuality. Geoff was perceived as a sick character, but his visibility, the very fact of his legitimacy as a character, was the irritant. Some American critics chafed like skittish horses, not yet really frightened but sensing something dangerous coming down the road. In England, the reaction to an increase of homosexuality onscreen was less agitated than it would become in the United States. The critic Dilys Powell wrote wistfully in the London *Times,* "I hope soon to feel the time has come to stop congratulating the British cinema on its ability to mention homosexuality."

American critics were neither amused nor amusing on the subject; they were openly hostile and expressed resentment at any kind of sympathetic treatment. Sympathy had come easily to *Tea and Sympathy*'s Tom Lee because, after all, he was not really queer. *A Taste of Honey*'s Geoff, on the other hand, was the genuine item, and this made a difference. Pauline Kael, calling Geoff "a sad-eyed queen," wrote sarcastically that liberal audiences now had a "new unfortunate" whom they could clasp to their "social worker hearts." It was not Richardson's sentimental approach to his characters that rankled but the very appearance of Geoff as a sympathetic character. Bosley Crowther, dissenting from a positive review of the film by A. H. Weiler in the *New York Times,* complained of Geoff's lack of villainy. "Certainly you'd think the grubby people who swarm through [the film] might shake out one disagreeable individual whose meanness we might despise," Crowther wrote. "The homosexual could do with some sharp and dirty digs. No one is more easily rendered odious than an obvious homosexual." In his search for villainy, Crowther ignored the easily despised meanness of the heterosexual sailor (Paul Danquah) who prompts Jo's pitiful condition in the first place and then abandons her. Instead, Crowther calls for the head of Geoff.

Murray Melvin, the "sad-eyed queen," with Rita Tushingham in A Taste of Honey *(1961).*

But a sad-eyed queen is no hero, and Geoff was no threat. The homosexual in Basil Dearden's *Victim* was an entirely different number, heroic enough to be a genuine menace. The key phrase in the Code's ruling, prescribing "care, discretion and restraint," was about to be clarified. *Victim* was a blackmail thriller that pleaded tolerance for homosexuals, the first commercial film to do so since the German *Anders als die Anderen* in 1919. The MPAA found *Victim* "thematically objectionable" on two counts and refused to grant it a seal without certain cuts. The film, the Johnston Office said, violated the basic precepts of the Code "through its candid and clinical discussion of homosexuality and its overtly expressed plea for social acceptance of the homosexual to the extent that [he] be made tolerable."

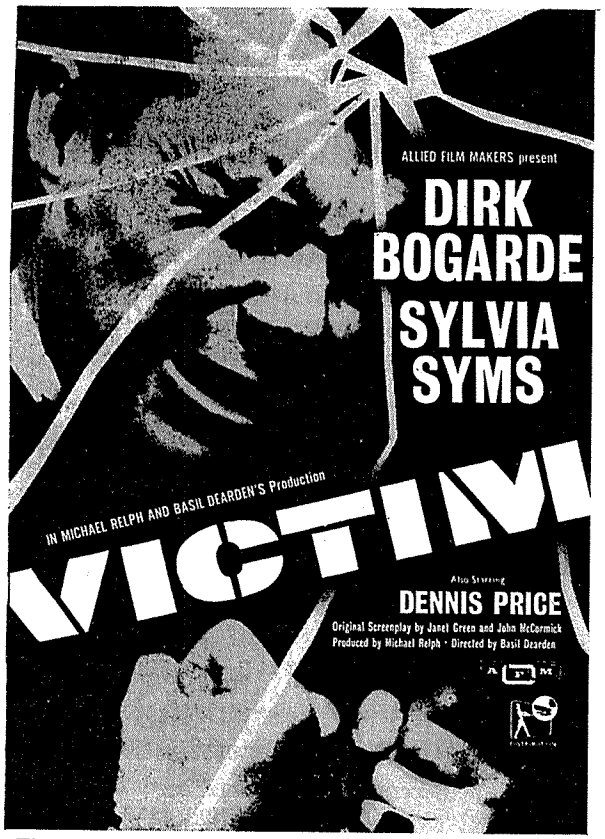
The first objection had to do with the spoken words *homosexual* and *homosexuality,* which had never before been uttered onscreen. In early 1961, before the new ruling on homosexuality, Sidney Poitier was allowed to deride a college student's lack of manhood by attacking his "faggoty" white shoes in *A Raisin in the Sun.* Now, in 1962, the Code fought to eliminate the nonpejorative "homosexual" from a film that was then doing well in Europe and was the sole British entry in the Venice Film Festival. The Code was answering the questions the *Motion Picture Herald* had raised about the basic contradiction in permitting homosexuality onscreen when to do so violated the precepts of

the Code. In an official clarification of the October 3 ruling, the MPAA said that "sexual aberration could be suggested but not actually spelled out," a requirement that barred honesty and forthrightness and invited innuendo and slander. Thus "faggoty" was okay but "homosexual" was not. Although much was made of the refusal of *Victim*'s director Basil Dearden and his coproducer Michael Relph to cut the offending words from the soundtrack, it was clear that the real objections of the MPAA concerned the film's strong conclusion that homosexuals were victimized by society's laws. No cuts were made in *Victim,* and the film was released without a seal of approval two months after the liberalization of the Production Code.

The story of *Victim,* written by Janet Green and John McCormick, was shockingly explicit for its time. Green and Dearden had collaborated once before on a thriller with a social message; their film *Sapphire* (1958) built a neat murder mystery around the death of a black woman who had been passing for white. *Victim*'s story of homosexual blackmail was also about people who passed. For a unique difference between homosexuals and other minorities has always been that the homosexual had the option to "pass" simply by maintaining silence. The crucial need of the homosexual to hide is presented in *Victim,* which points out that ninety percent of all blackmail cases in England at that time involved homosexuals. The closet door had shifted uneasily on its hinges in the 1950s as homosexuality was discussed publicly for the first time in America, and now *Victim* sought to push the debate to a new level. The film portrays the screen's first homosexual character to choose visibility and thereby challenge the status quo. The issues of repression and enforced invisibility were equated, for the first time, with the law's relegation of homosexuals to a lawless subculture in which they became victims of their own ghostly status.

A plea for the legalization of homosexuality between consenting adults in private is implicit in *Victim*'s dramatization of one man's battle for understanding and tolerance. There are times when *Victim* says that being homosexual should be punishment enough for such creatures, that to hound them seems a pointless exercise. One tortured victim, a timid barber, offers "nature played me a dirty trick" as a reason to pay blackmail and "buy a little peace while I still have some time left." Powerlessness is seen as part of the mechanism of invisibility. There is silence because the law makes homosexuality illegal, and blackmail flourishes because there is silence. The police chief in *Victim* remarks to Dirk Bogarde, "Someone once called this law against homosexuality the blackmailer's charter."

"Is that how you feel about it?" Bogarde asks.



This advertisement for Victim *(1961) showed a tortured Dirk Bogarde in a pose that does not appear in the film.*

"I'm a policeman, sir," he replies. "I don't have feelings."

Victim creates a gay hero with credentials enough to get into heaven, let alone society. Like Sidney Poitier's superwhite super black in Stanley Kramer's *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner* (a summa cum laude big shot with the World Health Organization), Bogarde's upper middle class barrister in *Victim* is as clean as a whistle. Married to a loving and patient woman, Melville Farr has resolved to bury his homosexual feelings and has not been "active" for several years. His unexpected and personally unwelcome attraction to a working class youth (Peter McEnery) and their brief, sexless relationship is seen as a moral lapse. Farr is redeemed by the fact that he "wanted" the young man but never gave in to his "desires." When their affair is threatened with exposure through blackmail, the youth kills himself in an attempt to protect Farr's marriage and career.

The suicide turns Melville Farr into a hero in gay terms. Willing to sacrifice his reputation in order to "challenge the existing law" against homosexuals, he sets out to avenge the death of his friend by bringing the blackmailers to

justice. Already an acceptable hero to some liberal audiences because he admits that homosexual acts are wrong and refrains from acting on his urges, he becomes a hero in the gay perspective because he is willing to lend a little dignity to his homosexual relationship by fighting to legitimize its existence. The situation in *Victim* offered the opportunity to explore the closet from both sides of the door. When Farr tries to enlist the aid of affluent homosexuals who are being preyed on by the same gang of blackmailers, the homosexuals practically form a posse to force him to "lay off." Farr assumes the role of the gay militant who is accused of rocking the boat; no other homosexual in the film so much as wishes him a furtive "good luck." And Farr is shocked when the meek barber tells him bitterly that he thinks the young suicide is "well out of it." The barrister, set against the paralyzing self-hatred of others like him, becomes ever more the shining hero.

A general distaste surrounded the filming of *Victim*. Reportedly the shooting was beset with overt hostilities on the part of crew members and production people. Bogarde recalls that the cast and crew were sometimes treated "as if we were attacking the Bible." One lawyer involved in preproduction contracts, Bogarde said, reported that he had wanted "to wash his hands after reading the script." For gays in the closet, though, it was one of the first indications on film of the knowledge of shared oppression. "I believe," Bogarde says, "that the film made a lot of difference to a lot of people's lives."

In America, *Victim* was given the serious art house treatment, but without a Code seal, and typed as a film that condoned homosexuality, it was shunned by the general public. Press reactions to the social issues raised in the film often obscured their reactions to the film itself, as though the topic of homosexuality were all-encompassing and capable of blinding critics in the analysis of other aspects of the work. Consider, for example, the criticism of *Time:* "[The film is] a coyly sensational exploitation of homosexuality as a theme—and what's more offensive—an implicit approval of homosexuality as a practice . . . nowhere does the film suggest that homosexuality is a serious but often curable neurosis that attacks the biological basis of life itself."

Victim touched a nerve and marked a turning point. The *New York Times* was quick to say that anyone who liked *Victim* had to be abnormal (just as critics in the Thirties had suggested that anyone who found lesbianism in *Mädchen in Uniform* was a pervert). The *Times* critic wrote, "How much [the film] will be appreciated and how much its pronounced sympathy for the victimized homosexual will be shared by the viewer will depend upon the individual's awareness and tolerance of the abnormality . . . while the subject is disagreeable it is not handled distastefully."

This type of film criticism remains with us. Critics, no matter how "liberal," continue to differentiate between straight and gay audiences, whether dealing with gay or non-gay films. The television critic Stuart Klein implied on the air that only gay people and gay critics would find *La Cage aux Folles* a funny film. When Woody Allen's *Annie Hall* opened in New York, Andrew Sarris wrote that he was glad to see a return of heterosexual romance to the screen—as if homosexual romance had become all the rage—worse, as if romance itself were somehow heterosexual in nature. (Why not just "the return of romance" to the screen?)

It is an old stereotype, that homosexuality has to do only with sex while heterosexuality is multifaceted and embraces love and romance. This is why the introduction of a gay hero in *Victim* ran counter to the popular conception of homosexuals. The film was seen as a challenge to heterosexual hegemony, and there was outrage at the social realities that now intruded on and crushed the illusions of earlier films made in simpler times. *Victim*'s stark portrait of the pressures caused by hiding and the sense of despair of the homosexuals in the film (including the noble Farr) removed it from the category of films that dealt only with harmless, amorphous sissies; it made gays real. Farr's insistence on being both a homosexual and a real person mirrors the producers' insistence on using candid language in the film. On the one hand, the film was a regrettable legitimization of social issues perceived to be distasteful; on the other, it was a validation of the existence of homosexuals who were not comic relief for the majority. *Victim,* it seems, was a killjoy.

Pauline Kael bemoaned immediately the loss of "bitchy old queens like Franklin Pangborn and Grady Sutton" (whom nobody ever agrees were playing homosexuals) and despaired of the cinematic consequences of treating homosexuals "seriously, with sympathy and respect, like Negroes and Jews." She need not have worried; the equation of gay oppression with that of blacks and Jews is still under attack by liberals and conservatives alike, and the sissy remains with us today, albeit much changed. It soon became clear that while the Code might allow the use of homosexuality as a subject in films made in the United States, it intended to maintain some control over *how* that subject was used. "Care, discretion and restraint" meant, essentially, "treat it like a dirty secret." And that is what filmmakers did.

Heroes like Melville Farr were out of the question on the American screen. Deletions were made continually, under pressure or fear of public disapproval, whenever literary or historical material was brought to the screen. Strong suggestions in Peter Glenville's *Becket* (1964) of a sexual relationship between Thomas à Becket (Richard Burton) and King Henry II (Peter O'Toole), in a scene in

which the two men sleep together, were condemned by American critics for damaging the heroic image of the two buddies' noble relationship. *Newsweek* attacked the source material, asserting that the playwright Jean Anouilh, "by descending to the realm of the psychiatric and implying a sexual attraction between the two, muddies the issues."

The issues were the eternal issues of masculinity and heroism and their preservation at all cost. Andrew Sarris, writing in the *Village Voice,* complained that "O'Toole plays the King as a lovesick Queen." (This attitude indicates why *A Taste of Honey* won a seal of approval and *Victim* did not.) For most people, homosexuality was inextricably bound to the idea of men acting like women—and that was bad, even dangerous, for heroes. Although, under the new Code, villainous homosexuals sometimes *wanted* the hero sexually, their homosexuality served as an illustration of their pathology and thus illuminated their villainy. In Peter Ustinov's *Billy Budd* (1962), the fatal attraction of Claggart (Robert Ryan) to the beauteous innocence of Billy (Terence Stamp) is both his problem and his eventual retribution. The attraction consumes him. Billy is pure and beautiful, seemingly unconscious of the feelings he engenders, much like Stamp's sexual angel in Pier Paolo Pasolini's *Teorema* (1968). Innocent and irresistible is how Melville created Billy Budd, and Ustinov left it that way. But the homoeroticism in the film comes as much from Stamp's angelic embodiment of Melville's Billy as it does from the lechings of the fascinated Claggart.

Other film characters were saved from self-knowledge by means of selective interpretation for the screen. Although Robert Bolt is credited with the screenplay for *Lawrence of Arabia* (1962), Michael Wilson, who wrote several preliminary versions, made some of the fundamental decisions regarding the film's approach to Lawrence's sexuality and shaped the use of homosexuality to indicate villainy. In an early synopsis, Wilson described Chapter 80 of Lawrence's book: "Lawrence [Peter O'Toole] goes out alone to scout the district of Derea on foot. He is picked up and arrested and taken before the Turkish bey, a sadistic homosexual [Jose Ferrer]. There follows here an account of the hideous night of torture and degradation he spends at the hands of the Turks."

This is the episode of which Lawrence writes, "the citadel of my integrity had been irretrievably lost that night in Derea." The problem for the filmmakers was how to interpret what that citadel was to Lawrence. Wilson's notes on the Derea sequence are illuminating.

Much has been made of this scene . . . as the key to the enigma of Lawrence. It seems to me that it becomes the key only if the question of homosexuality is placed

Peter O'Toole faces Jose Ferrer, the evil homosexual Turkish bey, in Lawrence of Arabia *(1962).*

at the center of the riddle—and this I have no desire to do. There is little to be gained from dramatizing the notion that Lawrence finally succumbs to the bey's advances . . . if Lawrence believed that he had strengthened his willpower to the point where he could endure any physical pain; if he was sure that his spirit could dominate his flesh (and thus, set him apart from other men)—and if he found that he too had his breaking point and finally whimpered for mercy—is this not enough for our story? This does not mean, of course, that we should omit any suggestion of the bey's homosexuality.

And so Lawrence's "citadel" was defined onscreen as his strength in being able to rise above other men, and its "irretrievable loss" came as a result of his admission of weakness under torture. His difficulties arise from nothing so long-lasting as homosexuality, which is represented in the film entirely by the evil bey. Thus an important by-product of the Code revision was the allowance of the American dream of staunchly heterosexual heroes to coexist with visible homosexuality so long as the two fought the classic battle and homosexuality and heroism did not occur in the same person. Again, the hero had to be "a hell of a nice guy or the audiences won't go for it." The hero still could not be queer.

Yet in a time when homosexuality was suddenly visible and villains could also be heroes, new choices soon became available. Perhaps the hero could not be a faggot, but he no longer had to be a hell of a nice guy. David Newman and Robert Benton's script for Joseph Mankiewicz' *There Was a Crooked Man* (1970) retained a sadistic homosexual prison foreman (Bert Freed) who has a prisoner flogged for spurning his sexual advances—in a film with a highly moral hero. But Newman and Benton's script for *Bonnie and Clyde* (1967) underwent drastic revision to accommodate a highly immoral

hero. The sexual relationship between Clyde Barrow (Warren Beatty) and C. W. Moss (Michael J. Pollard), indicated by their biographers and included in the original Newman and Benton story, was erased when director Arthur Penn and producer-actor Warren Beatty joined the project. Newman describes the original treatment.

The first draft had a ménage à trois between Bonnie, Clyde and a third male character who was a different version of the C. W. Moss character. He was more of a dumb stud type, a conglomeration of three or four different drivers the real Barrows had used. In our research we came across references which suggested that several of these guys had been in a sexual thrall with Bonnie and Clyde. So in our first draft that seemed just one more thing which made them outside the structure of society. In fact, in the original draft, there was a shot of the three of them lying in bed together after having sex.

When Penn and Beatty came on the scene, this aspect of the story became a liability instead of an interesting asset. Beatty, it was decided, could play an impotent killer but not a sexually ambiguous one and still retain the audience's sympathy. Clyde's "problem" thus became the impotence that Bonnie Parker "cures" in a tender scene in the grass just before the final bloodbath. "We decided," Newman says, "that it would be off-putting to the audience and throw the picture out of kilter if we retained the sexual ambiguity. Plus, when Michael J. Pollard came along and his character was created, there was no sexuality at all because the part was rewritten especially for him."

As in *The Lost Weekend,* people wanted to deal only with updated "normal" American problems. There is never as much outrage at the sight of heroes who choose violence as there is absolute moral fury when a hero expresses unorthodox sexual feelings. The homoerotic aspects of the buddyhood of Truman Capote's two real-life killers of *In Cold Blood* were absent from the screen version directed by Richard Brooks in 1967. Misunderstood heroes driven to kill out of disaffection and frustration were fine, but homosexuality was clearly only for villains.

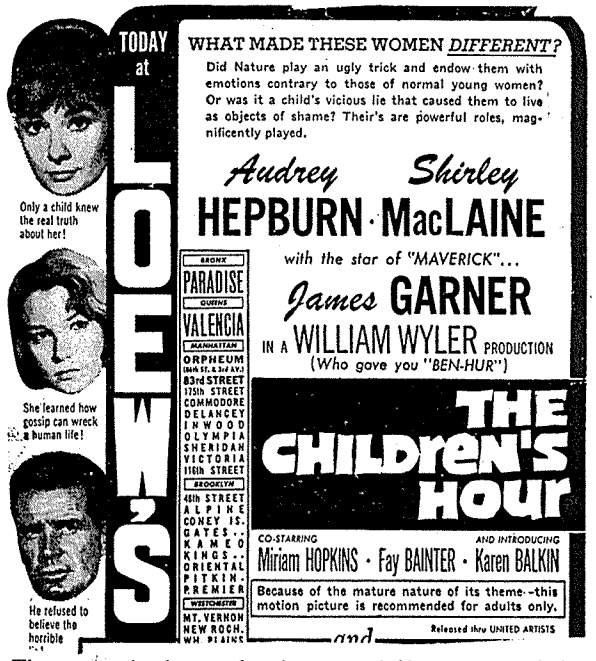
There has been speculation that an early version of the script for *Dr. Strangelove, or How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Bomb* (1964) indicated that Peter Sellers' president of the United States was queer as well as incompetent. If so, it is a pity to have lost the added irony in a film so expertly satiric on the paranoia of the military concerning "preverts" in the ranks. The buddy relationship of soldiers in wartime was more sacred than that of western heroes or hip athletes. Just as Private Prewitt's homosexual episode in James Jones' *From Here to Eternity* was trimmed for Montgomery Clift's portrayal in the

1953 film version, soldiers ten years later were still protected from this particular intimation, even by extension. Carl Foreman's *The Victors* (1963) lost several scenes that would have indicated that American soldiers (George Peppard and George Hamilton) were sleeping with a young French male prostitute (Joel Flateau) and giving him food in exchange. As the Code said, it could be intimated but not shown. So while the Flateau character existed, it was a mystery to American audiences just who was patronizing the seemingly prosperous prostitute. (Probably the enemy!)

Similarly, Bryan Forbes' prisoner of war drama *King Rat* (1965), based on James Clavell's novel, was shorn of a subplot in which a prisoner acts as a surrogate woman by dressing in drag at camp shows, a routine that leads to a full-time cross-dressing situation that has sexual overtones. The prisoner comes to accept the female role to the extent that when the camp is liberated, he dons women's clothing once more and walks into the sea. According to Forbes, his script contained a sequence in which the character "actually underwent a sex change operation and, when the war was over, committed suicide." This episode did not survive the shock of the studio. "The sequence was removed in its entirety," Forbes says, "at the insistence of Columbia Pictures, in spite of the fact that it had always been in the script, which they either failed to read or didn't understand." The latter is more likely. A submerged, unstated homosexual attraction between the king (George Segal) and a young British officer (James Fox) is discernible but never threatening in the way that the deleted footage would have erased the line between male and female.

The hero-villain question persisted throughout the Sixties and well into the Seventies, with movie homosexuals increasingly falling victim to their own inherently villainous sexuality—the flaw that always destroyed them in one way or another. Self-hatred was the standard accessory with every new model. The "pioneer" films for which the change in the Code had been petitioned, the widely discussed "adult" dramas of the early 1960s, were barely an industry toe in the water, yet they revealed much for the first time. Three of the first four American releases to deal with homosexuality in a major way used it only as the subject of a false accusation made against ultimately heterosexual characters. The "dirty secret" angle was given full play in the media. Hundreds of articles appeared in newspapers and magazines describing the bold themes in such mature new films as *A View from the Bridge, Walk on the Wild Side, Advise and Consent* and *The Children's Hour. Life*'s cover story, "The Outbreak of New Films for Adults Only," made it sound as though a new disease had been spotted; the magazine approached *The Children's Hour* with the headlines, "A Shocking Lie . . . A Terrible Secret!" William Wyler's first title for the

Audrey Hepburn and Shirley MacLaine are found guilty of having had "sinful sexual knowledge of one another" in a courtroom scene that was cut from The Children's Hour *(1962).*



The original ad copy for the second film version of The Children's Hour *(1962) made the two accused lesbians freaks of nature.*

(74)

film was *Infamous!;* in England it was called *The Loudest Whisper.* Newspaper ads for the film were headlined, "Did Nature Play an Ugly Trick on These Women?"

The ugly trick was on the public, for the promise of forbidden fruit was fraudulent. In Sidney Lumet's adaptation of Arthur Miller's *A View from the Bridge* (1962), an Italian immigrant dockworker (Raf Vallone) is in love with his wife's niece (Carol Lawrence). In a fit of jealousy, he accuses her boyfriend (Jean Sorel) of being "not quite right," grabbing the youth by the shirtfront and humiliating him by kissing him on the lips in front of everyone. "That's what you are!" Vallone shouts, throwing him aside. The screen's first male-male kiss was an accusation of the behavior it was supposed to describe. If a man were to grab a woman and kiss her on the lips, shouting "That's what you are!" nobody would understand the accusation. (Was she accused of being a kisser?) But here the scene says that two men kissing represents not the act but the orientation—homosexuality, what Vallone calls "not quite right." Yet even by its own standards, the film presents nothing that is "wrong." The charges against Sorel are only that he knows how to cut a dress pattern and that he sings tenor. And so Vallone's character comes off as an old jock from *Tea and Sympathy* who is still yelling "Sister Boy!" at the sensitive but straight youth. Since there is no homosexual, the kissing scene is pure shock. The spectre of homosexuality is raised, but it remains as invisible as Sebastian Venable's gay ghost.

The lesbianism in *The Children's Hour* (1962) might have remained the

"That's what you are!" Raf Vallone (right) prepares to kiss Jean Sorel on the lips in Sidney Lumet's A View from the Bridge *(1962).*

same kind of spectre, a false accusation hurled at two "innocent" teachers by a vicious child, had it not been for an added touch of reality by Lillian Hellman. According to *Films in Review,* the idea for *The Children's Hour* suggested itself to Hellman when she read *Bad Company,* a story by a Scottish lawyer, William Roughhead. It told how two Edinburgh schoolteachers were accused of lesbianism in 1810 by a half-caste student whose grandmother then spread the libel and ruined the school. Similarly, Hellman's drama is the examination of how lies can have the power to destroy the lives of innocent people. And, as the director William Wyler pointed out, it could work on this level only if the lie were a pretty terrible thing. "The lie has to have such a devastating effect," he said, "that to be credible it must be appalling." So there is some *Tea and Sympathy* here, too, in that lesbianism is never considered a valid option. Homosexuality is the dirty secret.

But in the character of Martha Dobie (Shirley MacLaine) Hellman created the sudden revelation that comes to a woman who discovers the truth of her own lesbianism by means of a child's stupid lie. That self-revelation costs Martha Dobie her life—the first in a long series of suicides of homosexual screen characters. In a climactic confrontation scene, Martha traces the growth of her love for Karen Wright (Audrey Hepburn) from their schooldays. In a tortured monologue, filled with self-hatred, she expresses her own culpability. "I'm guilty!" she cries. "I've ruined your life, and I've ruined my own. I feel so damn sick and dirty I just can't stand it anymore." In a scene of the play that did not appear in the film, it is made clear that when Martha hangs herself following this confession, she does so not because a false accusation has ruined her life but because she has discovered that she really is a lesbian. It is not a lie that destroys Martha; it is the awful truth. Martha was guilty of being the alien thing everyone feared, and her "coming out" speech reflects the surprise and wonder she feels at this discovery. "There's something in you," she tells Karen, "and you don't know anything about it because you don't know it's there. I couldn't call it by name before, but I know now. It's there. It's been there ever since I first knew you."

It; the film did not name "it" either. In a courtroom scene cut from the final print, a judge finds Karen and Martha guilty of "having had sinful sexual knowledge of one another." In keeping with Code requirements, lesbianism existed in the film only by implication; the innuendos about child molestation are more explicit than those about the sexuality of the teachers. The accusing student's grandmother (Fay Bainter) orders the two women from her home, saying, "This *thing* is your own. Take it out of here. I don't understand it. I don't want any part of it . . . you've been playing with a lot of children's

lives, that's why I had to stop you." Thus the lesbianism that Martha discovers in herself is the lesbianism defined by the drama, the desire of sinful sexual knowledge of another woman.

Martha's growing love for Karen, treated gently throughout the Hellman play, is thinly sketched in the film version. In an interview in 1976, Shirley MacLaine put the blame on Wyler.

> Lillian Hellman hadn't just fallen out of her tree when she wrote *The Children's Hour* in the early Thirties. She had experienced a lot of it herself. In the play, scenes were developed so that you could see Martha falling in love with Karen and realizing why she was jealous of Karen's boyfriend . . . but when Wyler put it on the screen he cut those scenes out. He thought they would be too much for middle America to take. I thought he was wrong, and I told him so, and Audrey Hepburn was right behind me. But he was the director, and there was nothing we could do. Even so, I conceived my part as though those scenes were still there. I didn't want it to suddenly just hit her when the child tells the lie that maybe she could really be a lesbian and therefore she felt sick and dirty. Lillian had written a slow examination of one woman's personal growth in the area of falling in love with another woman. But Willie Wyler didn't want that, and that's why the story didn't work on film.

That is not what Hellman wanted, either—unless she intended to suggest that suicide equals personal growth. Martha was a doomed character, and the story did not work onscreen because the audience was denied the satisfaction of seeing Karen reunited with her boyfriend (James Garner) at the end. The close of the film offered a rare touch of dignity, but it was not a crowd pleaser. At Martha's funeral, Karen kneels at the flower-covered casket and whispers, "Goodbye, Martha. I'll love you until I die." As her estranged fiancé watches from a crowd of staring mourners, Karen walks past him and out of the cemetery, alone, her head held high.

According to the *Hollywood Reporter,* until two months before the film's final release date, Wyler wanted to tack a "new, upbeat ending on the picture. Instead of leaving Audrey Hepburn sobbing in the cemetery as of the present print, James Garner will follow her home." Although this alternative ending was not used, *Time* imagined its own happy ending and erroneously informed its readers that at the end of the film "Audrey Hepburn walks towards her boyfriend." Perhaps the *Time* critic saw what he wanted to see; others were out for blood. *Films in Review* attacked Hellman, Wyler and the Mirisch Company for "condoning lesbianism, albeit surreptitiously" because in the film MacLaine mentions those homosexuals "who believe in it, who have chosen it for themselves." After the two women have been destroyed by the child's lie, *Films in Review* said, "there is an explicit scene which asserts that those who *choose* to practice lesbianism are not destroyed by it—a claim disproven by the number of lesbians who become insane or commit suicide."

In fact *The Children's Hour,* while presenting a tragic figure, afforded the visibility of a real human being who discovered her true sexuality at a crucial moment in her life. The "condoning" of lesbianism cited by *Films in Review* involved Martha's reference to the survivors of her ordeal. "This isn't a new sin they say we've done," Karen says. "Other people haven't been destroyed by it." Martha thinks for a moment, then replies, "They're the people who want it. Who believe in it. Who have chosen it for themselves. That must be very different."

Karen and Martha referred unwittingly to a subculture that was still a twilight world of half-understood terrors. But not for long; Otto Preminger's *Advise and Consent* (1962), which followed *The Children's Hour* into release by only three months, presented homosexuality on essentially the same ground. Again, a false accusation and a dirty secret precipitate the suicide of the accused. But here, with Code approval, was the chance to show "the people who want it," of whom Martha Dobie had spoken. The story of political corruption, based on Allen Drury's novel, contains a subplot in which Senator Brig Anderson (Don Murray) is blackmailed by political opponents because of a homosexual incident in his army past with a fellow soldier named Ray (John Granger). In a sequence not found in the novel, Anderson, terrified by the snide accusations telephoned to his distraught wife, takes a night flight to New York to track down Ray. His search leads him to the apartment of a mysterious fat man who lives in a walkup surrounded by cats. The fat man obviously pimps for Ray, who has become a hustler of sorts. The young senator is directed to a local gay bar, one said to be fashioned after a popular New York haunt of the early Sixties.

The screen's first official gay bar, overloaded to create the desired effect of otherworldliness in a previously hidden subculture, is nevertheless quite tame compared to the more flamboyant versions of later films. As Anderson enters the dimly lit bar, he is confronted by three glaring, decidedly "arch" men, one of whom holds a cigarette grandly aloft. He walks past the three men, down a narrow hallway and into a room in which colored spotlights punctuate the darkness, revealing scenes of men sitting together at candlelit tables. The music, coming from a juke box, features the voice of Frank Sinatra.

Long alone . . .
I have sung the loser's song alone.

Let me hear a voice
A secret voice
A voice that will say
Come to me
And be what I need you to be . . .

Don Murray is shocked by his first glimpse of a gay bar in Otto Preminger's Advise and Consent *(1962). It was also a first for modern American audiences, and they were shocked as well.*

Anderson, visibly shaken, backs away and runs for the door. However, Ray has spotted him and follows, trying to explain why he has been cooperating with the blackmailers. "I was drunk," he shouts, "I needed money . . . you wouldn't see me, I kept calling!" There is a brief struggle on the street when Ray tries to stop Anderson from fleeing in a taxi, and Ray is thrown face down into a puddle of dirty water. Anderson speeds back to Washington, locks himself in his oak-paneled Senate office and slits his throat with a straight razor.

The "tired old sin" for which Brig Anderson dies is never named in the film. His grieving wife (Inga Swenson) knows the truth because she has seen the blackmail notes and photos of Brig and Ray, but she withholds the information lest it harm her husband's memory. His status as a hero depends on this because, like Shirley MacLaine's Martha, he too was once guilty, and in the gay bar he realizes this. He kills himself not because he is being blackmailed in Washington but because he has gone to New York and found people with whom he has something in common and is so repulsed that he sees no alternative to the straight razor. Thirteen years later, in Max Baer's *Ode to Billy Joe* (1976), another reflection of 1950s masculine mythology, Billy Joe McAllister (Robby Benson) suffers a similar fate and is protected in the same way by the girl who loves him (Glynis O'Connor). When Billy Joe jumps off the Tallahatchie Bridge because he had "been with a man—a sin against God

and nature," his secret dies with him. "Can't have people thinking he died because of a *man,"* O'Connor says solemnly. "He's a legend around here now." And legends cannot be queer.

The bar scene in *Advise and Consent* dramatized the difference between Ray and Brig. The film virtually canonizes Brig for his dislike of Ray's surroundings. Look how the two young American soldiers turned out, the film seems to say; the one who was really straight became a senator of the United States, and the one who was really gay became a seedy hustler, a barfly and a blackmailer. The fat man, the cats and the cheap bar were necessary to make the distinction that had only been outlined in *The Children's Hour.* Ray and Brig illustrated the difference between someone who had "tried it" once in the army (where there is always a whine about no women and how loneliness can make a man weak) and someone who really wanted it. Preminger, unable to say "homosexual" in his script, had a field day with his graphic illustration of Ray's twilight world. Wendell Mayes, the screenwriter, noted that the sequence was created to spell out the nature of the blackmail threat on which the plot twist is based. "It was somewhat sensational in 1961, to be so open about a closed subject, and candidly, I suppose I dramatized it the way I did for its sensational impact."

Where *The Children's Hour* made brief reference to the twilight world and *Advise and Consent* visited it in New York City, Edward Dmytryk's adaptation of Nelson Algren's novel *Walk on the Wild Side* (1962) was set in the underworld itself, and the lesbianism of Jo (Barbara Stanwyck), the madam of a New Orleans brothel, was created to fit into it. In the three films, released in the same year, America returned to the archetypes with only a few concessions to modern times. Just as the briefly liberated films of the early Thirties had routinely represented gays as being part of various illicit subcultures, the evolution of Jo in *Walk on the Wild Side* indicated a return from ostrichlike silence to business as usual for Hollywood. The movies simply reflected what little they could identify of a hidden world and, in both pre-Code and post-Code times, saw homosexuals solely in sexual terms because that was what had always been sold. For more than thirty years people had agreed that "it" should not be talked about, and when the ban was lifted they picked up where they had left off. In 1962, however, *Walk on the Wild Side* was at liberty to define the sexual ghetto with greater frankness and precision. The Code allowed it. Therefore the brothel portrayed in the film, the screenwriter Edmund North points out, "was not a dance hall, as in the film version of *From Here to Eternity.* Our whorehouse was a whorehouse."

Stanwyck's Jo was the opposite of MacLaine's Martha, a villain, not a victim.

Jo's acceptance of her own lesbianism is part of her villainy. Any decent woman would kill herself, as Martha and Brig did, rather than open a whorehouse and prey on her girls. Like Ray, she was one of those "who have chosen it." When Jo lashes out at her husband with "What does *any* man know about the feelings of a woman?" it is supposed to explain—but not excuse—her man-hating lesbianism. Jo's sexual and emotional domination of Hallie (Capucine), her most beautiful whore, is central to the plot because it binds Hallie to prostitution and at the same time stands in the way of her chances for a normal relationship with her boyfriend Dove Linkhorn (Laurence Harvey). Jo's love for Hallie precipitates everyone's downfall. Hallie, a victim like Martha, dies when she is accidentally shot by one of Jo's minions, and Jo the villain is sent to prison ("Vice Queen Jailed"). Yet, according to North, "there was not the slightest hint of homoeroticism in Algren's novel. That relationship between Jo and Hallie, among others, was mine."

The marketplaces of various sexual ghettos widened routinely to accommodate new gay characters. A lesbian relationship involving another screen madam (Shelley Winters), in an adaptation of Jean Genet's *The Balcony* (1963), featured a kiss between Winters and her bookkeeper (Lee Grant) that earned the description a "lesbian letch" in *Variety*'s review. In Sidney Lumet's *The Pawnbroker* (1965), Brock Peters played an imperious, sadistic pimp who is clearly having an affair with a man (whom *Newsday* called his "white underling"). These combinations of newly visible losers thrown together in the sexual jungles of major cities did not demystify homosexuality; they only paid tribute to its mysterious, lowlife nature. What disappeared was the restriction on saying "it" out loud.

What the well-dressed lesbian will wear. Costume sketches for Candice Bergen's Lakey in Sidney Lumet's The Group *(1966) and Barbara Stanwyck's Jo in* Walk on the Wild Side *(1962).*

"Whores are a dime a dozen, but a good bookkeeper is hard to find." Shelley Winters zeroes in on Lee Grant in the film version of Genet's The Balcony *(1963).*

Gore Vidal used the word *homosexual* in his screen adaptation of his own play *The Best Man,* directed for the screen by Franklin Schaffner in 1964. A political melodrama similar to *Advise and Consent,* but with fewer soapsuds, the film uses homosexuality once again as a blackmail threat, this time against a candidate for president of the United States (Cliff Robertson). The incumbent president (Henry Fonda) receives the information but refuses to use it because he knows it is not true. "If I thought he *was* homosexual, I'd use it in a minute," Fonda says, indicating that although he would not smear an innocent man, a homosexual president would be out of the question. The Code ignored the use of the word *homosexual* this time, but, according to Vidal, it insisted on one cut. "I had the old president react to the smear by saying, 'I don't care if he deflowers sheep by the light of the moon,' and the censors said, 'You

can't say that—that's bestiality.' So I changed it to 'I don't care if he has carnal knowledge of a McCormick reaper,' and that was all right."

In the same period, America's obsession with defining homosexuality by its third syllable contrasted sharply with more human exercises from Europe. On the American screen the discovery of a character's homosexuality came most often as the shock of seeing the familiar suddenly turn alien, a ploy of classic horror films, like studying a pretty picture and watching it turn into a grinning skull. Revelation scenes abounded. *Bus Riley's Back in Town* (1965), written by William Inge under the pseudonym Walter Gage, contains this kind of lurking, sex-defined creature. A lecherous old undertaker puts his hand on the knee of all-American sailor boy Michael Parks who, like Brig Anderson before him, flees when he sees the face of the demon. But attitudes in European films were less relentlessly chilling, less grim. Maybe that is why the cool and sophisticated Lakey (Candice Bergen) in *The Group* (1966) ran off to Europe to be a lesbian, returning years later, complete with tailored suit and mysterious baroness (Lidia Prochnika) in tow. According to Pauline Kael, Lakey's lesbianism was handled with such "discretion that United Artists publicity men threw out the ad campaign they'd prepared to exploit it." But Mary McCarthy's heroines had the money to flee to Europe if necessary. Jonathan Katz' *Gay American History* recounts a conversation in which a lesbian says, "Lesbians are subnatural when they live next door to you and supernatural when they live in Paris and write books."

In such films as *The L-Shaped Room, The Leather Boys* and *The Family Way* from England and *This Special Friendship* from France, gays are portrayed in terms of nonsexual love as well as erotic love. Yet most of the homosexuals in these films faced heavy social or moral penalties, including the obligatory suicide in *This Special Friendship.* Nevertheless the situations were less hysterical than those in American films, and sexual acts did not form the framework in which the gay characters existed. Affection entered the picture, perhaps for the first time.

The L-Shaped Room (1962) portrays love as a many-gendered thing in a seamy London rooming house. Johnny (Brock Peters), a West Indian jazz musician, is painfully in love with the object of Leslie Caron's affections (Tom Bell) and lies in bed at night listening to the two of them make love and writhing in agony. But he is not suffering because he is homosexual; he has the blues because Tom Bell is not interested in him. (Bell, who describes Johnny as "a bit bent," later took the role of a homosexual on the London stage, opposite Ian McKellen, in Martin Sherman's *Bent,* a play about the Nazi persecution of homosexuals.)

Elsewhere in the rooming house lives a sweet old vaudevillian, a welcome contrast to Johnny's pain and spiteful behavior. Beautifully played by Cicely Courtneidge, she is full of song and dance and is cheerily interested in everyone else's business. She talks constantly of the "friend" with whom she once shared her life yet expresses contentment with her present solitary state. "A real love match it was," she tells Leslie Caron. "I've never wanted anything since." When Caron asks if "he" was in show business too, Courtneidge smiles and takes from the mantel a tiny framed photo of a woman. "This is my friend," she says gently. "It takes all kinds, you know, dearie." It is a coming out scene so much less painful than Martha Dobie's in *The Children's Hour.* But playing vaudeville in Brighton is not the same as teaching rich little girls in New England; show people are expected to be a bit odd.

The Courtneidge character does not appear in the novel by Lynn Reid Banks from which *The L-Shaped Room* was adapted. Bryan Forbes, the director, says he based her on "a woman I once met when I was an actor and on tour in England with Gertrude Lawrence. She was mostly my invention, drawn from personal observation, and it was my intention, for once, to present a sympathetic portrait of a lesbian's twilight world."

In terms of screen impact, the funny vaudevillian was a harmless old lady, slightly dotty, while the musician was a powerless, doubly cursed black homosexual. But Forbes made them people, even survivors in a sense, not guest freaks like the drooling undertaker in *Bus Riley.* In a way, the film says, "Well, even *they* have feelings," and in that sense the film can be seen as condescending, but it took the American screen another ten years to achieve that level of condescension toward homosexuals. Paul Mazursky's use of a token male homosexual couple in an otherwise heterosexual roundelay at the end of *Bob & Carol & Ted & Alice* (1969) looked forward to the Seventies with the teary-eyed acknowledgment that "What the World Needs Now Is Love, Sweet Love," and that included those silly faggots in their lavender silk shirts. Mazursky used a similar image at the end of *Blume in Love* (1973) when he showed a homosexual couple in the Piazza San Marco, a postscript that said with a gulp, "Yes, they too are loved," while Susan Anspach and George Segal embraced in the foreground.

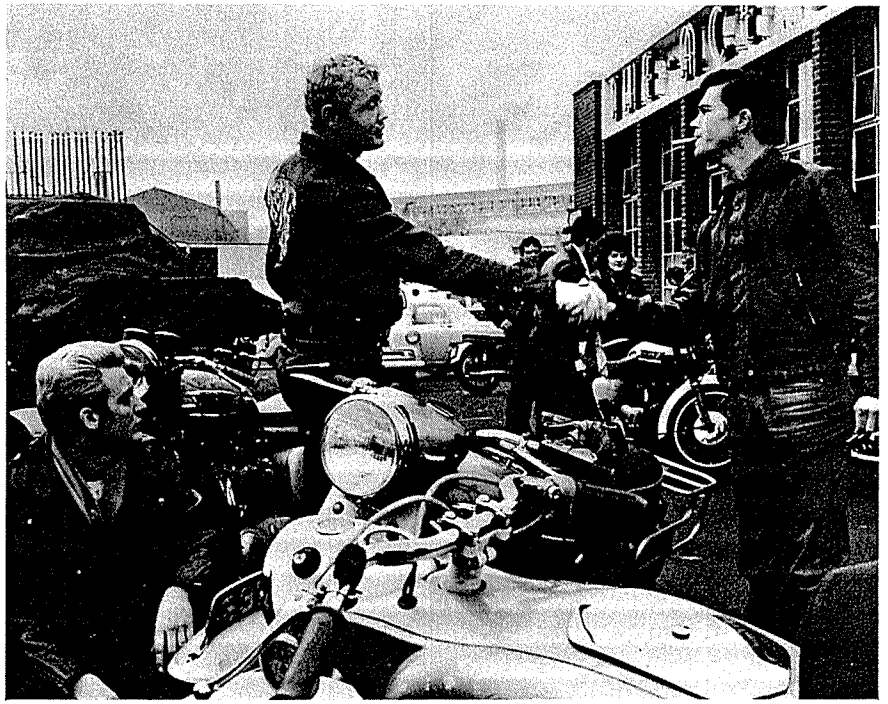
In Sidney J. Furie's *The Leather Boys* and Bill Naughton's *The Family Way,* queerness emerges as the central issue in perceptive studies of masculinity. Both films show ways in which homosexual panic limits the feelings between men. In *The Leather Boys* (1964), young Reggie (Colin Campbell) leaves his wife Dot (Rita Tushingham) and their drab, disappointing marriage for the adolescent romance and excitement of a lawless alliance with his buddy Pete

(Dudley Sutton). Near the end of the film the innocent Reggie is confronted with Pete's homosexuality in a grim leather bar on the waterfront. Realizing that Pete and his friends are homosexuals, Reggie follows the tradition and runs like hell.

But Furie's film does not use homosexuality as a bogeyman; when Reggie runs away, he is not fleeing from the horror of the unknown or even the unthinkable. *The Leather Boys* illuminates the betrayal that Reggie feels. We see that he wants to escape what he imagines will be the same emotional responsibilities that he could not face in his heterosexual marriage. By popular definition, Pete's homosexuality brought "a woman" into the picture and destroyed the adolescent fantasy. *The Leather Boys* chooses to make the buddy relationship suddenly explicit and deliberately homosexual. In doing so it shows why the existence of physical homosexuality ruins the clean dream of the dime novel romance between men. The appeal of the buddy relationship for heterosexual men has always been that of an escape from the role playing of men and women—a safe, neutral emotional zone with no chance for confusion. The possibility that sex could intrude in such a relationship muddles the situation hopelessly. Reggie runs not from homosexuality but from what he sees as another kind of emotional commitment.

In its exploration of another kind of buddy relationship, *The Family Way* (1966) takes some of the issues raised by *Tea and Sympathy* a step further. When a shy young man (Hywel Bennett) fails to consummate his marriage to an equally nervous young bride (Hayley Mills) under his father's roof, speculation arises in the family regarding the lad's masculinity. The boy's father (John Mills) refers throughout the film to his "old pal, Billy Stringfellow," with whom it is clear he had the most satisfying emotional relationship of his life. Inseparable, they had enjoyed long talks and quiet walks along the beach; Billy had even accompanied him and his wife on their honeymoon. Then Billy disappeared one day, after a brief affair with the wife, and Mills never discovered the reason for his departure. Now, years later, he complains that his son is showing signs of sissyhood. "To think a son of mine can't prove his manhood!" he shouts, adding defensively, "There's nothing odd or queer about *me!*"

"Would you say," asks his wife (Marjorie Rhodes), "that there was something odd or queer about a fellow who went on his honeymoon and took his pal along?" But this is not sarcasm, it is tolerance. Answering the inherent question of *Tea and Sympathy,* she takes up the banner for her son. "And suppose he *were?*" she shouts at her husband, who is now lost in reveries of Billy. "Is it something to get *at* the lad for? Nature would've done it. A father should help and protect a lad like that—not turn on him like the mob when it sees



The last sequence in The Leather Boys *(1964), when Reggie discovers that Pete's friends are gay.*

somebody different." This is the only film speech in which a parent defends the possibility that a homosexual child might not be turned away from the fold. The mother's suggestion that queerness might be a natural thing, something one could live with, works here because the heterosexuality of her son is never really in doubt. It is the father's relationship with his friend that is at issue in the final scenes of the film, not the inadequacies of his son. Mills breaks down and cries when he sees finally how much like Billy his son has come to be. It is possible that his son is in fact the offspring of Billy; but Mills is crying for the adolescent freedom he lost when Billy disappeared. "Laugh about it when you're young," he mutters to himself, "but one day it will make you bloody cry."

At the end of Federico Fellini's *La Dolce Vita* (1960), a drugged transvestite hits the beach and screams, "By the end of the year 2000 the whole world will be homosexual!" To America, however, homosexuality was still something you did in the dark or in Europe—preferably both. Jean Delannoy's *This Special Friendship* (1964) and John Schlesinger's *Darling* provided slightly shocked American audiences with diverse gay experiences and even a few hints of the decadence that would be put to excessive use in American films of the early Seventies. The Delannoy film, based on Roger Peyrefitte's *Les Amitiés Particulières,* was a sort of male version of *Mädchen in Uniform.* It attacked

Two schoolboys in love in This Special Friendship *(1964).*

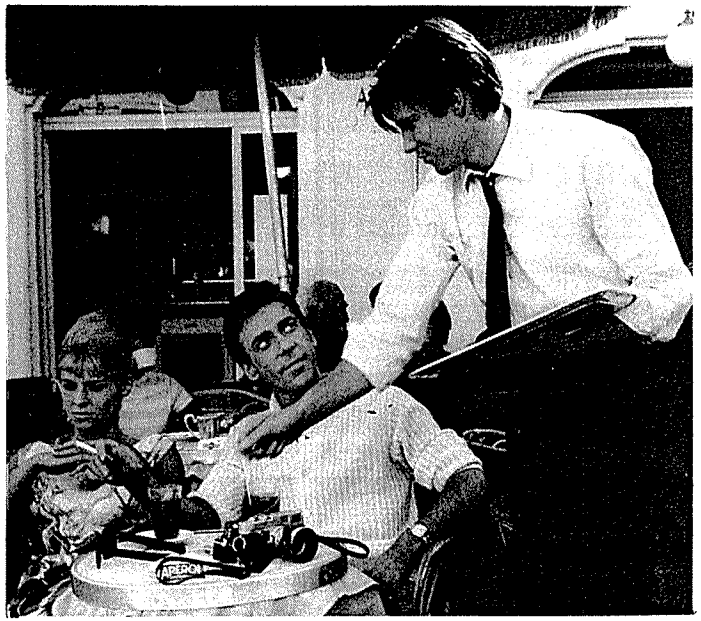
the authoritarianism of the Catholic Church, a favorite target of Peyrefitte. The innocent love between two schoolboys afforded one of the most natural and openly affectionate homosexual relationships ever filmed. The freedom and naturalness of the two boys' behavior was contrasted sharply with the fears of a repressed, self-hating homosexual priest who thinks their behavior (and his own) sinful. Although the younger boy (Didier Haudepin) kills himself by jumping from a speeding train, he does so because the priests have told him that his friend no longer loves him—a lie concocted in an effort to force him to leave school quietly. The idea of homosexual love is glorified here, and the Church is challenged on its condemnation of same-sex love.

This Special Friendship had a small success in the United States, drawing heavily on an increasingly visible gay audience that emerged in ghetto cities beginning in New York in 1967. In that year, critic Stuart Byron pointed out in *Variety* that Jean Genet's *Deathwatch,* then playing at the Bleecker Street Cinema, was the first film whose advertising was directed specifically at a gay audience. But while Jack Smith's *Flaming Creatures,* Kenneth Anger's *Scorpio Rising,* Genet's *Un Chant d'Amour* and the films of Maya Deren, Gregory Markopoulos, and others were being seen and discussed as the foremost experimental films of their time, Hollywood saw no such thing as a "gay" audience.

John Schlesinger's *Darling* (1965), which reached an enormous American audience (compared to that for *This Special Friendship*) and won an Oscar for actress Julie Christie, provided clues to the next logical step in the perception

of homosexuality onscreen. Bisexuality was introduced, and although it was found to be more acceptable, it was still not considered "normal." Schlesinger's virile Italian waiter, who sleeps one night with Julie Christie and the next with her (happy, amiable, well-adjusted) gay photographer friend, was after all only a waiter in a foreign movie about decadent fashion models and their fey friends (whose chief concern, apparently, was to set the alarm clock to remind them to turn over in the Italian sun). This behavior was a threat to no one. Yet in the same year, 1965, there were big hassles over the character of a bisexual Hollywood actor to be played by Robert Redford in an American film.

Roland Curram cruises an Italian waiter in Darling *(1965) while Julie Christie pouts.* (British Film Institute)



Gavin Lambert's script for *Inside Daisy Clover* (1966) underwent more than one major revision to avoid just the kind of freewheeling, unconscious bisexuality that Schlesinger had given his Italian waiter. The homosexual side of bisexual actor Wade Lewis is avoided altogether, and his bisexuality becomes the dirty secret. Redford's role as the screen star husband of the rising starlet Daisy Clover (Natalie Wood) was conceived originally as a homosexual character who marries Daisy Clover at the request of the studio—for appearances' sake.

But both Redford and director Robert Mulligan became nervous about the direction the role was taking and insisted on certain changes.

"I didn't want to play Wade Lewis as a homosexual, as the script originally had him," Redford told writer Jim Spada in 1976. "I wanted to play him as a guy who bats ten ways—men, women, children, dogs, cats, anything—anything that salves his ego. Total narcissism." The script was changed, and Wade Lewis became a bisexual.

But there was more nervousness as the shooting progressed, and again during the editing, and the new version of Wade Lewis' bisexuality became less and less specific. Lambert says, "We made the basic changes in the idea of the character of Wade and made him a sort of bisexual who keeps his bisexuality a secret, and I was quite happy with that. There were a lot of valid reasons for doing it, and it was marvelous for Redford." Consequently there is one telephone conversation in *Inside Daisy Clover* during which the secret of Wade's bisexuality comes out.

As the time drew near to shoot that scene, according to Lambert, "Mulligan got more and more nervous about the lines being too explicit, and several of them were cut, making it all not very intelligible." In the end the revelation of Wade's bisexuality was squeaked out in a postsynched line or two of dialogue, but all of Lambert's attempts to establish it visually failed. "I suggested one scene in which Daisy was having her breakdown and they all come to her bedroom one by one. When Redford arrived, I wanted a young man on the veranda behind him with never a word about why he was there. I think it would have made its point quietly. But it was vetoed. What pleased me about *Daisy Clover* was that even in its mutilated state, the film showed Wade as attractive and functional."

True; Wade Lewis, though of discreetly questionable sexuality at best, was a character cast in the traditional mold of the handsome Hollywood hero. Any tampering whatever with his sexuality represented a giant step away from that tradition. More than two dozen films used lesbianism or male homosexuality for a plot twist or as a major theme in the last years of the 1960s, and none of the gays were particularly attractive or even functional. Villains, of course, were cunning and functional, but they were all killed in the last reel. (As Lambert points out, if Wade Lewis had been totally homosexual, he would have had to kill himself at the end of the movie.) The gentle lesbian of *The L-Shaped Room* gave way in America to predatory neurotics and cartoon dykes; Johnny the West Indian jazz musician became Sidney Lumet's pimp in *The Pawnbroker,* a man who sells love for money. The cartoons and the caricatures continued.

A few changes were wrought by the increasing visibility of homosexuals in

American society. In the Sixties the subject of gays onscreen became more and more an examination of what was now being identified as the closet syndrome. All the homosexuals interviewed by Mike Wallace on *CBS Presents: The Homosexuals* in 1967 were seated behind potted palm trees, the leaves obscuring their faces. Stereotypes were heightened, but the growing diversity of new homosexual characters worked constantly against them. In her review of *Victim* in 1961, Pauline Kael had bemoaned the suffering in that film and longed for the good old days of Franklin Pangborn and Grady Sutton. She sensed that those characters and the shorthand they represented would disappear, and she was right. We no longer needed shorthand, though we hung on to the safety of the stereotype. "There is so much effort to make us feel sympathetic to homosexuals in *Victim,"* Kael wrote, "that they are never allowed to be *gay."* This was like saying that there was so much effort to make us feel sympathy for blacks in *Nothing But a Man* or *One Potato, Two Potato* that they were never allowed to tap dance or eat a slice of watermelon. After all, the stereotype was the charm of such characters in the long view, and in a sense it is perfectly valid to mourn their passing.

It is common to wax nostalgic over one's lost cinema past, however stereotypical; the practice is perhaps even more common among members of a minority group that has been invisible in real life. Inclusion in the myth, even token representation in the American dream being played out onscreen, was of paramount importance, for it was confirmation that one existed. A visibility barely glimpsed through a pervasive illusion is doubly valued and certainly more memorable for those people who have never spoken aloud their very name. Homosexuals, cut off from society and from one another, have spent lifetimes growing up at the movies alongside heterosexual relatives and neighbors. Everyone learned the same dream, but gays appreciated the sexual joke more fully than the others, being able to see the illusion from both sides. For many the movies were where one learned to pass for straight, where one learned the boundaries of what America would accept as normal. Yet the movies shared an alternative truth. Early gay stereotypes in film were signals, testaments to the existence of others at a time when nobody was supposed to know that there *were* others. It was a screen reality that we now recall affectionately as the phenomenon which took place in the absence of gay visibility and was doomed to fade as gays found their voices.

In the documentary film *Word Is Out: Conversations with 26 Lesbians and Gay Men* (1977), Pat Bond, a former WAC, expresses this nostalgia for a stereotypical past. Having lived through the military witchhunts of the 1940s in Tokyo and police raids on San Francisco bars in the 1950s, she says, "I'll

miss the excitement of the old gay world, somehow—of belonging to a secret place that nobody knew about but you. I'll miss that." It was comfortable, she was saying; everyone knew the rules, whom they were to be and what they were expected to do. In his affectionate interpretive history of blacks in film, *Toms, Coons, Mulattoes, Mammies and Bucks,* Donald Bogle says that "the essence of black film history is not found in the stereotyped role but in what certain talented actors have done with the stereotype." In the same sense, the characters created by Pangborn, Sutton, Horton, Webb and dozens of others brought a brief electric contact with the quicksilver truth and wrought a comic chaos that the social order suppressed. Each in his own style, they were signposts to a hidden gay experience where chaos was the norm. But what they reflected then is now dead.

Victim had revived the issue of politicizing homosexual visibility for the first time since the German propaganda films of the early 1900s. The jokes on which the old sissies had been based were no longer so funny; stereotypes lose their charm when they are examined too closely and their mythic foundations are challenged. They outgrow the naive values that gave them life. An alternative evolution was developed for the sissy, another option for the dyke. But the new options were no more attractive and even less universal than the old ones, and the stereotypes would be forced to live past their time for years to come.

When gays became real, they became threatening. The new sissies departed radically from their gentle ancestors; the dykes became predatory and dangerous. Lesbians were still creatures to be conquered or defeated, but now viciously so, as though they were other men. The charm and challenge of the early role-reversal comics, once the smug chink in society's armor, gave way to a subversive omnipresence. And the symbols gave way to the certainty that there actually were people who were queer.

While sober films would eventually take up some of the issues raised in *Victim,* the comic stereotype became a useful tool for putting homosexuality back in its place. As object lessons, officially defined as the opposite of normal, sissies and dykes throughout the 1960s were a nasty lot even when they were funny. They exhibited an abundance of the "meanness" that Bosley Crowther had found lacking in *A Taste of Honey*'s sweet Geoff. Once "it" had been named and had officially arrived onscreen, the whimsical creatures of old disappeared, to be replaced by the dirty jokes that neatly accompanied the dirty secrets of more serious films.

Popular sex farces and James Bond spy thrillers used sissies and dykes to prove the virility of cartoon heroes and to stress the sterility of homosexuality.

Crowther, reviewing *Goldfinger* for the *New York Times,* identified the supermasculine pose of James Bond as "what we're now calling homosexual sarcasm." There was plenty of room for sarcasm. In *From Russia with Love* (1963) and *Goldfinger* (1964), cartoon dykes are alternately killed and cured in the grand tradition of heterosexual solutions. In the former, Lotte Lenya's Colonel Rosa Klebb is old, snakelike, dangerous; a killer spy who makes cobra eyes at a young blonde agent on whom she tries to put the arm during a private interview. The young blonde, of course, is in love with James Bond, at whose crotch Klebb aims a spike-tipped shoe. Bond's castration is prevented when Klebb is shot to death by the pretty young thing she had tried to seduce. In *Goldfinger,* Bond conquers the beautiful Pussy Galore (Honor Blackman), a lesbian doll who comes to life complete with a coterie of beautiful Amazons. Sean Connery's Bond relishes the challenge that Ian Fleming describes so vividly in his novel.

> [Bond] liked the look of her. He felt the sexual challenge all beautiful lesbians have for men. He was amused by the uncompromising attitude that said "all men are bastards and cheats. Don't try any hocus pocus on me . . . I'm in a separate league."

There is a preoccupation with sports terminology in the typical male definition of lesbianism; it also surfaces in Gordon Douglas' *Tony Rome* (1967), in which

Lotte Lenya as Colonel Rosa Klebb tries to put the arm on Daniela Bianchi in From Russia with Love *(1963).*

Frank Sinatra plays another kind of James Bond, a sexy private eye. Sinatra describes two lesbians as being "in the wrong ballpark" and therefore "out of his league" in the romance department. The solution is as much a cartoon as the problem. Bond is so much the "real" man that his seduction of Pussy Galore takes on a cosmic comic-book truth.

[Pussy] lay in the crook of Bond's arm and looked up at him. She said, not in a gangster's voice, or a lesbian's, but in a girl's voice, "Will you write to me in Sing Sing?" Bond looked down into her deep violet eyes that were no longer hard, imperious. He bent and kissed them lightly. He said, "They told me you only liked women." She said, "I never met a man before." His mouth came down ruthlessly on hers.

Lesbians who were of use in the service of male sexuality were those beautiful young women who could be variously defined to serve the fantasies of male conquest. Old crows like Rosa Klebb were messily dispatched, along with homosexual men and any other challenge to a James Bond hero. Wint (Bruce Glover) and Kidd (Putter Smith), two gay lovers who are not to be found in the novel *Diamonds Are Forever,* appear in the 1971 film version as gleeful killers. The pair even get to walk hand in hand into the sunset after they have blown up a helicopter. In the end, though, they are set aflame and toasted like the two marshmallows they really are.

Gays dropped like flies in the Sixties, and for as many reasons as there were tragedies. Sometimes the sexuality of lesbians or crazed gay men victimized others, threatening the status quo; sometimes it caused self-hatred enough to make them suicidal. Either way, the fray was thick with dead bodies, and few escaped to the relative safety of the closet. The question, as it applied to the portrayal of gays at the end of the 1960s, became one of visibility. Overt, active or predatory gays—including some particularly nasty sissies who would have been harmless thirty years before—were killed off. The repressed, tormented types usually committed suicide, and scattered cases were "cured" by sufficient attention from the opposite sex. Obvious cartoons were spared when they happened to be passing through only to provide color or to present a strong contrast to a sexy hero. Pathetic, lonely old lesbians were preserved if they were not wearing spiked shoes. Survival was an option only for nonthreatening characters, and almost all homosexuals threatened the heterosexual status quo by their very existence.

Lilith, The Haunting, The Night of the Iguana and *Seven Women* all featured lesbians who survive in a twilight world of neurotic repression. In Robert Rossen's adaptation of *Lilith* (1964), Jean Seberg is a mental patient who wanders blithely into an affair with an older woman (Anne Meacham) during their

confinement in an institution. Lilith's acceptance of the lesbian attraction is seen as a consequence of her psychosis, a willingness to live in a constant state of sexual heat. Even so, Warren Beatty, supposedly a hospital trainee responsible for Lilith's mental health, insists on making love to her immediately following his discovery of the two women locked in an embrace in an old barn on the hospital grounds. Lilith is "set straight," and the cure of her psychosis presumes the cure of her lesbianism. Anne Meacham, the "real" lesbian, quietly disappears, just as Pussy Galore's lesbian lover Tilly Masterson (Tania Mallett) disappears from *Goldfinger* after Pussy is won over by James Bond.

Warren Beatty pulls Anne Meacham off Jean Seberg in Lilith *(1964).*

In *Lilith,* Jean Seberg was susceptible to the advances of Anne Meacham because Lilith was a sick girl and the affair took place in a mental hospital removed from the "civilized world." In *Seven Women* (1966) and *The Night of the Iguana* (1964), the action takes place in the desolate reaches of Outer Mongolia and in primitive jungles. Grayson Hall's repressed spinster in *Iguana* and Margaret Leighton's fanatical missionary woman in *Seven Women* have buried their lesbianism beneath religion and devotion to their work. In each case, they are tempted by an unsuspecting innocent who brings their latent sexuality briefly and dangerously to the surface. Both women are moralistic ogres whose predatory urges, unconscious and unrecognized, are quickly buried before they can do serious damage. In both films the childlike Sue Lyon is the catalyst.

In both films, too, there is inherent sympathy for these women who will never be fulfilled in a normal way. But in *The Night of the Iguana,* Tennessee Williams describes more fully the impact of the closet on Miss Fellowes (Grayson Hall), stressing the power of forbidden sexuality to destroy. When Maxine Falk (Ava Gardner), the earthy proprietor of the jungle hotel, lays Miss Fellowes out cold in the last scene, calling her a "dyke," the defrocked minister Shannon (Richard Burton) steps in to protect her. "Miss Fellowes is a very moral person," he tells Maxine. "If she ever found out the truth about herself, it would destroy her." Both Miss Fellowes and Leighton's missionary woman are saved by their ignorance. Never having to face the self-awakening that is forced on Martha Dobie in *The Children's Hour,* they are allowed to live. Unconscious lesbianism is its own punishment.

The same is true for Claire Bloom's neurotic Greenwich Village lesbian in *The Haunting* (1963). She gets her psychosexual jollies by hugging Julie Harris and blaming it on ghosts. But she is not predatory; she is just out of life's running. She professes no interest in actively seducing either Harris or an attentive Russ Tamblyn. The lesbianism is entirely mental, and her sterility leaves her at a dead end. The militaristic Rosa Klebb laid a hand on a blonde's knee and got shot, but Bloom merely returns to Greenwich Village—presumably where such characters are made. Lesbianism is rendered invisible because it is purely psychological. And since most lesbians were invisible even to themselves, their sexuality, ill-defined in general, emerged onscreen as a wasted product of a closeted lifestyle.

Creatures of repression are often fascinating characters because their whole lives are apt to be illuminated in a sudden brief moment of truth. The lesbianism of Calla Mackie, Estelle Parsons' lonely schoolteacher in *Rachel, Rachel* (1968), emerges all at once when she delivers an impulsive but passionate kiss on the lips of a shocked Joanne Woodward, local spinster. It is a touching and pathetic moment because she has been in the closet for years and is just as shocked as Woodward—who after an awkward time remains her friend in spite of the revelation. But "it" will never come up again; Calla Mackie has nowhere to go either. Like Miss Fellowes and Leighton's missionary, she is a highly moral person, almost fanatical in her religious beliefs. Each of these women has a motherly instinct that masks her untoward interest in young, helpless women. The formula is a remnant of the barely lesbian characters of the 1950s (such as Kim Stanley's motherly nurse [Elizabeth Wilson] in *The Goddess*) and it is with us today, representing one view of the closeted life.

In Robert Altman's *A Wedding* (1978), Geraldine Chaplin plays the "bride lady" who oversees the wedding reception from start to finish, making sure

Margaret Leighton represses her desire for Sue Lyon in Seven Women *(1966).*

that everything comes off on schedule. She thinks of her brides as "my only children" and, in a character switch, browbeats her female assistant mercilessly. She expresses her real feelings when she suddenly pulls an Estelle Parsons on the current bride. After the kiss, shocked for a moment by what she has done, she says the same thing that Parsons said to Woodward: "I didn't do that!" This is harmless dykery; the woman probably pulls the same pounce on all her brides and has developed it into a routine. Altman always creates characters who get their rocks off in strange ways, and gays who deny their own sexuality are invisible by choice and present no threat.

In the same way that lesbians measured the virility of a James Bond or enforced their own invisibility in serious drama, sissies measured the virility of Bond's humdrum generation while ensuring their own invisibility in serious films. In sex farces such as *That Touch of Mink, The Wheeler Dealers, A Very Special Favor* and *Any Wednesday,* heroes were sexual athletes who protested their masculinity too much. James Garner, Cary Grant, Jason Robards and especially Rock Hudson were the romantic leading men who played the field and ended up corralled. Along the way, they were contrasted persistently with any number of flamboyant decorators, art critics, hairdressers and aunties. In the Thirties and Forties, the "real" men were friends with the classic sissies; Fred Astaire and Edward Everett Horton had been affectionate with each other. But just as Eric Blore had stepped over the line and confused the issue when he told Leslie Howard "I love you" in *It's Love I'm After* (1937), more rigorous lines were drawn in the explicit Sixties. Sex became the dirty joke and homosexuality the added snigger.

Any Wednesday (1966) featured a gratuitous lisping interior decorator who comes and goes in a puff of lavender smoke, but the payoff was the reaction of Robards to a bogus intimation of homosexuality. His mistress (Jane Fonda) tells him that her fantasy is a roomful of balloons. "Wouldn't that be *gay?"* she asks. Robards snaps to attention at the word *gay* and puts his hands out in an automatic gesture of defense. "Oh, no!" he says firmly, "I never answer questions like that without my lawyer at my side."

In *That Touch of Mink* (1962), the paranoia is founded in psychiatry. Gig Young, a failed Romeo, regularly provides his psychiatrist with tips on the stock market. In one couch scene Young is distraught over losing Doris Day to Cary Grant, and he muses aloud about what he would do if he were a woman and a rich, handsome man offered *him* a trip to Bermuda and a mink coat. The psychiatrist hears only part of the monologue and concludes that Young is in love with Grant. He rushes to the telephone to call his broker. "Cancel my order!" he shouts. "My patient has developed some instabilities which make his judgment questionable."

The masculine insecurities of James Garner in *The Wheeler Dealers* and Rock Hudson in *A Very Special Favor* lead them to seize on yardstick sissies as pop psychology scapegoats for their problems with women. In *The Wheeler Dealers* (1963), Garner plays a Texas oil tycoon who spends his entire visit to New York City trying to seduce Lee Remick. It is the ancient story of the rugged cowboy who is disgusted by the weak men he finds in the big city, this time with Garner hooting and hollering like a dime-store Don Murray from *Bus Stop.* Constantly reminding "modern" businesswoman Lee Remick that it is "unfeminine" for a woman to engage in business, Garner points to the sissies in the movie as proof of the unnaturalness of the liberated world. Remick's boyfriend is a prissy art critic, an obvious fraud surrounded by little old ladies and hapless faggots in shiny silk shirts. Garner's objection to him and the rest of her "arty" friends is that they are a product of female emancipation. Only "masculine women," he says, attract such people.

In *A Very Special Favor* (1965), it is the old-fashioned father of a liberated woman who objects to her weak, passive boyfriend and enlists the help of what he considers a suitably virile replacement. Charles Boyer is the European father of psychologist Leslie Caron. Her boyfriend (Dick Shawn) used to be her hairdresser, and now she orders him about like a lackey. He follows closely on her heels everywhere, talking constantly of the baby they plan to have once they are married. Boyer, speaking with an old friend (Walter Slezak), shouts, "He's ridiculous! His only regret is that *he* will not be able to have the baby!" Slezak replies offhandedly that such a thing would be very difficult

to arrange, but Boyer waves him aside. "Ahh," he sighs, "when you meet him, you will not rule out the possibility." In a similar scene in Carl Reiner's *The Comic* (1969), two old comedians (Dick Van Dyke and Mickey Rooney) discuss Van Dyke's effeminate son. "He'll make you a grandpa one of these days," Rooney says. "Don't you bet on it," Van Dyke snaps. Dick Shawn behaves so much like a woman that it seems he almost could have a baby, and Van Dyke's son is so pitiful a man that he could never have a woman. Same joke.

The answer to Boyer's prayers arrives in the person of the American businessman Rock Hudson. Hudson plays the standard model, a smooth but insincere ladykiller who talks with three women at once on different telephones—but only when someone else is in the room to appreciate how much of a man he is. Basically insecure, he really does not do well with women, and the constant strain of the pretense drives him crazy. His masculinity is on trial throughout the film, its authenticity under constant scrutiny. Boyer believes that Rock Hudson would make a fine husband for his daughter because he is everything that Dick Shawn is not. They decide that Hudson will pretend to be homosexual so that the therapist Leslie Caron can "save" him. Hudson sets up a hotel room liaison as a charade to fool Caron, using as his "boyfriend" not a man but a woman (Nita Talbot) in drag. At the last moment, Caron rushes into the room. "Stop! I'm trying to prevent you from making a tragic mistake. You were once a magnificent man." As she collapses in his arms, the scene fades to the birth of their first child, a boy.

The cure solution to homosexuality, popularized by *Tea and Sympathy,* was used in a flock of films, usually in a comic way but always with melodramatically serious overtones. People really believed that a good lay cured homosexuals. Otto Preminger's *Tell Me That You Love Me, Junie Moon* (1970) featured Bob Moore as Warren, a cripple who is homosexual because he was raised by a gay foster father (played in flashback by Leonard Frey). At the end of the film, Warren makes love with a black prostitute, a woman who is a hooker like his mother, and is summarily cured of his homosexuality—a fact that he gleefully shouts from a speeding car the next morning. In Robert Altman's *M*A*S*H* (1970), the well-endowed surgeon finds one morning that he "can't get it up" and concludes miserably that he "must be a fairy." He goes to his tent to commit suicide but in the middle of the night is visited by a young nurse, and in the morning he emerges to pronounce himself "cured."

In Mark Robson's adaptation of Jacqueline Susann's *Valley of the Dolls* (1967), Hollywood fashion designer Ted Casablanca (Alex Davion) is referred to throughout the film as "queer" even though the story indicates he is "bisex-

ual." When superstar Neely O'Hara (Patty Duke) shows some interest in Casablanca, her husband (Martin Milner) remarks, "You sure are spending a lot of time with that fag."

"He's *not* a fag!" she screams. "And I'm just the dame who can prove it!"

In a kill 'em or cure 'em climate, violence by and toward homosexuals onscreen escalated at the end of the 1960s and became the keynote of the 1970s. Sissies were now cured, killed or rendered impotent in suitably nasty ways. Ray Walston's effeminate psychotic killer in *Caprice* (1967) reflects an unnatural fear that the world is about to become homosexual. Walston's Dr. Clancy, a cosmetologist, rationalizes that if women are made more beautiful, their husbands "won't want to kiss the bus driver in the morning"—something he sees as a widespread danger. He is later revealed as a murderer who likes to dress in women's clothing. Doris Day pushes him to his death from a balcony in a public building.

Ray Walston as the vicious transvestite killer kisses Doris Day on the set of Caprice *(1967).* (Homer Dickens Collection)

John Guillermin's *P.J.* (1968) featured George Peppard as the broken-down (but still sexy) private eye whose work takes him to an ominous gay bar and pits him against an evil queen. Summoned to act as bodyguard for the inevitable rich and beautiful woman, Peppard must first deal with her manservant, a classically turned out faggot named Shelton Kwell (Severn Darden) who peeks through curtains and is always preceded into a room by a puff of smoke from a long cigarette holder. After pointedly refusing to shake Kwell's hand, Peppard asks the mistress why she has chosen such an unlikely servant. "He isn't much," she admits, "but he sleeps in."

"Where?" shoots Peppard. "At the bottom of the garden?"

Unfortunately, Kwell is involved in a plot to murder his mistress, and he invites Peppard to meet him secretly at a club called the Gay Caballero. Guillermin's gay bar is one reason why so many people thought that the alien bar in *Star Wars* was a gay bar. The scenes in *P.J.* were typical of the gay bar buildup that the American screen had pushed for almost a decade. Filled with leather types wearing gold earrings, the place is a dark affair with tightly shuttered windows. The jukebox plays "The Halls of Montezuma" as Peppard is served a Scotch in a stemmed shot glass. Suddenly the music stops and the men at the bar turn and advance on him menacingly. Amused, Peppard asks, "Do any of you tomboys know a guy named Shelton Kwell?" The tomboys attack in force, but Peppard is ready for them, and he beats the daylights out of at least fifteen men, wrecking the place in the process. Our hero emerges from the battle none the worse for wear, sporting only a bloody nose and five artfully created fingernail scratches down one cheek.

All this gay activity did not go unnoticed. In June 1968, *Time* announced that the "third sex" was making a determined bid for first place at the box office. "Unashamedly queer characters are everywhere!" *Time* screeched, pointing out that most of the homosexuals shown so far were "sadists, buffoons or psychopaths." The power of the Code was at an end. In 1966, another drastic revision had divided films into those for mature and those for general audiences. Films such as *The Sergeant, Reflections in a Golden Eye, The Fox, The Detective* and *The Killing of Sister George* clearly contained "adult" material, and it became apparent that the Code had little or no control over them. John Huston's *Reflections in a Golden Eye* (1967) was released with a seal of approval despite the director's refusal to make a series of cuts requested by the Catholic Office for Motion Pictures and the MPAA. In spite of a C ("condemned") rating from the Catholic Church, the film gained wide distribution, something that could not have happened a decade earlier. *Variety* interpreted this as "a sign of increased independence on the part of Hollywood . . . and a decline in the importance of ratings to theatrical bookings."

One year later, in 1968, the Code was abolished altogether in favor of the "alphabet soup" rating system we have today. In January 1969, a *Variety* headline proclaimed, "Homo 'n' Lesbo Films at Peak, Deviate Theme Now Box Office." The explosion of "gay" films culminated in 1970 with the release of the film version, directed by William Friedkin, of Mart Crowley's stage hit *The Boys in the Band,* which coincided with the rebirth of the activist gay movement in America.

The onscreen exploration and exploitation of gay life in America was now

carried out against a backdrop of vocal and visible homosexuals reacting publicly to their media image. On a June night in 1969, New York City police raided a Greenwich Village bar called the Stonewall. For the first time, gays fought back against the police, and there followed a week of nightly rioting. Less than a year later there were gay liberation groups in over three hundred American cities. Today there are more than two thousand such organizations in the United States alone, in small cities and towns, on college campuses and in almost every business and professional organization. The late 1960s and the whole of the 1970s saw a regurgitation of the closet syndrome in both commercial and independent films made by and about gays.

But gradually films by gays would begin to explore the gay lifestyle in personal terms, apart from the superstructure of a film industry interested primarily in economic return. The films *A Very Natural Thing, Word Is Out, Nighthawks, Outrageous!, The Consequence* and *Gay U.S.A.* evolved out of a consciousness seeded by gay liberation and shaped by the lies and distortions of most commercial cinema. At times the sex and violence that Hollywood attributed to the gay lifestyle were indistinguishable from the violence against gays in real life. Some films of the 1960s reflected the violence, and it was not always possible to separate the sad truth from the stereotypes.

Gay relationships continued to be shown as inherently violent. By making the lesbian relationship between Jill (Sandy Dennis) and Ellen (Anne Heywood) explicit in their adaptation of D. H. Lawrence's *The Fox* (1968), director Mark Rydell and screenwriter Lewis John Carlino exaggerated the results of that lesbian passion. A subtle, almost unconsciously lesbian affair between Jill and Ellen became on film a hotly explicit obsession that is broken up by the arrival of Paul (Keir Dullea), the "fox" for whom Ellen has an inexplicable attraction. The overstated sexuality in the film makes it a "will she or won't she choose normalcy?" tug-of-war between lesbianism and heterosexuality.

Lesbianism loses. At the end of the movie, the fox carries off his prize. A tree falls between Jill's legs, killing her, and Ellen goes off into the sunset with Paul. One lesbian is killed, the other cured. But because Sandy Dennis wore the dress and Anne Heywood the pants, American critics were confused at the denouement. Martin Gottfried, writing in *Women's Wear Daily,* expressed disbelief that Paul would be attracted to Ellen ("the bulldyke") over Jill ("the female lesbian"). "How," he asked, "could the feminine one be the real lesbian?" Pauline Kael, in a telling query, revealed that she could not conceive of a woman's preferring other women. "If Ellen isn't afraid of sex with men, what's she doing playing house in the woods with that frumpy Jill?"

Homosexuality, it seems, was still a matter of queers who imitated heterosexuality onscreen and off. In *Staircase, The Killing of Sister George, The Gay Deceivers* and even *The Boys in the Band,* heterosexual role playing was the rule. If there was such a thing as a defined gay behavior, it was not explicit onscreen even though it emerged often enough as camp.

Anne Heywood makes love to Sandy Dennis in Mark Rydell's screen version of D. H. Lawrence's The Fox *(1968).*

The wages of sin: Sandy Dennis lies mangled beneath a fallen tree at the end of The Fox; *Keir Dullea and Anne Heywood walk off into the sunset.*

John Huston's adaptation of Carson McCullers' *Reflections in a Golden Eye* and John Flynn's screen version of Dennis Murphy's *The Sergeant* dealt with the fate of repressed homosexuals who were at odds with the supermacho ethic of military life. The submerged emotions that had been given flesh in Kenneth Anger's *Fireworks* were here given the post-1950s Hollywood

sledgehammer treatment. Both films explore graphically the fears of men who believe that they are freaks of nature and can no longer hide their true selves.

In *Reflections in a Golden Eye* (1967), Major Penderton (Marlon Brando) is a constipated closet case who sweats constantly and moons furtively over picture postcards depicting Greek statues of naked men. His repressed sexuality is seen as the triumph of his military training, and when it is set loose, it is responsible for the murder that climaxes the film. Penderton's sexual urges express themselves more fancifully in Huston's film than in McCullers' book, principally through Penderton's tortured reactions to crude fag jokes and a sadistic streak that is triggered by sexual frustration. Brando, who is said to have adopted Tennessee Williams' southern accent for his role as Penderton, follows a young private (Robert Forester) around the army camp at night, picking up discarded candy wrappers that he lovingly preserves along with his postcards. The most shocking scene shows Brando before a mirror, slathering makeup and cold cream over his face. Major Penderton's assumption of the female role through the use of cosmetics says more about John Huston's analysis of homosexuality than it does about Carson McCullers' version of sexual repression.

The simplistic rendering of Penderton's obsession matches the treatment afforded the character of the Filipino houseboy Anacleto (Zorro David), who is played as a screaming queen out of a Warner Brothers cartoon. He serves well as the visible result of the kind of sexuality Brando thinks he is hiding within himself. Anacleto is used consistently as sounding board for the kinds of ideas that have kept Major Penderton in the closet. The flighty creature is just what a mother might point to as an example of what could happen if a disobedient child did not stop playing with dolls. An officer (Brian Keith) says of Anacleto, "He wouldn't be happy in the army, but it would make a man of him." This pro-closet philosophy suggests that men can indeed be "made"—or at least approximated—and that homosexuality is merely a matter of effeminate behavior that can be altered with the right kind of training. The troubled Brando knows better, but he keeps the knowledge to himself. Lecturing on "leadership, strength, power and war," he tells the classroom of soldiers, "It is morally honorable for the square peg to keep scraping around in the round hole rather than to discover and use the unorthodox one that would fit."

In *The Sergeant* (1968), Rod Steiger's Callan is faced with the same dilemma as Brando's Penderton. After scraping around in the wrong hole for years, he suddenly encounters a perfect fit. So careful a film is *The Sergeant,* however, that it offers two hours of imagined foreplay, culminating in a sloppy kiss

Rod Steiger plants a tortured kiss on the lips of John Phillip Law in The Sergeant *(1968).*

and tragedy. Steiger approaches the object of his covert affections, one Private Swanson (John Phillip Law), the way spinsters Margaret Leighton and Grayson Hall approached Sue Lyon in *Seven Women* and *The Night of the Iguana.* When the two soldiers first meet, violins are heard on the soundtrack. Sergeant Callan is a homosexual Marty, his hands in his pockets, always hanging out with the straight guys, going along on their dates, secretly in love with them, waiting for the chance to pounce in a drunken moment. The ploy was immortalized by Mart Crowley in *The Boys in the Band* as the "Christ, was I drunk last night" syndrome.

Neither *The Sergeant* nor *Reflections in a Golden Eye* offers the possibility of homosexual relationships; they deal only in sexually motivated manipulations, spitefulness and petty jealousy, most of it unconscious and unexplored. The result is caricature. Steiger acts Sergeant Callan like a man possessed, pursing his lips maniacally and sweating buckets. When in the film's anticlimax he finally kisses the nonplussed Private Swanson, there is no culminating passion but rage and hatred for what the kiss represents. It is the accusatory kiss of *A View from the Bridge* all over again. In *Reflections in a Golden Eye,* Brando murders the young private when he discovers that his wife (Elizabeth Taylor) is the real attraction to the young man; he is betrayed by his own weakness. In *The Sergeant,* Steiger kills himself by blowing his brains out with a shotgun.

In each case, the gay character is killing what he sees as the source of his homosexuality. Both films insist that there is no option, no way out for these doomed people. They are driven by their fatal flaw. In an angry speech condemning the behavior of Anacleto, Brian Keith says, "We'd have run him ragged in the army. He sure would've been miserable, but anything would've

been better than all that other mess—painting with watercolors and dancing. . . ." John Phillip Law sees Steiger go into the woods with a gun and realizes what is about to happen, but he makes no move to stop it. The virginal young private, hardly aware throughout the film that there is such a thing as homosexuality, knows enough finally to allow the suicide to take place unhindered. At the sound of the gunshot, he sighs in resignation; another doomed faggot has bitten the dust.

Eventually a new consciousness had to emerge from these dreary circumstances. For the rote suicide as solution to homosexuality soon looked like the worn-out stereotype it was. There was a subtle shift; the subject of films that dealt with gays became the ghettos in which gays lived. Where *Reflections in a Golden Eye* and *The Sergeant* had examined military closets, supercop thrillers such as *P.J., Tony Rome* and *The Detective* explored the seedy underworld of gay ghetto life, where homosexuality among the lawless was tolerated. *P.J.* and *Tony Rome* featured leather-jacketed killer gays and alcoholic lesbian strippers in a series of brief but sordid sequences that were designed to repel.

Some more serious implications of the closeted life were glimpsed in *The Incident* and *The Boston Strangler,* films that showed gays as victims of the law and the lawless. The physical and mental brutality that is visited so easily on creatures who are forced to spend their lives in hiding is illuminated in both films. In *The Boston Strangler* (1968), Hurd Hatfield plays Terence Huntley, a rich homosexual who is interrogated by detective Henry Fonda in a gay bar. "Whenever there are sex crimes," Hatfield tells Fonda, "the police crack down on us. When you're very rich and also gay, you're very vulnerable." An underground synonym for homosexual since the 1920s, the word *gay* had suddenly become acceptable in films (it was used again that year in *The Detective*). The vulnerability of closeted gays was elaborated on in both *The Incident* and *The Detective,* which also illustrated the Catch-22 nature of the trap that invisibility engenders.

In *The Incident* (1967), two mindless punks (Tony Musante and Martin Sheen) terrorize a subway car filled with people. But it is the lone gay passenger who is singled out first and tormented longest. Robert Fields plays Kenneth Otis, a man whose homosexuality makes him physically ill. At the outset of the film he tries—pathetically—to pick up a straight man (Gary Merrill) in a local bar and becomes sick in the john. It is a film that, while being repulsive, gives a sense of the alienation that results from being gay in a straight world. Fields' portrait of Otis is like Brando's Penderton; he almost shouts "Unclean!" as he walks the streets to the subway station.

Once the "Ride of Terror" (the title of the original teleplay) has begun,

Robert Fields as Kenneth Otis is tormented by Martin Sheen and Tony Musante in The Incident *(1967).*

Otis is victimized into trusting Martin Sheen, a psychosexual game player. Sheen allows Otis to think he is gay by smiling conspiratorially and touching him gently. One result of this early encounter is that Otis becomes the only terrorized passenger for whom no sympathy is created. As each rider in turn is attacked by the two youths, others make tentative attempts to offer help. The homosexual suffers alone. The lone comment is that of a male passenger who says to his girlfriend, "Ahhh, so what? So they found a queer." The homosexual is an outsider not only in his family and his neighborhood but on the planet itself, says the microcosmic vision of the film. He can expect none of the neighborly concern or simple human compassion that people share as a matter of daily life; he is not a part of the community.

In late 1967, screenwriter Abby Mann told the *New York Times* that "it's easier to be accepted in our society as a murderer than as a homosexual," and his next screenplay, for Gordon Douglas' *The Detective* (1968), had its roots in this observation. The film, set almost exclusively in the gay haunts of New York City's sexual underground, starred Frank Sinatra as a tough but liberal (educated) detective who is faced with having to solve the brutal castration murder of a wealthy homosexual (James Inman). Under pressure from his department to find the killer quickly and attain promotion, Sinatra uses the same kind of studied come-on that Martin Sheen had employed in *The Incident,* and he seduces a confession from an innocent gay beach bum (Tony Musante). Later Sinatra discovers that he has sent an innocent man to the electric chair just because he was in a hurry and any homosexual would do. The real killer (William Windom), a closeted homosexual who murdered to keep his secret, commits suicide. His written confession says, "I was more ashamed of being a homosexual than a murderer." The police cooperate in the suppression of the nature of his death because they do not wish to reveal

the homosexuality of a prominent citizen. Thus the closet syndrome is held responsible for all three deaths of homosexual characters: an execution, a murder and a suicide.

In *The Detective,* Sinatra's search for the killer took him on a tour of the public sex hangouts of the New York waterfront. It was the most graphic coverage to date of the underworld of casual sex and violence that would become the dominant homosexual milieu on film throughout the Seventies.

As the Sixties came to a close, *The Killing of Sister George* (1968) and *The Boys in the Band* (1970) seemed to sum up and even type the gay experience for American audiences. Both films made detailed but divergent statements about the nature of the closet, and both were received as definitive portraits of gay life. Homosexuality was no longer a vague insinuation or the unexplored component of a tortured character. The lesbianism in *The Killing of Sister George,* John Lee noted in the *New York Times,* was "treated as a condition rather than an accusation." The "killing" in the film was not the death of homosexuality but the death of its visibility; the closet was at war with the flamboyance of Sister George herself. Homosexuality had become a fact of life, and Hollywood ballyhooed it as though the movies had invented it. Twentieth Century-Fox's full-page ad in the *New York Times* announcing the production of George Cukor's *Justine* listed the cast and concluded dramatically with, "And Dirk Bogarde as . . . The Homosexual." Bogarde in fact eventually played the heterosexual Pursewarden, but Cliff Gorman was featured as one of the nastiest sissies ever filmed.

Every attempt at portraying gays or the gay world was termed definitive. *Time* hailed *The Boys in the Band* as "a landslide of truths." Richard Schickel wrote in *Life* that *The Killing of Sister George* "recreates the whole lesbian world." Observing that the film "really penetrates the queer mind and milieu," Schickel said that *Sister George* would be sure to give its audience a "good sense of the demi-monde lesbians share with fags, prosties, etc." He said the picture was "tacky, tawdry, repellent and true."

The demi-monde in question was the Gateways Club, a lesbian bar in London at which director Robert Aldrich shot one scene for *The Killing of Sister George,* using regular patrons as extras. In spite of a strict press ban on the set, the scene was photographed by a still photographer and pictures appeared in a London daily and then in newspapers around the world. As a result, Aldrich says, a receptionist in a doctor's office was fired from her job because she was spotted in a photo. It was an ironic presage of the fate of the film's chief character.

In Aldrich's adaptation of the play, Beryl Reid's June Buckridge is a BBC

William Windom is about to murder a wealthy young gay man in The Detective *(1968).*

Susannah York, Beryl Reid and Coral Browne at the Gateways Club in The Killing of Sister George *(1968).*

(91)

soap opera actress who plays a cheerful country nurse, Sister George, on a weekly series. In private life, George is a loud, aggressive, butch lesbian whose alcoholic escapades and petty tyrannies precipitate her downfall. She loses both her job and her baby-doll lover (Susannah York) as a result of the reptilian

interference of a predatory BBC executive, Mercy Croft (Coral Browne). George's crime lies not in being queer but in being so offensively butch about it, a dinosaur pitting herself against modern weapons. And Coral Browne's Mercy Croft was the newest thing in the hooded cobra look for lesbians onscreen that season. (Viveca Lindfors' domineering fashion photographer who preyed on Faye Dunaway in *Puzzle of a Downfall Child,* Capucine's bloodless lesbian spy who closed in on Suzy Kendall in *Fräulein Doktor* and Stéphane Audran's seductress in *Les Biches* were other examples of the excessive eyeshadow and dangling earring school of lesbian screen villains.)

The internal battle in *The Killing of Sister George* is one between the acceptable and the offensive gay lifestyles. The "killing" of Sister George is the process by which George's overt lesbianism is punished by forcing her into invisibility. "Look at yourself, you pathetic old dyke!" shouts Mercy Croft, belittling the tweedy George.

Though generally maligned as an offensive and nasty character, Sister George is in fact the only multifaceted woman in the film. The honesty and openness of her character, when set beside the cartoon treachery of the sleek and sophisticated Mercy Croft or the loveless opportunism of Susannah York's Childie, make George the more complete human being. Critics who pounced on George's domineering, somewhat sadistic role-playing with Childie and her small, middle class values and alcoholic jealousies, missed her emotional commitment to her lesbianism, that is, to being herself. When she suspiciously questions Childie about an affair with a co-worker, Childie snaps, "Not *all* girls are raving bloody lesbians, you know!"

George takes a slow puff on her cigar and pronounces, *"That's* a misfortune of which I am perfectly well aware."

George is clearly the only character in the film who is committed to being a lesbian—and the one for whom it is impossible (like the nellie Emory in *The Boys in the Band*) to hide it. She is also the only character in the film to love anyone in a nonmanipulative way and the only person with a sense of humor. Her description of the first time she saw Childie ("It was like standing in an enchanted wood") is the single love speech in the picture. Her tender and understanding relationship with a local prostitute suggests that her only real emotional contact or solace is with other outsiders. She goes to the prostitute's house because she needs a place "where I can cry." George's hilarious drunken assault on two nuns in the back seat of a taxicab and her barroom imitations of Sydney Greenstreet and Oliver Hardy are all naughty but funny indications of her unconventional nature, a nature that is eventually eclipsed and destroyed by people who are a bunch of fakes. The message for George is that only the fakes will survive, that she has no alternative to the closet.

"Sister George's loud behavior and individuality," Aldrich says, "are encompassed in her character, they're not a product of her lesbianism. She doesn't have to dress or act like that, but—fuck it—that's the way she wants to live. She doesn't give a shit about the BBC or the public's acceptance of her relationships. That's why they couldn't afford her. She didn't fit into the machine."

Because of what Mercy Croft calls George's "refusal to conduct herself in a decent, civilized manner," the Sister George character is killed off on the BBC, hit by a speeding truck while riding her motor scooter in the English countryside. Croft then seduces Childie away from George, leaving her without a job and without a relationship. Yet the final indignity is the theft of her openness. The only job offered the aging actress is the part of an animal on a children's series, a part that will require her to wear a cow's head for the duration of her television career. Alone at night in the deserted television studio, she spots the black casket that was used for the funeral of Sister George that afternoon. She lifts the lid, expecting it to be heavy, and discovers that it is made of light balsa wood. "Even the bloody coffin is a fake!" she cries, and in an impotent fury she begins to smash lights and props. Spent at last, she sits on a wooden bench on the set of a small country village and in the darkness begins to moo quietly, a sound that becomes a scream of despair. Sister George dies for our sins, and Mercy Croft gets the girl. The options are invisibility, assimilation or ostracism.

Aldrich's decision, in adapting the play to the screen, to make Coral Browne's seduction of Susannah York sexually explicit caused a furor. "After all," Aldrich said, "unlike the stage version, the picture had to play out the betrayal, and the story itself is so genteel, it's possible you could be sitting in Sheboygan and the film could be so 'well done' that nobody would know what the hell you were talking about." When she reviewed *The Children's Hour* in 1962, Pauline Kael noted that audiences felt sorry for poor Martha Dobie because she and Karen "don't really *do* anything, after all," and Kael added parenthetically, "I always thought that was why lesbians needed sympathy—because there isn't much they *can* do." Six years later, when Aldrich released *The Killing of Sister George* with 119 seconds of footage showing exactly what lesbians could do, Kael's review of the film was titled "Frightening the Horses."

The seduction scene was cut from *The Killing of Sister George* in several states, including Connecticut and Massachusetts, where it was found to be in violation of obscenity and licensing laws. Yet the film's X rating was not a reflection of the offending scene, which Aldrich finally offered to cut for an R rating.

After a disastrous screening in New York at the Ziegfeld Theater, I called my old friend Jean Dockerty, who was the head of the Code Administration, and said to him, "Okay, I'll make the cuts."

"It's too late," he said to me, "Jack Valenti said that it gets an X no matter what you do to it."

The X was based on subject matter alone. So there was a curtain in front of that picture. No matter how good it was, it was dirty because it was an X film. *The Pom Pom Girls* was an X, and *The Killing of Sister George* was an X. No difference. And the whole idea of having ratings to let us compete with foreign filmmakers in an adult market went right down the toilet.

Aldrich's movie was as much a scapegoat as its heroine was. The film had begun shooting under the old Code system, which involved having a seal of approval or not, and it completed shooting under the new rating system. To release the film without a seal would not have had the stigma that an X rating eventually took on. It was also a transitional time for the movies. Technically, *The Killing of Sister George* was given an X rating on theme alone. Yet less than a year later, *Midnight Cowboy* won the Oscar for best picture of the year in spite of its X rating. Then, early in 1970, *Variety* reported that the MPAA, in a landmark decision, had given *The Boys in the Band* an R rating in spite of what it called "homosexual dialogue."

The Boys in the Band (1970), with its "landslide of truths," became the most famous Hollywood film on the subject of male homosexuality. Viewed in the press and by the public as a "serious study" of gay men, Mart Crowley's Off Broadway play was transferred to the screen by director William Friedkin with its original nine-member cast. The film was a "special" project in Hollywood, and it was handled with a fidelity to the text that was more appropriate to a *Long Day's Journey into Night.*

Andrew Sarris, in his review of *The Killing of Sister George,* observed that "you can't make tragedy out of abnormal psychology." But he ignored the fact that most tragic figures in literature and history were indeed abnormal by society's standards and that in reality both *The Killing of Sister George* and *The Boys in the Band* are tragedy. Most heterosexual critics wear blinders when it comes to homosexuality onscreen; they tend to see the very theme as abnormal. The review of *The Boys in the Band* that appeared in the *New York Times* was headlined, "Crowley Study of Male Homosexuality Opens"—which sounds like the description of a documentary.

The author, who also wrote the screenplay, says the film was approached with a pair of tongs in Hollywood. The film industry had homosexuality under a microscope, and there was a hush, as though some great advance were about to be made. "It was a very taboo subject in Hollywood," Crowley says,

"and it still is. When we were filming it, it was considered this very liberal New York theater project, and nobody wanted to get too close."

On the strength of a classy set of New York stage reviews and its billing as a comedy despite its dead serious intent, *The Boys in the Band* was taken for gospel in an America populated by people who had never met a live homosexual in their entire lives. The film presented a perfunctory compendium of easily acceptable stereotypes who gather at a Manhattan birthday party and spend an evening savaging each other and their way of life. The "landslide of truths" consisted ultimately of some jumbled Freudian stabs at overly protective mothers and absent fathers and lots of zippy fag humor that posed as philosophy. Yet in spite of itself, Crowley's passion play was part catharsis and part catalyst. His characters were losers or borderline survivors at best, but they paved the way for winners.

Although it was difficult to see this clearly in 1970, *The Boys in the Band* presented some attractive and functional gay men who formed an implicit challenge to the stereotypes exploited in Emory (Cliff Gorman) and Harold (Leonard Frey). The film was not positive, but it was fair. The heterosexual Alan (Peter White) can easily despise the nellie Emory because he is everything a faggot is supposed to be, a "butterfly in heat." Alan even comes to pity the battered sissy in the end. But what scares Alan and the audience, what they could not come to terms with or understand, is the homosexuality of Hank and Larry (Laurence Luckinbill and Keith Prentice), who are both just as queer as Emory yet "look" as straight as Alan. The possibility that there could be nonstereotypical homosexuals who are also staunch advocates of a working gay relationship is presented by the two lovers throughout the film. And they are the two characters most often ignored by critics and analysts of the film. It is Larry who speaks of rejecting heterosexual concepts of marriage and creating a relationship with "respect for one another's freedom, with no need to lie or pretend." At the end of the film, Larry and Hank win the telephone truth game, that Michael (Kenneth Nelson) has viciously devised, when they call each other and say "I love you." It is when Larry and Hank express affection for each other physically and verbally that the audience and the lone straight party guest are most uncomfortable.

In contrast, Michael's inability to deal with his own homosexuality is exposed as old-time movie melodrama, and Harold's final, equally melodramatic speech puts it in perspective.

You are a sad and pathetic man, Michael. You are a homosexual, and you don't want to be, but there's nothing you can do to change it. Not all your prayers to your God. Not all the analysis your money can buy in the years you have left to live. You

may one day be able to know a heterosexual life. If you want it desperately enough. If you pursue it with the fervor with which you annihilate. But you will always be homosexual as well, Michael. Always. Until the day you die.

The speech captured the essence of self-hatred and summed up a generation of gay men who were taught to blame all their troubles on their homosexuality. In the end, Michael's self-hatred and his inability to function became as antiquated as Harold's keeping his marijuana in a Band-Aid box in the medicine chest so that he can flush it down the john if the police should arrive. Michael's crying jags and old-movie fantasies shed light not on his homosexuality but on the falsehoods and illusions of Hollywood dreams, the dreams that had taught homosexuals that there were no homosexuals in polite society.

Laurence Luckinbill as Hank and Keith Prentice as Larry in a scene not used in The Boys in the Band *(1970).* (Mart Crowley)

When Clive Barnes called *The Boys in the Band* a homosexual play, he was right. It was a homosexual period piece just as *Green Pastures* was a Negro period piece. But blacks are visible and gays are not, and Hollywood was not moved to change a whit by all this hysteria in the gay drawing rooms of Manhattan. Yet *Boys* moved homosexuals throughout the country. The internalized guilt and self-hatred of eight gay men at a Manhattan birthday

party formed the best and most potent argument for gay liberation ever offered in a popular art form. It supplied concrete and personalized examples of the negative effects of what homosexuals learn about themselves from the distortions of the media. And the film caused the first public reaction by a burgeoning gay rights movement to the accepted stereotypes in Crowley's play.

Protests by gays did not dispute the existence of such stereotypes, but they were quick to point out that the view was one-sided and that the exclusive depiction or representation of any group of people by a minority stereotype is called bigotry. *The Boys in the Band* was a play about homosexuals and a homosexual play. It was a work that sprang from the subculture itself and represented bitter reflection. Society treated it as though it were a scientific expedition, but in fact it was an inner journey for countless gays who snapped to attention when confronted with the pathos of Michael's sickening routines. Many of the stereotypes put forth by Crowley were myths that gays had accepted and even fit themselves into because there appeared to be no alternative. At the beginning of the 1960s, two British films about the life of Oscar Wilde could not even be shown in the United States because the Code had not yet been revised. The audience for *The Boys in the Band* included gay people who had grown up thinking that they were the only homosexuals in the world. The film explored passing and not being able to pass, loving and not being able to love, and above all else, surviving in a world that denied one's very existence. But it did so before an American public that was at the stage of barely being able to mention homosexuality at all. It was a gay movie for gay people, and it immediately became both a period piece and a reconfirmation of the stereotypes.

The film industry showed no sign of seeing *The Boys in the Band* as anything but a diversion in a business that was always on the lookout for a novel angle. During the Seventies Hollywood did not relinquish the stereotypes of the Crowley play but moved steadily toward solidifying them. It was the gays in the audiences of 1970 who would eventually form a rebuttal to the homosexual party guests, and their voices would grow louder with each passing year.

"Nobody would try to pass Michael off as having today's consciousness," Crowley admits. "All the negative things in the play are represented by Michael, and because he's the leading character, it was his message that a very square American public wanted to receive." And did receive. The internal chaos of Michael, a guilt-ridden Catholic, forms the focal point of the reaction to the gay lifestyle throughout the story. The *Catholic Film Newsletter* said that the film "comments with wit and passion on the desolation and waste which chill this way of life . . . with all its anxiety, bitterness, depression and solitude."

It is the Roman Catholic Michael who utters the play's most famous line, "You show me a happy homosexual and I'll show you a gay corpse." The author gathers together one Jew, one black, one Wasp, one midnight cowboy, one nellie queen and a married man and his lover to react to Michael's torment. When gays reacted publicly, Friedkin said, "This film is not about homosexuality,

Chris Sarandon as Leon (patterned after the real-life Liz Eden), the transsexual lover of a gay bank robber in Dog Day Afternoon *(1975).*

it's about human problems. I hope there *are* happy homosexuals. They just don't happen to be in my film." Nor have they been in any other major American release before or since.

If nothing else, *The Boys in the Band* illuminated the fear and ignorance that surrounded homosexuality in America. And while it was considered the pinnacle of Hollywood's commitment to the exploration of such "adult" themes as homosexuality, it was in fact a freak show. The 1970s would continue to reflect the freak show aspects of homosexual villains, fools and queens. The most successful film of the decade that dealt with an openly gay homosexual, Sidney Lumet's *Dog Day Afternoon* (1975), was the ultimate freak show, a

film that used the sensational side of a true story to titillate a square audience. The decade that began with regurgitations of *The Boys in the Band* and the riots that sparked the gay liberation movement would end with more public violence over the filming of another William Friedkin movie, *Cruising* (1980), marking the first time gays rose up and rioted in the streets in reaction to the making of a motion picture. And the hero still could not be queer.