

# **DIFFERENT FROM THE OTHERS**

## **A Comparative Analysis of Representations of Male Queerness and Male-Male Intimacy in the Films of Europe and America, 1912-1934**

**A thesis submitted to the University of East Anglia for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy**

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## ABSTRACT

Since the publication of Vito Russo's now classic study, *The Celluloid Closet*, in 1981, much has been written on the representation of queer characters on screen. However, no full length work on the representation of queer sexualities in silent and early sound film has yet been published, although the articles and chapters of Dyer (1990), Kuzniar (2000) and Barrios (2003) are currently taken as the definitive accounts of these issues. However, each of the above studies deals with a specific country or region and, since their publication, a significant number of silent films have been discovered that were previously thought lost. There has also been a tendency in the past to map modern concepts of sexuality and gender on to films made nearly one hundred years ago.

This thesis, therefore, compares the representations of male queerness and male-male intimacy in the films of America and Europe during the period 1912 to 1934, and does so by placing these films within the social and cultural context in which they were made. This allows us to understand not how modern audiences read them, but how they were understood by audiences when they were initially released. While previous studies have concentrated on a relatively small group of films, this thesis looks far beyond this and, although it does re-examine these core works, it also explores previously neglected films, those that have only recently been rediscovered and,

through a study of newspaper articles, reviews and advertisements, films that are now lost. This approach has produced some surprising conclusions, not least that, aside from the core group of European “gay-themed” films (*Vingarne*, *Anders als die Andern*, *Michael* and *Geschlecht in Fesseln*), it is in America that queer characters were dealt with more sensitively and with more compassion in the films of this period. It has also been possible to re-examine friendships or relationships on film that were previously regarded as having a homosexual subtext and, instead, demonstrate that these were actually representations of the “romantic friendship” popular in the late nineteenth century in America or the comradeship experienced by those that served in the battlefields of World War I.

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## Introduction

In late 1894 or early 1895, a film was produced which attempted to link sound with the moving image for possibly the first time. Directed by William K Dickson, the film, just seventeen seconds long, shows a violinist playing into a large recording horn while “two men clasp each other and dance in circles” (Benshoff and Griffin, 2006: 21). Vito Russo, in his groundbreaking book *The Celluloid Closet* incorrectly names the film as *The Gay Brothers*, and both the book and the documentary of the same name suggests homosexual content due to the two men dancing together in the film (Russo, 1987: 6).<sup>1</sup> However, the reason for two *men* dancing, rather than a man and a woman, seemingly has no relation to sexuality. Anthony Slide states that the “two men provided the movement for the moving picture not because they were sexually attracted to each other but simply because there were no female employees at the Edison laboratory; even the secretaries were male, confirmed an Edison historian” (Slide 1999: 25). Despite this, Dickson’s short experimental film was (albeit inadvertently) the very first to feature queer images on the screen. Queer cinema was born.

Dickson’s experimental film can effectively act as a microcosm for everything that is

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<sup>1</sup> In recent years, the film (which has no formal title) has been referred to as the *Dickson Experimental Sound Film*.

to follow within this thesis. It demonstrates the importance of placing a film within its historic and cultural context, and that original intentions can often only be revealed by doing this. However, at the same time, knowing what the filmmakers intended, and that it had nothing to do with sexuality, does not prevent a film from being read as “queer” either at the time of release or at a later date.

“Queer cinema” is, after all, one of those strange terms: difficult to give a concrete definition, but we “know it when we see it”. Geoffrey Nowell-Smith describes it as bringing together “in a single field a large number of manifestations of homosexuality in the cinema, from explicit to implicit, from pornography to the most respectable mainstream, all of which could be seen as in some way challenging the heterosexual norm” (Nowell-Smith, 1996: 756). While this is a useful definition, it is also one which merely scratches the surface of what queer cinema is or can be. It is a relatively modern term (Nowell-Smith’s definition comes under the heading of “New Concepts in Cinema” in *The Oxford History of World Cinema*) and has evolved considerably over its short lifetime, such that queer cinema surely now goes beyond “manifestations of homosexuality” in film in order to include many forms of otherness within representations of gender and sexuality. The term “queer” may encompass homosexuals, bisexuals, asexuals, transvestites, hermaphrodites and more but, more importantly, it also *resists* this simplistic pigeonholing, allowing for a less rigid and more fluid examination of both human sexuality and gender roles.

This use of the term “queer” in order to provide a resistance to pigeon-holing is discussed by Eve Sedgwick in her 1993 book *Tendencies*, one of the key early works of “queer theory”. Here she states that “queer” can refer to “the open mesh of



possibilities, gaps, overlaps, dissonances and resonances, lapses and excesses of meaning when the constituent elements of anyone's gender, of anyone's sexuality aren't made (or *can't* be made) to signify monolithically" (Sedgwick, 1993: 8). This description, one of three that she offers, clearly sees a moving away from the overly-restrictive terms of "gay", "lesbian", "bisexual" and others. These terms have had a pigeon-holing effect, resulting in individuals identifying themselves through a "best fit" scenario that is at odds with the realities of often-fluid human sexuality. The term "queer" ultimately seeks to avoid this, and is most often used to denote individuals or qualities that do not fit within the boundaries of heteronormativity. This has a two-fold effect. On the one hand, it removes the need for, and usage of, the restrictive identifiers of "gay", "lesbian", and so on, but on the other hand there is still a process of identification at work here: queerness clearly denotes anything other than heteronormativity, and is therefore a classification in itself.

The use of an over-arching term that is used to describe any sexual orientation or gender behaviour that is not heterosexual and/or heteronormative in place of the various categories of orientation that have been used for over a hundred years might, in the first instance, appear to be a step backwards rather than forwards. This in turn takes us back to the argument of normal versus abnormal, one which is not far removed from the terminology that will be referred to time and again within this thesis: natural versus unnatural. "Queer" is surely simply a term used for sexual and gender behaviour which does not fit within society's norms.

However, Foucault suggests that the naming of that behaviour in itself provides power:

There is no question that the appearance in nineteenth-century psychiatry, jurisprudence, and literature of a whole series of discourses on the species and subspecies of homosexuality, inversion, pederasty and 'psychic hermaphroditism' made possible a strong advance of social controls into this area of 'perversity'; but it also made possible the formation of a 'reverse' discourse: homosexuality began to speak in its own behalf, to demand that its legitimacy or 'naturalness' be acknowledged, often in the same vocabulary, using the same categories by which it was medically disqualified.

Foucault, 1976: 101

Foucault argues that the negativity of sexual discourse nonetheless involved a naming, calling into being the category of homosexuality and ultimately providing power to those on both sides of the arguments surrounding it. The term "queer", however, was not adopted by psychiatrists, the medical profession, and lawmakers, but by the queer community itself. This term, that was most often used as an abusive or negative term towards gays and lesbians just a couple of decades ago (and certainly when I was still at school), has been reclaimed by the very elements of society that were attacked by it, and that reclamation and the discourse surrounding it is in itself a symbol of power and unity, rejecting the negative place assigned to queerness as the "other" of heteronormativity.

It is important to make clear that the word "queer" is not used in connection to just sexual behaviour, and this is another way in which its meaning is different to that of "homosexual". Luhmann writes that "if heterosexuality commonly assumes a congruence among a sexed body, its gender identity, and its (different sex) object choice, homosexuality's only variation is that the object choice is same sex"

(Luhmann, 1998: 123n4). Therefore, homosexuality can, and most often, refers simply to the choice of same-sex partner, and rarely looks beyond that. She goes on to argue that the term “queer” allows for more than this: “Queer aims to spoil and transgress coherent (and essential) gender configurations and the desire for a neat arrangement for dichotomous sexual and gendered difference, central to both heterosexual and homosexual identities. But beyond suggesting gender fluidity, queer theory also insists on the complications of the two: without gender, sexuality is nothing” (Luhmann, 1998: 123). Gender and sexuality are combined and, as will be shown within my thesis, it is essential to keep this in mind when looking for and discussing queerness within film. It is not straightforward to pinpoint where a discussion of gender representation ends and one of sexuality begins. The *Dickson Experimental Sound Film* is therefore queer not because the two men dancing together are homosexual, but because they challenge and disrupt gender norms.

While this thesis is not heavily rooted in queer theory but is instead of a historical nature, concepts of queerness allow for a discussion not just of representations of sexuality, but also of the disruption of gender norms, and how one is inextricably linked to the other. Within this thesis, therefore, “queerness” refers to representations of sexuality or gender in film which challenges or in some way complicates our understanding of these areas and what would traditionally have been referred to as “normality”. It essentially includes depictions of both alternate sexualities and non-traditional gender roles and behaviour.

Queerness in this sense can be traced back much further than the beginning of the time frame of the films discussed in this thesis. For example, chapter three is based

around the notion of “romantic friendships” as discussed by Rotundo, a mostly middle-class phenomenon that developed in America during the 19<sup>th</sup> Century. Likewise, Axel Nissen (2009) traces the portrayal of romantic friendship in American fiction back to the work of Herman Melville. The romantic friendship is a key example of the “queer”, in that it is an intimate friendship between two young men that is passionate and often contains physical gestures, but rarely, if ever, crosses into sexual activity.<sup>2</sup> It is, therefore, behaviour which does not fall within the expected norms of either the male gender or heterosexuality, but is not homosexual in nature either. It is instead a disruption of the norm.

\* \* \*

This thesis is an examination of representations of male queerness and male-male intimacy in film from 1912 to 1934, comparing and contrasting those found in European and American cinema. The dates 1912 and 1934 may appear at first glance to be arbitrary, but they are significant within the world of film and/or social history. 1912 is the year of production of the earliest surviving film from America to contain a queer character. *Algie the Miner*, directed by Edward Warren, tells the story of an effeminate young man who is told by the Father of his beloved that he cannot marry her unless he becomes a “man” within a year. Algie heads off West, meets a number of burly cowboys who befriend him, and returns a year later ultra-masculine in order to marry the girl of his dreams. The film features the earliest known example in American film of what has become known as the sissy: a stock character which featured in American films for the first half of the twentieth century, and which has

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<sup>2</sup> The romantic friendship and what it entailed is discussed at length in chapter three.

been regarded by writers with a political agenda, such as Russo (1987), as a substitute for an explicitly homosexual character.<sup>3</sup> This is a view I challenge within this thesis by demonstrating that, when placing these characters within the context of the period and, most importantly, within contemporary discourses on masculinity and gender, it becomes clear that they are a reflection of changing attitudes towards *gender* as much as a representation of homosexuality.

1912 was also the year in which Hollywood became established as the new home of the American film industry. Williams writes that “movie production had arrived in Los Angeles in 1907. Chicago-based Selig Polyscope Company came, as did later movie crews, to avoid the bitter Eastern winters” (Williams, 2005: 57). Other companies not only came to avoid the cold winters and to make the use of the extra sunlight that Hollywood could provide, but also to be as far away as possible from the Patents War that was taking place (and the possible prosecution that went along with it) in the previous home of American cinema, New York:

The Patents War (1897-1908) began when Edison realized that ownership of the rights of this burgeoning medium was vital. ... He patented the sprocket holes in the film by which it was clawed through the camera. Anyone who wanted to use film with sprocket holes, which was everyone, had to pay Edison. Other film producers...were furious at this and many of them refused to pay.

Cousins, 2004: 41-42

The Biograph Film Company arrived in Hollywood in 1910, and in 1912 Vitagraph “bought twenty-nine acres of sheep-grazing land at the eastern end of Prospect, where

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<sup>3</sup> An examination of American early trade journals for this thesis has revealed that the first time the word “sissy” was used to describe a character was in relation to *Algie the Miner*.

they built a sprawling studio” (Williams, 2005: 62). Also in 1912, Nestor was “merged with a film company owned by German immigrant Carl Laemmle” (ibid), and Universal West Coast Studios (later simply Universal) was born. Therefore, while the year 1912 is pivotal to historians of queer cinema due to the production of *Algie the Miner*, it is also pivotal within the history of American cinema in general.

Meanwhile, in Europe, longer film forms were being experimented with during this period, especially in Italy. The longer films were soon to be taken up by American cinema. Although my work examines short films as well as feature-length movies, it is possible to view this period of the early 1910s as the time when cinema moved from its infancy into adulthood, aided and abetted by the use of the longer form, the move to Hollywood and the development of what might be called “film grammar” by directors such as D W Griffith.

The other end of the time frame discussed within this thesis is important for two reasons: Firstly, it was the year in which Hollywood’s self-regulation, The Production Code (or Hays Code), came into force. The “Hays Office” was part of an organisation formed in 1922 called the Motion Pictures Producers and Distributors of America (MPPDA). The organisation was formed after “the industry was rocked by a series of sensational scandals about the private lives of its stars, the most famous being the scandal involving Fatty Arbuckle. The dual forces of scandal and censorship forced the industry to unite under a common banner” (Black, 1989: 169). Arbuckle’s downfall took place following the death of a young starlet at a party at which he was present and implicated. While eventually found not guilty on all charges, Arbuckle was made the scapegoat for Hollywood’s supposed moral degradation. Not only were

there other scandals at the time such as the murder of director William Desmond Taylor, the mysterious death of rising star Olive Thomas, and the drug-related death of leading man Wallace Reid, there were also calls, particularly from church groups, for more censorship within the movies due to alleged immoral content.<sup>4</sup> The Production Code was “a doctrine of ethics that Hays commissioned a Jesuit priest and a Catholic publisher to write in 1930. Code enforcement had been fairly lax until 1933, when widespread criticism of excessive sex and violence in movies led the MPPDA’s board of directors...to sign a ‘Reaffirmation of Objectives’ of the Production Code.” (Schatz, 1989: 167). The Code was enforced the following year, with the Hays Office having the power to require cuts to films or scripts or, in extreme cases, to ban films outright. With the Code not permitting “sex perversion” on screen, a blanket term which encompassed homosexuality, the prevalence of queer representations in American cinema diminished significantly after 1934, although some instances still slipped through the net as filmmakers learned how to play and circumnavigate the system (see Barrios, 2003; Russo, 1987; and Benschhoff and Griffin, 2006). Despite the fact that the Production Code was at times worked around by directors and scriptwriters in order to include more adult material within films, the enforcement of the Code essentially saw the end of the often racy content of the films of the pre-Code era that had been used to attempt to lure the public back into the cinema during the Great Depression.

1934 was also significant from a European perspective. During the “liberal atmosphere of the Weimar Republic of the 1920s, Germany witnessed the flowering of homosexual

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<sup>4</sup> Newspaper reports in *The New York Times* and elsewhere intimated that Olive Thomas’s husband, Jack Pickford (brother of Hollywood’s golden girl Mary Pickford), was somehow involved with her death. This had taken place after she swallowed mercury bichloride, which had supposedly been prescribed to Jack for syphilis, although no evidence has yet been produced which proves he actually had syphilis at this time or later in his life. Pickford’s treatment by the press resulted in what could arguably be called the first “trial by media” of a film star.

life and culture” (Miller, 1995: 125). Berlin was the centre of European gay culture. Florence Tamagne writes that “there were a host of homosexual clubs and bars with their own distinct character, clientele and ambience” (Tamagne, 2006a: 38). She goes on to add that there were “at the same time meeting places, hangouts, private clubs, and conference halls” (ibid: 42). This was despite the fact that homosexual acts between men were illegal in Germany, and had been further criminalised in 1871. The liberal atmosphere within Weimar Germany paved the way for a number of gay and lesbian-themed films from the late 1910s until the early 1930s. These included an impassioned appeal for a decriminalisation of homosexual acts in *Anders als die Andern/Different from the Others* (Richard Oswald, 1919), a version of *Hamlet* (Svend Gade, 1921) starring Danish actress Asta Nielsen as a female Hamlet disguised as a man, and the lesbian-themed drama *Mädchen in Uniform/Girls in Uniform* (Leontine Sagan and Carl Froelich, 1931). In 1929, following nearly sixty years of campaigning against Paragraph 175 of German law, which criminalised homosexual acts, the Reichstag voted to repeal the law.<sup>5</sup> However, this repeal never came into place due to the Nazi’s rise to power. After Hitler seized power in 1933, “the homosexual bars were closed and all [gay] movements and magazines banned. This repression accelerated after the Night of the Long Knives the following year and the elimination of Ernst Röhm, a well-known homosexual” (Tamagne, 2006: 193). One year later, on June 28, 1935, “the language of Paragraph 175 was extended to include virtually any physical contact between men” (Miller, 1995: 220). Therefore, while Germany had produced more films with a homosexual or queer element than any other country during the 1920s and even into the early 1930s, no more were produced until

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<sup>5</sup> A full account of the fight for the repeal of Paragraph 175 and those personalities at the heart of the campaign, can be found in chapter one of this thesis.



*Anders Als Du und Ich/Bewildered Youth* (Veit Harlen, 1957) nearly 25 years later.<sup>6</sup> In the early sound era in Germany, the queer voice fell silent.

While the title of this thesis refers to a comparison between the films of “Europe” and America, the term “Europe” needs to be qualified. I have opted to examine the films of certain countries within Europe rather than those from the continent as a whole. There are two reasons for this. The first is that the countries I have chosen are all linked within the film industry. Germany could be called the centre of the European film industry during the 1910s and 1920s. Not only was it home to influential film movements such as German Expressionism, but the German film industry and those working within it had prospered when Germany had “closed its borders to foreign films in 1916 and this ban wasn’t lifted until 1920, so in the interim there was a protected market for indigenous filmmakers, which stimulated production considerably” (Cousins, 2004: 96). Economic considerations meant that German films were cheap to import and that Germany was a cheap place to make films. This resulted not only in Germany becoming a prolific and influential film producer, but also that filmmakers from other countries were influenced by German movies and went there to make films. These included such luminaries as Victor Sjöström from Sweden, Carl Theodor Dreyer from Denmark and Alfred Hitchcock from the UK. The films discussed within this thesis are therefore in the main from the countries involved in this film production network, namely Germany, Sweden, Denmark and the UK. There is the occasional exception to this, such as the discussion of the French *Zero de Conduite* (Jean Vigo, 1933) in chapter three, but this is the exception rather than the rule.

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<sup>6</sup> *Bewildered Youth* was the title of the American release of the film. The literal translation of the German is *Different from You and Me*.

The other consideration here is the rather more sobering fact that one can only work with the films that are available (and contemporary information on lost films), and the four European countries that I am centring my investigation on are those from which more relevant films appear to have survived. While it would have been fascinating to explore queerness in, for example, the films of Spain, Portugal or Poland, there simply does not appear to be enough films available for study at this time to have made that currently viable.<sup>7</sup> Moreover, those that *are* available do not seem to contain significant queer images for the most part. Of course, why this might be is worthy of investigation, but that is for a different time and a different project. The loss of the vast majority of silent films from both Europe and America is always going to be a hindrance to a research project such as this one and, unsurprisingly, there has been a great deal of frustration in not being able to view films due to their lost or incomplete status, or simply because there are not viewable prints even though the film itself may survive in archives or in private hands. Despite this, considerably more material is available now than in the past when previous explorations of queerness during this period of film history were written. Over the last two decades, a number of key films relating to this subject have been found and/or made available. These include the Clara Bow vehicle *Parisian Love* (Louis J Gasnier, 1925), the Thanhouser production of *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (Eugene Moore, 1915), Mauritz Stiller's *Vingarne/The Wings* (1916) which is based on Herman Bang's novel *Mikael*, and the re-edit of *Anders als die Andern* as found in the portmanteau film *Gesetz der Liebe/The Laws of Love* (Richard Oswald and Dr Magnus Hirschfeld, 1927).<sup>8</sup> Access to these and other films have allowed for a fuller understanding to develop, and for a more detailed picture of

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<sup>7</sup> This does not mean there are no queer images or characters at all in the films from these countries during this period. For example, research for this thesis revealed an extant Portuguese comedy about transvestism, *Rita ou Rito?* (Reinaldo Ferreira, 1927).

<sup>8</sup> Many thanks to Ned Thanhouser and The Swedish National Archive of Recorded Sound and Moving Images (SLBA) for making available prints of *The Picture of Dorian Gray* and *Vingarne* respectively.

representations of queerness during this period to emerge than has been possible before. Whereas previous examinations of this subject area have effectively been a study of individual titles, the new materials available for this research has allowed for trends within queer representations to be visible for the first time. Where films remain lost and/or unavailable, whenever possible, an understanding of the film and its contents has been constructed using contemporary film reviews and articles from newspapers, magazines and trade journals as well as press books, posters, lobby cards, postcards and other publicity materials.

While to date there has been no published full-length study of queer representations in film of the silent and early sound era, that is not to say that no work has been done in this area before. Vito Russo's ground-breaking *The Celluloid Closet*, first published in 1981 and then revised in 1987, contains a significant discussion on (mostly) American films from this period. Russo was one of the first to piece together a history of gay and lesbian representation on the big screen, and his work stands today as a who's who of queer characters in films from the 1890s until the 1980s. While Russo clearly wrote with his own political agenda, his research and study of gays and lesbians on screen has been the foundation upon which later researchers have built their own work, despite the obvious issue of many films not being made available for his research. For example, Richard Barrios's 2003 book *Screened Out*, which covers the period from the dawn of cinema until Stonewall, builds on, updates, and elaborates on Russo's seminal work, including an examination of many films that were not discussed in Russo's book. Meanwhile Richard Dyer's book *Now You See It* (1990, updated 2003) concentrates on films made by homosexuals *about* homosexuals and its opening chapter discusses films made in Weimar Germany, with the revised edition also

dedicating a chapter to the discussion of the then-recently found *Vingarne*. Alice A Kuzniar's book *The Queer German Cinema* (2000) also contains an opening chapter on the films of Weimar Cinema, with many of those pages filled with a discussion of cross-dressing films featuring women in drag which were popular in Germany during this period.

Of the writers mentioned above, only Kuzniar attempts to refrain from transplanting modern ideas and information onto films from the past. As my work will show, views of sexuality were very different eighty to a hundred years ago and, while it can be argued that men and women in Germany during this period may well have thought of themselves as homosexual (or an equivalent term from the period), at the same time in America there was little or no concept of sexual orientation within heterosexual society - although, as I will argue later, there is evidence of an understanding of orientation or sub-cultural identification amongst homosexuals themselves.<sup>9</sup> Bearing this in mind, this thesis allows us to investigate what the films considered tell us about the times and culture in which they were made.

Many of these films, or moments in them, that have been regarded as “gay” by previous writers will be shown to represent something rather different when placed within the social, political and scientific context in which they were made. For example, the much-discussed climactic kiss that Charles “Buddy” Rogers gives the dying Richard Arlen in *Wings* (William Wellman, 1927) will be shown not to be the eventual declaration of a homosexual subtext which had supposedly been bubbling just

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<sup>9</sup> See Miller, 1995: 13-29; Dyer, 1990b; Ramsey, 2008; and Brand, 1925 for accounts of thought on sexuality in Germany during this period, and Grant, 2004; and Chauncey, 1994 for equivalent information for America. Full accounts are also given in chapters one and two of this thesis respectively.

below the surface of the film, but an expression of the trend for romantic friendships between young men which had taken place in America during the nineteenth century and had re-emerged during the terrors of World War I. Likewise, while Richard Dyer makes a case for *Vingarne* being the most overtly homosexual of the two silent film versions of Herman Bang's novel *Mikael* (see Dyer, 2003: 11-12), he does so by transplanting extraneous information about the sexuality of the director, actors and writer on to the film itself – information that contemporary audiences were unlikely to have been aware of. Bearing this in mind, if audiences were not aware of this information, would they have viewed and/or read the film in the same way? By already knowing that the director was gay and that one of the actors was bisexual, we are already primed to make a different reading of the film than if we approached the text without such information. Similar issues arise when transplanting of a modern term such as “homosexual” on to films from America during the 1920s when evidence suggests that sexual orientation was an idea given little credence there at the time. This is a legitimate current reading, but not appropriate to the time of release.

This thesis will argue that representations of sexuality and gender during this period are often melded together in such a way to make them inseparable. Where a discussion or representation of one ends and the other begins is often difficult to determine, and this is for the most part linked with what appears to be a misunderstanding or oversimplification of these areas in past writings on film of this period. For example, Russo suggests that the sissy character in films of the 1920s were read (or to be read) as homosexual characters by audiences (Russo, 1987: 16-17), and yet an exploration of issues regarding gender of the period (and contemporary reviews) shows that the sissy was often a reflection not of fears of homosexuality but fears of an erosion of

traditional masculinity. While these two things might be thematically linked, they are not one and the same. Therefore it was always going to be essential within this thesis to discuss representations of male queerness rather than simply masculinity *or* homosexuality, and this is an issue which recurs throughout my work.

These issues are at the heart of this thesis. The examination of these films within their historical context has provided some startling information. The title of this thesis refers to both queerness *and* male-male intimacy, with the inclusion of this latter term a direct result of my findings. It is important to understand that these two terms are not interchangeable. I use “male-male intimacy” throughout this thesis to refer to friendships and relationships that are not sexual in nature. There are a number of cases where earlier readings of a film, or group of films, have resulted in the application of the term “gay” or “gay-themed” or of “gay interest”, with *Wings* being an obvious example. By contrast, my research suggests that the designation of such film texts and/or characters as “gay-themed” involves overlooking historical context. Many films of supposed “gay interest” are, I argue, more accurately read as representative of romantic friendships or buddy friendships common during the period and not sexual in nature at all. They, therefore, include representations of queer characters or relationships, not homosexual ones. This thesis, therefore, is not a gay character-finding mission, but one which often involves the re-examination of texts already established (in some cases, mistakenly) as part of the queer canon.

A number of scholars have seen this contextualisation of films as important. In his work on *All Quiet on the Western Front* (Lewis Milestone, 1930), John Whiteclay Chambers II discusses the importance of viewing film as an historical artefact (1994).

While he is specifically talking about what film tells us about the First World War, his comments and questions are just as applicable to a discussion of what film tells us about sexuality and gender during this period. He asks “how much of a window does film provide into the past? (In examining historical films...this means both the era in which the film was produced...and the historical era portrayed)” and, more importantly, “what relationships do films have to cultural constructs?” (Chambers, 1994: 377). These are important questions and themes that underpin my own thesis. The films will be examined in a way that will allow them to provide us with important information about how sexuality and gender were viewed at the time in which the films were made and within the culture in which they were made – and also the reverse: how does information about the period in which they were produced help us to read these films in the way they were intended rather than from a modern viewpoint?

While previous examinations of representations of queerness within this period of filmmaking have centred on *either* films made in Europe or those made in America, this thesis is a comparison of both. By viewing the films from these two continents side by side, it is not only possible to understand the differences in representation but also *why* there were differences and how, why and when the culture from one area started to influence the other. By the turn of the twentieth century, there were already vast differences in the way what we today call homosexuality was viewed in America and Europe.

In Britain in the spring of 1895, just a few months before the Lumière brothers gave the first public screening of film to paying customers, the trials of Oscar Wilde were taking place for gross indecency. Just five years later when Wilde died, newspaper

reports show that attitudes in Britain towards Wilde and his fate had become considerably more lenient in a relatively short space of time. The obituary in *The Times* newspaper is remarkably sympathetic both to Wilde, his transgressions and his work. The article refers to the “once brilliant man of letters” who was “exiled from his country and from the society of his countrymen” (anon, 1900a: 8), and that “the verdict that a jury passed upon his conduct at the Old Bailey in May, 1895, destroyed forever his reputation, and condemned him to ignoble obscurity” (ibid). There are suggestions here of Wilde as a victim, rather than as the guilty party. For example, note how the writer of the obituary does not state that Wilde was exiled from *the* country, but from *his* country, suggesting that he had a right to live there. His plays are spoken of with fondness, with the anonymous writer talking of their “paradoxical humour” and “witty sayings” (ibid), and even that one of the plays had been revived in London, although “not at a West-end theatre” (ibid). Even so, the fact that there was a call for Wilde’s work just five years after his downfall goes some way to suggest that he was either forgiven by many or, perhaps, more understood.

1897 saw the publication of a work by British sexologist Havelock Ellis entitled *Sexual Inversion* and both he and another British sexologist, Edward Carpenter, tried to “combine an understanding of homosexuality and its causes with a plea for toleration of homosexuals” (Miller, 1995: 22). Whether the writings and teachings of these men (and those such as Dr Magnus Hirschfeld from Germany, a figure who is discussed at length in chapter one) had an effect on the changing attitudes towards Wilde is unclear, but certainly the obituary in *The Times* is considerably more sympathetic to Wilde than that published in America in *The New York Times*, which is remarkably bitter. Referring to how Wilde was caricatured by Punch and W S Gilbert, the writer of the



article states that “the advertising he received was just what he wanted” (anon, 1900b: 1). When referring to his first play, *Lady Windermere’s Fan*, the article says that it was performed in New York “without setting the town ablaze” and that its “plot was antique and its stagecraft insufficient. But its insincerity and diffusiveness were not to be denied” (ibid). *A Woman of No Importance* is referred to as “a play of no importance”, and Wilde’s plays are said to have suffered in general from his “lack of sincerity and his inability to master the technical side of play-writing” (ibid). Of his trial and downfall, the writer of the article states that Wilde had “exercised an evil influence” and that the evidence “shocked the civilised world”, before going on to say that he became “the most despised of social outcasts” (ibid). If Europe had slowly been becoming more tolerant and understanding of homosexuality, then the opposite appears to have been the case in America. When one of Dr Magnus Hirschfeld’s colleagues gave a talk on homosexuality in America in 1906, he was met with derision both from lawyers and doctors. He wrote later that year about such incidents, stating that America was a place where “educated people are so stupid” (Spengler, 1906: 381).

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My thesis is split into two parts: the first outlines the cultural and scientific thought on homosexuality and masculinity in Europe and America respectively before examining key cinematic texts to demonstrate how the views of the period were translated to the screen. The second half of the thesis consists of explorations of three groups of films, each linked by theme or genre, and how the cinemas of America and Europe approached these in different ways, and what the films tell us about views of sexuality and masculinity during this period. Essentially, therefore, the first part explores how

cultural and scientific thought was translated to the screen, whereas the second part is almost the opposite of this: what do these films tell us about contemporary culture that history books currently do not. The first part re-examines general trends within the American and European cinemas, whereas the second part builds upon this and allows for a more detailed discussion of three different groups of films. This thesis is therefore underpinned by the notion that film can be viewed as a historical document and can be examined as such. In both parts, discussions of previously unavailable cinematic texts allowing us to build a clearer picture of queer representations during this period than has hitherto been possible.

The first chapter concerns itself with an exploration of European thought on homosexuality during the first part of the twentieth century, before exploring films which were influenced by theories of the period. The chapter primarily centres on Germany for a number of reasons. Firstly, it was from Germany that much of the scientific thought on homosexuality originated directly before and during this period. Dr Magnus Hirschfeld believed in what became known as the “third sex theory” (a male homosexual was a woman’s soul in a man’s body, and a female homosexual was the opposite of this), whereas Adolf Brand and his followers believed in, and championed, a style of love between friends based on the Ancient Greek model. Despite their professional and personal differences, both men spent many years seeking a change in the law so as to decriminalise homosexual acts between men.

The second reason for Germany being at the heart of this chapter is that it allows me to contextualise my work in relation to previous scholarship (Dyer, 2003; Kuzniar, 2000). Whereas some work has taken place exploring how the thinking of Hirschfeld was

translated on to film, less has been done on how the philosophies of Brand were reflected within cinematic texts, and this opening chapter seeks to rectify this, and thus give a fuller understanding of how thought on homosexuality fed into European cinema of the time.

The second chapter deals with American views on homosexuality during the same period and how these were inextricably linked to those of gender and masculinity. The view of homosexuality in America at the time was very different to that in Germany and some other parts of Europe. Whereas Hirschfeld's theories saw homosexuality as a natural phenomenon rather than an object choice, in America the idea of a sexual orientation was not commonplace. A man (or woman) was not viewed as homosexual; he or she simply committed homosexual acts. This chapter explores how America was seen to be going through a masculinity crisis during this period – prompted in part by the First World War which saw men shipped overseas to do battle, and women taking their place in the workplace. I also explore how immigrants (particularly Italian and Mexican) were viewed as a threat to traditional American masculinity, and how the late 1910s and 1920s saw a change in the type of leading man in American film from the well-built or rough, tough stars such as Lon Chaney, Douglas Fairbanks or Victor MacLaglen, to the more boy-next-door type epitomised by the likes of Charles “Buddy” Rogers, Ben Lyon and Ramon Novarro – with Rudolph Valentino acting as a kind of pivot between the two differing types of actors.

The chapter then explores what has become known as the “sissy” character, and shows that this was as much a reflection of the masculinity crisis as it was a way to portray homosexuals on the screen. I also suggest that these characters should be viewed as

two distinct groups, “sissies” and “fops”, and that the characters and how they acted and dressed were quite different from each other and reflected different groups of people in American society at that time. I also challenge the notion that the sissy and the fop were intended to be viewed as homosexual, as this is a case of transferring modern day ideas on to texts from eighty or ninety years ago. How could these characters be standing-in for homosexuals when the medical and scientific professions in America at that time didn’t recognise homosexuality as a lifestyle, other than as separate homosexual acts? Whilst prior work has taken place on both the masculinity crisis and the prominence of the sissy character on film, little effort has been made to tie these two strands together or to suggest that they are interconnected. This second chapter of the thesis does this for possibly the first time, and is aided and abetted by a study of contemporary critical responses to the sissy in trade journals and newspaper reviews. This has allowed for a more comprehensive understanding of the history of the character and its reception than has been available before. Also of importance is a discussion of a recently discovered film featuring the sissy that pre-dates the previous earliest example by six years.

The first two chapters explore general trends in the cinemas of Europe and America, but the second half of my thesis examines how these two cinemas approach queer representation and/or male-male intimacy differently when compared in like-for-like films. The third chapter, which opens the second part of this thesis, explores the notion of the male romantic friendship of the nineteenth century which was popular in the United States. It re-examines films in order to demonstrate how certain relationships within them could and should be viewed as a reflection of this type of friendship rather than one of homosexuality. The chapter takes as its starting point an article on male

romantic friendships by Rotundo (1989), and suggests that, despite Rotundo writing that this style of friendship died out at the end of the nineteenth century, they flourished once again on the battlefields of the First World War as the same circumstances were replicated (moving away from family, living in close proximity to other young men, lack of female companionship or mother figure). In light of this, I then re-examine the aforementioned climactic kiss during Richard Arlen's death scene in *Wings*, which has hitherto been viewed in purely homosexual terms, and place it within the context of the romantic friendship. Following this, an exploration is made of romantic friendships in films set in schools, colleges or military academies, settings which allow the romantic friendship to flourish. The chapter then turns its attention to similar friendships in European films, and demonstrate how Brand's view of homosexuality is not all that far removed from the relationships that Rotundo describes. A number of European films with equivalent settings to those from America are examined, including Vigo's *Zero de Conduité* (1933) and, for the first time with regards to queerness, a 1916 British film adaptation of *Tom Brown's Schooldays* (Rex Wilson, 1916).<sup>10</sup>

The discussion of the romantic friendship is then built upon in chapter four by following it through into the portrayal of buddy friendships in war films of the period. The chapter begins by outlining how and why buddy friendships are different to romantic friendships before going on to examine instances of them in American war films of the late 1920s and early 1930s. In turning to the European war films of the same period, one finds that these relationships between men – and even fully-rounded characters or an existence beyond the war itself – are non-existent. The buddy

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<sup>10</sup> Many thanks to the British Film Institute for making this film available for viewing.

friendship is also hard to find in the first wave of the Hollywood war film which took place in the late 1910s. This leads to an examination of why these relationships are only present in American films of the 1920s and early 1930s, and not in earlier films or those from Europe. In order to do this, a study is made of how the public discourse on the Great War changed following the publication of war poetry and memoirs, and the affect writers and directors who had actually served in the war had on the Hollywood war film.

The fifth and final chapter finds attention being shifted to the horror film, a genre about which little has been written prior to the production of *Dracula* (Tod Browning, 1931). The chapter takes a detailed look at the “queer monster”. This is a term I am using to describe either a supernatural or human monster who attempts to come between the heterosexual couple at the heart of the film, and therefore keep the male protagonist for himself *or* one that can be seen to be attempting to spread queerness as a form of contagion – a fear commonly expressed in magazines and newspapers in America during this period. The chapter is split into two parts, with the first examining human monsters who attempt to come between the heterosexual couple. Here I analyse a number of films, including *White Zombie* (Victor Halperin, 1932) and *The Most Dangerous Game* (Irving Pichel and Ernest Schoedsack, 1932). The second section looks at the phenomenon of the *doppelganger* or “double” through an examination of four silent film adaptations of *Dr Jeckyll and Mr Hyde* and the surviving fragment of an early adaptation of *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. Also explored is how horror is distinct from other genres in that the European and American influences overlap due not only to the adoption of each other’s styles, but also due to the source material of the American films often being European novels and vice versa.

Previous writings on queerness and film history have largely concentrated on how filmmakers circumvented the Production Code that came into force in 1934. As will be seen in the following pages, this thesis provides a detailed analysis of queerness in film prior to that, not only in America but also in Europe and, in doing so, provides a much needed insight into the origins of queer representation and how these films relate to the period in which they were made.

## PART ONE



## Chapter One

### Seen But Not Heard: Representations of Gay Men in European Cinema, 1916-28

#### Introduction

By the time of the birth of cinema in the mid-1890s, Germany had become home to what was effectively the world's first gay-rights movement. In the 1860s, Karl Heinrich Ulrichs had coined the term *urnings* to describe what would today be called a gay man. The word derives from a description in Plato's *Symposium* of the birth of Aphrodite, the goddess of sexuality, in which Uranus is castrated by his son, Kronos, who then throws the genitals into the air behind him. Hansen writes that "the severed organ hurtles through the air...[and] settles finally on the waters of the sea; in time foam issuing from the organ surrounds it, and within the foam a girl coalesces" (Hansen 2000: 1). Ulrichs, like the sexologist Magnus Hirschfeld who would follow two decades later, was a believer in what was termed the "third sex" theory, the belief in which "became quite widespread in Germany and throughout Europe in the first decades of the twentieth century" (Miller, 1995: 14). Richard Dyer sums up this theory as the belief that "a man was a heterosexual man, a woman a heterosexual woman, and it followed that people who were not heterosexual were therefore neither

one thing nor the other, neither a real man nor a real woman but something in-between” (Dyer 2003: 33). Ulrichs believed that homosexuality was a result of an event during pregnancy. At the time, it was believed that embryos possessed both male and female sexual organs, losing one as it developed during pregnancy. Neil Miller writes that Ulrichs “theorized that male homosexuality came about when the embryo shed the female sex organ, but the same change did not occur in the part of the brain that regulates the sex drive” (Miller, 1995: 14). What is key here is that both Ulrichs and Hirschfeld believed that homosexuality was the result of nature, and not nurture, albeit still viewed as a departure from the norm. Ulrichs used this belief as the basis for his appeal to the Reichstag in 1870 by which he hoped to liberate *urnings* from penal law. In the process he also identified a category of sexual identity rather than emphasising sexual behaviours. In this appeal, he stated: “in all creation, no other living creature endowed with sexual feeling is required to engage in life-long suppression of this powerful drive, causing it to consume itself in cruel self-martyrdom” (Ulrichs, 1870: 64). However, despite Ulrich’s eloquent and heartfelt appeal, in 1871 homosexual acts between men were further criminalised both within Germany and throughout the German Empire via what became known as Paragraph 175. This stated that “unnatural vice committed by two persons of the male sex or by people with animals is to be punished by imprisonment; the verdict may also include the loss of civil rights” (Blasius and Phelan, 1997: 63). The use of the word “unnatural” in the legislation seems almost purposefully at odds with Ulrich’s theories which claimed that homosexuality was as natural as heterosexuality. Both the term “unnatural” and the arguments that underpin it would be used for much of the 20<sup>th</sup> century by lawmakers and anti-gay protestors alike.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Conversely, naturalness became a key rhetorical trope for gay campaigners. (See Stacey, 1991: 284-

It is worth noting that the linking of homosexuality with bestiality in this law was not unusual at the time; homosexuality and bestiality were associated legally in other European countries. For example, the Swedish Penal Code of 1864, like Paragraph 175 in Germany, refers to homosexual acts and acts of bestiality together and with the same punishments applicable. Chapter 18, section 10 stated that “anyone who commits fornication against nature with another person, and anyone who commits fornication with animals shall be sentenced to up to two years’ hard labor” (Rydstrom: 2003, 29). As Rydstrom comments, this law “brings together sexual acts with animals and sexual acts ‘against nature’, suggesting that these different activities were merely different aspects of ‘unnatural’ sexuality” (ibid). It is also significant that homosexual acts are referred to here as “unnatural” in the same way that they would be in German law just seven years later. The most significant difference between the laws of the two countries is that Swedish law “did not outlaw same-sex sexuality for many hundreds of years, but only bestiality” (Rydstrom, 2003: 30).

In Germany, building on Ulrich’s efforts, Dr Magnus Hirshfeld began his campaign for the repeal of Paragraph 175 in the 1880s, and in 1897 founded the Wissenschaftlich-humanitäres Komitee/Scientific-Humanitarian Committee to this specific end. Although he gave advice to people with all kinds of sexual problems and diseases, the Committee “initially formulated as its primary goal the repeal of §175” (Steakley, 1997: 139). It was not just in Germany that laws prohibiting homosexuality were strengthened during the latter decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. For example, in 1885, British law had also been extended so that now *any* sexual relations

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between men were outlawed rather than just the act of sodomy itself. This became popularly known, until its repeal in 1967, as the “blackmailer’s charter”. The issue of blackmailing would feature significantly as a plot element in a number of films and other texts which argued for a relaxation of the law. The prevalence of blackmail was also one of the major arguments Hirschfeld used against the validity and efficacy of Paragraph 175 in his 1897 appeal to the Reichstag. In the course of this appeal, he claimed that that the law “has not helped to ‘cure’ homosexuals, but ... has made many courageous and useful human beings desperate and guilty. And in some cases, this law was and is responsible for madness and suicide” (Hirschfeld, 1897: 136). This appeal, and all later attempts by Hirschfeld, was unsuccessful, with the exception of a vote for reform in 1929. Blasius and Phelan write that “in 1929, socialist and communist Reichstag delegates voted to reform Paragraph 175, but this proposal was scathingly denounced by the burgeoning Nazi Party, which repudiated Weimar culture as decadent and promised to wipe out homosexuality” (Blasius and Phelan, 1997: 134). Hirschfeld left Germany for a world tour in 1930, never to return. He died in Paris in 1935, just over a year after watching newsreel images showing the destruction of his Sexual Institute and the burning of its library by the Nazis.

Filmmakers in both Germany and the UK would go on to use cinema in their fight to repeal the laws outlawing homosexual acts, with the films *Anders als die Andern/Different from the Others* (Richard Oswald, 1919) and *Victim* (Basil Dearden, 1961) both tackling the issue via the continuing problem of blackmail even though they were made some four decades apart. Both films were produced during a context of political and/or social change. The origins of *Anders als die Andern* will be discussed fully later in this chapter, but it is worth noting here Hirschfeld’s

involvement in the project as co-writer and performer. This involvement meant that many of the ideas and theories he had been publishing and lecturing on since the 1890s were included here in a film which could be described as his most public of lectures. The production of *Victim* took place a few years after the publication in Britain of the Wolfenden Report, which recommended that committing a homosexual act in private should not be regarded as a criminal offence. During the late 1950s, British cinema had also sounded out public reaction to the subject of homosexuality in films such as *Serious Charge* (Terence Young, 1959) and *The Trials of Oscar Wilde* (Ken Hughes, 1960) before producing *Victim*, a film with a fully-fledged gay storyline. Of course, it is not just against these laws that film has historically been used as a campaigning tool. Social issues were regularly addressed during the silent and early sound era by films ranging from *Intolerance* (D W Griffith, 1916) and the “My Forgotten Man” sequence which closes *Gold Diggers of 1933* (Mervyn LeRoy, 1933) in America, to *Prostitutka/Prostitute* (Oleg Frelikh, 1927) in the Soviet Union and *Berg-Ejvind och Hans Hustru/The Outlaw and his Wife* (Victor Sjostrom, 1918) in Sweden, a film which criticised the country’s poor laws.<sup>12</sup>

Though Hirschfeld’s name is recognisable today due to his work for gay rights, there was also a second, distinct gay movement in Germany during the same period. This was known as the *Gemeinschaft der Eigenen/Community of the Self-Owned*, and was headed by German author Adolf Brand. Brand and his followers believed in what Glenn Ramsey calls an “older, nationalistic aesthetic of classical male eros or *Freundesliebe* (‘friend-love’ between males)” (Ramsey, 2008: 89). Ramsey goes on to say that the *Community of the Self-Owned* “insisted on a broad cultural and

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<sup>12</sup> For more information on the use of film as a campaigning tool see Smith, 2010: 13-30 and Mellencamp, 2002: 65-76.

aesthetic program of promoting classical Hellenism in the service of its model of erotic male comradeship, in which pederasty played a key note” (ibid). Brand was also the founder and editor of the world’s first gay journal, *Der Eigene*, which was devoted to fiction, articles, photographs and drawings which celebrated Brand’s concept of homosexuality. The journal ran intermittently from 1896 until 1932. Brand’s opinion of what a homosexual man should be and how he should act led him to author a number of attacks on Hirschfeld’s theories and the more effeminate (and often extrovert) gay men with whom he associated. In contrast to Hirschfeld, Brand and his followers were advocates of a teacher-pupil model of male/male relationships. The love of an older man for a younger one, the sort of relationship advocated by Brand, had been spoken about by Oscar Wilde during his infamous trials during the spring of 1895. To this extent Brand provided a model of same-sex relations which had a defined public presence. Significantly it is this relationship model which is portrayed in the majority of the films examined in this chapter.

The existence of both Hirschfeld’s Scientific-Humanitarian Committee and Brand’s Community of the Self-Owned, suggests that opinion in Germany was split within the homosexual population itself at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. As Ramsey writes:

male same-sex desire had largely fallen into the two discursive paradigms of either homoerotic sociality among males who claimed to be more or less bisexual or a third-sexed, psychic hermaphroditism, where male physical sex characteristics were believed to cohabit with a feminine mental constitution.

Ramsey, 2008: 89

Correspondingly, one would expect that films produced in Germany and elsewhere in

Europe which featured gay characters during the silent and early sound periods would be influenced by either Hirschfeld's *or* Brand's theories, and yet a closer examination reveals that many were actually influenced by *both*. In this chapter, therefore, I will argue that the division in popular opinion on homosexuality in turn generated an almost schizophrenic portrayal of gay males within European films of the 1910s and 1920s. In developing this argument, I will concentrate on five European films: *Vingarne* (Mauritz Stiller, 1916), a Swedish film, and *Anders als die Andern* (1919), *Michael* (Carl Theodor Dreyer, 1924), the documentary *Wege zu Kraft und Schönheit/Ways to Strength and Beauty* (Nicholas Kaufman and Wilhelm Prager, 1925) and *Geschlecht in Fesseln/Sex in Chains* (Wilhelm Dieterle, 1928), all four of which are German in origin. By looking specifically at characterisation in these works (along with elements such as performance, costuming, narrative and intertitles), I will demonstrate the high degree to which scientific and social theories influenced films from mainland Europe. Although connections between European film and the work of Hirschfeld have been drawn before by scholars such as Dyer (2003) and Kuzniar (2000), relatively little has been written about the influence of Brand's relationship model on these films. It is the links between European film, the work of Hirschfeld and the philosophies of Brand which I will discuss in detail in this chapter. This analysis is both productive in its own terms and also allows an examination of the contrasting attitudes in American films of the same period which is developed in the next chapter. Unlike previous readings of these films, I will attempt to separate these texts from extraneous information and modern conceptions of sexuality and gender. This will allow for an exploration of how these films were understood by audiences on initial release.

The question needs to be addressed as to why, in a thesis which explores comparisons between the films of *Europe* and America, and not just *Germany* and America, so much of this first chapter dwells on the output of just one country. To begin, much of the previous academic work on European queer silent cinema has concentrated solely on German film, and so to put my work in the context of what has gone before, it is important to revisit with fresh eyes the quintet of films which could now perhaps be classed as the “core works” of European gay silent film. That four of these works originate from Germany should come as no surprise considering the period in history with which we are dealing. Germany and, in particular, Berlin could be classed as the gay capital of the world during the late 1910s and 1920s. Despite the fact that homosexual acts between men were still against the law in Germany, the more liberal Weimar Republic became home to gay men from all countries who wanted to experience the vibrant night life and gay community.

Bearing all of this in mind it is perhaps unsurprising that it was Germany which had the biggest output of films with queer characters within Europe, and that it was German culture and German cinema which often influenced the films of other countries which contained representations of gay men or women. For example, it is impossible to view *Prostitutka*, a film about the issue of prostitution in the Soviet Union, as anything other than an extension of the series of films dealing with pressing social issues (*Aufklärungsfilm*) which *Anders als die Andern* was a part of. Indeed, in 1927 *Anders als die Andern* was re-edited and formed a segment of a portmanteau film by Hirschfeld entitled *Gesetz der Liebe/The Laws of Love*. It was a Russian print of this segment of *Gesetz der Liebe* which provided us with the fragments of *Anders als die Andern* that we have today. That this film was shown in Russia at around the



time that social conscience films were being made there suggests an influence of the German films. Likewise, the cross-dressing killer Handel Fane in Alfred Hitchcock's *Murder* (1930) seems likely to have been influenced by the director's visits to Berlin nightspots during his period working in Germany during the early to mid-1920s. It can therefore be argued that the films of other European countries which featured gay representations during this period were likely to have been influenced by German culture, German cinema and thus, by default, both Dr Magnus Hirschfeld and Adolph Brand.

### ***Anders als die Andern: A Rallying Cry***

Produced in 1919, *Anders als die Andern* is probably the best known German film of the silent period to feature gay characters, despite the fact that it only survives in fragmented form. It was designed, in Alice Kuzniar's words, as "an educational film that valiantly defended homosexual rights and pleaded for sympathy for men who, unable to alter their natures, were blackmailed" (Kuzniar 2000: 27). The film was made as part of a series of *Aufklärungsfilm*, or "enlightenment films", others of which dealt with health and social issues such as venereal disease, abortion and prostitution. This was a "genre with which Oswald was particularly associated, possibly even being its inventor" (Dyer 2003: 29).<sup>13</sup> With the film being part of this series, homosexuality was clearly positioned within a social problem discourse, and yet it is more complex than this. While the film is critical of the contemporary legal situation, it is not *uncritical* of the lifestyle led by some gay men, and yet suggests that one is the result of the other – a kind of unavoidable vicious circle. In other words, if the law stopped

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<sup>13</sup> It should be emphasised that Oswald did not specialise solely in this type of film. He was a prolific director in a variety of genres and one of the first directors to use the portmanteau structure in films such as *Hoffmann's Erzählungen/Hoffmann's Tales* (1916) and *Unheimliche Geschichten/Weird Tales* (1919).

causing gay men to go into hiding and keep their sexuality a secret, then perhaps the more socially unacceptable elements of gay life, such as cottaging, would be unnecessary.

State censorship of films had been a feature of German cinema since 1906. Following the end of World War I, state censorship was abandoned only to be reinstated just eighteen months later, on May 12, 1920. Significantly, *Anders als die Andern* was produced during the short period in which state censorship was dropped, allowing for a more realistic portrayal of homosexuality than would have been permissible either before or after.

The film tells the story of a famous violinist, Paul Körner, played by Conrad Veidt, who falls in love with one of his pupils, Kurt Sivers. Paul is subsequently blackmailed by a man named Franz Bollek, but, after a period of time, is unwilling to give him yet more money. Kurt runs away, but Bollek goes to the police to report Paul as an active homosexual and both he and Paul are sent to prison: one for blackmail, the other for being gay. The scandal results in Paul's concert engagements being cancelled and he is shunned by those who know him. Realising that his life as he knew it is over, he commits suicide. Vito Russo writes of this scenario:

And so the very first gay man to be presented on film ended in the obligatory suicide that would mark the fate of screen gays for years to come. The suicide of Veidt and the images of blackmail presaged the fate of American screen characters who would suffer for their sexuality in like manner when the U.S. cinema reached a similar starting point almost fifty years later.

Russo, 1987: 21

To some extent Russo misses the point. American cinema was not alone in this tendency to supply gay characters with tragic endings. Indeed, in each of the four narrative films discussed in this chapter, at least one of the gay characters die – two by committing suicide and two by natural causes. However, while Russo is right to draw attention to the film as the first of many to feature the death of a gay character, he does not appear to acknowledge the significance of this within the immediate context of *Anders als die Andern*'s production and release. Specifically, Oswald's film was intended to highlight the plight of gay men in Germany as a result of Paragraph 175. As such, a positive end to the film would have been counter-productive. If gay men were in a position to live happy lives and have relationships with other men without fear, then there would have been no need to make the film. Thus its status as a campaigning film needs to be acknowledged when judging the narrative.<sup>14</sup>

Support for this view is given by the fact that Magnus Hirschfeld appears as himself in the film (as he did in some of the other *Aufklärungsfilm*), being the sexologist to whom Paul sends a female admirer in order to have his position explained, when he feels unable to tell her the truth about himself. A lecture by Hirschfeld was also included in the film, based on those he gave regularly regarding his theories of the third sex. The sexologist is also credited as the co-writer of the film, although the extent of his input on the screenplay is unclear.

Shortly after the film was released, state cinematic censorship was reintroduced in Germany. *Anders als die Andern* was singled out as one of the reasons for this move following a number of riots in cinemas where it had been shown. The censors

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<sup>14</sup> As we shall see later in this chapter, the character of Paul Körner was *not* the first on-screen gay character to die for the love of another man. That distinction goes to the artist, Zoret, in the Swedish film, *Vingarne*.

declared the film a danger to the German *Volk* as a means of seduction to homosexual acts among youth and as threatening the further spread of homosexuality through propaganda. The censor's verdict also denied scientific merit in the film's treatment of the topic, calling it misleading, since Paragraph 175 prohibited acts but not sexual desire in itself

Ramsey, 2008: 91

The reasons for the film's ban are rather strange considering the actual content of the film, as they suggest that the narrative and characters within it somehow make a homosexual life appealing, which is far from the truth. In a film where none of the homosexual characters live happy lives, the suggestion that it encourages people to somehow "turn" homosexual seems ludicrous. An article in a Hamburg newspaper reflects this, stating that "the suffering of those with abnormal feelings are so shockingly depicted that the effect is harshly deterring" (L.B., 1919). While the film was effectively prohibited in mainstream distribution, it was ruled that the film could still be shown "to doctors and those concerned with medicine in places of learning and scientific institutions" (Lamprecht, cited in Dyer 2003: 26). This decision is clearly at odds with the censor's view that the film lacked "scientific merit", suggesting a contradictory official stance and scientific uncertainty with respect to homosexuality in the period.

The film was heavily re-edited and re-released in 1927 as a segment of *Gesetze der Liebe* (Richard Oswald and Magnus Hirschfeld, 1927). It is this edited footage which survives today and has been used to reconstruct the original version of the film with the aid of production stills and explanatory intertitles to replace the lost footage. The unusual history of *Anders als die Andern* has led to a number of confusions over the

years, with writers such as Russo claiming that *Gesetze der Liebe* was in fact a remake of the earlier film. We now know that this is not the case and the 1927 film had something of a portmanteau structure, a format which Oswald utilised on a number of occasions including *Unheimliche Geschichten* (1919) and *Hoffmann's Erzählungen* (1916). In the case of *Gesetz der Liebe*, some sections were edited from previous films and others featured new material. The fragments of the *Anders als die Andern* section were found in a Russian archive at the end of the 1980s.

The gay characters which inhabit the film are numerous and varied. Paul himself, played by rising star Conrad Veidt, is particularly interesting when we place the character within the political context of the time. According to Ramsey, criticism of the film “came from homosexual activists themselves, particularly those who advocated for a masculine homoeroticism and who accused Hirschfeld of only representing the effeminate, inverted type of homosexual, not the ‘manly’ lovers of male youth” (Ramsey, 2008: 91). Indeed, the character of Paul was likely to have been the cause of criticism from Hirschfeld’s detractors. His exoticism and pale, drawn look is worlds away from the photographs and drawings of healthy, muscular male youths that adorned the pages of the *Der Eigene* journal. However it could be argued that this criticism may have owed more to personal disagreements between Brand and Hirschfeld than to the representations of gay men that are featured in the film itself. As I will demonstrate, the film actually contains characters and relationships reflecting the concepts and ideas of both men.

It is true to say that Paul is far from traditionally masculine both in manner and dress.



Fig. 1.1: Conrad Veidt as Paul in *Anders als die Andern*

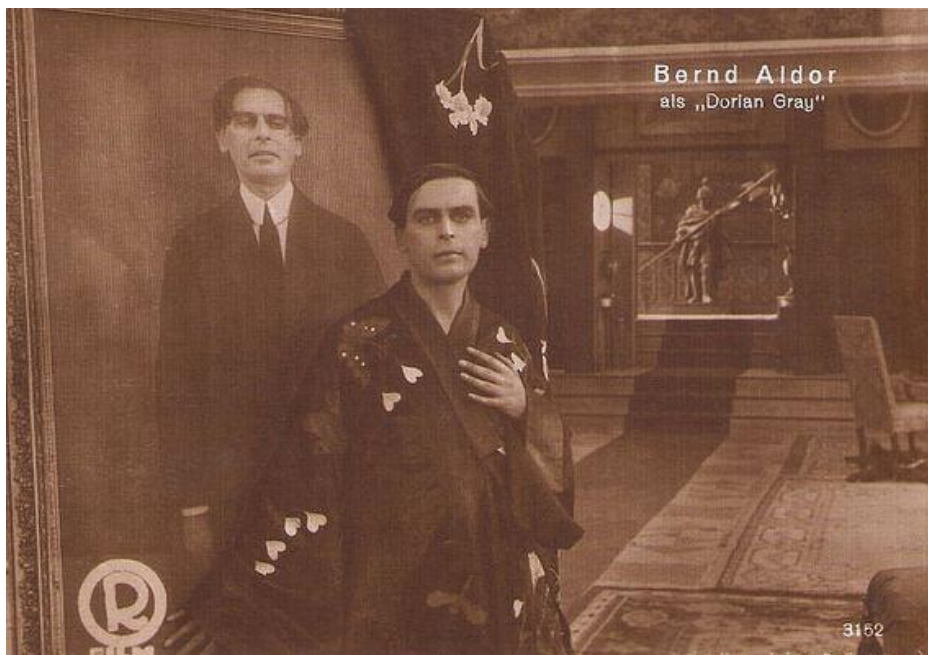


Fig 1.2: Bernd Aldor in *Das Bildnis des Dorian Gray*

In one scene near the beginning of the film he is seen playing the piano whilst wearing an Eastern-style half-length silken robe (see fig. 1.1). In contrast to the gaudy garment, his face is ashen white with pronounced cheek bones. His hands seem almost skeletal as they emerge from the cavernous sleeves of the robe. He doesn't seem to walk as much as glide around the house in a nervous, almost ghostly way. To

say he is camp or effeminate would be imprecise; he is almost exotic, even other-worldly at times. His clothing is very similar to that worn by Dorian Gray in the lost film *Das Bildnis des Dorian Gray/The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1917), which was also directed by Richard Oswald. While nothing survives of the film itself, a postcard featuring a still from the film is intriguing (fig 1.2).<sup>15</sup> As with Paul in *Anders als die Andern*, the garment worn by Gray is oriental in style with large sleeves, and his hands also appear skeletal next to the dark material. While *The Picture of Dorian Gray* will be discussed fully in chapter five, suffice to say here that these two queer characters from two separate films wearing similar garments suggests that queerness was somehow exoticised within German society and culture during the late 1910s.<sup>16</sup>

Returning to *Anders als die Andern*, Paul clearly conforms to Hirschfeld's theory of the third sex rather than Brand's idea of *Freundesliebe*. This is hardly surprising considering that Hirschfeld both appears in the film and had a hand in writing it. Hirschfeld's input goes a long way to making Paul a sympathetic character. In one scene he explains to Paul's parents:

You mustn't think poorly of your son because he is a homosexual. He is not at all to blame for his orientation. It is neither a vice nor a crime, indeed, not even an illness, but instead a variation, one of the borderline cases that occur so frequently in nature. Your son suffers not from his condition, but rather from the false judgement of it. This is the legal and social condemnation of his feelings along with widespread misconceptions about their expression.

*Anders Als Die Andern*, 1919

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<sup>15</sup> The use of this postcard is by kind permission, and from the following private collection: Truus, Bob & Jan Too!@Flickr.

<sup>16</sup> Links between Asia, the Oriental, and images of queerness are discussed at length in Marchetti, 1993.

In his book *Christopher and his Kind*, Christopher Isherwood likens the words of Hirschfeld in the film to the famous “Dead, your majesty” speech in Dickens’s *Bleak House* (Isherwood, 1976: 35) in which the author stops the narrative in order to give his own comments on the death of a young boy and how such events in real life could and should be avoided. Whilst Isherwood is referring specifically to the speech at the end of the film, the point holds true for the above speech too, with Hirschfeld’s words attacking both the legal system and social attitudes.

Paul may thus, on first examination, appear to be an early form of stock gay victim in the Hirschfeld mould. Yet his relationships and interactions with other characters in the film do much to suggest otherwise, complicating the audience’s view of the film’s hero. Despite being sympathetic to the plight of gay men of the time, the film is not averse to critiquing elements of gay life (or, to be more correct, elements of *some* gay men’s lives) and effectively suggesting, in Grundmann’s words, “that Paul is partly to blame for his own fate, as his promiscuous pining for ‘rough trade’ triggered his encounter with Franz in the first place” (Grundmann 2005: 64). As part of a flashback sequence we are shown how Paul originally met Franz Bollek at what appears to be a festive gay costume party or ball. After their meeting, the pair promptly leave the ball together, with Paul taking Franz to his house. Once inside the house, Paul moves behind Franz and starts to caress him, making it clear that he is expecting to have sex with him. At this point Franz reveals himself to be a blackmailer, demanding money there and then to remain quiet. Therefore, while Paul gains the audience’s sympathies due to falling victim to a blackmailer, and because of his eventual downfall and death, it is likely that some audiences would have less sympathy with the character due to the fact that his predicament was the result of a proposed one-night stand.



Meanwhile, the sexuality of the blackmailer, Franz, is never spelled out to the viewer either during the aforementioned flashback sequence or during the present day scenes of the film. Although his appearance at the gay costume ball is arguably enough to confirm his homosexuality, Franz's role as a blackmailer calls this into question. Franz is seen "making eyes" at Paul at the ball and even encouraging his advances, but this is also part of his ploy to trick Paul into inviting him to his house so that he has grounds for blackmail once Paul makes a move on him. These elements of narrative and characterisation mean that, while Franz could be a gay man intent on blackmailing and bringing about the downfall of members of his own kind, it is equally possible that he could be an opportunist heterosexual posing as gay in order to trick homosexuals into revealing themselves so that he can blackmail them. This latter reading is further suggested by the conclusion of the trial which takes place after Paul reports Franz to the police for blackmailing him with regards to his relationship with Kurt: Franz is found guilty of blackmail but no mention is made of him violating Paragraph 175. It should also not be forgotten that extra information regarding the character of Franz may well be absent due to the loss of parts of the film itself.

In its present incomplete state, the film presents us with further doubts when we come to the relationship between Paul and Kurt. Other than the occasional hand on the shoulder, there is little in the way of physical intimacy shown between them, although Franz *does* indicate that he has knowledge that some form of sexual relationship is taking place. In the scene where Kurt walks in on Paul and Franz arguing over the blackmail, Kurt is shocked to find that his friend and mentor has been paying Franz to keep quiet about them. Franz turns to Kurt and tells him "you're paying him, too!",

thus accusing Kurt of paying for his violin coaching with sex. Whether or not sex has taken place between the two we still cannot be sure, in the same way that we cannot be sure whether Kurt flees because he realises people are *thinking* that he and Paul are sexual partners or because he realises that he is, as Franz has said, in a way paying for his tuition with sex. Richard Dyer also has his doubts about what this and other relationships within the film involve:

There is no physical expression of feeling shown between Paul and either Max or Kurt. ... By contrast there is physical expression between Paul and Franz, Franz puckering his lips when he makes a play for Paul at the dance, Paul caressing him back at home. The 'good' sexuality in *Anders*, represented by Max and Kurt, as opposed to the 'bad' sexuality embodied in Franz, may on inspection not involve sex at all.

Dyer, 2003: 56

However, in terms of the textual evidence one must question Dyer's findings. Whereas what he calls the "good" sexuality within the film may indeed not involve sex (although, as I shall demonstrate, this may not necessarily be the case), we can be *absolutely* sure that sex hasn't taken place between Paul and Franz as the blackmailing begins virtually as soon as they arrive at Paul's house on the night of the costume ball (and in the hallway, not the bedroom). In other words, for sex to have taken place between Paul and Franz, they would have had to know each other before, or else had sex somewhere on the way from the ball to Paul's home - or even before leaving the ball. However, there is no indication that this is the case - at least not within the surviving fragments of the film.

In addition, Dyer's analysis takes account of Paul's friendships with a character called

Max, a friendship that Dyer refers to as a “spiritual unity” (Dyer, 2003: 56). In an earlier part of the flashback, we see Paul at boarding school and his friendship with a boy called Max. Although Dyer states that there is no physical expression between the two on screen, this is not the case. The two teenage boys share a room at the school and, while comforting Max after a teacher has picked on him, Paul bends down to kiss him. Although the film cuts away to show the shocked face of a teacher who has walked into the room at that precise moment, we *are* shown Paul approaching Max to kiss him as well as moving away from him once the teacher has walked in on them.<sup>17</sup> I would argue that this is the only moment of sexual tenderness shown between Paul and *any* of his potential partners, and certainly appears to be the most genuine. Although Paul caresses an uncomfortable-looking Franz in the hallway when they arrive back at his house after the ball, this is more a case of lust on Paul’s part than love or romance. Paul’s love for Max and Kurt clearly develops over a long period of time, whereas with Franz we see Paul succumbing to more animalistic instincts – ones which the film appears to be critical of.

Considering what we already know of their sexual orientation, and that Paul and Max slept in the same room at boarding school, the kiss that the two boys share could be taken as an indication that the two of them might have taken part in some form of sexual activity together, even if it is one of simple mutual masturbation. Such activity in boarding schools during this period has become common knowledge, and Royston Lambert’s groundbreaking 1968 book *The Hothouse Society* gives us perhaps the best indication of what kind of activity took place in such conditions, not least because the vast majority of the book is made up of pupils’ own words. One boy of

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<sup>17</sup> There is a possibility that the kiss itself was shown without the cut away in the original version of the film.

thirteen comments that “nearly everyone is a homme and a bum banilit except me. They fiddle about with each others penis at nights” (Lambert, 1968: 326).<sup>18</sup> Another boy of the same age states that “we get into others beds and have some fun” (ibid). An older boy of eighteen talks of what he calls “dormitory orgies” which include “naked war dances by torchlight”, “projecting erect penises onto the ceiling and walls by torch” and “each getting into each others beds, and feeling erections, and lustful pantings etc. Nothing serious” (ibid: 326-7).<sup>19</sup> In contrast to the (albeit assumed) sexual activity of Paul and Max, we are not even made aware if Paul and Kurt shared a room together at Paul’s house.

What we have here, then, is a suggestion that almost reverses Dyer’s argument. Paul may pucker his lips and make a play in the hallway for Franz in a demonstration of what Dyer calls “bad sexuality,” but his advances are not returned, whereas the opposite is true when Paul kisses Max (albeit off-screen due to editing). It is therefore the “good” sexuality which involves reciprocated physical affections and not the “bad”, where Paul’s attempts at physical intimacy are returned only with a request for money through blackmail. The film therefore appears to be sending out the message that love between two men is far more desirable, both within a relationship and wider society, than lust. Love is likely to be returned, whereas lust is likely to be punished.

Considering Hirschfeld’s input into the film, it seems curious that the relationship of Paul and Kurt seems to be based very much on the Brand model of Greek love. The influence of Brand’s beliefs and theories can be seen throughout the film, not least in

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<sup>18</sup> Lambert’s book leaves the children’s anonymous, written comments “as is”, with no alterations to grammar or spelling.

<sup>19</sup> Homosexual activity in boarding schools was also acknowledged by Thomas Hughes in the novel *Tom Brown’s Schooldays*. This, and the subject of male-male intimacy in boarding schools, is discussed fully in Chapter Three with regards to the 1916 film adaptation of Hughes’s novel.

the youthful relationship between Paul and Max, discussed above. In 1925, Brand wrote in *Der Eigene*, the gay journal which he edited:

[The Community of the Self-Owned] advises the young man to have sexual intercourse with no women before marriage, but rather until then to seek his highest joy of human contact, his moral strength, his bodily release, his spiritual calm, and his inner peace in the intimate intercourse with a friend. With a friend who means his ideal, who understands him; who joins in his adventures and shares his studies with him; who wins influence over him in every way, who emotionally and bodily gives him all, who furthers him as a comrade and enriches him as a human being; and who is ready with desire and love, for the sake of his beauty, his character, and his personality, to render him every imaginable service.

Brand, 1925: 159

We see many elements of this in the friendship between Paul and Max who appear to be inseparable – they share a room, Paul helps Max with his work, and he consoles him when teachers pick on him. We also know that they share some physical contact, as shown by the scene in which they kiss. It is possible to suggest that this type of relationship was included in order to placate Brand and his followers, given the verbal attacks that Brand had made against Hirschfeld in the past. However, the relationship between Paul and Max does not fit Brand's words as neatly as it would first seem, not least because the teenaged Paul and Max share none of the physical characteristics of male youth praised by Brand. Both are awkward, somewhat shy, teenagers and far removed from the muscular, athletic young men which the Community of the Self-Owned worshipped. It is also the case that Paul remains homosexual throughout his adult life, effectively distancing the character from Brand's words despite what appears to be similarities within this teenaged romance. By giving the two boys the

kind of relationship which Brand would advocate but without the physical characteristics, and without Paul later being involved sexually with women, the teenaged Paul and Max occupy some form of middle ground between the theories of Hirschfeld and the concepts of Brand. With most of Hirschfeld's papers destroyed in 1933, it is impossible to ascertain whether this mix of the two opposing theories of homosexuality was intentional or not.

Brand's theories go beyond this sharing of love between two adolescent boys. In the same article he sets out in detail his thoughts with regards to the love of an older man for a younger one:

[We promote] a close joining of man to youth and of youth to man, so that through respect and mutual trust, and not least through the offering of one to the other, through the case of the older for the younger, through assistance in his education and progress, as well as through the promotion of his whole personality – to educate each individual to loyalty, to voluntary subordination, to civil virtue, to a noble ambition, free from all social climbing, to a noble courage constantly ready to act, and to a sacrificing willingness and joy in working for the national cause!

Brand, 1925: 161

Bearing in mind Brand's comments, and those of another contributor to the same journal some two decades earlier who wrote that "the ideal love union of a mature man with a growing adolescent can be of the greatest social value" (Reiffegg, 1902: 167), we can see Paul's relationship with Kurt as a reflection of these contemporary ideals. It is hard to gauge Kurt's age in the film. He could be anywhere from around 15 to 21, although Fritz Schultz, who plays the part, was 23 when the film was made, while



Fig. 1.3: Publicity photograph of Conrad Veidt c.1919.



Fig. 1.4: Veidt (left) as he looks in *Anders als die Andern*.

Veidt was only 26, despite being made up to look considerably older. Indeed, Veidt's real age may come as a shock to anyone who has seen the film without prior knowledge of the actor's age as he looks and acts as if he were in his forties (see *fig. 1.3* for a publicity still from the period, and *fig. 1.4* for a still from the film in which he is pictured with Fritz Schultz as Kurt). If this indeed was the intention, then the characters of Paul and Kurt are very close in age to those of Oscar Wilde and Lord

Alfred Douglas when they met and had a relationship in the 1890s. The figure of Wilde actually makes an appearance in the film. At the beginning of the film, as Paul reads in the newspapers of the mysterious suicides of his gay friends, he imagines a procession of famous gay men who have suffered as a result of their sexuality. Wilde is among them, as is the composer Tchaikovsky, Leonardo da Vinci, King Edward II and others.<sup>20</sup> Towards the end of the film, Paul imagines this procession again, but with himself included.

The influence of the Wilde case on European culture should not be underestimated, with the prosecution (and persecution) of Wilde sending shockwaves through homosexual communities both in the UK and in mainland Europe in the mid-1890s. The verdict triggered something of an exodus of gay men from the UK to mainland Europe as they feared that they too would be arrested and tried in court. Many of the gay men fleeing Britain moved to France (as did Wilde when he was released from prison) as homosexuality was not illegal there. As Blasius and Phelan write: “The law of France was characterised by sexual liberalism (sodomy had been decriminalised in the constitution of 1793, and had remained so since then). It was the fabric of everyday life in France that was conservative; *pudeur* or modesty was the reigning principal” (Blasius and Phelan, 1997: 191). Despite this, it was clearly the fear of arrest, conviction and punishment which was the cause of the exodus from Britain, and France was a safe haven from that. As demonstrated in the introduction to this thesis, the view towards Wilde in the UK and Europe changed a great deal in a very short space of time, and obituaries following his death in 1900 saw him as a victim more than a criminal (see Anon, 1900a: 8). Neil Miller writes that “despite the

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<sup>20</sup> This is one of a number of sections of *Anders als die Andern* that has not been located and is presumed lost. The current restoration inserts production stills to replace this lost footage.



revulsion caused by the trials – and the fear that they inspired within many homosexual men – ‘the love that dare not speak its name’ was given a name, a voice, a face” (Miller, 1995: 51). Given this, and the fact that the film includes Wilde in the procession of famous gay men, it is hardly surprising that his relationship with Lord Alfred Douglas can be seen as the model upon which that of Paul and Kurt in *Anders als die Andern* was based. After all, Wilde’s work was remarkably in vogue on the silver screen during the 1910s and early 1920s. At least seven film adaptations of *The Picture of Dorian Gray* were produced between 1912 and 1919 (four of these were European productions, with one directed by Richard Oswald in 1917). There were also versions of *Lady Windermere’s Fan* in 1916 and 1925, two of *Lord Arthur Savile’s Crime* in 1920 and 1922, and at least three of *Salome* in 1908, 1918 and 1923. The sheer number of these adaptations point to the visibility of Wilde and his works during this period, and his influence is very much to the fore in the two films that I turn to next: *Vingarne* and *Michael*.

### ***Vingarne* and *Michael*: Ghosts of Oscar Wilde**

Both *Vingarne* and *Michael* were based on the novel *Mikael*, published in 1904, by gay Danish author Hermann Bang, with the narrative centring on a relationship between an older artist and his younger protégé. Both films follow the same basic plot: Zoret, an aging artist, helps and supports Michael, a young aspiring artist who also models for him.<sup>21</sup> The two begin a relationship (whether sexual, romantic or totally platonic is only hinted at through the subtexts of both films) but, through Zoret, Michael meets a Princess and the two begin an affair. Michael sells the gifts Zoret has given him, as well as borrowing and then stealing from him in order to sustain his now

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<sup>21</sup> Michael is referred to in differing prints of the films as “Michael” and “Mikael”. For clarity, I shall refer to this character throughout as “Michael”.

luxurious lifestyle. As Zoret becomes aware of the affair and the fact that he has been used by Michael, his health deteriorates rapidly and he dies before Michael can reach him and make peace with his mentor.

In the Swedish *Vingarne*, the earlier of the two films based on the novel, this narrative is supplemented by a framing device in which the director, Mauritz Stiller, and the actors all play themselves during the casting and making of the film. This involves a sequence where Nils Asther is cast in the role of Michael and filming begins, only for him to be told by Stiller early on in the production that he thinks he is too young and inexperienced an actor to play the role. He is replaced by Lars Hanson in the role of Michael, although Asther remains on set during the production. Once the film has been made, the cast and crew attend the opening of *Vingarne* which we, the audience, then watch as a film within a film. Once the premiere screening is over, attention once again turns to the cast and crew as Egil Eide, who plays Zoret in the film, attempts to console Asther after his advances towards Lili Bech, the actress playing the Princess, are rejected.

Richard Dyer, in the second edition of *Now You See It* argues that this framing device is significant when exploring the homosexual element of the film (Dyer, 2003: 8-22), not least because of the sexuality of both Stiller and Asther who were gay and bisexual respectively and who themselves had a relationship (although whether this was during the filming of *Vingarne* is unclear). However, there are problems here, not the least of which is that this whole framing section of the film is lost, leaving us with just the film within a film section, ie. the dramatisation of Bang's novel. While the current restoration reconstructs the beginning and end section of the film in detail with

stills and explanatory intertitles, it is difficult to explore these sections of the film and come to conclusions about characterisations as we cannot view the performances themselves. What the framing device clearly *does* give us, however, are further examples of the mentor/pupil relationship that I have previously discussed in relation to *Anders als die Andern* although, in this case, the role of mentor is split between Stiller (in the opening segment) and Egil Eide (in the closing segment). While the parallels between real life relationships, those in the framing device and those in the film within a film are fascinating, for Dyer this is partly because of the sexuality of the real-life participants:

The key personnel were all gay. Herman Bang's novel, published in 1904, was well known and he himself was a notoriously gay figure, a kind of melancholy Oscar Wilde...The scriptwriter and designer, Alex Esbensen was gay. Mauritz Stiller, the director, was not only gay but a flamboyant man about town...One of Stiller's most important relationships was with Nils Asther, the Danish actor who plays himself in *Vingarne*, his first film.

Dyer, 2003: 11-12

While this information is of interest to modern viewers, and no doubt encourages queer readings within the characterisations and narrative, it is safe to assume that, with the possible exception of Herman Bang, the sexuality of the participants would not be common knowledge to viewers when the film premiered in 1916. For example, Stiller himself, although having directed a number of films since 1912, had not yet reached his zenith as a filmmaker by the time of *Vingarne*, meaning his best work and most significant period of fame was still to come. Bearing in mind that he was not a household name, and that Nils Asther was a newcomer to film (*Vingarne* was his first film), just how much of the homosexual element of the film would contemporary

audiences have picked up on, and how much are modern audiences giving queer readings of the film simply because of personal information that we are privy to?

Richard Dyer writes

*Vingarne's* framing story ... seems to emphasise that the actors in 'Vingarne' are not implicated in the characters' predilections. Lars Hanson, at the premiere, says he's terrible at Mikael and can't understand why Mikael leaves the Princess, while Egil Eide (Zoret) says that he is glad the film is over. In other words, the men who play the lovers in 'Vingarne' seem to want to have nothing to do with it.

Dyer, 2003: 15

Here Dyer bases his observations on textual features of the film, specifically the dialogue (via intertitles). While this interpretation is possible, it is just as likely that these comments were inserted into the film as instances of self-referential and self-deprecating humour on the part of Stiller as much as to distance the actors from the parts they have been playing. Similar self-referencing moments can be found in Stiller's comedy *Thomas Graal's Basta Film* (1917) from the following year. While playing gay characters – whether implicit or more overt in character - could be viewed until recently as damaging to an actor's career (although it appeared to have done Conrad Veidt no harm), the homosexual element in *Vingarne* (or, at least, what exists of it today) is buried so far beneath the surface that it is possible for many viewers not to notice it at all. In other words, the comments to which Dyer refers are available to be interpreted in different ways depending on what the viewer themselves bring to the film. Once again, it is almost impossible to come to definite conclusions about a segment of film that survives only via a handful of stills, original intertitles and explanatory intertitles added later. How can one comprehend whether the comments

to which Dyer refers were intended to be taken at face value or as a joke without access to the footage?

I will address in the next chapter the various code-words and actions used in American cinema of the silent and early sound period to suggest homosexuality and homosexuals at a time when explicit representation was not possible. These codes and devices apply considerably less to European film of the period; while homosexuality was not commonplace on screen, a film such as *Vingarne* was made around a decade before the American code-words came to the fore. This, together with the less sophisticated approach of Stiller at this early stage of his career (complex framing device notwithstanding), means that, in order to try and view the film in the same way as audiences back in 1916, we need to effectively ignore the information that we have about the actors in the film, their relationships and sexuality simply because audiences of the time were unlikely to be privy to this kind of knowledge. While the connection with Bang and the gay and bisexual members of the cast and crew are fascinating, it does not make the characters involved any more or less homosexual – and, what is more, the actors playing Zoret and Michael were both, as far as we know, heterosexual. The issue of historical viewing practices, and of trying to understand how films were viewed by contemporary audiences is one that will be revisited throughout my work, and is at the heart of this thesis.

Near the opening of the film there is a significant scene in which “Stiller is discussing the project with Asther, [and] takes the novel *Michael* off the shelf ... and says that his script is ‘faithful to the ideas’ in it” (Dyer, 2003: 12). This could certainly refer to the gay element to be found in Herman Bang’s novel, although even in that source novel

the nature of the relationship between Zoret and Michael is hardly explicit. Bearing this in mind, and the seemingly impossible task of finding just one element of the film that spells out for certain that homosexual content is present, what is it about *Vingarne* that has given it its position as being regarded as the first “gay” feature length film? After all, if we ignore extraneous information about the actors and the director, there is nothing here to inform the viewer of the nature of the relationship between the two protagonists *Vingarne* in the way that there is in *Anders als die Andern*. Michael Kennedy, in his review of the DVD release of Dreyer’s film *Michael*, may provide the answer, suggesting that “if the Master’s obsession with Michael isn’t carnal, the plot veers into meaninglessness” (Kennedy 2005). Kennedy is writing specifically about Dreyer’s remake, *Michael*, here, but the same thing can certainly be said about *Vingarne*. If Zoret and Michael are not in love, then why is Zoret so upset when Michael begins a relationship with the Princess? It could, of course, be that Zoret simply objects to losing the platonic attention of his young protégé, and especially that Michael begins fleecing money from Zoret in one way or another. What is more, Zoret could be said to be looking for a successor. We know his quality of work is falling from when he is painting the portrait of the Princess. He is having trouble getting the eyes right in the picture, and becomes frustrated. It is at this point that Michael enters (meeting the Princess for the first time). While Zoret’s back is turned, Michael picks up the brush and makes the necessary adjustment to the eyes, which his mentor has been struggling with. With Zoret getting older and his touch failing him, he seems to spend more time mentoring his pupil than actually painting. Therefore, it could be said that he fears all of his work with Michael is going to waste as he now spends all of his time socialising with the Princess. This is a valid reading, but fails to work dramatically. After all, this is not a revenge narrative, in which Zoret plans to

get some form of revenge on Michael for his abuse of their friendship and through sheer envy on Zoret's part. Instead, the artist's health starts to fail and, at times, is on the border of losing his sanity as well as his physical wellbeing. It could be argued that he is, simply, love-sick.

A gay reading of the film that is contextual *as well* as textual links these two protagonists back to the thinking of both Hirschfeld and Brand, identifying elements of both men's ideas at work in the scenario despite their seeming contradiction. Here, as in the later *Michael*, is portrayed a love that has grown out of a mentor/pupil relationship of the kind which Brand advocates; yet in *Vingarne*, Michael himself is full of contradictions and ambiguities. When we first see him, he is an excitable and bubbly youth in the company of some girls with whom he appears to be flirting, a scene which is clearly not intended to spark questions about his sexuality in the minds of the audience. Zoret, on the other hand, can be characterised as almost predatory in this scene. He observes Michael from afar and promptly walks down to him and asks him to model for him. The modelling, we later discover, involves Michael being nearly naked and posing for a sculpture that Zoret is working on. Michael simply stands while modelling with his arms above his head, his chest pushed forward and a sheet draped over his waist in order to retain his modesty. While hardly the most masculine of poses, if Stiller wanted to make more of the relationship between Zoret and Michael it would have been more effective to simply film Michael from the waist up and therefore give the viewer the impression that he is, indeed, naked. Instead, we are afforded no close-ups of Lars Hanson as he poses for Zoret in this scene. We, the audience, have to content ourselves with viewing him from afar, although the long shot of Zoret working on his sculpture with Michael in the background does allow us

to view Zoret studying his half-naked model's torso as he perfects his work of art. Here, as throughout the whole of *Vingarne*, it is impossible to ascertain whether Zoret is in love with Michael as a person or Michael's youth, a question which brings us back to the influence of Oscar Wilde. During his testimony in his first criminal trial, which took place between April 26 and May 1, 1895, Wilde said "I am a lover of youth...I like to study the young in everything. There is something fascinating in youthfulness".<sup>22</sup> In *Vingarne*, Zoret could be called a cinematic representation of this mode of thinking – he does, after all, seem to love Michael's youth more than Michael himself. Whether or not there is sexual attraction between the two is never made explicit within the film although, as I have discussed with regards to Kennedy's comments, without that sexual attraction, the story does not quite make sense.

Carl Theodor Dreyer's adaptation eight years later of the same source novel draws on the influence of Wilde even more conspicuously than *Vingarne*. Indeed, Roy Grundmann writes that "the master of satire seems just around the corner in *Michael*" (Grundmann 2005: 65). This proximity is evident in apparent influences from both Wilde's work and life, not least of which is the relationship between Zoret and Michael, which bears more than a passing resemblance to that of Basil Hallward and Dorian Gray in Oscar Wilde's novel *The Picture Of Dorian Gray*. One specific exchange in *Michael* has echoes of the opening chapter of the book. Zoret says that he has been offered a large sum of money for the sketches he made during a trip with Michael but that he won't sell them because "we don't want to sell our precious memories". Meanwhile, in Wilde's novel, the painter Basil Hallward tells his friend Henry Wotton that he will not show his portrait of Dorian Gray because "there is too

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<sup>22</sup> Source: <http://www.mr-oscar-wilde.de/> (accessed November 28, 2010)



much of myself in the thing” (Wilde, 1891: 14). There seems to be a correlation here between Zoret’s memories being somehow embedded in the sketches, and Hallward’s self being captured in Dorian Gray’s portrait. Hallward goes on to speak of Dorian in a way that suggests parallels with Zoret talking about Michael:

As a rule, he is charming to me, and we sit in the studio and talk of a thousand things. Now and then, however, he is horribly thoughtless, and seems to take real delight in giving me pain.

Wilde 1891: 14

The character of Michael is considerably different in the two film versions. Whereas he could be argued to be naive and taken advantage of by the Princess in *Vingarne*, in *Michael* he is much more callous, flippant, spoilt and uncaring. By the start of *Michael*, he is already an established part of Zoret’s life, having modelled for him numerous times and provided the painter with his greatest successes. We learn through a short flashback that Michael was already under Zoret’s tuition when he was asked to model, but that Zoret was unimpressed by Michael’s artwork. This is quite different to Zoret’s discovery of Michael as a possible model in *Vingarne*, discussed earlier. By the end of the film, as in *Vingarne*, Michael’s work has overtaken that of his mentor. In *Michael*, this helps to characterise Zoret as someone who is out of touch with the art world of the time. At one point he is unimpressed by Michael’s work, and yet it is Michael who is the more appreciated artist by the end of the film. Although we are not informed how long has passed from the time Michael began to model to the point at which we join the narrative, it is made clear that he treats Zoret’s house as his own. Because of the expensive clothes he is wearing, we can assume that these are gifts from Zoret. In other words, Zoret has taken the youth under his wing and can be seen to be lavishing gifts on him in order to keep him in favour, effectively

buying his friendship (even if doing so without realising it). Michael also seems happy to remain in Zoret's company, clearly enjoying the chance to move in his mentor's social circles, and making the most of the opportunities that present themselves.

As the film progresses, it becomes clear that the relationship between artist and protégé in *Michael* is modelled even more on that of Wilde and Douglas than in *Vingarne*. Michael in particular seems to exhibit characteristics which we have come to associate with Lord Alfred Douglas through biographies such as that by Douglas Murray (2000), which treat Douglas sympathetically, and in film biopics such as *The Trials Of Oscar Wilde* and *Wilde* (Brian Gilbert, 1997), which do not. Richard Ellmann writes of Douglas, "his friends – and he never lacked friends – thought him charming. In temperament, he was totally spoiled, reckless, insolent, and, when thwarted, fiercely vindictive" (Ellmann, 1988: 306). Ellmann could have been writing about Michael as much as Lord Alfred Douglas, whose character traits were well-reported at the time. By the time the film was made, however, Douglas had become a devoted Catholic, been married and separated (but not divorced), and vehemently denounced homosexuality. Despite this, he was rarely out of the newspapers, often through his own libel actions, and even spent a short time in prison. While we will never know whether Douglas would have denounced homosexuality and married had Wilde lived, it seems more than a coincidence that Michael leaves Zoret for the Princess in both screen versions of the story as well as the source novel.<sup>2324</sup> In

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<sup>23</sup> Douglas married his wife in March 1902, the same year as the publication of Bang's novel, although his engagement and relationship would have been reported in newspapers prior to this.

<sup>24</sup> Douglas's biographer, Douglas Murray, suggests that the marriage to Olive Custance was not exactly conventional, with an examination of her letters revealing that "Olive had lesbian leanings" (Murray, 2000: 124), and also caught the attention of writer Nathalie Barney who suggested to Olive that "she herself should marry Douglas and the three of them live in a *ménage à trios*" (ibid). While this did not

*Michael* this is taken even further than in *Vingarne*. In Stiller's film, Michael rushes to the deathbed of Zoret as soon as he finds out that his mentor is dying, only to arrive a few moments too late. In *Michael*, Zoret is already dead by the time Michael hears the news and, instead of making his way to Zoret's body to pay his respects, he is comforted like a baby in the arms of the Princess. He is upset, or maybe just feeling guilty, but not enough to be drawn away from the arms of the woman who has caused the separation with Zoret, and with whom he is now in love.

Richard Dyer, in his examination of *Vingarne* (1990), argues that it is the more explicitly homosexual of the two film adaptations. Yet, as my discussion suggests, there are more textual clues for the viewer in *Michael* as to the nature of the relationship without the need for the personal information of those involved in the making of the film, which is almost essential for a full gay reading of *Vingarne*. The motto on the first intertitle of *Michael* reads "Now I can die in peace, for I have known a great love". While this is not attributed to Zoret at this stage, by the end of the film we are aware that the quotation originates from him, not only because it is he who dies, but also because he is the only person in the film about whom it could be said has "known great love". Michael's love for the Princess seems superficial in comparison. The comment referred to earlier when Zoret is talking of the sketches he made while on a trip with Michael is also telling: "we don't want to sell our precious memories". This, together with Zoret's rather intimate gesture immediately after of resting his hand on Michael's head and stroking his hair, also provides a key indicator that the pair are involved in a relationship, and that this relationship is not necessarily a secretive one. After all, the comment and gesture are made in front of various guests

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occur, Douglas's previous homosexual affairs and Olive's lesbian tendencies meant that the marriage was hardly conventional.

rather than while the two of them are alone.

However, there are complications here. Modern scholars have viewed this as a “gay film” for some years, going back to Russo and beyond, and the American DVD release advertises this as a “gay-themed film” of the silent era. And yet, publicity materials from the time of initial release in Germany show that this was *not* how the film was sold at the time. In all of the press-books and theatre programmes that survive in the Berlin archives, this film is advertised as a conventional heterosexual romance between Michael and the Princess. Michael and Zoret are never featured alone together in publicity stills within these materials, except on one occasion where a teacher-pupil relationship is clearly being depicted, with Zoret leaning over Michael, presumably admonishing him for a wrong-doing. Whereas homosexual themes in German films were not the norm during this period, they were not taboo – *Michael* fits chronologically between *Anders als die Andern* and *Geschlecht in Fesseln*, a film which will be discussed later in this chapter. So, while the film is understood now as gay-themed, on its release this represented a sub-textual reading.

Although the three films discussed so far contain portrayals of gay relationships of the Brand model of teacher-pupil partnerships, it cannot be said that any of them result in happy unions. In the case of *Anders als die Andern*, this is something of a necessity; it would have been counter-productive given the object of the film to have anything approaching a happy ending to the narrative. Of course, the narratives of *Vingarne* and *Michael* both rely, understandably, on the Danish author Herman Bang’s source novel, although this, once again, was written at a time when male homosexual acts were illegal in Denmark. Therefore, it would have been illogical at that time to

portray a gay partnership which was both long-lasting and positive. Despite this, each of these three films can still be described as apathetic and largely non-judgemental towards the gay characters and their predicaments, with *Anders als die Andern* clearly more so than *Vingarne* and *Michael*, but even these cannot be said to be anti-gay – in fact the love triangle within these two films is dealt with in the same matter of fact way as a more conventional one featuring two men in love with the same woman. The same cannot necessarily be said for Wilhelm Dieterle's 1928 film *Geschlecht in Fesseln*, to which I now turn, in which homosexuality is not the subject of the film, but merely a plot device in order to make a social commentary on the German prison system.<sup>25</sup>

### ***Geschlecht in Fesseln: Homosexuality as Lifestyle Choice***

*Geschlecht in Fesseln* is a melodrama telling the story of a young man, Franz Sommer, who, unable to hold down a job himself, reluctantly agrees to his wife's request to take a job she has been offered selling cigarettes. When going to see his wife, Helene, at work one night, he sees a man giving her unwanted attention. Franz eventually confronts the man and knocks him down. However, upon falling, the man hits his head and later dies. Franz is arrested, found guilty of manslaughter and sent to prison. In the all-male environment of the prison, Franz finds himself entering a relationship with another inmate, Alfred. On release, Franz returns home to Helene but is visited by Alfred, who has been encouraged by another former inmate to blackmail Franz. Alfred is not interested in this idea, instead arriving at the Sommer's apartment carrying a bunch of flowers which he intends to give to Franz but, on seeing the effect his visit is having on the couple, quickly leaves. However it is too late and Helene

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<sup>25</sup> Full title: *Geschlecht in Fesseln: Die Sexualnot der Gefangenen*

now knows of her husband's indiscretion. When she, too, admits to an affair with her new boss, the pair of them commit suicide by gassing themselves in their small apartment.

The film, like *Anders als die Andern*, has a political agenda: "*Geschlecht in Fesseln* presents itself as an intervention in debates concerning prison reform, based on the notion that sexuality constitutes a basic human right...presenting the sexual predicament of prisoners in terms at once culturally palatable and urgent" (Rogowski, 2010: 212). Basically the film suggests that, because of the lack of intimacy allowed between them and their girlfriends or wives, the prisoners turn to other inmates for sexual gratification. The film attempts to portray just how sexually frustrated the men are, at one point showing them lovingly making dolls out of bread crumbs that they then fight over. When he is in solitary confinement as a punishment for bringing his wife's handkerchief back to his cell, Franz draws a picture of his wife on the wall, lovingly caressing it as we see a super-imposed image of Helene over the picture itself. There is also a history of self-mutilation in the prison with one of the longer-serving prisoners telling Franz that "I've lived to see someone unman himself, just so he could finally sleep". Later in the film, one of the inmates tries to castrate himself but is restrained before this can happen. He is sent to the sanatorium, but on returning to his cell some time later he steals a gun from a prison guard and kills himself.

The film may concern itself with the plight of these men in a sympathetic way, but homosexuality is dealt with differently than in the other films discussed so far in this chapter. While the character of Michael in *Vingarne* and *Michael* can be viewed as bisexual, Zoret in the same films is, as far as we are aware, homosexual. The same

can be said for both Paul, Max and Kurt in *Anders als die Andern*. However, *Geschlecht in Fesseln* views homosexuality as an illness or condition rather than part of the genetic make-up of the individual. In other words, according to the film, homosexuality comes about through choice rather than from a notion of a third sex or as a result of nature in general. Roy Grundmann states that “Sommer’s brief prison fling with Alfred instantly makes clear that gay lust is treated from an outside perspective, without the kind of nuance, empathy, and affirmation someone like Hirschfeld could bring to Oswald’s film” (Grundmann, 2005). In the nine years since *Anders Als Die Andern*, representations of homosexuality in German film had gone from gay characters being defiant against society’s prejudices and calling for a change in the law to heterosexual characters dabbling in homosexuality and feeling shame (and blame) for their choice. This is not to say that we do not feel sympathy for Franz in *Geschlecht In Fesseln*, but the sympathy is much more centred on the unfortunate outcome of the fight at the café and his subsequent imprisonment than his carnal desires. These events in themselves are a result of Franz being unable to fill the traditional male role of breadwinner as he cannot hold down a steady job. This change in cinematic portrayals of gay men in Germany coincided with a change in government, with a swing from the left to the right. A change in the pornography laws had even taken place a few weeks before elections as if to demonstrate Germany’s new, more conservative, constitution.

Like the other films, however, the gay relationship in *Geschlecht in Fesseln* is of the teacher-pupil model. Here it is Franz, who is used to prison life, teaching Alfred how to survive as an inmate, and comforting him when he is upset and scared. While this may be a nod to the ideas of Brand and his followers, it is important not to forget that

not all sexologists and psychologists in central Europe were in agreement with Hirschfeld and Brand's belief that homosexuality was normal and should not be suppressed. For example, the Austrian urologist Oswald Schwartz writes that what he calls the homosexuality of youth (and Alfred in *Geschlecht in Fesseln* certainly comes under the category of "youth") "is always definitely abnormal, to a very large extent induced by the environment, and therefore practiced by only a very small number of boys" (Schwartz, 1949: 45).<sup>26</sup> The film's view of sexuality is closer to Schwartz's or Freud's than that of either Hirschfeld or Brand. Freud believed in the idea of a fluid, unfixed sexuality rather than the static heterosexual, bisexual and homosexual categories. "According to Freud, not only is sexual identity, or varying degrees of masculinity and femininity, unfixed in all human subjects; object choice is equally precarious and fluid" (Kuzniar 2000:26). This is, of course, key to the film's argument in support of penal reform. Without the narrative of men turning to other men in the absence of women, the campaign calling for more contact between men and women during their time in prison would be invalid. Unlike *Anders als die Andern*, *Vingarne* and *Michael*, therefore, what we have here is a film which *contains* homosexual elements but which is not *about* homosexuality. It is used as plot device, a means to a narrative end, hence the fact the subject is not dealt with the same sympathy as in other films, all of which were written, or based on works by, gay authors.

### ***Wege Zu Kraft und Schönheit* and the Wandervogel Movement**

One German film of the period which is something of an anomaly with respect to the foregoing is the 1925 documentary *Wege Zu Kraft Und Schönheit* which appeared to

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<sup>26</sup> Although written more than a decade after the period discussed here, Schwarz's book was effectively an English-language distillation of theories and ideas that had largely been developed during the inter-war period.



be cashing in on the naturist craze and what Dyer calls the “cult of the athlete” (Dyer, 2003: 39), which was sweeping the country at the time. The *Wandervogel* movement, which took shape at approximately the same time as Brand’s Community of the Self-Owned, saw itself as something of an advocate for a return to nature, arguing that this would have a positive effect on physical and mental health. The origins of the movement can be traced back to the late nineteenth century when a “part-time teacher named Herman Hoffman began excursions with his pupils during the spring of 1896. Involving campfires, community singing, and rough sleeping, these prolonged hikes quickly attracted schoolboy adherents” (Savage, 2007: 104). However, Dyer writes that the *Wandervogel* movement was sometimes regarded as “just a cover for the desire to look at naked men” (Dyer, 2003: 39). This argument is given more credence when one realises that the co-founder of Brand’s Community of the Self-Owned, Wilhelm Jansen, was also a financial contributor and leader within the *Wandervogel* movement until his expulsion for homosexuality. In 1913, one of the movement’s first members, Hans Bluher, wrote in a history of the movement that the “male bonding was held together by homosexual eroticism” (Savage, 2007: 107). Bluher also believed in keeping the movement an exclusively male one but, in 1911, women were allowed to enter for the first time (ibid).

The movement was still going strong by the time *Wege Zu Kraft Und Schönheit* was made, and the back to nature approach of the *Wandervogel* is portrayed throughout the film. The film purports to be a documentary which teaches the audience how to keep healthy and beautiful (the title of the film translates as *The Ways to Strength and Beauty*) but, depending on the viewer, could also be argued to be an exploitation film which endeavours to show as much naked flesh as possible during its ninety minute

running time. Following the introductory section, virtually all of the participants (whether they be men, women or children) are naked or nearly naked. Women are generally shown completely unclothed, whereas the men generally wear a skimpy garment in order to hide their modesty – the main exception to this is a hammer thrower who, for some reason, is totally naked. The men featured in the documentary are all of the build, and have the physique, that Brand advocated, and featured in picture sections of *Der Eigene*. The only rare exceptions are those of lesser build that are made an example of.<sup>27</sup> The homoeroticism of the film is virtually constant throughout, as the near-naked men play a variety of sports or take part in a number of gymnastic exercises which are often filmed in slow motion so as to emphasise the graceful movement of the body and its muscles.

Seen today, the film can be viewed as beautiful, dull, unintentionally funny, or disturbing – or, more likely, a mixture of all of these. Although viewers of today might possibly see the film as unintentionally humorous, it is clear that the makers of the film were no doubt serious about their subject matter, even if the large amount of nudity might have added to any box office potential. The appearance by a number of famed sports personalities and medical professionals add to the overall feeling that this was a serious enterprise. The disturbing thing here for a modern viewer is that the majority of the men featured in the film could be classed as part of what would become the Nazi Party's Aryan ideal. If a viewer today were not aware of the year in which it was made, it would be easy to view the images and assume that this was a propaganda film for the Nazi youth movement. These elements may well have been part of the reason for a sound re-release of the film in 1932, just one year before Hitler

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<sup>27</sup> The issue of making an example of the less-masculine man is something that is more common in American films of the period, and will be discussed at length in the next chapter, particularly in regards to the use of the “sissy” character.

came to power. This re-release even made it to British cinemas, with a newly-added English voice-over, and a copy resides within the British Film Institute archives. Indeed, when linking the attendance at youth clubs with the “abnormal” homosexuality in young men, Oswald Schwartz describes the *Wandervogel* movement as “a worthy forerunner of the Hitler Youth” (Schwartz, 1949: 47), with the word “worthy” leaving something of an unpleasant aftertaste. Here then is a film which is something of a conundrum: while it seems to be directly linked to Brand’s concept of male-male relationships and worship of the male physique, particularly with its recreations of Ancient Greece (see Dyer, 2003: 37-39), it also looks forward to a period less than ten years later when homosexuals and “non-Aryans” would be persecuted by the German government for over a decade.

## **Conclusion**

It is worth reiterating that the five films discussed in this first chapter are not the only examples of representations of gay men or male-male intimacy in European silent cinema, or even just the silent cinema of Germany, the country upon which I have concentrated so far. Considerably more European films will be discussed in the case studies which make up the second half of this thesis, which does not aim to provide an over-arching view of film-making of the period but, instead, concentrate on specific groups of films that are related by genre or locale.

As I have shown in this chapter, the work and concepts of Dr Magnus Hirschfeld and Adolph Brand are inextricably linked to gay representations in the European cinema of the period. Whether one agrees with what these two men had to say seems immaterial, for their very presence and willingness to be vocal about their differing

views on homosexuality at least gave gay men a voice, and one which, if it was not for the rise of the Nazi Party, would undoubtedly have caused a change in the law following the vote to repeal Paragraph 175 in 1929. As we shall see in the next chapter, homosexuality in America was something that was not even recognised by the medical profession at this time, and so American gays and lesbians were given no such outlet for their opinions – something which was reflected in Hollywood films of the time .

The figure of Brand seems to have slipped from the public’s consciousness over the last eighty years, with his concepts of homosexuality often just a footnote in gay histories. Compared to Hirschfeld he was something of a brash, even militant figure, not least because he was one of the first gay men to advocate the “outing” of gay politicians whom he saw as hypocrites in the fight to repeal Paragraph 175. In Rosa von Praunheim’s 1999 film biopic of Hirschfeld, *Der Einstein des Sex/The Einstein of Sex*, Brand’s militancy is all too apparent when compared with the harmless, almost grandfatherly portrayal of Hirschfeld. What is more, movements such as the Community of the Self-Owned saw many of their positive attributes adopted by the Nazi party in the early 1930s and transformed into something sinister. It is possibly this more than anything that is the cause of Brand being a forgotten or much-maligned figure. Despite this, we have seen in this chapter that he was as much of an influence on gay representations in early cinema as the better-known and more fondly remembered Hirschfeld.

As we move into the next chapter to look at the films being produced in Hollywood from the 1910s through to the early 1930s we will witness a very different approach to

queer characterisations. Through the examinations of European films, we have been witness to homosexual characters as wholly rounded individuals with feelings, personalities and faults similar to heterosexual ones. As we shall see, in Hollywood films of the period this was not always the case.

## Chapter Two

### **“Laughing at him will do as much to cure him as compulsory football”: American Film, the sissy and the fop.**

*“You better not mess with the U.S. Male, my friend,  
If the U.S. Male gets mad, he’s gonna do you in.”*

#### **Introduction: America – A Country In Crisis**

The above lyrics were written by country singer/songwriter Jerry Reed in 1967 for the song *U.S. Male*. Although tongue-in-cheek, the lyrics epitomise the tough American male as had been portrayed by Hollywood for the previous fifty years, from the light-hearted adventure movies of the 1910s and 1920s, starring the likes of Douglas Fairbanks and Rod La Rocque, through to the western and war film genres which were still going strong at the time Reed wrote and recorded his song. Despite this, there were a number of indications in early film that the traditional view of American masculinity was somehow under threat from a new kind of man who was more caring, tender and altogether prettier than his predecessors. Fairbanks, Victor McLaglen and Lon Chaney may still have been star names at the end of the 1920s, but the new wave of young leading men were vastly different in looks, and played characters altogether less tough and more vulnerable than those that had gone before them. The likes of Jack Pickford and Charles Ray with their boyish good looks had perhaps been two of the first of this new type of prettier male pin-up to be popular when they rose to

stardom in the second half of the 1910s, but it was the cult of Rudolph Valentino at the beginning of the 1920s which really signalled the change to the wider public. While the change within cinema had been occurring over a period of around five years, it was Valentino, and the publicity surrounding him and his fandom, which brought the changing image of masculinity on screen to the attention of those who were not regular cinema-goers. Valentino had elements in common with both the (often older) more masculine leading men of the period as well as the younger generation of Charles “Buddy” Rogers, Richard Arlen, Ben Lyon, William Haines and Ramon Novarro who were to follow. Like Fairbanks, Valentino’s body was often on show in his films and publicity pictures, emphasising his masculine physical attributes, and sometimes even his manhood (fig 2.1). At the same time, his pretty rather than rugged and handsome face, and the sequence of photographs by Helen MacGregor which saw him in ever-more effeminate poses led to him being accused in the press of being “responsible for a decline in the masculinity of the American male” (Leider, 2003: 372) (fig 2.2).<sup>28</sup>



Fig. 2.1: Rudolph Valentino publicity shot

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<sup>28</sup> For a full account of what became known as the “pink powder puffs” episode, see Leider, 2003: 371-376.



Fig. 2.2: Valentino as photographed by Helen MacGregor

In hindsight, it appears that the press were simply looking for a scapegoat for the erosion of traditional masculinity. Gaylyn Studlar writes that “many scholars propose that from the late 1880s through World War I and into the waning years of the Progressive era, American masculinity was in a self-defined crisis” (Studlar, 1996: 25). Studlar goes on to say that the fear during this period, and in the years preceding it, of “losing traditional masculine anchors of identity, such as the gender-role validation provided by work, seemed to spur a multi-faceted, nervous search for middle-class male identity in an increasingly bureaucratized, industrialized, and, therefore, ‘feminized’ America” (ibid). Julia Grant writes that “politicians and qufigureheads as diverse as Theodore Roosevelt and G Stanley Hall had raised the spectre of effeminacy as a threat to the progress of American civilisation at the turn of



the century” (Grant, 2004: 230). This perceived threat to masculinity was reflected through the media of the time, from movies through to magazines and even songs.<sup>29</sup>

This chapter, therefore, not only examines what have been read previously as cinematic representations of male homosexuals, but also links these representations to the so-called masculinity crisis and how this was reflected in the stock characters of the “sissy” and the “fop”. Without homosexual-themed films or explicitly gay characters, one of the biggest challenges when examining American films of this period is determining what was read, and what was intended to be read, as gay and what was not. My goal with regard to this critical examination of the sissy character is threefold. Firstly, I aim to put the sissy back into the context of the period and to explore the possibility that not all of the characters assumed by previous scholars to be gay were actually intended to be read in this way. With only a few explicitly male gay characters in American film during this period, we cannot be absolutely sure what some of these characters are intended to represent with respect to sexuality, especially during a period in which masculinity was so evidently deemed to have been under threat. However, homosexual or not, there is no doubting the *queerness* of the sissy due to his behaviour being at odds with gender norms. Secondly, I will examine how the personality traits of the sissy character changed with the advent of sound and how this in turn resulted in the creation of what I will call the “fop” character. The fop has hitherto been included under the more general term “sissy” by previous scholars, despite seemingly obvious differences between the two with respect to characterisation and their treatment by other characters within the world of the film. I will therefore

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<sup>29</sup> One such song was entitled *Masculine Women, Feminine Men*, originally recorded by the jazz band Merrit Brunies and his Friars Inn Orchestra. Lyrics include “Masculine women, feminine men/Which is the rooster which is the hen?/It’s hard to tell ‘em apart today/Sister is busy learning to shave/Brother just loves his permanent wave/It’s hard to tell ‘em apart today”. UK jazz singer George Melly revived the song for an album in 1984, and used the song as part of his on stage performances.

demonstrate the key differences between the “sissy” and the “fop” and show why these characters should not be banded together. I will also look at the sissy and fop characters that are assumed to be homosexual within the narrative but which, by the end of the film, have been shown to be otherwise due to a declaration of love for a member of the opposite sex. And finally, I will re-examine what the sissy meant to audiences of the time, and whether this stock character was seen to be as offensive as writers such as Russo and Barrios might lead us to believe.

Prior to this, however, it is important to take a closer look at how the perceived threat to masculinity was discussed within society at the time and how it was reflected in non-cinematic texts such as magazines and newspapers. It is only by doing this that we can place the films of the period within context and attempt to understand how they were read by audiences at the time of their release.

### **America and the “masculinity crisis”**

Even the most cursory of glances through American magazines and newspapers of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century reveals a country almost obsessed with masculinity and the notion of the “real man”. A recurring advertisement during the mid-1920s in the magazine *Motion Picture Classic* is that for the “Physical and Health Specialist”, Lionel Strongfort (Fig. 2.3).<sup>30</sup> With the headline “Make Your Honeymoon Dreams Come True!”, the advertisement tells us that “she looks up to you as the Prince Charming of her maiden dreams – the answer to her prayers for a big, strong, virile husband – a real red-blooded man capable of fathering healthy little ones”. Strongfort claims that he can help with, among other things, colds, hay fever, asthma, a flat chest, pimples, drug

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<sup>30</sup> During its 16-year existence, the magazine was called at different times, Motion Picture Supplement, Motion Picture Classic, Classic, and Classic Pictorial of Screen and Stage.

addiction and “youthful errors” by aiding nature to “restore your vital powers and Manhood and fit yourself for the joys of Marriage and Parenthood”. He is pictured, nearly naked, with a body and pose resembling that of the Great Sandow, a strongman popular at the turn of the century and most famous today for his appearance in an Edison film from 1895.

**Make Your Honeymoon Dreams Come True!**

"Shattered ideals, broken promises, and the discovery of weakness, lost libido and tendencies hidden during courtship days are the cause of misery in marriage, weak, sickly children and divorce. Their destroying elements are undermining the family unit and eating away the basic fabric of our civilization."—Lionel Strongfort.

**Be True to Your Marriage Vows!**

Countless days by the frustration of your future happiness is now in married life. You have shared the very best side of your character as that sweet girl who has in full faith given her body and soul into your hands. She looks up to you as the Prince Charming of her waking dreams—the answer to her prayers for a big strong, white bearded—a real old-fashioned man capable of suffering healthy little ones.

**Don't Betray the Girl You Love**

Her eyes are clouded by Brenna and she has for you. She cannot know the things about your mind that YOU know. Her judgment is emotional and she cannot see thru the eyes of Love your weak habits and weaknesses that are so apparent to everyone else. You fear to tell her that you are a victim of youthful errors, lost libido and weakness—that you are a physical junkie for a real man. Yet you dare not change her and wreck her happiness.

**Rout Out the Crop of Youthful Errors**

You have seen a big crop of "wild oats". You have seen well that she girl you love will reap most of the harvest if you continue in your present weakened, overtaxed and debilitated condition. YOU KNOW THAT—and you know that her faith in you as a man would not survive the month. You are facing the crisis of your life. Your decision now will influence your wife's future and hers. It looks dark and hopeless to you but there is a way out. I can help you. I have devoted my entire life to the study of Nature's amazing corrective forces. I have helped to save thousands of men in your condition. I want to save you!

**You Can Be a Man Again**

Step Up. It's time to get back to it is not for the sake of the girl you love. You can come back. You can be fit, healthy and masculine, that's because you can get your mind and the happiness of that girl out. You can get rid of Cancer, Consumption, Indigestion, Fatigue, Her Pain, Nervousness, Exhaustion, Tremors, Loss of Strength, Your Worry, and the numerous other signs of Youthful Errors and Weakness that threaten to destroy you. You can get started in restoring your Vital Power and Strength and get ready for the joy of the girl you love.

**STRONGFORTISM**  
The Modern Science of Health Promotion

Specialties: I am skilled in the scientific methods that Nature has used in the past time helping the processes of life. I have seen her health promoting work in Nature's Law, and more scientific health, strength and vitality. Specialties: Herbs, Food, Exercise, and the most scientific and modern methods of the day.

**FREE CONSULTATION COUPON**  
ABSOLUTELY CONFIDENTIAL

Send for My FREE Book  
It's a Revelation

**LIONEL STRONGFORT**  
Physical and Health Specialist  
Department 723, Newark, New Jersey

Fig. 2.3: Advertisement from *Motion Picture Classic* magazine.

This concern with masculinity and virility was not only displayed through advertisements such as these in American publications. While Strongfort emphasised the positives of a strong body, newspapers of the time chose to concentrate on the problems of not being a “red-blooded man”. For example, in an article in the *New Castle News* from April 1922 entitled “Sissy Type of Young Gentleman Is Not New So Why The Worry”, we are told of the alarm at the “tendency among young college

men to wear their handkerchiefs in their sleeves and powder their noses” (Anon, 1922:

2). The article goes on:

The American sense of humour never has tolerated the sissy long. He can not be happy in the company of girls because they do not care for young men of that class. He can not be happy among other sissies as there are not enough of them. Laughing at him will do as much to cure him as compulsory football.

Anon, 1922: 2

However, in an “Agony Aunt” column nearly a decade later in the *Hamilton Daily News*, Dorothy Dix is surprisingly supportive not just of the Mother of an “effeminate” boy, but also of the boy himself. She writes: “don’t think your son need be a failure because he is not like the other boys...even in commercial life there are great opportunities for the man who knows colour and style and fabrics instinctively, or who likes to cook and other things that used to be considered as belonging to a woman’s sphere” (Dix, 1931: 7).<sup>31</sup> The fact that Dix says that these were attributes that *used* to be considered feminine might suggest some form of progress since the *New Castle News* article from nine years earlier. However, despite Ms Dix’s apparent support of the Mother in this article, not all publications took the same lenient view towards homosexuality. In April 1928, the *Gastonia Daily Gazette* in North Carolina reprinted in full a sermon delivered by the preacher Cyclone Mack. Part of the sermon reads: “The greatest menace that the church of God Almighty has to go up against today is the powdered-faced, painted-lipped, pencil-browed, spit-curled, light-headed, frizzle-topped, society-gadding, theatre-going, dancing, card-playing, fudge-eating

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<sup>31</sup> It is worth noting that part of the so-called masculinity crisis came about through women taking traditional male vocations during the war years. If that shift in gender roles is well-documented (women taking on men’s roles), then here Dix is indicating that the reverse was also occurring during this period.

sissy” (Cyclone Mack, 1928: 9). As we shall see, many of these adjectives, such as “powdered-faced”, “painted-lipped”, “society-gadding” and “light-headed”, can be used to describe Hollywood’s stock sissy and fop characters during the 1910s, 1920s and the first half of the 1930s.

Perhaps the media reaction to the masculinity crisis in America reached its peak in what have become known as the “Newport Trials” of the late 1910s and early 1920s. As World War I reached its conclusion, the US Navy became aware of a homosexual community within Newport, Rhode Island, which was being frequented by sailors. The government then “employed sailors to entrap military men and civilians, employing deceit and feigning sexual endearment to collect evidence” (Murphy, 1988: 2). Following this investigation, 36 people were arrested and the “decoys testified against them at a naval court of inquiry and several civilian trials” (Chauncey, 1985: 189). Little publicity surrounded those trials (see Murphy, 1988), until the trial of a “prominent Episcopal clergyman who worked at the Y.M.C.A. [accused of] soliciting homosexual contacts there” (Chauncey, 1985: 189). The Navy was then forced via a campaign by the *Providence Journal* newspaper “to conduct a second inquiry in 1920 into the methods used in the first investigation” (ibid).

Research on these trials by Chauncey (1985) and Murphy (1988) allow us a unique insight into how homosexuality was viewed at the time, and the terminology used to describe it, through the copious extracts from the inquiry transcripts. These transcripts give us a more truthful depiction of the views and (often colourful) language of the period than any newspaper article could ever do, due to the incredible frankness of the evidence given. We know from these transcripts that gay stereotypes were in place

and firmly accepted by 1920. Chauncey quotes a heterosexual investigator as saying that “if a man was walking along the street in an effeminate manner, with his lips rouged, face-powdered and his eye-brow pencilled, that in the majority of cases you could form a pretty good opinion of what kind of man he was...a ‘fairy’” (Chauncey, 1985: 191). These same adjectives were used in the 1928 sermon reprinted in *Gastonia Daily Gazette* discussed earlier in the chapter, showing that such views were still held nearly a decade later. We also know through these transcripts that a term such as “fairy” referred to someone who preferred to give oral sex, rather than being simply the derogatory term for a gay man we know today. Perhaps rather surprisingly, the term “cocksucker” was also common parlance within the trials, used by the various representing counsels as well as by witnesses. The term appears to have been used as an alternative word for “fairy” (see Chauncey, 1985: 192). The words “queer”, “faggott” and “queen” were commonly used in the trials to refer to homosexuals in general, whereas we also learn that the gay community itself also had terms with which to refer to each other. A “pogue” or “brown” was someone who preferred to be anally penetrated and “two-way artists” liked to both give and receive, although these appear to have been used *by* homosexuals about each other rather than by heterosexuals *about* homosexuals. These terms suggest the idea of a gay “community” with its own language.

The use of the term “sissy” in the 1922 newspaper article, as well as, elsewhere, “pansy” and “fairy” (the three terms were somewhat interchangeable during the late 1920s), is a problematic one, and poses a number of questions when looking at the representation of queerness in Hollywood films of the silent and early sound periods. Since the publication of *The Celluloid Closet* in 1981, the term “sissy” has been used

in studies of queer cinema in relation to the sequence of characters which appeared in Hollywood cinema, most notably during the 1920s and 1930s, which have been assumed to represent Hollywood's dominant image of male homosexuality. However, the use of the term in the articles and advertisements discussed earlier in this chapter may not be referring to homosexuality at all, but simply to the perceived changes in masculinity, although there are clearly links between the two. As I shall demonstrate throughout this chapter, homosexuality is/was often linked with the so-called threat to masculinity which was caused as much by changes to industry and therefore traditional male roles in the workplace as by any changes in genetics or feminization. Bearing this in mind, we have to be careful in assuming that the term "sissy" (or "pansy" or "fairy") was interchangeable with the term homosexual, not least because a homosexual identity as we understand it today was not recognised in America during this period, except for those familiar with the work of the European sexologists discussed in the previous chapter.

It is difficult to ascertain just how many Americans *were* familiar with the European sexologists. Bronski reminds us that they and their work were mentioned within certain stage productions. He writes that "questions raised by sexology about gender roles and sex were also explicitly 'staged' and this became part of a public discourse. The opening scene of Mae West's 1927 play *The Drag* has two characters openly discussing the ideas of Karl Ulrichs" (Bronski, 2011: 114). Despite this, *The Drag* played only in New Jersey and Connecticut, but never on Broadway in fear of being closed down (see Bronski, 2011: 117-8). Therefore sexuality and the ideas of the European sexologists were becoming part of a public discourse, but only in select, "safe" areas. Likewise, Bronski tells us that public cruising was also present in New

York, but only within Harlem and Greenwich Village, the two areas most accepting of homosexual behaviour (Bronski, 2011: 123). We have also already seen that there was sense of a gay community in Newport in the 1910s. For such a community to exist, with its own code words and slang, one feels that each person within it must have had a sense of identity in order to belong. So, while a homosexual identity was not recognised by much of heterosexual America (certainly outside of the big cities) and the medical profession, we cannot be certain that this was also the case for homosexuals themselves, especially in parts of the country or areas of the cities where they were able to mix with others of their own kind and form communities like the one in Newport, Rhode Island. Bronski also comments on this, writing that “homosexuals found public streets and parks useful for meeting one another. These public places became a space to enact formerly private aspects of life. Earl Lind ... describes at length an active homosexual culture, often centred around the role of fairy or pansy” (Bronski, 2011: 123).

This sense of homosexual community is one that is also described by a “well-informed American correspondent” in the 1915 book *Sexual Inversion* by the sexologist Havelock Ellis. The correspondent is quoted as saying that “the world of sexual inverts is, indeed, a large one in any American city, and it is a community distinctly organised – words, customs, traditions of its own; and every city has its numerous meeting places” (Ellis, quoted in Katz, 1976: 52). These “sexual inverts” may not have identified themselves as “homosexual” at that time, but there is little doubt from the accounts of Ellis, Bronski (2011) and Chauncey (1994) that this is what they were in all but name, but the term simply wasn’t in common use at the time, and the idea of sexual identity was not commonplace. Despite this, and perhaps more importantly, the



population of these communities identified with each other.

However, with regards to understanding the role of the sissy in popular culture at the time, things are not so straightforward. Russo and Barrios have both influentially aligned the sissy character in film with homosexuality, with Russo writing that “Webster defined *sissy* as the opposite of male, and the jump from harmless sissy characters to explicit reference to homosexuality was made well before sound arrived” (Russo, 1987:16). However this automatic association may be an erroneous one. In his study of gay New York during this period, Chauncey writes that “the determinative criterion in the identification of men as fairies was not the extent of their same-sex desire or activity (their ‘sexuality’) but rather the gender persona and status they assumed” (Chauncey, 1994: 47). Despite this, in his work on the Newport trials, discussed earlier in this chapter, Chauncey states that the words “fairy” and “cocksucker” appear to have been interchangeable within the homosexual community. Ellis also suggests this, telling us that a “fairy” was another name for a “fellator” in New York (Ellis, quoted in Katz, 1976: 52).

These contradictions and confusion only go to highlight the importance of re-examining the sissy character in Hollywood films by putting it within the social, scientific and political context of the time. After all, what may seem “gay” to us today may not have done so ninety years ago in an America where same-sex acts were known to take place, but homosexuality as a lifestyle was not thought to exist or, at least, was not recognised by most of the population. It is worth being reminded of the *Dickson Experimental Sound Film*, discussed at the very beginning of this thesis, where the two men dancing in the 1894 film were not doing so because of

homosexuality but because no women were employed by the studio at that time. The images may seem “gay” to us, but often the origin of the images is not rooted in a desire to represent homosexuality on screen.

If the first decades of the twentieth century were silent ones for films, they were invisible ones for the gay men of America. Unlike Germany and some other parts of Europe, there were no organised groups fighting for gay rights and for penal reform in the United States. Magnus Hirschfeld and his colleagues from the Scientific-Humanitarian Committee had made trips to America to give lecture tours, but most of their appeals for reform and humanity towards homosexuals fell on deaf ears. They found that the majority of the leading physicians and psychiatrists in America were of the belief that homosexuality was an illness or an object choice and not part of a person’s genetic make-up. After giving a talk on homosexuality in 1906, Otto Spengler, one of Hirschfeld’s colleagues at the Scientific-Humanitarian Committee, wrote “a lawyer stood up and maintained...that homosexuals belong in prison. This shows plainly what educational efforts are still required here, where such educated people are so stupid...People just faint when the subject is broached” (Spengler, 1906: 381).

An illness inevitably needed a cure, and many attempts were made in the early 1900s to find one, resulting in gay men often finding themselves used as a form of human guinea pig while the medical profession tried out treatments from castration to electric shock therapy (see Katz, 1976: 129-209). Despite this, there were a small number of people who fought for the rights of homosexuals. One of these was the anarchist Emma Goldman whose efforts on behalf of gay men and women stemmed partly from

her experience of living in Greenwich Village where a gay community had begun to form during the 1910s. In 1923, she wrote a letter to Magnus Hirschfeld for publication in the *Yearbook for Sexual Intermediate Types*, issued by the Scientific-Humanitarian Committee. In it she writes:

I spoke up in no uncertain terms on behalf of Oscar Wilde. The entire persecution and sentencing of Wilde struck me *as an act of cruel injustice and repulsive hypocrisy* on the part of the society which condemned this man...I defended in the spoken and written work those whose nature is different in regard to sexual feeling and needs.

Goldman, 1923: 379

Most of the time, however, homosexuality was not talked about, and gay men and women did their best not to draw attention to their sexuality and/or sexual activities. This is perhaps best demonstrated by the fact that the 2003 book containing reprints of articles concerned with gay rights from the last century from the *New York Times* has no entries at all before 1928 (Samar, 2003).

The fact that gay men were viewed differently politically, socially, scientifically and medically in the America of the 1910s and 20s when compared to some parts of Europe makes it no surprise that cinematic portrayals were also often vastly different. In European films (albeit a relatively small number), at least homosexuals *were* portrayed on screen and without apology. In America, homosexuality may have been indicated (often very broadly), but the word itself was never uttered, and the characterisations were intrinsically linked with the masculinity crisis of the time. Explicit homosexuality was as invisible in the cinema as it was for most Americans “real life”. And yet, despite this invisibility, those characters in American cinema of

the time that are routinely viewed as gay by modern audiences often appear to have a happier existence than the gay characters in the films discussed in the previous chapter. The queer character in America was mostly introduced for the sake of humour, and not to demand social change. As we shall see, corresponding to their relatively unchallenging political aspect, sissy characters are often seen to be happy, healthy and enjoying life, whether they are men-about-town or cowboys.

### **The Sissy**

By the mid-1920s, the sissy character was already well-established as a feature of Hollywood films. Until recently, the earliest known surviving film containing what we now call the “sissy” was *Algie The Miner*, directed by Edward Warren and Harry Schenk in 1912,<sup>32</sup> although with so many films from the period lost, it is always possible that there were films prior to this which featured similar characterisations. The film was made for the Solax Studios, a company formed in 1910 by Alice Guy Blaché and her husband, Herbert, who had travelled to America after over a decade of making films for Gaumont in France. Alice Guy Blaché directed the majority of the Solax films, and had been directing since the mid-1890s. The narrative of *Algie the Miner* tells how Algie, an effeminate man, is sent away by his girlfriend’s father in order to prove himself a “real” man within a year; if he fails, the marriage cannot proceed. Algie goes West, encounters a variety of cowboys, including Big Jim, with whom he becomes good friends and whose life he eventually saves. Once the year is up, Algie returns to claim his girl, having slowly but surely changed from a mincing and effeminate sissy to being a gun-wielding, butch and altogether more “manly” man.

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<sup>32</sup> Alice Guy Blaché has been erroneously listed as director in a number of previous works which discuss this film. She is actually credited as “producer and directing supervision”.

Her father then “allows the two to marry under the watchful eye of Big Jim’s gun” (McMahan, 2002: 224).

Barrios writes that Algie has a “dandified air, fluttering hands, pursed and apparently rouged lips, sly smile and eyes that he bats while fondling the barrel of a pistol” (Barrios, 2003: 17). He goes on to suggest that “Algie is heterosexual in only that he has a girlfriend” (ibid). Alice Guy-Blaché’s biographer, Alison McMahan is in agreement:

At the diegetic level of narration the movie is about Algie becoming more virile, skilled and confident, but at an extra-diegetic level the film is a love story between two men...To satisfy American mores, [Alice Guy-Blaché] added the sweetheart subplot, but as we have seen the sweetheart is barely a presence.

McMahan, 2002: 223-4

While this reading is interesting, there is no evidence of Alice Guy-Blaché’s intentions. Although offered as fact, MacMahan offers no evidence (production notes, journal entries, interviews with participants in the film, etc) to support this gay reading of the film. If characters do not have male partners within films or refer to themselves as homosexual there is always going to be some element of doubt as to the intention of filmmakers and the extent to which contemporary audiences would have read these figures as gay, particularly with the notion of sexual orientation not widely recognised in America at the time. In other words, how do we know that Algie and other characters like him are intended to be read as homosexual, rather than effeminate and yet heterosexual?

Within this mire of uncertainty, one film from 1916 appears to explicitly inform a modern-day viewer as to contemporary understandings of the sissy. *Behind the Screen* (Charles Chaplin, Edward Brewer) is a short film starring Charlie Chaplin as a scene-mover at a film studio. Chaplin's regular leading lady, Edna Purviance, plays a young woman who dresses as a man in order to get a job on the set, and is employed when the other manual workers go on strike. Chaplin is the only person to know about the disguise and falls in love with the young woman, eventually kissing her. However, the kiss is seen by Chaplin's boss who believes that he has just seen his employee kissing another man. At this point he taunts Chaplin by impersonating a sissy, thus accusing him of being homosexual in the process. It is the impersonation which is telling here, for he is mimicking a sissy character, therefore making clear that this type of portrayal on screen was linked intrinsically with homosexual behaviour, despite such apparent inconsistencies as sissy characters having girlfriends or, in some cases, wives.

Bearing this in mind we can, perhaps, assume that Algie *was* intended to be read as gay. This in itself is problematic in that, as we have already learned, the notion of homosexuality as an identity did not widely exist in America at the time. Even so, we know from the Newport trial transcripts that links were made between effeminacy and homosexual acts (and thus suggesting a sense of sexual identity rather than simply sexual acts) and therefore audiences of 1912 may have been able to make this connection too. As a consequence, audiences would not have expected the sissy character to be sexually or romantically involved with women. And yet Algie has a girlfriend, and returns to her at the end of the film despite seemingly enjoying his adventures in the West with his male companions. Rather than an inconsistency, this is arguably a reflection of the experiences of many gay Americans of the time. Algie

is a character that can be read as choosing a safe, heterosexual life despite have what appears to be homosexual inclinations. To follow those homosexual impulses would have possibly resulted in being ostracised from his social circle. Therefore one can read the film as Algie not miraculously turning straight at the end of the film, but making a choice to become something he isn't (heterosexual) having spent a year in training during his travels. This is, of course, conjecture and the real reason that Algie returns to his girlfriend in the film may have been simply the need to bow to the mores of America at the time. However, both of these options amount to basically the same thing. Whether the character of Algie is seen to choose a safer heterosexual life over a homosexual one, or the filmmaker adding a heterosexual end to the film to please audiences, the end result is the same: homosexuality (or, at least, effeminacy) was not socially acceptable.

Either way, *Algie the Miner* exemplifies what I term the “transformation narrative”, a recurrent feature of American films from the 1910s through to the 1960s. Perhaps the most well-known example of this can be found in the 1949 film *Adam's Rib* (George Cukor), in which Kip (David Wayne), is seen to be a sissy through the majority of the running time. In this battle-of-the-sexes, Kip tells Amanda (Katharine Hepburn) at one point that “I may even go out and become a woman”, to which Adam (Spencer Tracy) replies “and he wouldn't have far to go either”. This comment is not about Kip's sexuality but about his gender and that Adam sees him as “womanly”, and this, once again, links the sissy with gender issues rather than sexuality and, by the end of the film, Kip has declared his love for Amanda.

This type of transformation occurs in other comedies of the silent era. In 1926,

Leatrice Roy starred in two such films: *The Clinging Vine* (Paul Sloane) and *Eve's Leaves* (Paul Sloane). In the former, she plays the head of a paint company, and has all the stereotypical associations of 1920s lesbianism – a powerful woman who wears a mannish suit etc – who is turned into a beautiful, feminine young woman by the love of a young man. In *Eve's Leaves*, Joy plays a girl who has been raised as a boy, only realising that she is a girl when she falls in love with a young man (William Boyd). In all of these examples, despite the clear link between the sissy and homosexuality in *Behind the Screen*, the sissy was first and foremost a representation of a man who did not fit the gender norms of the day. This may in turn refer to, or indicate, an alternate sexuality, but this is seemingly always bound together with gender issues.

A different type of transformation takes place in the 1914 surreal fantasy, *A Florida Enchantment* (Sidney Drew), which tells the story of what happens when a seed is swallowed which turns men into women and vice versa, but whilst staying within the original body. The transformation takes place here with a rather convenient it-was-all-a-dream ending. As a consequence one must question whether the filmmakers are implying that such a happy life could not be had by men who love men (and women who love women); and that the main section of the film is portraying something which was simply not possible in 1914 America. Either way, it appears to be the nearest that Hollywood had come at this point to portraying Hirschfeld's third sex theory on screen, in that Hirschfeld's theory was that gay men were actually female souls in a male body and vice versa. After all, *A Florida Enchantment* actually presents us with this scenario as the seed is swallowed and male characters turn female whilst retaining their original male body (and vice versa).



But there is a problem here, most notably that the film is itself based upon an 1891 novel and an 1896 play of the same name, and if these incarnations of the story featured similar characterisations, then it would be impossible for the film version to have been somehow inspired by Hirschfeld. While the play is lost, the novel survives and in it the effect of the seeds is quite different. In the film, the seed only affects the *gender* of the person who has taken it, and not the body, but in the novel the body is changed as well, although rather inexplicably the face is unaltered: Lilly Travers, “chancing in a lazy way to fold her arms over her bosom, has suddenly discovered, in place of the usual rounded billowy softness, a massive masculine chest that would do honor to a Yale rusher” (Gunter, 1891: 73). This does not mean that the novel veers completely away from the notion of a different soul inhabiting the same body, with Lilly sometimes thinking “another soul is inside of her and her true spirit has wandered into space” (ibid: 75). However, first and foremost the novel is a commentary on gender norms, with Lilly now talking in a rougher tone, swearing and snoring – something she has never done before. After taking the seed and becoming a man we are told she has “an exalted sense of supremacy” (ibid: 75), and is “in for a good thing” (ibid: 76), reflecting that she is better off in society as a man. This results in some significant differences as to how the novel and the film are read. In the film version, the outward appearance of the character’s body remains the same, therefore when the gender of the character is changed it looks as if he or she is taking part in same-sex flirting – which, going by outward appearances, they are. However, in the novel, the body has changed too which effectively gives the book a fantastical sex-change narrative in which a woman turns into a man and thus becomes attracted to women (or vice versa).

Due to the play's status as a lost work it is impossible to ascertain whether the physical changes are a part of the stage version or just the novel. This means that any definitive conclusions are impossible, but the differences between the novel and the film are intriguing, especially when one takes into account that Hirschfeld's theories came to the fore in the period between the publication of the novel and the release of the film. However, there may be a straight-forward reason as to why the physical changes are not seen in the film. The book tells us in detail the physical changes that Lilly undergoes when she takes the seeds, but what could easily be described in a book could not necessarily have been shown in a film in 1914, not least because it may not have been deemed acceptable in film at the time. The other question is whether it would have been actually *possible* to show a woman turning into a man on film, and how that could have been represented without at least partial nudity, notwithstanding the moral debate of acceptability of the subject matter. The issues of representing these changes visually would also have raised themselves for the stage version of 1896, and leads me to believe that the changes to narrative were probably made for that adaptation as well, and that the film was based on the play rather than the novel, a common practice at the time.<sup>33</sup>

In its earliest incarnation, the sissy character can be read as something of a cinematic representation of Hirschfeld's ideas of a homosexual being the soul of one gender in the body of the other – the behaviour of the sissy is often fussy, and they often wear baggy or flowing garments rather than traditional masculine attire. However, there are a number of problems associated with this reading. How do we *know* that they are a

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<sup>33</sup> In Chapter Five I discuss film adaptations of *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* and how they were adapted from the stage play and not the novella itself. Another well known case of this is the 1931 film of *Dracula* (Tod Browning, 1931), which is based on the stage adaptation which had starred Bela Lugosi in the late 1920s, and not on the novel itself.

cinematic representation of the Third Sex theory and, even if it could be proved, how and why was American cinema reflecting a theory neither popular or commonly believed in America at that time. If these films were made in Germany, where such theories were well-known, these issues would not arise. So, the big question here is where the sissy character comes from. Until recently, this has been a question with no obvious answer. However, a recently-discovered film might provide some of the answers.

In 1906, Alice Guy Blaché had directed a film while still in France: *Les Résultats du Féminisme/The Results of Feminism*. The film is a comic suggestion of what might happen to traditional gender roles if feminism took hold. Traditional gender roles are reversed in the film, with the men seen to be doing household chores, sewing etc, in a way not dissimilar to the novel of *A Florida Enchantment*. However, there is a difference in Blaché's film, in that the men have become sissies. These sissies pre-date what was thought to be the first occurrence of the character on film by six years, and the film's rediscovery is an important moment in understanding the evolution of the character and queer representations on film in general. The sissies contained in the film are not all that different from Algie, acting in a prissy fashion, hands on hips and, in some cases, a flower in their hair. These are, essentially, offering a comic interpretation of women in men's bodies, a concept which was at the very heart of Hirschfeld's Third Sex theory. Again, there is a link between issues of gender and issues of sexuality here. The film is *about* gender, not sexuality, and yet the effects of the changes in gender roles result in characters closely resembling the gender-types that Hirschfeld describes. In fact, Blaché's sissies are seemingly influenced not just by Hirschfeld, but also by the aesthetic movement of which Oscar Wilde was a part,

and whose influence was significant in the queer representations on film in Germany and Sweden during this period, as we have seen in the previous chapter. One sissy in particular looks as if he has walked out of a Punch cartoon satirising Wilde from the 1880s or 1890s.

The most important thing about this 1906 film, however, is that it could hold the key as to how the sissy, previously thought to be a solely American phenomenon, had traces of Hirschfeld's ideas attached to it. There is an argument to be made that Blaché, a Frenchwoman, was the first to put the sissy on screen, and that she took her creation with her to America, including him in her films (and those of her studio) there, and therefore influenced other film makers to use the same stock character. Blaché's biographer, Alison McMahan, discusses at length the many films made by the director/producer that involved transvestism, cross-dressing and gender role reversal (McMahan, 2002: 206-241). McMahan is hindered by many of the films in question being unavailable or lost (including, at that time, *Les Résultats du Féminisme* which I have discussed here), and discusses the films in relation to Blaché's own view of gender and feminism. She writes that "crossdressing in these films is used to question, undermine, and subvert the socially delimited concept of gender" (ibid: 239). Bearing this comment in mind, and most notably that Blaché was keen to examine social concepts of gender in her films, it seems remarkably likely that the sissy appeared in yet more of her films. It is already known that he appears in *Algie the Miner*, which I have discussed above, but it is also known that an American remake of *Les Résultats du Féminisme* was made by Blaché in 1912, with the title *In the Year 2000*, and starring Billy Quirke who played Algie.<sup>34</sup> It is impossible to *prove* that

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<sup>34</sup> This is a lost film.

Alice Guy Blaché was the “inventor” of the cinematic sissy and that it was initially through her films that the character became popular in American movies during the 1910s and 1920s, but the available evidence points towards this being the case. For example, an examination of newspapers, magazines and journals of the period has resulted in no references to the cinematic sissy prior to *Algie the Miner*.

Using as a source the trade journal *The Moving Picture World*, which ran from 1907 to 1927, it is possible to chart the history of the sissy character on film. No characters before Algie in *Algie the Miner* were referred to as a “sissy” within the pages of the magazine. In an advertisement within *The Moving Picture World* on February 24, 1912, Algie is referred to as “a ‘sissy boy’ who has as much back-bone as a jelly fish” (Anon, 1912a: 649). Within the same issue, the narrative of *Algie the Miner* is given in the section “Independent Film Stories”.<sup>35</sup> There we are told that “to a real man Algie is unendurable” (Anon, 1912b: 714).<sup>36</sup> This is the first time that the sissy character is talked about in negative terms within the trade journal, but it is certainly not the last. In the review of the film from a couple of weeks later, the reviewer links the character with disruptive gender behaviour, referring to Algie as a “girlish youth” (Anon, 1912c: 867).

Over the next few years a number of films featuring sissy characters (nearly all of which are lost) were reviewed or summarised within the pages of *The Moving Picture World*. In May 1912, a film is reviewed with the intriguing title *A Cave Man Wooing*

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<sup>35</sup> As some of the wording within this summation of the narrative is very similar to the advertisement for the film, it seems quite possible that these summaries of the stories of films were written and supplied by the studios themselves.

<sup>36</sup> This doesn’t appear to be true in the film itself. Big Jim and his companions seem quite happy to take Algie under their wing. While associations with them changes Algie’s behaviour, there is nothing to suggest that they find him unendurable when they first meet him.

(Otis Turner, 1912), which, from the description, is clearly modelled upon *Algie The Miner*. In this case a sissy goes away and returns a strong man (Anon, 1912d: 736).

By the following year, a backlash had started against the sissy character in the pages of the trade journal, with reviewers commenting in a negative fashion on the sissy each time he appeared. For example, in the review of *Hilda Wakes* (unknown director, 1913), the anonymous writer tells us that “it did not strengthen an otherwise good comedy to make the manager of the matrimonial bureau play a sissy instead of a human being” (Anon, 1913a: 47). Likewise, in the review of *Sissybelle* (Lem B Parker, 1913), bringing up a boy as a sissy is referred to as “sickly” (Anon, 1913b: 70). At the end of the review of *The Pay-as-You-Enter Man* (unknown director, 1913), the reviewer asks “why interject the abominable ‘sissy’ in the score – such stuff is not comedy” (Anon, 1913c: 1412).

By 1916, the reviews and commentaries on the films inform us that the sissies were being treated with little sympathy within the actual films in which they appeared. In one film, a father is “so thoroughly disgusted with the effeminate ways of his son that at last in desperation he managed to have him sent to college” (Anon, 1916a: 1744). When the son writes to his mother to complain about his treatment at the hands of his fellow students, the father intercepts the letter and tells him to “stick it out” (ibid). Seemingly reflecting the negative comments written about the character-type by film reviewers, and the more general comments about sissies from newspapers discussed earlier in this chapter, the film narrative tells us that deception and drinking alcohol is better than being a sissy and, rather more bizarrely, is apt to change the sissy into a “real man”. The protagonist in the film meets a girl at the college who dresses up as

the boy's mother each night and arrives at the college. The two go out together and return home in the early hours in a "somewhat intoxicated condition" (ibid). When the principal informs the father of what has been happening, he is "delighted" (ibid). The title of the film, *He Became a Regular Fellow* (Roy Clements, 1916), reminds the audience of what was and was not considered normality when it came to gender behaviour. The sissy in *Keep Moving* (Louis Myll, 1915) is treated even more badly: "a sissy boy buys a ball of wool for his knitting, and Musty, disgusted at the effeminate qualities of the customer, puts a lighted firecracker in the package" (Anon, 1916b: 154). By this stage, then, sissies were not just ripe candidates for normalisation, they were also valid targets for physical harm as well. Judging by the available evidence, sissies effectively disappeared from the cinematic map during late 1916 or early 1917, possibly as a result of America's entry into World War I and the desire for more traditional, heroic characters to populate films. This figure would return in the early 1920s, as will be discussed later in this chapter.

With seemingly no sissies in American films prior to *Algie the Miner*, all evidence suggests that he arrived on American shores along with Alice Guy around 1910 and, as we can see from the above reviews, his popularity appears to have been relatively short-lived at this stage – although whether audiences had a similar dislike for this type of character as the reviewers is of course difficult to ascertain. Despite this big step in finding the origins of the cinematic sissy, there are still questions left unanswered, most notably: If Blaché's sissy character became popular in American cinema after he appeared in the director's American films for her Solax company, why did the character not blossom in French cinema in the same way when she had used the character there as well? This is something of a mystery. There is always the

possibility that the answer lies in films that are either lost or neglected by scholars, but this seems unlikely. While individual films might be lost, it seems far-fetched to suggest that an entire cycle of films featuring a specific character-type would be lost completely; it seems far more likely that such a group of films never existed in the first place.

We cannot give Alice Guy Blaché all of the credit for creating the cinematic sissy, however; a variant of the character had existed for some years within stage plays. Play reviews within *Variety* refer to a sissy character on a number of occasions, but there appears to have been differences between this character and the one used in films. For example, one review in *Variety* indicates that the sissy in *City Sports* is a woman in man's clothing, stating "there is no actor with any regard for his present or future reputation who should attempt the part. Female impersonators in men's clothes should be eliminated from the burlesque business" (Sime, 1906a, 11). Elsewhere the character is linked with physical agility. For example, Guy Rawson writes that "the big 'understander' in an acrobatic act makes a good 'sissy'" (Rawson, 1906: 23). While it is clear that a stock character referred to as the "sissy" existed in stage productions of the time, it is impossible to understand through the passing comments in *Variety* just what relationship the character had with his cinematic counterpart. One reason to think that the relationship between the stage and cinematic sissy is not particularly close is that occurrences on stage appear to have reached their peak around 1906/7, and yet the cinematic sissy didn't occur until 1912. Also, considering that New York was the home of both American theatre and film at that time, one would assume that a stock character such as this would have made the transition from one medium to another, but this appears not to have happened.



The sissy also has literary origins. For example, *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*, published in 1876, contains a vivid account of a character that can only be described as a sissy: “His cap was a dainty thing, his close-buttoned blue cloth roundabout was new and natty, and so too were his pantaloons. He had shoes on – and yet it was only Friday. He even wore a necktie, a bright bit of ribbon. He had a certified air about him that ate into Tom’s vitals” (Twain, 1876: 8). However, it appears that this sissy is connected not only with issues of gender, but also issues of class. Twain draws our attention to clothes that are “new and natty” and that he is wearing shoes even on a weekday (as opposed to just Sundays). Here we have a sissy who is not necessarily feminine in behaviour but who (through the eyes of Sawyer) is molly-coddled by his parents.

There are also other issues at play here which complicate our understanding of the sissy and how this literary example may or may not feed into the history and formation of the cinematic variant. Nearly 140 years after Twain published *Tom Sawyer*, we are used to very different portrayals of the character. The first cinematic portrayal of Sawyer was by Jack Pickford in 1917, a role which he then reprised the following year. However, Pickford was twenty-one when he played the role for the first time, and his performance would suggest that the character was in his mid-teens. Cinematic portrayals of the character since then have continued putting Sawyer and his friend Huckleberry Finn at around this age. However, in the book the characters are around ten years of age. Therefore, while the boy described above *is* recognisable as a sissy, he has little in common with those discussed elsewhere in this chapter, all of whom are in their mid-teens or older. A similar character can be found in the 1913 film *Just a*

*Boy* (unknown director, possibly Alice Guy Blaché, 1912). Here, a boy is called a sissy by his friends when a kindly woman takes him in and replaces his ragged and dirty clothes with clean new ones (Anon, 1912e: 837). While this film no longer exists and therefore cannot be examined, we can tell even from the little information that we *do* have that this boy is called a sissy not because of sexuality or even because he contradicts gender norms, but because he is now dressed decently and looked after by a “kindly woman”. There is a sense here that “real boys” are not just rugged and tough, but also poor. To be dressed in clean new clothes can also earn the title “sissy”. Of course, we don’t know for certain the age of the boy within this film, and not even a cast list is available with which to ascertain the age of the actor. The only credit is for 6 year old Magda Foy, and while it’s not beyond the realms of possibility that the “Solax Kid” (as she was known) played the part of the boy in the film, the synopsis suggests that the character in question was older than six. However, it also seems likely from what we do know that the boy was intended to be viewed as pre-teen. As with *Tom Sawyer* it is clear that a sissy of this age is a very different type of character to that of an older teenager, especially when being viewed with regards to issues of sexuality.

While traces of the cinematic sissy can be found in the characters that populated both stage plays and American literature both prior to and during the 1910s, it appears that these variants of the sissy did not contain all the same attributes that would be found in portrayals on film. That audiences were used to a character *like* but not the *same* as the cinematic sissy through stage productions and literature might explain why the character that Alice Guy-Blaché brought to America became popular there but not in Europe.

Despite the various cinematic narratives in which a sissy turns into a “real man”, thus undermining a character’s possible homosexuality, on occasion a director, even as early as the 1910s, was daring enough to make a film in which sissies were seen to have male partners. One such film is D W Griffith’s 1913 short *The Reformers*. The film is critical of social reformers who, Griffith suggests, perhaps would be better off trying to sort out their own lives rather than those of other people. In this case, “a candidate for mayor, with his wife, campaigns around town on an anti-vice platform, closing saloons and theatres. Safe at home, their adolescent children read racy magazines and imbibe alcohol” (Brownlow, 1990: xix). None of the reformers are shown as model citizens by Griffith, with most portrayed as straightforward do-gooders, but there are also thieves, prostitutes - and sissies. The two sissies are shown only briefly, but on each occasion they are portrayed tutting at each other and rolling their eyes in response to the various vices they come across. The fact that there are in this case *two* sissies who spar off each other adds yet more gravitas to the argument that these characters were intended to be read as homosexual, and in this case a homosexual couple. However, Griffith’s inclusion of these characters cannot be taken as a straightforward, positive step: if all of the reformers in the film have their own vices, then homosexuality is also being classed in negative terms as a vice. This is therefore a very different situation to a film such as *Anders als die Andern*, which argued throughout that homosexuality was *not* a vice or even unnatural in any way. By portraying the reformers as having their own issues which need to be dealt with, Griffith’s film backfires. Whilst the film expresses contempt for the reformers who interfere in, and judge, the lives of others, Griffith himself is judging other’s lives. What is perhaps most interesting (and frustrating) about this little-known Griffith

short, however, is that if this film was brave enough to show a male-male relationship on screen in 1913, then it is highly likely that others were too. Sadly with 90% of films from this early period lost, it is impossible to get any real idea of how often such images appeared. An in-depth textual analysis of sissy characters from this early period is simply not possible, therefore, unless one makes the assumption that the handful of examples we have at our disposal were typical of the period. However, there is no way of knowing this and so we are forced to concentrate our study of the sissy on films made a decade or more later, where there are enough examples at our disposal that we can see commonalities between them. As we have already learned through the examination of *The Moving Picture World*, there were other sissies on film during this period. However, as with all other characters, the sissy would only garner a mention in the pages of fan magazines or trade journals (often the only surviving information on lost films of the period) if they were notable in some way. For example, if they were a main character, or a particularly funny or even dislikeable character. Characters such as the sissies in this Griffith film would not be mentioned, however, leaving something of a gap in our knowledge.

The sissy appears to have vanished from the screen at some point around 1916 or 1917. As the reviews and summaries in *The Moving Picture World* tell us, this type of character seems to have fallen out of favour with reviewers at least, and possibly with the public as well. He did, however, re-appear in the early 1920s, most noticeably in a one-reel comedy, *The Soilers* (Ralph Cedar, 1923), a film which is very clear about the homosexuality of its sissy. This short film starring Stan Laurel was a parody of the recent hit western *The Spoilers* (Lambert Hillyer, 1923). The narrative of this single-reel film is simple: Laurel's character finds gold in Alaska but, with the aid of

the corrupt sheriff, a competitor claims it for himself. Later that night, Laurel goes to the competitor's house and a fight takes place between the two to settle their differences. It is this long comic fight scene which makes up the bulk of the film's short running time. At various points the two men are interrupted by a sissy cowboy who comes in and out of the room looking for his hat and, predictably, his gun. The fact that he is gay is never in question in this film: he flutters his eyelashes at Laurel, refers to him as "my hero" and even drops a plant pot on his head when his advances are ignored at the end of the film. What is particularly interesting here is that the gay character seems totally uninterested in sex – something that sits at odds with the idea put forward by Russo that American films concentrate on the *sex* in homosexual. When the fight moves into the bedroom, the gay cowboy ignores the fighters, choosing to file his nails instead. Even when the two enemies are fighting (literally) on the bed and tearing each other's clothes off, they are still ignored.

What seems intriguing here is that the gay cowboy is allowed to exist within the film world without ridicule. Never is he seen pretending to be heterosexual and, at the end of the film, there is no startling transformation thanks to the love of a beautiful young woman. Nor is his homosexuality merely hinted at; there is no doubt about the sexual preference of the young cowboy and, unusually, nobody within the film seems to care. While he can be seen to be the butt of the *film's* jokes, nobody *within* the film world laughs at him or teases or bullies him. The two protagonists seem simply bemused by the continued entrances and exits of this slightly bizarre figure, but otherwise his sexuality and effeminate manner are ignored through the movie. Rather than *The Soilers* being a gay-friendly, forward-thinking film, it seems more likely that the fact that nobody seems to take notice of the sissy character *is* the joke. In other words, it is

deemed to be funny that nobody takes any notice of the gay cowboy, and that he himself takes no notice of two men ripping each other's clothes off. And yet, despite the stereotyping, there is something peculiarly likeable about the sissy cowboy in *The Soilers* (to this author at least). Given that all of the characters within the film are stereotypes of one form or another (from the corrupt sheriff to the wimp-who-wins-in-the-end), the cowboy comes off better than similar characters in other films. In a film world populated by outrageous characters he does not seem out of place.

In 1927, the advent of sound significantly changed the cinema-going experience. Many actors found themselves out of work due to their voices (or the character-types they played) being deemed unsuitable for the new medium, but the pansy/sissy characters “not only survived the transition to sound; they thrived. Part of their popularity may have been that pansies had unique vocal qualities (high-pitched or lisping voices) that the new talking films could exploit” (Benshoff and Griffin 2006: 25). An example of such exploitation of the sissy's voice can be found in the early musical *The Broadway Melody* (Harry Beaumont, 1929), which features “Drew Demarest as the sissy couturier, the talkies first gay stereotype” (Barrios 1995: 75). Vito Russo describes him as a “thin, hawklike nervous Nellie who flits around like a butterfly, his hands ever in midair” (Russo 1987: 37), and it is hard to disagree with this description. His role in the film is small, only appearing in three scenes. On each occasion he is shown to be on the receiving end of an insult or put-down by others working in the theatre – a significant contrast to the cowboy in *The Soilers* who receives no such insults even in the predominantly male community in which he is seen to live. In the Costume Designer's last scene, the chorus girls are having problems manoeuvring due to the size of the hats he has designed for them. When the

Wardrobe Mistress tells the Designer that it is his fault, he says “Well, big woman, I design the costumes for the show, not the door for the theatre”, to which comes the reply “I know that. If you had, they’d have been done in lavender” – with the lavender comment being a reference to his homosexuality (*The Broadway Melody*, 1929)<sup>38</sup>. The role of the Costume Designer in this film has been written about on a number of occasions by writers such as Russo (1987) and Barrios (2003), and yet the role is totally inconsequential within the film itself – so much so that the character is not even given a name.<sup>39</sup> His only purpose seems to be to act as the butt of various jokes; he has no narrative function as such. Benschoff and Griffin write that “One must admit that the pansy was typically used in the films as a source of humour, relegated to the sidelines in throwaway moments or small supporting parts, simultaneously announcing both his presence and his inconsequentiality” (Benschoff and Griffin 2006: 26). While this is true of some films, it does not give us the whole picture; as we have seen already, the sissy often had prominent roles in films (*Algie the Miner*, *The Soilers* etc) and was sometimes accepted and integrated within society in the world of the film. It should also be noted that, unlike many of the sissy characters of the period, the one found in *The Broadway Melody* is surprisingly unlikeable to a modern audience. While he is on the receiving end of various jokes and insults, it is difficult to feel sympathy for a man who calls the Wardrobe Mistress “big woman” and treats other people with the same amount of disdain as they treat him.

There are differences between the sissy character here and the earlier appearances that I have discussed in *Algie the Miner* and *The Soilers*. In *The Broadway Melody*,

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<sup>38</sup> “lavender” and “lilac” were used as a signifier for homosexuality in films during during this period, along with the already discussed “fairy”, “sissy” etc.

<sup>39</sup> However, the Internet Movie Database refers to the character as “Turpe” in the cast list for the film, although no reason is given for the use of this name or where it originates from.

instead of just being effeminate, the costume designer is *womanly* in the way that he acts – considerably more so than the Wardrobe Mistress herself. This leads one back to Hirschfeld's Third Sex theory in which homosexuality is theorized as a woman's soul inhabiting a man's body. Here, however, this notion is taken to such an extreme that the character is nothing more than the butt of jokes, a figure that neither we the audience, nor the other characters in the film, have connection with. While the character might suggest some acceptance in America of the Third Sex theory, there is little evidence that this was actually the case. Although Hirschfeld did embark on a tour of the USA just after the release of the film, there is little to suggest that America was more open to his theories than before, and they were certainly not being universally accepted. It should be mentioned that, like so many films made in the first year or two of the sound era, *The Broadway Melody* has not aged well and the scenes concerning the Costume Designer have fared worse than others and only help to slow down the narrative. Whereas films such as *The Soilers* can still be viewed as harmless amusements, there is something undeniably offensive to a queer audience about the Costume Designer in *The Broadway Melody*. This offensiveness to a modern audience is difficult to pinpoint, however, although the fact that the sissy now has a voice (and a grating one at that) may have a part to play. The vocal performance adds a kind of perverseness to the characterisation as well as allowing the character to be the on the receiving end of a barrage of verbal attacks from other characters, something that could not have happened prior to the introduction of sound. Because of his small role, it is impossible to identify how the character was viewed at the time for he is simply not mentioned in reviews and publicity materials.

The Costume Designer in *The Broadway Melody* can be viewed as an extreme example



of the sissy stereotype, and the same can be said for the two sissies that appear in the Clara Bow vehicle *Call Her Savage* (John Francis Dillon, 1932). The film was Clara Bow's first on-screen appearance in eighteen months, and the pressbook for the film refers to Bow's character in the film as "primitive...vivid...irrepressible" and shows Bow cracking a whip. Also featured in the pressbook is an advertisement which states that the film contains "a Clara Bow never before revealed". Other advertising materials within the same book show that this is indeed the case in more ways than one, with one picture featuring Bow's breasts almost entirely on show. The reviewer in Harrison's Reports described the film as being "putrid material", observing that "it is an unhealthy, vulgar sex drama, with several extremely distasteful sex situations" (anon, 1932a: 194). Perhaps one of those "distasteful sex situations" is the rare Hollywood depiction of a gay bar in Greenwich Village. The Village was well-known by this time as a "pocket of political radicalism and sexual freedom and, above all, of art and artists" (Miller, 1995: 137). Entertainment at the bar is provided by two effeminate waiters who sing a risqué song but, interestingly, none of the actual male patrons of the bar appear to be sissies despite the fact that the clientele sit in same sex couplings or groupings around tables, some with their arms around each other (significantly, this is more often than not female couplings rather than male). In fact, if the cabaret act was not featured, it would be possible for a viewer to completely miss the fact that the scene is set in a gay bar altogether. Within all of classical Hollywood, this scene is without precedent. Never before had the "gay world" been depicted in a mainstream American film. The next time a gay bar was featured in a Hollywood film would be in *Advise and Consent* (Otto Preminger, 1962) some three decades later, and the establishment in that film hardly contains the same happy-go-lucky atmosphere as the one in *Call Her Savage*. The singing waiters, not seen again in the film after their

song, are one of the most outrageous instances of homosexual stereotypes to ever have graced a Hollywood film. It is clear that these are two gay men enjoying providing entertainment for other gay men. While they are an extreme example of the sissy, we cannot take the characters seriously for these are waiters *playing* at being sissies, effectively lampooning the outside world's view of gay men and exaggerating it. The Greenwich bar scene is, however, relatively tame when compared to some of the other content of the film, which includes depictions of mental instability through venereal disease and the death of a baby in a fire while its mother is soliciting on the street. While Richard Oswald was depicting such events in his films a decade earlier, in *Call Me Savage* they are being shown not for political, scientific or social causes, but purely for entertainment and sensationalism.

Another performing sissy can be found in the Frank Capra comedy *The Matinee Idol* (1928), which features the character of Eric Barrymaine, an actor in a theatre company. There are differences here between Eric and the singing waiters in *Call Her Savage*. In Capra's film we get to see that Eric is not just a sissy on-stage, but that he is also one when off-stage. This is something that remains a mystery in *Call Her Savage*. The singing waiters might not be anything like their on-stage persona when they finish their song and are out of the spotlight. Unlike *The Broadway Melody*, in *The Matinee Idol* the character is respected by his fellow performers and is defended by them when verbally attacked by an outsider. This is a situation far removed from the prejudice experienced by the costume designer in *The Broadway Melody*. Barrios writes that "unlike the many cinema sissies who were tossed in as quick seasoning in short scenes, this one is a prominent part of the texture of the film" (Barrios, 2003: 31). When it comes to cinematic representations of the sissy, Barrios

suggests that *The Matinee Idol* is the exception rather than the rule, although he does raise the question of how many other (now lost) low-budget backstage comedies of the 1920s contained similar characters and situations (ibid). Despite this, as the next section of this chapter will show, the queer characters of American films of the late 1920s and early 1930s were not always dealt with in a negative way. In fact, many were viewed positively within the filmic world, even if it was sometimes difficult to determine whether they were there to be laughed *at* or *with* by audiences themselves.

The sissy remains a divisive character. For example, while Russo views him as offensive, Harvey Fierstein declares in *The Celluloid Closet* documentary that he likes the character-type because “I *am* a sissy”. Fierstein even went on to write a children’s book called *The Sissy Duckling*, which was adapted into an animated TV movie in 1999. What is clear is that the sissy in films of the 1910s and 1920s cannot always be viewed in negative terms. Characters such as Algie the Miner, the cowboy in *The Soilers* and Eric Barrymaine in *The Matinee Idol* were welcomed and, in the latter’s case, defended within the film world itself and not ridiculed for who they were, and it is only in the case of Algie that the character becomes heterosexualised. In other words, Eric Barrymaine and the cowboy in *The Soilers* were allowed to be gay (and in these two cases there is little doubt that they are intended to be read as homosexual) within the film world without ridicule, bullying or prejudice from those around them. While some might not see the character itself as positive because it could be claimed that it simply reiterates gay stereotypes, other characters at least accept them for who and what they are without question. This acceptance was certainly not universal in all films featuring the sissy, but certainly became the norm with regards to the other queer stock character-type of the late 1920s and early 1930s, the “fop”.

## **The Fop**

By 1929, the character-type referred to by previous scholars with the all-encompassing term “sissies”, had fallen into two broad groups. The first, already discussed here, was exemplified by the Designer in *The Broadway Melody*, or any number of characters played by performers such as Edward Everett Horton and Franklin Pangborn who specialised in such roles. As played by Drew Demarest and Horton, sissies are typically characterised as being middle-aged, fussy, flabby, blustering and uncoordinated. Their clothes are often baggy, flowing garments and, even when this is not the case, an opportunity typically arises within the film to get these characters dressed in some form of laughable costume, such as when Horton is dressed in gym clothes in *The Gay Divorcee* (Mark Sandrich, 1934). These characters are direct descendents of *Algie the Miner* and, like Algie, their sexuality is ultimately indeterminate, with Horton in particular often represented as hen-pecked by a domineering wife. These characters, therefore, are as much reflections on contemporary discourses of gender as they are concerned with sexuality. Gender and sexuality are clearly connected in cultural constructions of identity, and here it is virtually impossible to separate those two discourses; that is, departures from gender norms speak to and reinforce the suggestion of the sissy’s implicit homosexuality. From Algie through to the characters of Horton, we are presented with a situation where a lack of traditional masculinity implies confusion about, or an alternate model of, sexuality. The first group can therefore be aptly described as feminised men.

In direct contrast to this formulation, the second type of character in Hollywood films of this period that has been classed as the sissy was someone the audience generally

laughed *with*. To aid clarification throughout this chapter, I will refer to this second type as the “fop”. These typically young, slim, smartly-dressed, well-turned out, often upper-class and witty characters stand in direct contrast to the first type of sissy, not least because they are nearly always seen to be liked by other characters, and are presented as likeable to the audience. The fop is present in considerably more films of the late silent/early sound period than the first type of sissy we have discussed. With the coming of sound, the fop was often used as a minor character, delivering witty one-liners, often at his own expense; nonetheless, the audience is laughing *with* rather than *at* him, a vastly different scenario to, say, the mockery of the Designer in *The Broadway Melody*. The jokes that the fop delivered often incorporated code-words for homosexuals such as “lavender”, “pansy” etc. However it is easy to over-estimate how many of the contemporary audience would have “got the joke” and understood the reference.

One of the earliest actors to perform the role of the fop on a regular basis was Johnny Arthur. Arthur came into films in the early 1920s, and rose to prominence in part due to a leading role in a Lon Chaney comedy-horror film, *The Monster* (Roland West, 1925). Arthur’s role in this film seems to be a strange amalgam of the end-of-the-decade fop and the man-boy roles played by the likes of Harry Langdon, with Arthur playing a shop assistant who masquerades as a private detective in his spare time. Unlike the sissy characters previously discussed, Arthur wears a suit throughout the film, rather than a feminine garb. This element of costume helps to differentiate the fop from the sissy, with the fop more often than not seen wearing a suit and tie. There is less attention to gender deviation with the fop, with the emphasis on sexuality instead. Richard Barrios writes:

The heroine he silently adores...seems to sense what Arthur is really about. In an early scene she comes to the store...She tells him what she's come for: a bag of pansy seeds...The message to the audience is unmistakable. This, in fact, is one of the earliest examples of one of the most popular of gay-oriented code words; the word *pansy* was at the time not necessarily pejorative, but from this time until its use was banned from movies in 1934 it had one meaning only.

Barrios, 2003: 25

Of course, if this *was* one of the earliest examples in film of the word “pansy” with a homosexual connotation, then how is the “message to the audience unmistakable”? Surely, for the joke to reach the audience, one would have to be aware of the meaning of the word in the first place. If this was an early use of the term in film then it is unlikely that intention would have been obvious. Had it been in common usage at the time as a reference to homosexuality, then the meaning to movie-goers might well have been clear. However, the term does not appear to have been used in American newspapers of the period in the same way that “sissy” was, for example. Likewise, despite numerous examples of slang and code words for gay men in the Newport trials of a few years earlier, the word “pansy” was seemingly *not* used. If we take these into account, it becomes difficult to make assumptions that the audiences were “in on the joke”. These are issues that need to be kept in mind when one is trying to ascertain the intentions of an actor, writer or director during this period, especially when the messages the audience receives from the film are mixed or confusing. After all, in *The Monster*, Johnny Arthur’s character is shown to be in love with a woman, in much the same way that Algie the Miner had been over a decade earlier. Bearing this in mind, it seems most likely that the character is intended to be read as heterosexual but shy when showing his feelings. With regards to *The Monster*, this argument gains strength

from this being an early film to feature both the fop and the word “pansy”, with perhaps neither yet having the obvious homosexual connotations they would just a few years later.

By the end of the 1920s, however, the implication of a word such as “pansy” was unmistakable. In *Palmy Days* (A Edward Sutherland, 1931), an Eddie Cantor vehicle, a fop enters a shop to buy a chocolate cake. When asked whether he would like it decorated with roses on the top, the predictable reply is “no, make it a pansy”. In just a few short years, the fop had gone from simply being a shy heterosexual man to definitely and *defiantly* a homosexual one. Here he is not at all shy and socially-awkward in the way that Johnny Arthur’s character is in *The Monster*. Instead, he is very much the opposite, being personable and confident enough to poke fun at himself and know that people will laugh *with* him rather than *at* him – in the same way that in the Stan Laurel comedy *The Soilers*, there appears to be no judgement of the homosexual by the other characters. Barrios writes that “it is clear that in many films of the time, gay characters...have a place, a milieu where they mingle with straights, are accepted at face value, and are neither punished nor censured” (Barrios, 2003: 69). While such liberal views from characters in a film towards a gay (or seemingly gay) character are mostly aimed towards the fop rather than the sissy, this is not always the case as I have already shown in my discussion of *The Matinee Idol*.

The early 1930s turned out to be pivotal years with regards to the portrayal of both sissies and fops. Following nearly a decade of pressure from the Catholic Church and various other campaigning bodies, Hollywood had agreed to adopt a code of production in 1930 which was designed to make films “emphasise that the church, the

government, and the family were the cornerstones of an orderly society and that success and happiness resulted from respecting and working in this system” (Black, 1989: 171). However, a crisis was looming. Following the Wall Street crash in 1929, cinema attendance in America dropped by a third from 90 million to 60 million a week (Black, 1989: 173). With some studios facing bankruptcy by 1932, the emphasis on traditional structures enshrined in the code of production stalled and “the studios tried to lure fans back into the theatre with sensational movies” (ibid). So it was that, for possibly the first time since D W Griffith’s *The Reformers* two decades earlier, in 1933 a Hollywood film dared to show a gay man with his partner. In *Only Yesterday* (John M Stahl, 1933), a gay man is seen taking his boyfriend/date to a party near the beginning of the film. The sequence is only a brief one, but one of the men was played by Franklin Pangborn, who played sissies and fops regularly during the late 1920s and early 1930s, starting with *Exit Smiling* (Sam Taylor) in 1926. The sequence in *Only Yesterday* was heavily criticised in *The Celluloid Closet* for containing yet another gay stereotype as Pangborn’s character is both an interior designer and completely uninterested in the “real world” events of the Wall Street Crash (Russo, 1987: 40-42). However, this remains an extremely rare example of Hollywood showing a loving gay couple, with Barrios noting that the “film portrayed these characters and their world with some degree of probity and without extreme judgement” (Barrios, 2003: 117), something which seems like remarkable progress on what had gone before. However, a key question remains as to how both the sissy and the fop were viewed by audiences of the time. As these were often minor characters, they are for the most part not mentioned in reviews of the period, and so with no obvious source materials from audiences to use to examine this issue, I instead will examine this question through films made by gay men that contain these characters and discuss whether these, in turn,



give us an indication of how homosexuals felt and reacted to the cinematic representations of themselves.

### **Reinforcing the Stereotypes: Gay Directors and Gay Representation**

Since the publication of the first edition of Vito Russo's book *The Celluloid Closet* in 1981, there has been much criticism of Hollywood's representations of gay and lesbian characters during the early decades of film, especially with regards to the sissy and the fop. A major point of interest (and contention) here is whether these stock characters were deemed as offensive by homosexuals of the period. We have no way of ascertaining how these characters were viewed by audiences at the time; as I have discussed earlier, the sissies and fops were not significant enough within the films of the late 1920s and early 1930s to be written about in reviews. However, one group of gay men who could make their thoughts about these characters known were gay directors of the period. I will therefore turn my attention to two films directed by gay men and explore how sissies and fops were portrayed within them, and suggest that these portrayals can be viewed as a contemporary commentary on the character-type in general.

*Our Betters* (George Cukor, 1933) saw openly gay director George Cukor giving cinema perhaps its most outrageously over-the-top fop character in the dance teacher Ernest, played by Tyrell Davis, who appears in the closing minutes of the film. Richard Barrios writes that "Ernest is portrayed less as a silly fop than a rouged, twitty, fairy-winged pansy, the most extreme portrayal of this sort yet, and perhaps ever, seen

in film” (Barrios, 2033: 99).<sup>40</sup> The fact that this “extreme portrayal” is present in a film by a gay director is all the more intriguing, and perhaps leads us to believe that the sissy and/or fop was not deemed to be offensive by at least some homosexuals of the period. This, together with the fact that modern-day versions of sissy characters still appear in gay-themed independent movies (which are, more often than not, directed by gay men or women) is suggestive that opinion is more divided than we might be led to believe.

One could argue, of course, that George Cukor, still in the early stage of his career, was under contract to his studio and did not necessarily have the final word in how his characters were portrayed on the screen, but the likelihood of being encouraged to create such an extreme example of a gay man seems unlikely. Perhaps the reverse is true. The shooting script of *Our Bette*s describes Ernest as “a little dark man with large eyes and long hair, neatly plastered down; he has the look of a hairdresser and is dressed like a tailor’s dummy – in black coat, white gloves, silk hat, patent leather boots. He is a dancing master and overwhelmingly gentlemanly. He speaks in mincing tones” (Murfin, 1932: 145). When the character is transferred to the screen it is almost as if Cukor has decided to critique the sissies and fops of Hollywood cinema by making this one into a grotesque caricature. After all, there is nothing in the script to suggest that Ernest wears lipstick and other make-up. Despite copious filmed and written interviews with Cukor over the following four decades, little attention seems to have been paid to *Our Bette*s, a film which seemed to fall from the radar for many years, and so we are unlikely to ever find out exactly what the director *did* intend

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<sup>40</sup> It would have been interesting to know what Russo made of the character but, alas, there is no mention of the film in either *The Celluloid Closet* or in the often-forgotten precursor to that book, Parker Tyler’s *Screening the Sexes* (1972), although a clip from the film is present and correct in the documentary version of Russo’s book.

through the bizarre characterisation of Ernest. Even in the full-length collection of interviews edited by Robert Emmet Long there is no comment on the character of Ernest, despite a number of pages dedicated to *Our Betters*. However, in an interview within that book given in 1982 for *The Advocate*, Cukor is pressed about whether he would ever make a gay-themed film. Cukor comments that “I don’t think the big public is interested in that...unless you’re going to make it a comedy character” (Edwards and Goodstein, 1982: 181). He goes on to say that the public perception is “that if you’re queer, you’re ridiculous” (ibid), a perception that, intentionally or not, Cukor helped to encourage in his own film some fifty years earlier. No matter what the intention of Cukor, the sexuality of the character was clear to at least one reviewer. *Photoplay* described the film as “great if you like sparkling dialogue, ‘intelligent’ humor, and don’t mind your sex – well, purple” (anon, 1933: 48)

Another openly gay Hollywood director of the 1930s was James Whale. His films are littered with so many unmistakable queer references and in-jokes that his intentions are perfectly clear to a queer audience, or an audience “in the know”, though not necessarily what Cukor referred to as the “big audience”. The term “queer” (in both of its meanings - as “strange” or “odd” as well as its sexual connotations) could have been invented to describe films such as *Bride of Frankenstein* (James Whale, 1935) and *The Old Dark House* (James Whale, 1932). The latter seemingly disappeared for a number of decades and was at one time feared lost. However, much of the reason for its disappearance was due to legal wrangling when the rights to the film were bought up in advance of a remake in the 1960s. The film resurfaced in the 1990s meaning, once again, we are deprived of Russo’s viewpoint on the film. Although he does mention it, he does not go into any detail, suggesting that a print was unavailable to him when he

was writing *The Celluloid Closet* (Russo, 1987: 52).

Whale's *The Old Dark House* is a distinctive film in the first cycle of Universal horror films. Of it Benschhoff writes that "incest, necrophilia, male and female homosexuality, androgyny, sado-masochism and orgiastic behaviour are all hinted at to greater or lesser degrees" (Benschhoff, 1997: 43). The film tells the story of the strange occurrences when a group of people are stranded in a storm and find themselves seeking shelter at the old dark house of the title. Whale's sense of humour makes an entrance early on, and the director wastes no time in announcing that the travellers have stumbled across the Femm family, no less. Despite the fact that Whale seems to relish the use of the name, it should be noted that the choice of surname for the family was not his but J B Priestley's, who wrote the novel upon which the film is based. Horace Femm is played by Ernest Thesiger, who could perhaps be best described as an amalgamation of the sissy and an elderly fop. Calling him a fop may seem unusual - after all he is not middle-class, young, a man about town or well-dressed - and yet he does inherit the wit from that character-type and it is melded seamlessly with the feminine attributes of the sissy. Thesiger would go on to play a similar role in *Bride of Frankenstein*, a few years later. But Whale does not stop with the repetition of the Femm name and Thesiger's characterisation. Benschhoff argues: "At the top of the dark and oppressive house lives its 102 year old patriarch, Roderick Femm. Whale facilitates a queer reading of the film by having chosen actress Elspeth Dudgeon to enact the role, making manifest the gender-bending sexuality inherent in the family name" (Benschhoff, 1997: 43). Whale does not appear to be rebelling against Hollywood's stock gay characters here, but rather revelling in them.

*The Old Dark House* is also a film which questions the place of Britain within the overarching comparative analysis of American and European films of this period at the heart of this thesis. While this film may be a Hollywood production, the director and a number of members of the cast were British, and the source novel was by a British author. Bearing this in mind, we must consider *The Old Dark House* as a film which contains influences and input from America, Britain and, in the case of some of the stylised visuals, mainland Europe (in particular Germany and Scandinavia). British films during this period, as shall be discussed throughout this thesis, appear to have been something of a melting pot of influences from both Hollywood and mainland Europe. In many respects, this is hardly surprising. After all, many of Britain's film directors of the 1920s worked extensively in Germany, and therefore were influenced by the cinematic culture of that country and by the film directors of other nationalities (such as Dreyer from Denmark and Sjöström from Sweden) who had also moved to Germany. Meanwhile, Hollywood films were becoming more popular than ever, so it seems inevitable that, as British film dug itself out of the comparative doldrums of the 1910s and early 1920s, it became a fusion of styles and ideas from both the other side of the English Channel and the other side of the Atlantic.

It may come as no surprise that the director whose work best demonstrates this is Alfred Hitchcock, and I here turn briefly to consider one of his early sound films, *Murder* (Alfred Hitchcock, 1930), in order to extrapolate some of the ways in which ideas from Europe and Hollywood merged together within one character in that film. Alfred Hitchcock incorporated a sissy into *Murder*, a film which is in many ways a basic murder mystery story in the style of Agatha Christie and her contemporaries. Played by Esme Percy, Handel Fane is an altogether much darker version of the

designer in *The Broadway Melody*. Truffaut describes the film as “a thinly disguised film about homosexuality” (Truffaut, 1985: 75). Indeed, it is this character, a female impersonator in a theatrical troupe, who is revealed to have murdered in order to keep his secret. In the narrative that secret is his race – he is of mixed racial heritage – but there is little doubt as to what this is intended to represent, as confirmed by Hitchcock himself following the above comment by Truffaut in *Hitchcock-Truffaut* (ibid). The film’s reference to “mixed blood” appears to be a metaphor for the ideas of the Third Sex which were popular in Germany during the time that Hitchcock worked there, and which have been discussed at length in the previous chapter. After all, the advocates of the Third Sex theory believed that a homosexual was the *mixing* of a man’s soul in a woman’s body or vice versa. When Fane is captured at the end of the film he is in full female garb (a sparkly leotard) and performing at a circus. Hitchcock may well have learned of the theories of the Third Sex during his time in Germany during the early to mid 1920s, but the character of Handel Fane seems to be a variant of the designer in *The Broadway Melody* as well, so we not only see Fane’s as a woman’s soul in a man’s body, but also the feminine costume associated with the sissy characters.

## **Conclusion**

It is clear from looking at the films discussed in this chapter that the sissy and the fop are not the same as each other or interchangeable, despite the apparent assumption of Russo and others. In fact these two characters are vastly different from each other, with the fop presenting a considerably more positive image than the sissy in many ways. While it is easy to look back from a modern viewpoint and criticise these characters, we can also see that there is as much positive imagery in these old films as negative. Sadly it is seemingly impossible to find evidence of what homosexuals of

the time thought of these characters or, in most cases, what heterosexuals made of them, for these were, more often than not, minor characters whose presence were not discussed in industry or newspaper reviews at the time. Turning our attention to openly gay filmmakers themselves does little to help in this matter, other than to show how Whale and Cukor took the stock character and embellished or played with them for what appears to be their own ends. In Whale's case this was likely to have been for his own (and other gay men's) amusement, while Cukor's motives are less obvious. What we *do* know is that the sissy has not gone away. Modern day equivalents litter gay-themed American independent films, which are normally made by homosexuals themselves. Bearing this in mind, it appears that such stock characters as the sissy, fop or simply effeminate men may be less offensive amongst gay audiences than we might be led to believe.

We can view the films containing the sissy and the fop historically as a reflection of a perceived masculinity crisis. By exaggerating and making caricatures of those that are seen to be threatening, power is ultimately transferred to those who feel threatened. Perhaps most of us are more familiar with this through the newspaper cartoons of the Second World War, in which the enemy was caricatured and made fun of. The fop, on the other hand, fails to fit into this category for we are laughing *with* them rather than *at* them. The fact that they are liked and respected within the film world is perhaps Hollywood's idea of putting the so-called masculinity crisis into perspective – in other words suggesting that both the heterosexual and the homosexual can live side by side and respect their differences. If Hollywood was showing its more liberal side through such characters and films during the late 1920s and early 1930s then it paid the price in 1934 when the Production Code was enforced. Homosexuality (or “sex perversion” as

it was referred to in the Code) was effectively banned from the screen alongside many of the other elements of liberalism which Hollywood had used to lure cinema-goers back in the early 1930s following the stock market crash of 1929. Despite this, many filmmakers would learn to include coded gay and lesbian characters in their films as they learned to circumnavigate the code.

Hollywood's portrayal of homosexuality during the silent and early sound years were therefore vastly different from that found in European cinema during the same period, and yet through viewing the American films as a reflection of the US masculinity crisis we can see that the motivation behind the drawing of these characters was extraordinarily similar. If the films discussed in chapter one were a celluloid reflection of society's views of homosexuality in countries such as Germany and Sweden, then those from America reflect that country's view of masculinity, its meaning, how it was changing, and the perceived masculinity crisis. Therefore, the three genre-based case studies which make up part two of this thesis, looking at specific traits within these films, will discuss in much greater detail the similarities and differences between the cinemas of these two different cultures and what these tell us about the period in which they were made.



## PART TWO

### **Chapter Three:**

#### **Romantic Friendships and the College Film**

The first two chapters of this thesis have concentrated on highlighting a number of attributes associated with on-screen representations of queerness that are specific to either European or American films of the silent and early sound era. Building on this framework, each of the following three chapters concentrates on a particular trait or character-type, exploring how these were treated or viewed differently by the filmmakers and audiences of Europe and America respectively.

This chapter examines a group of films that are set within school and college-like institutions. These are environments which allow (and even encourage) homosocial bonding, which Sedgwick describes as “social bonds between persons of the same sex” (Sedgwick, 1985: 1) and “is applied to such activities as ‘male bonding;’” (ibid). In order to draw upon the queer elements or readings of such friendships, my own examination of these film will be in relation to Anthony Rotundo’s work on “romantic friendships” (1989). These friendships, often formed within the homosocial settings discussed in this chapter, are an example of what Sedgwick refers to as “homosocial desire”. She writes that she uses the term “‘desire’ in a way analogous to the psychoanalytic use of ‘libido’ – not for a particular affective state or emotion, but for

the affective or social force, the glue, even when its manifestation is hostility or hatred or something less emotively charged, that shapes an important relationship” (Sedgwick, 1985: 2). In other words, such desire is a preference for the company of one’s own gender, but not a sexual preference. Rather than linking the male-male friendships between the young men and adolescents in these films with homosexuality, I will be aligning them with the male romantic friendships that were at their peak in America during the 19<sup>th</sup> century. It is unclear how often these types of friendships were spoken of at the time other than amongst the participants themselves. However, it is clear from an examination of film, popular song and literature that contemporary audiences of the films discussed in this chapter would have been able to relate to this concept of friendship. Once I have established these links within the American films, I will turn my attention to European films and explore the links with them to the various youth and back-to-nature movements that were popular during the early 20<sup>th</sup> century.

One of the most talked about films of the period with regards to homosexual subtexts is William A Wellmann’s tale of flyers in World War I, *Wings*, which was the first and only recipient of the Best Production Academy Award (replaced the following year with the Best Picture category) at the inaugural ceremony. The film tells the story of two young men, David and Jack, played by Richard Arlen and Charles “Buddy” Rogers respectively, who, whilst vying for the attentions of the same girl, sign up for the air force and, during training, become good friends. Whilst on a flying mission, David’s plane crashes in enemy territory. He comes across a German airfield and, seeing his chance of escape, steals a German plane and starts to fly back towards his own base. However, as he approaches the base, he is mistaken for one of the enemy

and Jack takes to the skies to shoot him down. It is only after David's plane is shot down that Jack realises he has forced his friend's plane to crash. In a much-discussed moving sequence, David dies in Jack's arms.

Much has been written about this scene, the way in which the two men caress in it, and the way in which Charles 'Buddy' Rogers kisses Richard Arlen on the lips. For example, Vito Russo writes: "Arlen and Rogers have the only real love scene in *Wings*, and Rogers learns the true meaning of love through his relationship with his buddy" (Russo, 1987: 71-72). This understanding of the "true meaning of love" results in Rogers finally pairing with Mary, played by Clara Bow, the girl next door who has been vying for his attention for the entire duration of the film. Unsurprisingly, it is not just Russo who finds homosexual connotations within the scene, with Richard Barrios noting that "likely the director's own memories of First World War flyer-buddyship factored in but, perhaps inadvertently, the two actors are so dreamy-looking, and genuinely beautiful, that it's hard not to read a subtext into it" (Barrios, 2003: 36). Barrios has a point, for Arlen and Rogers are archetypal examples of the new prettier male film star of the mid-to-late 1920s discussed in the previous chapter. Unlike the actors in a number of films discussed later in this chapter, Arlen and Rogers remain clothed throughout the film, and yet the camera often dwells on them, with their close-ups often filmed with the soft focus normally reserved for female sex symbols such as Garbo and Dietrich, two stars for whom the suggestion of mystery and exoticism was crucial.

Both Russo and Barrios are, it should be noted, reading the film from a modern viewpoint, where concepts of homosexuality are far different than in the 1920s.

William Benemann writes of how homosexuality was understood in America prior to the twentieth century or, rather, how the very idea did *not* exist. He states that there was no concept of homosexuality *per se*, but simply that individual acts were committed, rather than a combination of elements that were part of the genetic make-up of an individual: He writes that “terms referred to participants in male-male sexual activity...but [did not carry] the modern sense of sexual orientation. It would have been meaningless in the Eighteenth century to talk about a ‘latent sodomite’ or a ‘bugger orientation’” (Benemann, 2006: ix). Bearing this in mind, it seems pointless to try to transplant modern ideas of sexuality on to films made at a time when such ideas are not thought to have been commonly believed in or recognised (in America, at least). In other words, the question for the historian is how can we suggest that the characters played by Arlen and Rogers in *Wings* were an on-screen representation of homosexuality or a kind of homosexual love affair (even subconsciously) when today’s idea of homosexuality was not commonly accepted? Instead, it is important to try to associate their behaviour and friendship with ideas and theories from the period in which the film was made, rather than those with which we are familiar today.

In 1989, E Anthony Rotundo did for the subject of male same-sex romantic friendships in 19<sup>th</sup> century America what Carroll Smith-Rosenburg had done for the female counterpart a decade earlier (1975). That is, through a careful examination of diaries and journals, Rotundo’s article builds a picture of same-sex friendship which, while classed as romantic, was not typically sexual in nature. He writes that this class of friendship “was based on intimacy, on a sharing of innermost thoughts and secret emotions. In this altered conception of friendship, a friend was a partner in sentiment as well as action” (Rotundo, 1989: 1). He continues:

Gentle emotions served both as the cement of male friendship in youth and as one of its chief subjects as well. More than this, many young men expressed their fondness in affectionate physical gestures. All together, these friendships inverted usual patterns of male behaviour – they were intimate attachments that verged on romance.

Rotundo, 1989: 1

Rotundo reports that his examination of diaries and journals reveals a kind of same-sex relationship which, while not sexual, often featured physical gestures such as kissing and caressing and even the sharing of a bed. These were relationships which existed during youth and young adulthood and could perhaps be regarded as a rehearsal for married life (Rotundo, 1989:14). In his conclusion, Rotundo writes that

Close male friendships did not end with the nineteenth century; powerful bonding between male youths did not come to a halt and neither did homosexual activity. But what did vanish at the turn of the century was the form of male relation that we have called here the romantic friendship – a friendship expressed in fond words, filled with pledges of devotion, hinting at the possibility of physical affection, and serving the needs of young men at a perilous time of transition. Romantic friendship is an artefact of the nineteenth century.

Rotundo, 1989: 21

However, in this chapter I will put forward a case that suggests that these friendships *were* carried through into the twentieth century (or at least resurrected), and that this was reflected in the series of cinematic texts discussed below. While it can be argued that this type of friendship was reinvigorated in the main due to World War I, and that perhaps the archetypal on screen portrayal of such a relationship was in the 1927 war film, *Wings*, I will demonstrate that, on screen, these friendships could most often be

found in films centred around college life, or life within a military academy. These locations provided the ideal situations for romantic friendships to be depicted, with all or most of the population being young men who were living away from their family environment for the first time. And, if these romantic friendships were rehearsals for adult heterosexual relationships, what better place could there be for these relationships but somewhere that young men went to learn and/or train. I will show how the various elements of Rotundo's model of the romantic friendship can be found in films such as *Tom Brown of Culver* (William Wyler, 1932), *Brown of Harvard* (Jack Conway, 1926), and the surviving entries in a series of short films made from 1926 to 1929 by Universal, collectively known as *The Collegians*. Having discussed portrayals of romantic friendships in American films, I will then turn my attention to a comparison of this relationship model with Adolph Brand's notion of "friend-love", previously discussed in chapter one, before looking at films from both the UK and mainland Europe and how male-male friendships were portrayed in a different way to those from America.

### **The Romantic Friendship in twentieth Culture**

Before an examination of the romantic friendship in films of the 1910s, 1920s and early 1930s can be made, a case needs to be made that these types of friendships were still in existence at this time, particularly in light of Rotundo's claims that they died out at the end of the nineteenth century. Rotundo paints the picture of male romantic friendships as that between two young men in which not only the joys and sorrows of life are shared, but also physical gestures such as caresses, kisses, hugs and even the sharing of beds. These forms of affection portray a level of intimacy that could be said to be romantic but not sexual; although a "caress" might be viewed as unusual

within a platonic relationship today, Rotundo goes to great pains to tell us that this was not the case during the period in which this mode of friendship flourished. With regards to the sharing of beds, Rotundo reminds us that

In our own time the phrase “sleeping together” has become a euphemism for sexual intimacy. We need to remember that in the nineteenth century that phrase still had a literal meaning. Many middle-class men grew up in large families where children, of necessity, shared a bed. Boys are the natural choice as bed partners for other boys, so the habit of sleeping with one or more brothers developed early in life and continued throughout childhood.

Rotundo, 1989: 10

The sharing of beds should not be viewed, therefore, as an indication of (homo)sexual activity between the two men involved in the romantic friendship. From Rotundo’s research, physical gestures rarely developed into sexual intimacy.

Rotundo also points out that the relationships about which he is writing were more prevalent in the middle and upper-middle classes, and suggests that these friendships were formed as young men moved away from home in early adulthood in order to work or study, and these tight bonds somehow replaced those provided until then by the family and, in particular, the mother. These relationships are then perhaps best described in modern parlance as ones of “brotherly love” from an emotional point of view but, of course, the physical gestures go somewhat beyond this. They therefore occupied what may, to modern society, seem to be a strange and maybe even uncomfortable middle ground between traditional heterosexual relationship models, best friends, and the love one might feel for family.



Rotundo contends that these types of relationships died out with the end of the nineteenth century due to the developing concept of homosexuality:

It was in the final decades of the 1800s that the twentieth-century language of homosexuality developed. New concepts like 'sexual deviance' and 'perversity' took hold and the idea emerged that such 'inversions' were not the result of unnatural impulse, but of indwelling biological urges. With these changes in thinking, homosexuality became associated not with an *act* but with a *person* and a *social identity*. The idea of kissing another man or sharing a bed with him became frightening and the romantic language of male friendship evaporated.

Rotundo, 1989: 20

While this may indeed have played a part in the demise of open, somewhat innocent relationships of this type, to blame this entirely on the concept of homosexuality may be to exaggerate this a little. After all, as we have seen in part one of this thesis, the scientific community in America was considerably behind some countries in Europe in accepting the notion of homosexuality as a social identity as opposed to a person simply committing a series of homosexual acts. And, even in countries such as Germany, such ideas were not given much credence until the very last years of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth. Despite this, as more people became aware of the existence of homosexuality, so these seemingly innocent friendships would have caused more suspicion than before and, as Rotundo states above, the participants would have become more nervous of entering into such friendships.

It is the innocent nature of the relationships which Rotundo describes in his article which makes it so moving, and that makes one almost jealous of the honest

relationships these apparently heterosexual men had with other men without being judged by themselves or by their peers. Rotundo quotes a moving passage from the diary of James Blake, which reads

We retired early, but long was the time before our eyes were closed in slumber, for this was the last night we shall be together for the present, and our hearts were full of that true friendship which could not find utterance by words, we laid our heads upon each other's bosom and wept, it may be unmanly to weep, but i care not, the spirit was touched.

Blake, quoted in Rotundo, 1989: 5

As is pointed out, “James closes his comments with an apology for his unmanly conduct, but his apology is for weeping, not for laying his head on the bosom of his intimate male friend in bed. Apparently crying violated the norms of manliness more than the exchange of the affectionate physical gestures with another man” (Rotundo, 1989: 6). However, I will now demonstrate that this type of friendship managed to find its way into the popular culture of the early twentieth century, despite Rotundo's claims that the concept effectively died out prior to this.

Robert Eberwein discusses the song *My Buddy*, written by Walter Donaldson and Gus Kahn and published in 1922. The “buddy” of the title actually referred to Donaldson's dead fiancée (Eberwein, 2007: 27) and yet the song was soon adopted by men who had served in World War I who interpreted the song as looking “back at friendship in the war, exclusive of any implications of homosexuality” (ibid). This clearly reflects Sarah Cole's comment that “the story of war is almost always a story of male bonds” (Cole, 2003: chapter 3, paragraph 1). The song was also popular in World War II and revived by a number of singers in the 1950s and 1960s such as Bobby Darin and Chet

Baker, with the androgynous voice of the latter seemingly playing on the homosexual connotations of the lyrics.<sup>41</sup>

The fact that the song was adopted as a “war song” is particularly interesting considering the lyrical content which fits entirely with the concept of romantic friendship as outlined by Rotundo, and is described within the journals and diaries he examined in research for his article. For example, the first line of the song reads “Nights are long since you went away”, something which could certainly relate to nights spent together in the same bed as a companion as detailed in the quote from James Blake’s journal printed on the previous page. The next line “I think about you all through the day” also corresponds directly with journal entries in Rotundo’s article. For example, when Blake’s friend moved away he “went about like a widower”, with Blake adding “I feel as though I had lost my companion, my supporter and my friend” (Blake, quoted in Rotundo, 1989: 5). The first verse concludes “My buddy, my buddy, no buddy quite so true”, with the words “no buddy quite so true” seemingly crossing the unseen boundaries between friendship and love, for one can refer to both “true love” and a “true friend”. As with many songs, there seems to be some confusion with regards to the lyrics. Some singers appear to sing “no *buddy* quite so true”, with others singing “*nobody* quite so true”, with these words differing in various sheet music editions as well over the last ninety years.

The second verse continues in the same vein as the first, but is more specific with regards to the relationship between the buddies, with the lines reading

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<sup>41</sup> Interestingly, in her 2011 album of mostly unreleased archive material, *My Heart*, Doris Day gives the song yet another new meaning. In a newly-recorded spoken introduction she dedicates the song to her recently deceased son.

I miss your voice, the touch of your hand  
I long to know that you understand  
My buddy, my buddy  
Your buddy misses you

These lines clearly correlate with much of what we already know about romantic friendships, whether it be the tactile nature of the relationship or the intensity of it. Even though this song was written about a deceased girlfriend, the fact that it was adopted by soldiers who had fought in World War I and viewed as a reflection of their experiences goes a long way to suggest that the romantic friendships of which Rotundo writes still existed at that time. Once again, they may well have filled in the void left by the presence of family or provided comfort for the scared young men at the heart of the conflict. There are countless other examples of romantic friendships in mass culture during this period, most notably amongst teenage characters. Jeffrey P Dennis writes that “[in mass culture] boys fell in love with each other. They were not merely best friends. ... In fact the intensity, intimacy, exclusivity, and permanence of these partnerships resemble nothing in mass culture so much as adult heterosexual romances” (Dennis, 2007: 13).

If World War I had possibly reignited the romantic friendship, this would lead one to assume that such friendships would be reflected in the war film of the time more than any other genre. However, this is not the case. The war film of the 1920s often featured friendships between two men of *different* ages, that of a more experienced soldier with that of a younger, less experienced one. There are exceptions, one of which is the 1927 epic *Wings* which, as my discussion earlier in this chapter might suggest, contains what appears to be the cinematic portrayal of romantic friendship closest to the model laid out by Rotundo. Because of this, I will turn my attention to

this film first. However, being a war film it is something of an anomaly, with the majority of films featuring these kinds of friendships set in colleges, universities, school and academies. *Wings* is centred around just two men in the squadron, David and Jack. Few other male characters within the film are of importance, and it is their friendship which is at the heart of the film.

As with the conventions of the “buddy movies” of the present day, the relationships between the men in a number of the films that I am examining in this chapter and the next start out with a considerable amount of animosity – whether fighting over the same girl (as in the case of *Wings*) or a resentment due to a clash of personalities (as in *Tom Brown of Culver*). Eve Sedgwick describes this in *Between Men* as an “erotic triangle” when the animosity is centred on two men fighting over the same woman. She writes that “in any erotic rivalry, the bond that links the two rivals is as intense and potent as the bond that links either of the rivals to the beloved: that the bonds of ‘rivalry’ and ‘love’, differently as they are experienced, are equally powerful and in many senses equivalent” (Sedgwick, 1985: 21). Perhaps more importantly, she also reflects on the work of René Girard, who believed that the rivalry between two males did not have to be over a woman: “In this view, *any* relation of rivalry is structured by the same play of emulation and identification, whether the entities occupying the corners of the triangle be heroes, heroines, gods, books, or whatever” (ibid: 23). We can see from the films in this chapter that the animosity is often resolved following a physical fight between the two, which inevitably results in the shaking of hands, often an embrace, and a long-standing close friendship which is physically intimate but non-sexual. Rotundo regards fist-fights and wrestling matches as important with regards to romantic friendships, and suggests that they are a way for boys to express affection

rather than an animosity:

Fist fights and wrestling matches not only bespoke boyhood rivalries, but they served as a disguised channel of affection in a boy's world that forbade gestures of tenderness. So, although a boy of this era probably never expressed friendship through a caress, he knew the feeling of a close friend's body locked with his at a moment of high emotion. He learned the habit of physical contact with others of his own sex at an early age.

Rotundo, 1989: 10

The fight which takes place between David and Jack in *Wings* certainly appears to be the result of the tension that has built up between the two men during the opening section of the film, with the audience fully aware that, despite their quarrels and supposed animosity, this friendship is going to be at the centre of the film. This appears to follow the same pattern as many romantic comedies of the period, where the audience are fully aware long before the characters themselves that the supposed hatred between them is nothing more than a disguise for affection. The fight in *Wings* takes place at a relatively early stage, just twenty-five minutes into the nearly two and a half hour film, and occurs while the two men are in the early stages of their training. They are outside with the rest of the men, taking part in boxing training. When told to switch partners, Jack and David find themselves facing each other. As the trainer shouts at all the men, accusing them of being “powder puff guys”,<sup>42</sup> finally a mix of repressed affection and expressed rivalry reaches the surface and the two men start to fight with abandon. The homoerotic quality of the scene is increased not only by the beauty of the two men, but by the fact that their thin white vests become almost

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<sup>42</sup> This term would have been relatively well-known at the time the film was made, due to a writer in the Chicago Tribune accusing Valentino of effeminacy using the same term a year earlier, with Valentino going on to challenge the writer to a boxing match – a challenge which went unanswered. Whether the term would have been in use ten years earlier (when the film is set) is less clear.

invisible in the bright sunlight and, in anything other than close-up shots, it looks as if they are shirtless. David is floored by Jack twice, but still tries to carry on fighting until Jack grabs his arm and declares “Boy, you’re game!” before leading David off the field, gently wiping the blood off his new friend’s face with his boxing glove as he does so. The fight is almost a “coming out” process, with their friendship now openly declared in front of their peers, despite strenuous denials of it in the past.

As their friendship becomes cemented during the course of film, they talk openly about their joys and fears, and have a ritualised dialogue exchange before each flying mission. It is after an argument between the two that Jack refuses to partake in the exchange, their good luck charm so to speak, and David crashes in enemy territory. He then steals a plane from the Germans in an attempt to get back to his own airfield, but is mistaken as the enemy by Jack who shoots him down, only to realise just a few minutes later that he has shot down his closest friend. In the scene that follows, David lies dying while Jack kneels down beside him. Jack runs over to him, and puts one arm across David’s waist and caresses his hair with the other. Jack gets up, ready to go and find a doctor in the village, but he is told by one of the French military that it is too late. The man shrugs his shoulders and tells him: “C’est la guerre”. David pleads with Jack not to leave him, and so he goes back over to his dying friend and buries his head in his chest in a way similar to that described in Blake’s journal entry on the night before his friend was to leave (see above), before he impulsively kisses David on the lips. Despite being in full view of the people around them, the action is done unselfconsciously and without apology. At this stage he either does not know or does not care about the implications of such an act. Anything is possible, and anything is permissible during these extraordinary times. It doesn’t matter: *c’est la guerre*, after

all.

Just a couple of inches separate the lips of the two men as the scene concludes. The dying pilot is told “you know that there is nothing in the world that means so much to me as your friendship”, an intertitle which is important in arguing that the relationship between the two men is one of friendship rather than homosexual love. After all, this intertitle literally refers to “friendship” rather than to “love” at a moment when the character is oblivious to the implications of kissing his friend on the lips. We do not get to see David die. In a masterful move, as he is about to take his last breath, the film cuts to a close up on an aeroplane’s propeller as it slows to a stop. When we return a couple of seconds later, David is dead and Jack has his head buried in his dead friend’s chest, crying.

While it is possible to view this scene as the ending of a homosexual relationship, there are so many elements of Rotundo’s description of romantic friendship present here that it is difficult to view it as anything else, particularly when one factors in the affection both men have for the two women in their lives. In fact it is with the ending of the friendship between Jack and David that the relationship has yet more in common with the concept of romantic friendship. Jack is only able to begin an affair with Clara Bow’s character, Mary, once David is dead; the romantic friendship has prepared him for heterosexual love.

These types of friendships were rarely discussed in reviews or articles in newspapers or fan magazines of the time. These characters within these friendships were often simply referred to as “buddies”, with no extra information being given. Instead the



reviews often concentrated (particularly in war films) on the spectacle of the battle scenes or the heterosexual romance within the film. However, an article from 1930 in the relatively short-lived *New Movie Magazine* not only dwells on the queer aspects of the friendship between Jack and David in *Wings* but even suggests that it was also present amongst the actors playing the parts. The article, entitled *The Three Musketeers of Hollywood*, discusses the real life friendship of Charles “Buddy” Rogers, Richard Arlen and Gary Cooper (the latter had a small part in *Wings*). The writer describes the first meeting between Arlen and Rogers, stating that “[Rogers] was walking about the lot a week or so after he arrived, when he spotted another young fellow getting his shoes shined... Buddy decided instantly that he would like to know this gent. Liked his face. First time he hadn’t felt lonesome since he landed. He climbed into the seat next to him and started talking” (Hyland, 1930: 129). While this can be read as simply a rather embellished account of the first meeting, we are later told that “If you saw *Wings*, if you saw the death scene between Arlen and Rogers, you can transfer it right out of the picture and know that the feeling those buddies of the screen had for each other is a real one, that it applies in life” (ibid). This would seem less remarkable if it wasn’t for the author drawing attention to the death scene itself. However, anyone who *did* remember the death scene was likely to have remembered the kiss between Rogers and Arlen, and to suggest that similar the actors had similar feelings towards each other certainly seems extraordinary. However, if these kinds of friendships were well-known and accepted at the time (and not thought to indicate homosexual feelings) then perhaps such a suggestion would have been taken at face value by readers in 1930.

Bearing this in mind, Barrios points out (2003: 36) that it seems likely that the intense

bond between the characters played by Richard Arlen and Buddy Rogers in *Wings* is a reflection of the sort of friendships the director, William Wellman, himself experienced as a flyer during World War I. Some of the letters that Wellman sent back to his family during this period were published in 2006 in a biography written by his son, William Wellman Jr. One of these letters reads: “If it hadn’t been for one or two fellows here I don’t know what I would have done...No matter what they do or what happens to them I will always be ready to return their kindness. After all, friendship is the most wonderful thing in the war” (Wellman, quoted in Wellman, 2006: 35). This shows a similar level of dependence on his friends as that found in *Wings* and the other films discussed within this chapter. With the words “I don’t know what I would have done” Wellman is suggesting that life may have been insufferable without the friendships he had struck, language which is not all that different from that used in the journals examined by Rotundo.

A similar friendship, but lacking the tragic conclusion, takes place in the lesser-known *Tom Brown of Culver* (1932), an early directorial effort from William Wyler, which stars Tom Brown (playing a character called Tom Brown) and Richard Cromwell (as Bob Randolph). While the film is not a war movie, it *is* set in a military academy, and thus combines elements of both military dramas and college films within its characterisations. The film’s narrative may be pure melodrama, and therefore a very different genre, but it offers a romantic friendship between the two leads which has many of the elements of that in *Wings*. Richard Barrios writes, “a tale of military-school rivalries and bondings, it offered several unexpected features. Chief among these was the homoerotically charged enmity between Tom Brown and Bob Randolph” (Barrios, 2003: 76). In the film, Tom Brown is a failed boxer who finds himself given

the chance to enrol at Culver and become a cadet. But he dislikes the disciplinarian aspects of life there and rebels on a number of occasions, causing him to fall out with a number of his peers, including his roommate Bob Randolph. When Tom refuses to give ex-cadets who were killed in the war the respect Bob believes they should have, the two attempt to settle their differences in the boxing ring. The second half of the film takes a more melodramatic turn as Tom's supposedly dead father turns up alive and (reasonably) well, having faked his own death so that he could desert in World War I. But by this time the friendship between Tom and Bob is already cemented, with the exception of a couple of brief episodes of disagreement or annoyance between the two.

As Barrios states, the film is homoerotic in a number of ways, not least because of the homosocial environments, such as the world of boxing and the military academy, in which the majority of the film takes place. This leads, as with a number of other films discussed in this chapter and the next, to casual nudity in a scene set in the communal showers, which in this case also contains homoerotic horseplay. The use, both visually and symbolically, of water is something to which I shall return to in detail later in this chapter.

Like David and Jack in *Wings*, Tom and Bob are seen to be boys rather than men. Like their counterparts in the earlier film, the actors are pretty rather than rugged and handsome, and are fine examples of the new wave of boy-next-door looks which took over from the traditionally masculine attributes of actors such as Douglas Fairbanks, Lon Chaney and Victor MacLaglen during the 1920s, as discussed in chapter two of this thesis. Unlike these older actors, the bodies of the actors that are displayed a

number of times within the film are boyish rather than manly and muscular. Tom Brown and Richard Cromwell may have been 19 and 22 respectively when the film was released, but it is safe to assume that the ages of the characters they are playing here are nearer 16-18. This in turn links to the notion of romantic friendships and the way in which they can be viewed as a precursor to, or as a rehearsal for, traditional adult heterosexual romances. Here, neither boy has a serious interest in a girlfriend, with the closest being Bob who risks being reprimanded for not returning back on time after the Christmas break because he takes a detour to give his favourite actress a bunch of flowers when she makes a personal appearance at a nearby theatre. Bob is not just ridiculed by his fellow cadets for having an interest in an actress, but for having an interest in a girl at all. It is seen by the others as childish to have a crush on a girl. This is played on significantly in a sequence in which the boys are taught basic dance steps in advance of a dance at which girls will also be present. The boys are forced to dance with each other during practice, with one performing the girl's steps, and it is a sequence in which the homoerotic qualities of the film increase significantly. Richard Barrios writes of the scene that "the special edge of their relationship became most notable in a scene in which the two young men, rehearsing before the school dance, find themselves dancing together edgily holding each other and staring eye to eye as they work out the steps" (Barrios, 2003: 75). However, once again there is a problem here, in that Barrios is taking a scene and reading it from a modern viewpoint. While we can argue that these characters were involved in a romantic friendship, we cannot argue that their willingness to dance with each other has anything to do with that friendship of latent homosexuality. As we know from the discussion of the *Dickson Experimental Sound Film* discussed in the Introduction, two men dancing together was not necessarily viewed as out of the ordinary. In William Lipsky's book

*Images of America: Gay and Lesbian San Francisco*, a 19<sup>th</sup> century picture of men dancing together at a dance in the Wild West is included, demonstrating once again that in all-male communities, men would often dance with each other in the absence of women (Lipsky, 2006: 20).

Jeffrey Dennis points out that male camaraderie during youth to the exclusion of girls as both friends and objects of desire was common in media of the first decades of the twentieth century, ranging from books and comics through to films. He writes that “amid the flurry of professional and pop psychology that appeared in the first decades of the new century, we find barely a suggestion that the teenage boys are ever thunderstruck or even mildly inspired by the sight of the girl next door” (Dennis, 2007: 9). In other words, boys looked to each other for companionship and, as in *Tom Brown of Culver*, a fondness or liking for girls was looked down upon and ridiculed as a sign of sissydrom by peers. Meanwhile, male camaraderie was valued highly by peer groups, and as a sign of masculinity when boys were together doing “boys things”. Dennis goes on to say that in popular texts of the period

boys fell in love with each other. They were not merely best friends. They showed more physical intimacy than any stage convention or cultural norm allowed for in the expression of mere camaraderie, and more exclusivity than any homosocial bond, with other suitors either dismissed or sparking jealous arguments

Dennis, 2007: 13

The notion that male camaraderie was viewed as a sign of masculinity rather than the opposite demonstrates the difficulties in analysing films from a modern perspective and trying to ascertain how these texts were understood at the time of their first release

from the point of view of masculinity and sexuality. If we believe the model laid out by Dennis, then the various elements of *Tom Brown of Culver* are a sign of the typical behaviour of boys during this period rather than a nod to the romantic friendships of the 19<sup>th</sup> century as outlined by Rotundo. Perhaps they are both. After all, both Rotundo and Dennis identify the normalisation of close boyhood friendships and male physical (but not sexual) intimacy during this period. It could also be that Rotundo and Dennis are talking about different age groups. Dennis's book seems to be more pre-occupied with younger teens, whereas Rotundo's research mostly centres around young men who have left home for the first time to start work or to go to university or college. Either way, the lack of female love interest in the film was welcomed by the reviewer in *Photoplay* magazine, who writes that "Devoid of all mushy girl interest, [the film] moves zestfully through famous Culver Military Academy (*sic*), with Tom Brown, Richard Cromwell and Ben Alexander fighting nip and tuck for acting honors. The film shows men in the making" (Anon, 1932b: 54). Instead of questioning the effect these close male-male friendships will have on the characters, the writer believes it is all part of the rite of passage towards becoming a man.

The narrative of the 1926 film *Brown of Harvard* also centres on a character named Tom Brown, although it is not linked to *Tom Brown of Culver* in any way.<sup>43</sup> In *Brown of Harvard*, Brown, played by William Haines in what turned out to be a career-making role, is an arrogant and cocky young man who tries to win the heart of a professor's daughter, but only manages to do so after he has both been humbled and won a football game for Harvard. Despite the fact that Brown is a wholly unlikeable

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<sup>43</sup> In order to avoid confusion, I am referring to the character of Tom Brown as "Tom" with regards to *Tom Brown of Culver* and as "Brown" with regards to *Brown of Harvard*.

character for much of the running time, the film was a huge success and not only made William Haines a star, but it also temporarily reinvigorated the career of top-billed Jack Pickford.<sup>44</sup>

Pickford, in what is possibly his best surviving performance,<sup>45</sup> plays Brown's sickly roommate, Jed Doolittle, who throughout the film not only sees beyond Brown's many faults but almost hero-worships his friend. The bond between Brown and Jed is portrayed as quite a different type of romantic friendship to that seen in either *Wings* or *Tom Brown of Culver*. It seems for much of *Brown of Harvard* that the feelings between the two men is not mutual, and that Jed is far more fond of Brown than Brown is of Jed. Despite this, Brown's one redeeming feature during the first two-thirds of the film is his respect for, and friendship with, Jed. Jed is picked on and viewed as something of a wimp by the other young men in the dormitory, whereas Brown defends him a number of times and even refuses an offer of dinner with the others because they will not allow him to bring Jed along. Whether the character of Jed was intended to be read as homosexual or not is unclear, but his sexuality is certainly indeterminate, and his adoration of Brown is surprisingly moving.

As with other films portraying romantic friendships, the two men are surprisingly tactile throughout the film. In one scene, Brown has a fight with another student over the girl he is attempting to woo. Jed arrives to support his friend and, after the fight,

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<sup>44</sup> Once again, the ages of the actors are far removed from the ages of the characters they are playing. William Haines was 26 at the time of the film's release, whereas Jack Pickford was a couple of months shy of 30.

<sup>45</sup> The ratio of lost Jack Pickford films is remarkably high, and a great loss with regards to this chapter. Pickford, along with Charles Ray, was one of the first to play the boy-next-door type in coming of age-type films specifically aimed at a teen and young adult audience in the late 1910s. The characterisations and relationships within these films would be of great interest with regards to the issues discussed in this chapter but, with the notable exception of *Tom Sawyer*, nearly all are missing or unavailable. The only remaining materials appear to be short reviews in fan magazines or trade journals alongside the occasional photographic feature in the former.

they walk away together, with Jed linking arms with Brown and then nestling his head into the sleeve of Brown's fur coat as the scene fades to black. In another scene, Brown arrives home drunk the night before he is to take part in a rowing race against Yale. The team coach arrives looking for Brown, so Jed literally ties him up within the bedding and tells the coach that Brown has gone out to buy some books. The coach leaves, and Brown breaks free, telling Jed he is going out again. Not willing to let his friend jeopardise his chances of being on the team the next day, Jed attempts to knock Brown out. He succeeds only in stunning him, and the scene ends with Jed sitting on the floor with Brown's head resting in his lap. The scene fades as Jed starts running his fingers through Brown's hair.

The most physical and moving scene between the two characters is late in the film. Brown lost the rowing for Harvard due to his drinking the previous night, so has returned the next year to try his hand at football, but the newspaper has reported that he has been dropped from the team. Meanwhile, Jed is ill once again and in bed with flu. Haines enters and at once goes about making sure that Jed is alright. He unbuttons Jed's pyjama top, takes some ointment from the bedside table and rubs it slowly and tenderly into his friend's chest. The scene is a remarkable mix of innocence and homoeroticism, particularly in light of the scenes described above which have happened earlier in the film. While Jed has been tactile towards Brown before (linking arms with him, caressing his hair) this is the first and only time in the film in which Brown initiates contact. Brown re-buttons Jed's top and heads out to meet his own parents who have come to see him in the football game he now thinks he will not be playing in. After Brown has left, the telephone rings and Jed learns that the information in the newspaper was incorrect and that his friend is on the team after all.



Jed decides to go after his friend, despite the heavy rain. Upon reaching Brown, Jed collapses and is taken to hospital, where he dies (presumably of pneumonia) as Brown is winning the football game for Harvard. On hearing the news, Brown breaks down, but the portrayal of the romantic friendship is now complete: the two men have shared more than a year of their life together and they have shared physical intimacy and their sorrows and joys and, as in *Wings*, it is only now, after the tragic conclusion of this romantic friendship, that Brown can win the heart of the girl he loves. Once again, having been involved in a romantic friendship is seen as a prerequisite for a serious heterosexual relationship, and in this case has forced Brown to face up to adulthood and his own faults.

The 1930 anti-war film *All Quiet on The Western Front* may, at first glance, have little to do with college films such as *Brown of Harvard*, but on closer inspection the films have much in common, particularly if we compare the first half an hour or so of *All Quiet on the Western Front* with the college films explored here. This first section of Lewis Milestone's film begins in a high school as a class of young men listen to an impassioned speech from their teacher about the importance of fighting for their country. They then enrol in the army *en masse*, and the rest of the first part of the film deals with their experiences whilst undergoing training before being sent to the front. This period of time, I would argue, is the equivalent of the years the young men spend at college or military academy in the likes of *Tom Brown of Culver* and *Brown of Harvard*. Admittedly the time is dramatically condensed in *All Quiet on the Western Front*, and yet the effect is the same: a group of young men learn about life within a largely homosocial atmosphere in which all of the people around them (other than their superior officers) are of the same age – something which is, as has already been

discussed, essential to the notion of romantic friendships.

On arrival at the training camp, the boys are given their uniform and sent away to change into them, which they do so without a care for each other's exposed flesh. As they each state which part of the training and/or combat they are looking forward to most, one mimes using a bayonet, only to be given a kiss on each cheek by his friend, who says he has won a medal. As with the young men frolicking in the showers in *Tom Brown of Culver*, they are remarkably at ease with their own bodies and nakedness. There are also elements of low-brow humour at play. As one young man lying on the bed raises his backside to pull on his trousers, another puts his spiked helmet underneath, so that the spike prods him as lies back down on the bed. Himmelstoss, the postman-turned-sergeant who puts the boys through hell during their training is captured by the boys late one night when he is drunk. They pull down his trousers and spank him with their swords before carrying him and dumping him unceremoniously in the same mud that he has made them crawl through time and time again. Juxtaposed with these boyish pranks is the mud-filled horror of the trenches and multiple deaths including one, that of Kemmerich, which, despite being relatively early in the film, clearly draws inspiration from the death of David in *Wings*, not least the physical gestures between the two as Kemmerich lies dying. These various scenes are representative of elements of romantic friendships: the young men act as confidantes to each other, they share their joys and fears, and partake in forms of physical intimacy – whether it be playful kisses, emotional tragic scenes or the *en masse* humiliation of Himmelstoss. What the film does not do is set up a *specific* romantic friendship, instead showing us the environment in which such a relationship was likely to blossom and presenting us with the elements of such friendships as just described.

The river/swimming sequence, which takes place much later in the narrative of *All Quiet on the Western Front*, is particularly interesting. In this scene, cut from reissues of the film which took place during the years of the Production Code, a number of men are seen to be swimming, bathing and frolicking naked in the river in a similar way to the boys in the shower scene in *Tom Brown of Culver*. The bonds between the men were cemented early in the narrative, with a number of them going to the same school together. In the context of the narrative of the film, the scene is one of the few breathing spaces from the violence and grime of the war once the battle scenes of the film had begun. Justin Vicari writes that water “is the symbol of ever-changing, ever-fluid life energy, and it is generally associated with revelatory moments or moments of bliss” (Vicari, 2011: 113). As we have seen, the use of water is a recurring one in the films discussed so far in this chapter, and much has been written on the symbolic use of water in the cinema. One could argue that the river scene in *All Quiet on the Western Front* is simply a depiction of the stressed, tired men of the unit letting off steam, but the recurring image of water in the films discussed in this chapter suggests that there is something more going on here. Dennis writes that “bodies of water signify the boundary between civilisation and savagery, childhood and adulthood, the liminal space of adolescence itself” (Dennis, 2007: 52). This is echoed in the work of Vicari, who writes “water is acceptance, porousness; it is maleness breaking through narrowly confining boundaries, coming closer to femaleness. For this reason, it is also a dangerous, forbidden zone” (Vicari, 2011: 113). While Vicari suggests that water is a forbidden zone, I would suggest that it is at the same time a *safe* zone. The use of water in these and other films generally allows the characters to act in a way that would be forbidden according to society’s norms of the period. It is a space where

physical interaction is permitted within a more public arena (even if that arena is only as public as communal showers). The watery locations allow the young men to act in a more homoerotic way than would normally be deemed acceptable; it is the nearest these characters get to being allowed to flirt with same-sex sexual activity without fear.

Water is an important visual and thematic element within a large number of coming-of-age films of the 1910s and 1920s. Victor Turner saw liminality as a form of threshold, most notably during coming of age rituals, writing that he viewed it as “the ritual subject passing through a period and an area of ambiguity, a sort of social limbo” (Turner, 1982: 24). However, since Turner, the theory of liminality and the notion of a liminal space has been borrowed and expanded upon by fields other than anthropology, most notably Literature Studies. Within these fields, a liminal space is seen to “lie in a limbo-like space often beyond normal social and cultural restraints. In these spaces can be brief moments of freedom and an escape from the daily grind of social responsibilities” (Preston-Whyte, 2004: 350). Szakolczai writes simply that they are places where “the very structure of society [is] temporarily suspended” (Szakolczai, 2009: 142). It is with this idea in mind that I wish to discuss the use of water within the college and academy-set films that form the backbone of this chapter. The very subject of these films can, after all, be viewed as relating to the theory of liminality as outlined by Turner, with a boy’s period of adolescence, or time in a college or training ground, being the very threshold (or ritual) of which he speaks. What I wish to concern myself with in the following pages, however, is the use of water as a liminal space, and one in which the rules of society are temporarily suspended allowing for the possibility of same-sex horseplay and intimacy without repercussions. I will show how, both in and around water, the boys and young men of these films feel free to be

intimate with each other without being self-conscious. This examination will also look at the differences between different types and areas of water from open spaces such as rivers and lakes, to showers and bathrooms.

Films that took bodies of water as part of their setting were common in coming-of-age films during the 1910s and 1920s. The late 1910s saw a three-film series based on the Tom Sawyer and Huckleberry Finn novels by Mark Twain. Significant elements of the first film, *Tom Sawyer* (William Desmond Taylor, 1917),<sup>46</sup> which features Jack Pickford in the lead role, are set in and around the Mississippi river. Pickford also stars in *In Wrong* (James Kirkwood, 1919), a coming of age drama which opens with Pickford diving and swimming in a river, with a long shot suggesting that he is naked. We can also not forget that in *Brown of Harvard*, discussed earlier, some seven years later, Pickford's character shows his love for his friend by chasing after him in the rain and dying as a consequence of catching pneumonia after getting soaked in the process. Meanwhile, the 1921 rural coming of age drama *The Old Swimmin' Hole* (Joseph de Grasse), starring Charles Ray, spends much of its running time at the swimming hole of the title.<sup>47</sup>

In order to explore the meanings of water within college films and with regards to romantic friendships, I would like to turn my attention to the surviving entries in *The Collegians* film series (Wesley Ruggles 1926-29). There were over forty entries in this series of short films made by Universal, which clearly got their inspiration from the popular college-set films of the day, such as the previously-discussed *Brown of*

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<sup>46</sup> This was the only one of the three films available for viewing at this time. The second film is regarded as lost.

<sup>47</sup> This film could not be discussed at length in this thesis due to the poor condition of the only available print.

*Harvard*.<sup>48</sup> Each short film contained the same cast, namely George Lewis as the handsome, kindly Ed Benson who is in love with June Maxwell, played by Dorothy Gulliver. Eddie Phillips played Don Trent, the older student who is intent on both stealing Dorothy away from Benson and humiliating him at every opportunity. Virtually all of the films in the series feature one or more sports in the narrative, and many of these take place in or around water.

*Flashing Oars* is a typical entry in the series. Made in 1927, it centres on a rowing competition between Calford College and their traditional rivals, Velmar. As with many of the other *Collegians* films, the young men are often seen semi-naked and covered with sweat following their sporting activities, with their bodies on display in a way that is atypical for the period.<sup>49</sup> This is the case in the very first scene of *Flashing Oars*, as the boys are seen practicing for the race the next day, rowing shirtless down the river in two separate boats. Both Benson and Trent are on the team for the race, but a phone call comes through to the dormitory later that evening to tell Benson that Trent has been seen out drinking. Benson and the rest of the team leave the energetic pillow-fight which is taking place and make their way to the club where Trent is drinking in an effort to bring him back to the dorm to sober up. This they succeed in doing (despite basically having to kidnap him in order to achieve their aim). The next scene shows Benson and his team-mates attempting to sober Trent up by holding him under a cold shower. Once again, both Benson and Trent are shirtless, with the camera

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<sup>48</sup> My research suggests that approximately ten of the forty-four films are known to survive. Of these, eight were made available for viewing for this thesis.

<sup>49</sup> While a number of actors (most notably Douglas Fairbanks, Rod LaRoque and Rudolph Valentino) displayed their bodies within their films on a regular basis, the amount of male torsos on show in films of the 1910s and 1920s is considerably less than a modern film-goer might expect. There are genre-specific exceptions to this, such as the cycle of South Sea Island films of the 1920s and 1930s but, aside from this, even pin-ups such as Charles “Buddy” Rogers and Ben Lyon were rarely, if ever, seen shirtless on film.

angle not allowing us to see below their waist. However, it is Benson who is in physical contact with Trent as he holds him under the water knowing that, despite the animosity and fights between them (which as discussed earlier in this chapter, have been read by scholars as a sign of affection between two men), they have to work together to win the race. At the same time, the nerdy Doc Webster (played by Churchill Ross) is seen standing at the side of the showers holding Trent's trousers in his hands, suggesting that Trent has been stripped of most or all of his clothes by the others.

Doc is a rather strange character within the series, occupying a place between nerd and sissy, with his sexuality indeterminate. He is never seen dating a girl (at least not in the available films) and certainly has an unusually active interest in the sporting activities going on around him considering he is portrayed as a geek and never partakes in any of them. Therefore, while he is not a traditional sissy or a stereotypical gay character of the period, his role in the films can be seen as being the most un-masculine of the young male characters, although he is not seen to be bullied for this by the others. While he is never identified as homosexual within the films themselves, his sexuality is problematised not just because of his outsider status, but also by the fact that he is constantly surrounded by the sweaty, often half-naked sportsmen. He is often seen viewing them from a distance, as is the case in this scene in which he is fully-clothed at the side of the shower area watching a group of nearly naked men hold another under the water.

The use of water here is essential to legitimise what is taking place. While the view of a group of half-naked handsome young men in extreme close proximity to each other

within a shower can be viewed as homoerotic, their actions are, at least, permissible because of the bathroom environment. Had we seen Trent simply stripped of his clothes and put to bed by the other students, the scene would not only be less amusing but it could also be seen as more socially unacceptable. After all, Trent could be put to bed with his clothes *on* and it would not make much difference to the narrative. However, the attempt to sober him up under a shower gives validity to the partial-nudity of the scene and the slightly strange mix of slapstick and homoeroticism that it includes.

*The Relay* (1928) is a rather manic later episode in the series which concludes with a party in a restaurant which ends with most of the male characters fighting within a small indoor pool. The boys literally tear each other's clothes off during the course of the fight as they wrestle within the water. This is pure slapstick, with the sequence making relatively little dramatic sense within the course of the narrative. By the end of the scene, most of the boys are shirtless, with some also with their trousers down. Those that have not been stripped of their shirts are so wet that their (mostly white) shirts have become see-through. The homoerotic tensions are high within this episode through the increased physical contact between the boys within the indoor pool and, once again, we can take into account Rotundo's view that fights between boys shows a form of affection as much as hatred.

Once again, water is being primarily used as a pretext for the young male characters to become physical with each other. If the giant fight between them was staged without the water, it would be deemed unacceptable for them to literally tear each other's



clothes off.<sup>50</sup> The pool acts as a kind of screen from society's norms and what is seen to be socially acceptable or unacceptable. Within the other films discussed so far in this chapter, the same is also true. For example, in *Tom Brown of Culver* the showers provide an excuse for the boys to frolic with each other while naked. In *Brown of Harvard* it is after getting soaking wet in the rain that Jed dies, but by getting wet he has also effectively declared his love for Brown in a way that only the two young men can understand. Jed is therefore crossing two thresholds: declaring his love for Tom Brown by giving his own life for his friend's happiness and, literally, dying.

As I have shown, within these films of the 1920s and 1930s, water is used in two ways. Firstly, and more generally, it is in and around water that various coming of age films such as *Tom Sawyer* and *The Old Swimmin' Hole* are set, thus representing the notion of the threshold into adulthood as outlined by Turner. More important with regards to this thesis, however, is the use of water as a space where the boys and young men can be freed from society's norms with regards to permissible behaviour for heterosexual males. In a number of cases, such as the shower scene in *Tom Brown of Culver* and the river sequence in *All Quiet on the Western Front*, the characters are allowed to partake in naked horseplay with members of their own sex, something which would be shunned under normal circumstances. Elsewhere, in *The Collegians* films, for example, rivers, lakes, and pools provide a mask of slapstick that diverts attention from the homoerotic antics that are taking place. I am not suggesting that water is providing cover for *homosexual* activity in these films. However, we have already established that notions of homosexuality were slowly starting to take shape in the public's consciousness by this point and that this is Rotundo's argument as to why romantic

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<sup>50</sup> Despite this, another entry in the series set during "Rag Week" is preoccupied with the tradition of running up to students on the campus and relieving them of all their clothes except their underwear.

friendships were in decline after 1900. Water in these films, therefore, allows a space where the physical intimacies of the romantic friendship can take place without the participants becoming self-conscious or worried that their behaviour might be misconstrued.

Water continues to be a feature of modern films exploring young male queer sexualities, whether it be independent American features or films from around the world: *Dare* (Adam Salky, 2009) includes a scene in which a gay character receives his first kiss in a swimming pool (from a seemingly heterosexual student); the French drama *À Cause d'un Garçon/You'll Get Over It* (Frabrice Cazaneuve, 2002) is the coming out story of a young swimmer; coming of age drama *Les Roseaux Sauvages/The Wild Reeds* (André Téchiné, 1994) has its climactic scene in and around a river; *Were The World Mine* (Tom Gustafson, 2008) features a water-based potion which turns people gay when they come into contact with it; and dramas such as *Shelter* (Jonah Markowitz, 2007), *Newcastle, Australia* (Dan Castle, 2008), and *Sommersturm/Summer Storm* (Marco Kreuzpaintner, 2004) are all coming out stories which revolve around water sports of various kinds. More cynical viewers might suggest that the reason for proliferation of films concerning water sports is that it provides more opportunity for the actors to appear unclothed, and thus make the films more appealing to a gay audience – and there may be some truth in this. However, these films also show water being used as both a safe place and a threshold into adulthood in much the same way as the films of the 1920s and 1930s discussed above.

### **Romantic Friendships and the *Wandervogel* Movement**

*All Quiet on the Western Front* and *The Collegians* series do not portray romantic friendships in the exact way of Rotundo's model. While elements are retained (deep friendships, physical interaction, sharing of joys and woes, the young men have recently left home and are now without the direct support of parents), the key difference is that these films show loving friendships between whole *groups* of boys, rather than just between individual pairs. This group dynamic has as much in common with Adolph Brand's philosophies as it does with the American romantic friendship. This gives the suggestion that community is the chief concern of these young men, and not individual friendships themselves. This leads us back to what was happening within the youth movement in Europe during the first decade or two of the twentieth century, not least the *Wandervogel* movement which was popular in Germany during the late 1900s and 1910s.

The *Wandervogel* was a youth movement which began to form in the last years of the nineteenth century near Berlin, and officially became an organisation in 1901, at the helm of Karl Fischer. At first, the organisation was built around a back-to-nature ethos, but by the 1910s, the group had begun to split into factions. Savage writes that: "new splinter groups emerged, ranging from the right of the political spectrum, like the *Jungwandervogel*, to the more urban and cultural, the Hamburg *Wanderverein*" (Savage, 2007: 106). In 1913, Hans Bluher published a history of the *Wandervogel* in which he criticised the expulsion of the president of the *Alt-Wandervogel*, Willi Jansen, for homosexuality. Jon Savage writes that "informed by Freud, the pioneering sexologist Magnus Hirschfeld, and the gay-rights journal *Die Eigene*, Bluher retaliated by suggesting that the movement's male bonding was held together by homosexual eroticism" (Savage, 2007: 106-7). Bluher also believed that the *Wandervogel*

“comprised a necessary interval before the full responsibilities of adulthood” (ibid). This links the movement back to the romantic friendship model discussed earlier in this chapter, and particularly the view that there is a need for same-sex romantic friendships, or what Blüher called “homosexual eroticism,” prior to serious and meaningful adult heterosexual relationships. In many ways, the relationships between the young men in *All Quiet on the Western Front* and *The Collegians* films can be seen as filling that need.

In many ways, the Community of the Self-Owned (previously discussed in chapter one), with Adolph Brand at its helm, believed in much the same thing, with Florence Tamagne writing that “the movement was...close to the philosophy preached by the poet Stefan George, who entertained a circle of male admirers bound by a love of Greece and homoerotic relations, as well as the exaltations of nature” (Tamagne, 2006a: 71). The use of the term “circle of friends” suggests once again a sense of community rather than individual friendships. However, in 1923, Brand wrote that the community “stands for the social and moral rebirth of love between friends, the recognition of its natural right to existence in public and private life, as was the case at the height of its reputation, when it encouraged the arts and shaped the evolution of freedom in Ancient Greece” (Brand in Tamagne, 2006: 71). The Community of the Self-Owned therefore seemed to promote elements of both romantic friendships and homosocial communities – and the homoerotic qualities of each.

Bearing this in mind, how did European college films and those set in other locations featuring young males represent these various elements of romantic friendships and homosocial communities? The question is difficult to answer for the simple reason

that there are no direct European equivalents of the American films discussed within the first part of this chapter. This seems strange considering European works of literature such as *Tom Brown's Schooldays* by Thomas Hughes, and Robert Musil's homoerotic novella of bullying in a military academy, *Die Verwirrungen des Zöglings Törleß/The Confusions of Young Törless*. One would assume that such works would have influenced films set in similar same-sex establishments, especially considering Musil's book was not published until 1906, but this was clearly not the case. While *Tom Brown's Schooldays* was adapted into a UK film directed by Rex Wilson in 1916 which will be discussed later in this chapter, *Die Verwirrungen des Zöglings Törleß* was not made into a film until *Der Junge Törless/Young Törless* (Volker Schlöndorff) in 1966, with a looser, modernised adaptation following in 2008 under the title *Teenage Angst* (Thomas Stuber).<sup>51</sup> Other than films such as the 1916 *Tom Brown's Schooldays* and Jean Vigo's surreal *Zéro de Conduite*, there are very few European films from the silent or early sound period concentrating exclusively on male same-sex environments.

This does not mean to say that there are no examples of romantic friendships in European films during this period. The flashback scenes in *Anders als die Andern* which take us back to Paul Körner's days at boarding school and his friendship with a boy named Max seem to follow closely Rotundo's model of this type of friendship: they comfort each other, spend all their time with one another, and they are physically intimate with one another – even kissing at one point. And, as suggested by the journals examined for Rotundo's article, no sexual intercourse takes place that we are made aware of; while the boys share a room, they have separate beds. Despite this, the

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<sup>51</sup> This title was also used for the film in Germany, the country of production.

likelihood of the American model of romantic friendship being the influence for this section of the film is slim. The cycle of college films which I have discussed earlier in this chapter had not yet been made and so those cinematic reflections of romantic friendships could not have influenced this portrayal, and the types of journals examined by Rotundo would have still been in private hands nearly a century ago when *Anders als die Andern* was made.<sup>52</sup> The friendship between the two young men in the film must therefore have been influenced by Adolph Brand's philosophies, despite the striking similarities with the American romantic friendships. What is particularly interesting, however, is the way in which these scenes are used in the 1927 re-edit of the film as part of the portmanteau *Gesetz Der Liebe*.<sup>53</sup> Instead of simply being used as a flashback, the scenes are placed near the beginning of the film, with the story now more or less told in chronological order. By doing this these scenes gain more significance. As a flashback they were simply filling in details of Paul's life, but as part of the chronological narrative they suggest an issue of cause and effect which was not previously highlighted. In other words, without this romantic friendship during his school years, would Paul's life have been what it was? This is where this portrayal differs significantly from those in America – in America the romantic friendship is seen as part of the journey towards serious heterosexual relationships, but in *Anders als die Andern* the relationships that follow in Paul's life are all homosexual. The inclusion of the romantic friendship could be seen as Hirschfeld giving some acknowledgement to Brand's notion of *freundesliebe*, but is more likely to be Hirschfeld demonstrating that homosexuality is not a choice but something with us

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<sup>52</sup> While the 1920s cycle of college films had not been made by the time of *Anders als die Andern*, there were occasionally films with a campus setting, including versions of *Brown of Harvard* made in 1911 and 1918. Both of these are considered lost films.

<sup>53</sup> It is worth noting that, by the time of this re-edit, some of the college films discussed in this chapter *had* been released. While there is no evidence to suggest that these had an impact on the re-editing of the film and greater importance afforded these scenes in the 1927 version, the idea is nonetheless an intriguing one.

throughout our lives (ie. nature rather than nurture).

Jean Vigo's 1933 film *Zéro de Conduite* also features elements of romantic friendships within a scholastic setting but are quite different from those in *Anders als die Andern*. A number of friendships are highlighted within the short film, and it is the one of the two boys in the opening sequence on the train taking them to school for the next term which helps us to firmly place the film as one giving a portrayal of romantic friendships. The two boys on the train show each other their toys and games as they travel, with one showing a ball game while the other uses feathers to do his impression of an American Indian. While such activities place the two boys firmly as children, they then go on in the same scene to pretend to partake in adult activities. One of the boys blows up two balloons, holds them to his chest and fondles them as if they were women's breasts. Both boys then take out cigars and pretend to smoke them. The later activities, when merged with the earlier display of toys and games, give the viewer the impression that these boys are at an in-between stage of development – neither children nor men. This fits neatly within the suggestion that romantic friendships are formed at such an inbetween age, directly prior to full adulthood.

There is one clear romantic friendship within the course of the film, that of the feminine Tabard with another boy, Bruel. Tabard is an interesting figure, a boy who can be easily mistaken as a girl and whose close friendship with Bruel is looked down upon by the diminutive headmaster as “childlike”. Maria Pramaggiore writes that he “should be given his due within the context of Queer film studies. Tabard is not only a courageous rebel; he also has the temerity to wear his Academic gown like a Grecian tunic: on him, it's chic. He throws his Garbo-esque bob around as he throws the

corruption of his elders back in their faces” (Pramaggiore, 2010: 414). Whether or not Tabard is intended to be read as homosexual or not is difficult to decipher, for he is not coded through campness in the way that homosexuals of the period in American films often were. Instead, he is simply feminine.

It is worth noting that the romantic friendship between two teenage boys in both this film and *Anders als die Andern* are, perhaps surprisingly, viewed by other adult characters as unnatural, suspect and undesirable in a way that those seen in the American films are not. This is particularly interesting considering the relatively relaxed views on homosexuality in Germany during the late 1910s and most of the 1920s (despite it being against the law) and that homosexuality was *not* against the law in France at the time. However, both of these films are politically motivated, with *Anders als die Andern* being made as part of a campaign to decriminalise homosexuality in Germany and to try to prevent prejudice towards homosexuals. Likewise, Vigo’s film is an attack on authority in general and is clearly influenced by the director’s background, with Vigo’s father having been in prison for his anarchist views. In both of these films it is the figures in authority (in both cases teachers) that comment on the romantic friendships of the boys. In *Zéro de Conduite* the other boys make no such judgements and in *Anders als die Andern* no other boys from the school are seen.

*Zéro de Conduite* contains elements of the *Wandervogel* movement and Brand’s philosophies. These are evident in the various references to nature throughout the film, with the “back to nature” approach being at the heart of the *Wandervogel* movement. Vigo is not afraid to make reference to the human body and how it works, for example.



In an early scene, one of the boys is punished by having to stand at the foot of the teacher's bed, but he gets desperate for the toilet and has to run off to relieve himself. There are also numerous shots of the boys in various states of undress, often rear nudity but on one occasion, following the acclaimed pillow fight sequence, an older boy does gymnastic moves in such a way that his nightshirt rides up and his genitals are in full view. While there is rear nudity in a couple of the American films discussed in this and the next chapter, in Vigo's film it seems a little more conscious. A statement is being made that the schoolboys are comfortable with themselves and their bodies, which clearly has links with the "back to nature" approach of the two German movements.

Whilst in comparison to America there are relatively few films from mainland Europe set within the confines of a school, college or training ground, those that do exist are quite clearly different in nature to their Hollywood counterparts. This can, perhaps, be summed up best of all by briefly turning to a rarely seen early German sound film, *Boykott/Boycott* (Robert Land, 1930). In this film, a class of boys in their final term at a prestigious Berlin school turn against one of their classmates when his Father is imprisoned for embezzlement. This is a film that centres on the issue of community and not individual friendships. Even among the main group of students that ostracise Erich, the boy in question, there is no emphasis on a particular friendship or even a smaller group of friends. Instead, it is the group that matters. While the students are occasionally tactile towards each other, and seemingly at ease with each other's semi-naked bodies, there is none of the intimacy of the American films discussed earlier in this chapter.

Another film set which features the final year of schooling at a prestigious school is the British film *Downhill*, directed by Alfred Hitchcock. Ivor Novello plays a boy, Roddy, who is accused of impregnating a girl after a visit to her house by Roddy and his friend, Tim. Roddy and Tim are best friends at school and share a room. Their loyalty to each other is spelled out in the very first intertitle of the film which appears directly after the credits: “Here is a tale of two school-boys who made a pact of loyalty. One of them kept it – at a price.” The friendship between the two boys is seen for only the first reel of the film. During this time, Roddy is seen winning a rugby match for the school and he and Tim then go to the local shop where a young woman, Mabel, works. Mabel had already slipped Tim a note earlier in the day inviting the two boys over. They laugh, talk and dance together but she and Tim get more intimate when Roddy leaves the room in order to serve out front in the shop. Later, Mabel goes to see the headmaster at the school and accuses Roddy of making her pregnant during his visit to the shop.

This causes some confusion to viewers of the film – when Roddy leaves Tim and Mabel in the back room of the shop they are fully clothed and dancing and when he returns they are also fully clothed, suggesting that no intercourse took place. And yet Tim as good as admits to the act after Roddy does not argue against the accusation from Mabel. We are therefore confused as to whether Tim and Mabel had intercourse while Roddy was serving, or if Mabel was already pregnant by this point and decided to pin the blame on one of the boys. In the end, it doesn’t matter. In Hitchcock’s film, these opening scenes are just a plot device in order for Roddy’s life to go “downhill”, with the rest of the film charting his life’s downward spiral. However, the confusion regarding the pregnancy and who had sex with whom does make a difference when we

look at the film's portrayal of romantic friendship. After all, romantic friendships take place prior to heterosexual relationships, so could this be classed as a romantic friendship in the traditional way if Tim in fact had sex with Mabel? Also confusing is whether the portrayal is more in line with Brand's philosophies or the model outlined by Rotundo, or neither. While the sharing of rooms and each other's joys and woes point towards Rotundo, the fact that the boys appear to bond through rugby more than anything else suggests a German influence through the love of sport and the great outdoors and the back-to-nature approach that was currently in vogue. Perhaps, as with many of Hitchcock's English films, it is influenced by both Germany and America.

One country whose literary and social influence can be felt without doubt during this first section of *Downhill* is Britain. The boarding school scenes, with their emphasis on sport and boyhood friendships, and with the shots of the vast dining halls and long corridors we associate with these old buildings, look and feel as if they have come straight out of *Tom Brown's Schooldays*. Unsurprisingly, Thomas Hughes's novel was made into a British film in 1916, directed by Rex Wilson. The copy which resides in the British Film Institute archives is labelled as "incomplete", although what parts are missing is not clear. The narrative of the film deviates considerably from that of the book. In the film, Tom Brown's sister elopes with an older man and is sent away by her Father, only to return later in the film as the mother of Arthur, the young boy who comes under Tom Brown's care while at the school. While this may seem somewhat superfluous to the existent narrative, it does manage to normalise the close bond that Tom Brown has with Arthur during the second half of the film. This leans towards being a romantic friendship, with Tom and Arthur often walking around the

grounds of the school arm in arm, or sitting on the bed with Tom's arm around Arthur's shoulder and, when Arthur becomes frightened, he hugs Tom, burying his head in his chest. It is Tom walking arm in arm around the school with another boy earlier in the film that causes him to come to the attention of the bully, Flashman. The original novel goes further than these depictions of close friendships between boys. In the second half of the book, a young boy is referred to as "one of the miserably little pretty white-handed, curly-headed boys, petted and pampered by some of the big fellows" (Hughes, 1857: 233), which can only be assumed to be Thomas Hughes's reference to homosexual relations between an older and younger boy at a boarding school.<sup>54</sup> Another boy, East, even refers to the boy as a "pretty little dear" (ibid, 234). It can certainly be argued that the subplot regarding Tom Brown's sister is introduced to prevent any suggestion that the friendship between Tom and Arthur is anything but a straightforward friendship; after all, to think otherwise would now result in Tom having had a relationship with his own nephew. Their closeness is conveniently explained away by the fact that they are unknowingly close relatives.

## **Conclusion**

What we can see by this examination of romantic friendships from the mid 1910s through to the early 1930s is that the portrayals in films from both sides of the Atlantic have both similarities and differences in content. Both the American films and their European counterparts contain friendships between males which are characterised by loyalty, physical intimacy and a sharing of the ups and downs of life in general. In all cases, the boys and young men are living away from home, whether at college, school or in a military academy or army training camp. Bearing this in mind, it can certainly

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<sup>54</sup> Hughes even added a footnote to this passage, which reads "There were many noble friendships between big boys and little boys, but I can't strike out the passage; many boys will know why it is left in" (Hughes, 1857: 234).

be argued that the boys act as a surrogate family to each other, with the partners in the romantic friendship taking the place of the special bond between two members of a family. But there is more to it than this, for this is a loving relationship above and beyond that which might take place between two brothers; there is something more intimate taking place here, despite the fact that in only one film (*Anders als die Andern*) are the characters actually confirmed as homosexual. However, in the European films, Rotundo's notion of the romantic friendship is often usurped in preference for a sense of community in which the group dynamic is preferred over individual relationships.

The differences between the two sets of portrayals appear to be due to their influences. The American model of romantic friendships was still hidden away in private journals at the time that these films were made. Even those who had romantic friendships in their youth and were still alive in the 1920s were unlikely to talk about such things due to the American preoccupation with masculinity at this time, as described in chapter two, and the fear that their teenaged relationships might be misconstrued as being homosexual in nature. It would therefore be almost impossible for the European films to be influenced by the American model, and unlikely for American films to be influenced by Brand, for example. It is the preoccupation with ideals of masculinity which are attacked in *Zéro de Conduite* which, while criticising authority, also appears to be criticising those judging the private behaviour of others. What we can see, therefore, is that despite the similarities between the portrayals on screen, each one is shaped by the culture of the country of production in some way, with the individual friendships of Hollywood films reflecting romantic friendships, and the group dynamic of the films from mainland Europe reflecting the idea of Brand and the *Wandervogel*

movement.

What strikes a modern audience about portrayals of romantic friendships (as opposed to the group dynamic) is their innocence. Despite the closeness of one partner to the other, there is little suspicion that the relationships extend to sexual activity, and this is the case for films made on both sides of the Atlantic. In fact, there is a great deal of commonality between the films of both continents. In both cases, these relationships are portrayed as sympathetic, and also viewed in this way by most of the peer group within the world of the film itself. Whereas in *Tom Brown's Schooldays*, Tom is bullied when caught walking through the school grounds arm in arm with his friend, this is the exception not the rule. In most cases, these relationships appear to be accepted by the other boys and seemingly viewed as "normal". Other than this example from *Tom Brown's Schooldays*, it is only the adults in the films who view these kinds of relationships with any disdain, most notably the teachers in *Anders als die Andern* and *Zéro de Conduite*. In fact, in most of these films, older men are rarely to be seen and/or allowed to interfere with the day to day lives of the boys and young men. *The Collegians* does have the figure of the Coach, but in many ways he is something of a Greek Chorus type figure, simply narrating and commenting on the story and sometimes having a small part in the action (by picking one person over another for a team, for example). The older flyers in *Wings* are rarely seen, and neither are the instructors and teachers in *Tom Brown of Culver*. In those films where they are seen (such as *Brown of Harvard*), their part is so minute that they have no real impact on the boys' lives. In other words, within each of these films, the boys and young men live within their own society, one which rarely involves interaction with women or is devoid of contact with females entirely, and one which is also largely devoid of adults.

This in itself sets up a situation in which romantic friendships (according to Rotundo's descriptions) are likely to flourish, with both the absence of family and the absence of possible girlfriends, and may well contribute to the reason they appear in these films as natural as the heterosexual first-love romances that we see in teen films today. The college, school or academy setting is key in presenting these young characters as somewhere between childhood and adulthood. The experiences they are going through are leading them towards the threshold into adulthood, something which is represented symbolically in a number of these films by the use of water.

What is perhaps most striking about the films discussed in this chapter is the sympathetic way in which romantic friendships are portrayed in American films despite the fact that the masculinity crisis was at its peak when they were made. Given the films discussed in the first two chapters of this thesis, one would expect the European films to have more examples of this type of close friendship between boys and young men, and to be more sympathetic towards them. However, as we move away from the core group of gay-themed films from Germany and Sweden discussed in chapter one, it becomes clear that European cinema was far less comfortable with such issues than was first thought. As I turn my attention to the war film in the next chapter, it will become evident that close bonding between men was dealt with more often and more sympathetically in American cinema than in Europe.

## Chapter Four

### **‘Wonderful, Terrible Days’: The War Film and Depictions of the Buddy Relationship**

#### **Introduction**

In the previous chapter, an examination was made of the on-screen romantic friendships between males whose ages varied from adolescence to early manhood. These friendships were invariably located in places of learning, such as schools, colleges, or military training establishments. Indeed, as I have shown, these relationships could be viewed not as romantic ties with future potential, but as a kind of training for heterosexual love, marriage and family life, which audiences were led to assume would take place in the lives of the characters after the final credits had stopped rolling. This fourth chapter is a natural progression from the previous one, in that it also examines male friendships, intimacy and homoeroticism, but often (though not always) between two characters of different ages, at least one of whom would be classed as an adult “man” rather than a “boy”. The films discussed in relation to this are what we might call the beginnings of the “buddy” movie, a sub-genre in which two often seemingly mis-matched men take part in a series of adventures within the film’s narrative. Joan Mellen writes of such films:

The male bonding in American films in which two men travel together, epitomized by the cowboy with his sidekick...resembles the preadolescent bonding of young males who temporarily fear women and prefer each other’s company...These schoolboy relationships are meant to give way in maturity to heterosexual ones. But in the American film we repeatedly find adult men whose fear and distrust of predatory women lead them



to form obsessive male friendships essentially  
homosexual in character yet sexually chaste.

Mellen, 1977: 15

Other than the fact that Mellen is talking about on-screen friendships between adult men, the final sentence, about the relationship being homosexual in nature but sexually chaste, could equally apply to Rotundo's description of the romantic friendship, which was centred around emotional attachment and intimacy but, in the majority of cases, not sexual in nature.

Despite Mellen suggesting that the types of relationships she discusses are epitomized in the western genre, I will instead be concentrating on the war film in particular. There are two main reasons for this, the first is that the western genre did not adopt the cowboy/sidekick model on a regular basis until near the end of the period of filmmaking being discussed within this thesis. The second reason is that the war genre has a particular relationship to the films discussed in the previous chapter which often dealt with colleges, military training itself or military academy locations. These were institutions and self-contained societies in which young men were away from their families for the first time, and looked to each other for comfort. The war film provides a similar situation. Even though many of the characters portrayed are older than in the previous set of films, they are still located in an all-male environment, and the men are away from their wives, sweethearts and other blood relatives. What is more, from a historical point of view, it is possible to trace the changing attitudes in homosexuality and masculinity which took place through the twentieth century back to the trenches of the First World War and the poetry, fiction and memoirs which resulted from the conflict. Santanu Das writes that romantic friendships "intensified during wartime"

(Das, 2003: 52). He goes on:

In the trenches of World War I, the norms of tactile contact between men changed profoundly. Mutilation and mortality, loneliness and boredom, the strain of constant bombardment, the breakdown of language, and the sense of alienation from home led to a new level of intimacy under which the carefully constructed mores of civilian society broke down...These moments of charged physical contact...raise questions about the relation between the experimental reality of the body under physical extremity and the social constructions of gender and sexuality.

Das, 2002 52-53

Das is suggesting that the move away from Victorian views on homosexuality and masculinity began almost one hundred years ago in the trenches during World War I. While this chapter will often move away from examining cinematic representations of Rotundo's concept of romantic friendships as he states that they rarely, if ever, carried on into adulthood, the concept and connotations of male bonding between adults of different ages will almost seamlessly take its place. Sarah Cole writes that "the story of war is almost always a story of male bonds" (Cole, 2003: 138) and that "the huge conscripted armies of modern war seem particularly to invite an emphasis on intense masculine friendship, in part because these armies with their enormous scale and their capacity both to inflict and to suffer extreme violence, present a challenge to the self-concept of the societies they are meant to represent and protect" (ibid). The army (and navy and air force) has also been discussed in terms of being its own, self-contained society. For example, Chambers writes that "it is not with civilians, male or female, that these men bond, but with fellow soldiers in their own army, or sometimes even in the arms of the 'enemy'" (Chambers, 1994: 378). This, again, is an extension of the self-contained societies of the schools, colleges and academies discussed in the

previous chapter, with fellow soldiers taking on the various roles that would otherwise be filled by family members.

The war film was not a particularly prolific genre during the early 1920s, or even during the years of the war itself. It was only with the enormous success of prestigious productions such as *The Big Parade* (King Vidor, 1925), *What Price Glory* (Raoul Walsh, 1926) and *Wings* that the genre came into its own. These films, along with Lewis Milestone's *All Quiet On The Western Front* (1930), have all been discussed by scholars such as Mellen (1977), Barrios (2003) and Eberwein (2007), as have a number of the war films produced in Europe during the same period. However, my intention within this chapter is to re-examine the buddy relationships within these, and less prestigious, films, and contextualise them within the period in which they were both made and set. In order to do this, I will turn to letters, memoirs and poetry written by those who served during World War I, and draw comparisons between the close bonds that were often at the centre of these writings and those that are portrayed in many of the war films made during the interwar years. A comparison will also be made between the nature of friendships in films made during the mid-to-late 1920s, and those made during and immediately after World War I itself, and an exploration of why the portrayals within these two groups of films, made within ten years of each other, are so disparate. As elsewhere in the thesis, I will be examining films from both America and Europe not only to ascertain why there are differences between the nature of the friendships portrayed on screen but also differences in the format and style of the film itself.

### **Emotional Connections: The late 1920s war cycle**

I start my examination of the representations of masculinity in the war genre by returning to a film discussed in part in the previous chapter. *All Quiet on the Western Front* tells the story of a group of young men, led by Paul (played by Lew Ayres), as they sign up for the German army, are trained and then sent to fight in the trenches, where they are killed off one by one during the course of the film. Because of its structure, the film works effectively as a pivot between the depictions of romantic friendship I have discussed previously, and the representation of more adult male friendships with which this chapter concerns itself. There is a romanticised notion of male youth at work within the first reel or so of the film, set within the school classroom and during the training exercises that the new recruits are put through after enlisting. The young, attractive men are seen bonding as they try on their new uniforms, repeatedly crawl through the muddy training ground and then clean their uniforms. There is an innocence and playfulness here, with the boys being seen to partake in practical jokes and pranks during this section of the film, culminating in the spanking and dumping in the mud of Himmelstoss, their former-postman-turned-training-officer who has put them through much hardship during their weeks in preparation for fighting. Their youth, beauty and innocence is dwelt upon by the camera, with lingering shots of their smooth, naked torsos as they get dressed and washed. This romanticised view of male youth is more associated with the films discussed with regards to depictions of romantic friendships than the war film. These images are so effective in *All Quiet on the Western Front* because they are juxtaposed in this opening section with considerably less flattering images of the older men with whom the recruits come into contact. The teacher, whose patriotic fervour spurs the young men to sign up (and ultimately gets them killed), is often shown in extreme

close-up, with his sweaty face almost contorted as he gets carried away in his speech aimed at rallying them into action. *Himmelstoss* is subjected to similarly unflattering shots as he shouts at his raw recruits. This prepares us, at least aurally, for the almost unrelenting bombardment of the viewer once the young men reach the front itself. The viewer finds themselves watching these formerly-idealised young men literally being blown to pieces, with disembodied limbs clinging to barbed wire fences in scenes that pre-date the similar ones in *Saving Private Ryan* by nearly seventy years. The link between beauty and violence comes full circle at the end of the film when one of the few surviving men, Paul, is killed by a sniper while reaching out to touch a butterfly.

The film draws inspiration from the earlier *Wings*, particularly during the death scene of one of the young recruits, Kemmerich, which is remarkably similar to the death of David at the end of the 1927 Oscar-winner. Towards the end of the scene, when Paul returns to see him after his other friends have left, he hugs and caresses him as he dies. Unlike the earlier film, however, much more is shown of the horrors of war, and the male bonding within the film not only takes place between the young men, but between younger and older men too. Chambers writes that the film

touches on gender issues, a subject ignored by contemporary commentators. Concepts of masculinity are depicted in traditional methods for remolding civilian youths into soldiers. So is the forming of those youths into cohesive male fighting groups, bands of brothers who will fight for each other. There is much male bonding in the film, but it goes beyond the traditional military view of a clan of warriors. Instead, given the tremendous shock and pain suffered by the young men at the front, the men in these units are shown taking on what could be traditionally considered familial roles of caring, nurturing and even doing domestic chores. The unit depicts a family, but a family without women. The men support each other physically, monetarily,

psychologically.

Chambers, 1994: 382

The suggestion of family is perhaps exemplified by the father-son type of relationship portrayed within the film. When the new recruits reach the front for the first time they meet a charismatic older soldier, Kat, played by Louis Wolheim, who is highly regarded by soldiers of both his own age and younger. He becomes a father figure for the young men, giving them advice on how to survive bombardments and life generally in the trenches. This is seen just prior to the first bombardment the young recruits experience. He gathers them around him, giving them instructions, and calling them his “children”, but, before he has finished talking, the bombardment begins. The new recruits jump to the ground, while others literally cling to him in fright, as a child would cling to a parent in time of need. One of the soldiers soils himself. Kat comforts him, saying that such things had “happened to better men than you”. As the soldiers move on following this initial bombardment, Paul tentatively puts his arm around Kat’s shoulders and, later in the film when most of his classmates have died, tells him “you’re all I’ve got left”. However, the friendship between Paul and Kat is vastly different to that of a romantic friendship, not least because the ages of the two men are significantly different, suggesting a father-son relationship. Also, we are shown that Paul is sexually active. He and two of his young comrades spend the night with some French women after taking them some food. That this visit includes sexual activity is made explicit: the men arrive at the women’s house naked after swimming across the river, and Paul and one of the women are heard talking while the shadow of a double bed and their silhouettes are shown throughout the conversation.

Aside from the paternal aspect of the relationship, the friendship between Paul and Kat

has all the hallmarks of, but is somewhat less pronounced than, the buddy friendships which will dominate the films examined in this chapter. Interestingly, the sequence described above is one that harks back to the anxieties regarding masculinity in America discussed in previous chapters, and how these views were changed by the First World War. After all, here we have a soldier soiling himself and being told it is nothing to be ashamed of, something which would have been unthinkable outside of the war. Men traditionally did not show their emotions, but in films such as *All Quiet on the Western Front*, *Wings* and others discussed in this chapter, it was nothing to be ashamed of. A review in *Motion Picture News* intimates at changes that were taking place to traditional concepts of masculinity during this period. Reviewer Walter R Greene writes that the film “goes a lot further than merely transcribing incidents of the war to the eyes of audiences. It gets right down to the hearts and souls of those who battled through the mud of France – fought in the front line trenches – and suffered all the pains and horrors of the great conflict” (Greene, 1930: 44). In other words, the reviewer is seeing the film as portraying the soldiers as fragile, emotional human beings rather than fighting machines. Das confirms this, writing that “the experiences shared in the trenches were undoubtedly one of the deciding events in the history of twentieth century gender. They led to a radical reconceptualization of masculinity and male intimacy” (Das, 2003: 69). However, such reconceptualization did not occur straight away, for it was often the scenes of male bonding, communal nudity and depictions of physical and mental frailty which were censored on the initial release of the film in countries outside of America, and reissues of the film from the 1930s to the 1960s within America (Kelly, 1998).

Three years earlier, Lewis Milestone had directed another war-themed film, the more

light-hearted *Two Arabian Knights* (1927). Like the same year's *Wings*, Milestone's film both centres on the friendship of two men and won an academy award (for best comedy direction) during the inaugural ceremony. However, unlike Wellman's film, *Two Arabian Knights* is not a fully-fledged war film, and the central relationship featured within the film is quite different to that portrayed by Rogers and Arlen. Whereas in *Wings*, the two actors were close in age to each other, in *Two Arabian Knights* (as in *All Quiet on the Western Front*), there is fifteen years difference in the ages of actors William Boyd and Louis Wolheim. Despite this, the story of their relationship as it develops during the course of the film is remarkably similar in form and structure to Wellman's film: hatred turns to friendship following a fight (in this case in a muddy trench), and the two men become inseparable as they embark on a series of (often madcap) adventures after they find themselves prisoners of war captured by the Germans. Chambers summarises the film as one that "followed two American doughboys, portrayed by William Boyd and Louis Wolheim, as they escaped from a German prisoner-of-war camp through a series of escapades by these feuding buddies in the Middle East and eventually back home to the United States" (Chambers, 1994: 380).

While there are homoerotic sequences in the film, and the relationship between the two protagonists has an element of romantic friendship, in contrast to *Wings*, these are not directly related to the innocence of the characters and appearance of the actors. While Arlen and Rogers could be seen as pretty and beautiful respectively, the same cannot be said for William Boyd and Louis Wolheim here. Boyd is handsome rather than beautiful, and Wolheim is decidedly weathered, but this also feeds into the characters they are playing. These are not the ultra-young, innocent men of *Wings*. Boyd was



thirty-two at the time he made *Two Arabian Knights*, some five years older than Arlen and nine years older than Rogers when they made *Wings*. While one might argue that Boyd is playing someone younger than his actual age, his character has already had experience of the war when the film opens. He has none of the naive innocence of the characters in *Wings*, with it replaced here by a kind of impish, cheeky cockiness. Wolheim, on the other hand, plays his superior, with gruffness hiding an inevitable heart of gold – a character not far removed from his later performance as Kat in *All Quiet on the Western Front* for the same director.

When captured by the Germans, Boyd and Wolheim find themselves waiting to be moved on while other prisoners of war pass through a series of showers and disinfecting procedures in an area referred to in an intertitle as the “cooties cemetery”. Wolheim and Boyd stand apart from the others, fully clothed, leaning against a wall and facing away from the parade of naked showering men that passes behind them. As with *All Quiet on the Western Front*, the nudity is not just implied but shown fully from the rear. This, along with the close physical proximity of each man to the next and the steamy atmosphere, adds to the homoerotic nature of the scene, which is only partly dispelled by the comic antics of the two lead characters. Nudity, even from a rear view was still highly unusual in films of the time, despite the fact that it is a recurring feature of the films discussed in the second half of this thesis. This almost casual display of nudity therefore draws attention to itself, even more so when Wolheim becomes annoyed with Boyd and turns his back to him and thus faces the multitude of naked men showering in the same room.

*Two Arabian Knights* appeared in the third year of a cycle of prestigious films using

World War I as their setting. After the war had ended in 1918, the war film virtually disappeared from the cinematic map, but *The Big Parade* (King Vidor, 1925) changed all of that. Eberwein writes that the film

is regarded as one of the greatest war films of any era. Its impressive technical accomplishments complement the powerful narrative, which includes a number of motifs and conventions in the war film, such as the varied mix of soldiers of different social stations brought together in foxhole unity and their bonding, the sharing of a cigarette with one's enemy, a mixture of high jinks in camp and deadly seriousness on the battlefield, and the difficulties of wartime romance.

Eberwein, 2007: 17

All of the Hollywood war films made after 1925 examined in this chapter utilise the various motifs which Eberwein discusses. *The Big Parade* even includes a shower scene with rear male nudity, one that “initiates countless shower scenes that will follow in later films. Many involving horseplay” (Eberwein, 2007: 18). In fact, of all the war films discussed so far in this thesis, only *Wings* does not contain a shower or bathing scene involving male nudity to some extent. This feature extends to the military academy drama *Tom Brown of Culver* discussed in the previous chapter. Such scenes were no doubt intended to reground male camaraderie. *The Big Parade* may contain elements of the buddy friendships which are at the heart of this chapter but, as Eberwein suggests, here they “have nothing to do with male sexuality, which throughout the film is presented unambiguously strictly in heterosexual terms” (Eberwein, 2007: 20).

This all changed the following year. The characters played by Boyd and Wolheim in *Two Arabian Knights* were clearly modelled on Quirt and Flagg, two characters in

*What Price Glory* (Raoul Walsh, 1926), a huge hit and the second of the big, prestigious war films of the 1920s, following in the wake of *The Big Parade*. In *What Price Glory*, also set during World War I, Quirt and Flagg, (played by Edmund Lowe and Victor McLaglen respectively) are “comrades in the field of battle, they are friendly rivals over women, although it is clear that no woman can vie with the camaraderie experienced by these men when they are alone together” (Mellen, 1977: 42-3). In both *What Price Glory* and *Two Arabian Knights*, the close friendships between the two male protagonists is more akin to that between an older and younger brother, or even father and son, than it is between two lovers. This is demonstrated most notably at the end of *What Price Glory*, where the wounded Quirt calls after his buddy, “Wait for baby!”. He is then supported by Flagg as they walk. Joan Mellen writes that “his war wound serves to permit this touching between the two men, to render it credible and untinged by homosexual feeling, despite the emotion trembling between them throughout the film” (Mellen, 1977: 44). In fact it is the perceived age gap between the two sets of characters in these films which prevent these from being viewed as romantic friendships in the manner of *Wings*, despite the fact that the level of emotion between the characters is the same if not greater. But, as I have noted earlier, culturally, romantic friendships were seen to prepare the men involved for long-term and fulfilling heterosexual relationships, meaning the same intensity is not present here due to the assumption that (at least) the older man in each pairing has already experienced this to some degree.

There is a significant difference here between camaraderie and romantic love. If these two men in *What Price Glory* share an affection for each other, then it is a brotherly one, and not the same as their individual love for the same women, Charmaine.

Eberwein writes of this: “Charmaine clearly realizes the love of Quirt and Flagg is not erotic, in contrast to their sexual desire for her and hers for them. In effect, she is saying ‘you courageous soldiers share a love that is different in kind from what each of us has separately as a couple’” (Eberwein, 2007: 3). Despite this acceptance that their love for each other is neither sexual nor erotic, the ending of the film is unusual and perhaps even daring for the time, as Eberwein writes: “*What Price Glory* is remarkable for its failure to conclude with an ending that confirms the stability of the heterosexual couple. Quirt and Flagg are with each other at the end; neither is with Charmaine” (Eberwein, 2007: 32). An advertisement for the film in a May 1926 edition of *Film Daily* (fig 4.1) is really quite intriguing in this context, stating that the film is “the *intimate* story of the World War” (my italics). What is more, the positioning of the characters in the advertisement (which look nothing like Lowe and McLaglen) also suggest that the main relationship within the film is between the male protagonists, rather than between the men and Charmaine. The picture has Quirt, Flagg and Charmaine standing together, with Charmaine in between the two men. She is looking at the one on the left, but so also is the other man. Meanwhile the man

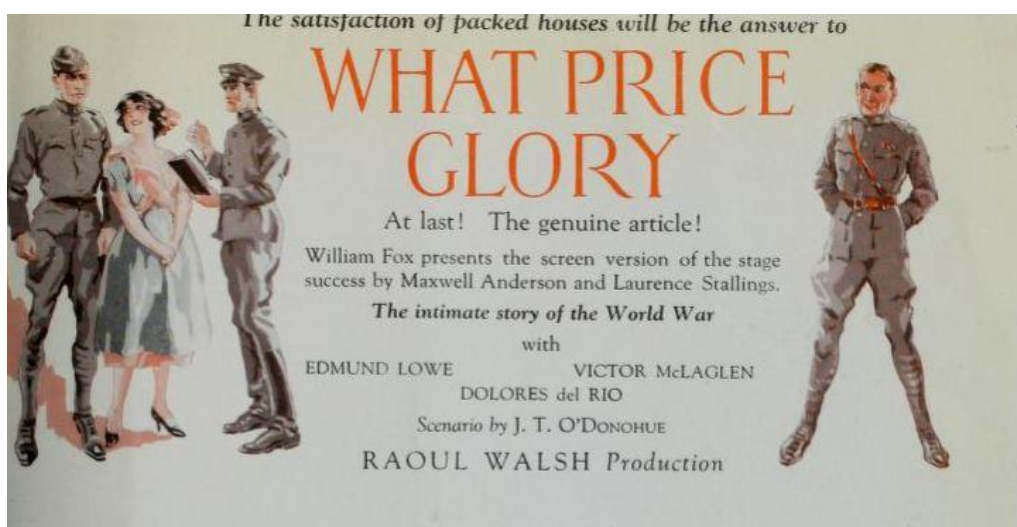


Fig 4.1: Advertisement for *What Price Glory*

being looked at is rather solemnly looking away with his head slightly down. The set-up suggests that he is confused as to with which of the two people looking at him his loyalty lies.

The ending of *What Price Glory*, one which excludes a heterosexual coupling, was anticipated in a Harold Lloyd comedy from five years earlier, only for a coda to be tagged on to the ending in order to rectify the situation. In *Sailor-Made Man* (Fred C Newmeyer, 1921), Lloyd plays a spoilt rich kid who proposes to a young woman whom he has only just met. The woman's father refuses to let him marry her until he proves that he is more than a layabout. He inadvertently finds himself signed up to three years service in the Navy, something which his privileged upbringing and money cannot buy him out of. Once in the Navy, he meets an older man, referred to only as "The Rowdy Element", played by Noah Young. As one might expect, they become friends only after a fight, but in this case the fight takes place during and after the sailors practice their dancing – with each other. Lloyd and Young find themselves partnered together and Young switches from dancing with Lloyd to trying to strangle him depending on whether the superior officer is watching or not. The fight then spills over and the two men find themselves punished by having to scrub the deck. The male-male dancing scene is intriguing, not only because it provides images of male-male couplings, but also because this is interspersed with the two men fighting. While we are not discussing romantic friendships here, it is worth remembering Rotundo's theory that fights between men should be interpreted as signs of affection. However, we also need to be careful not to read more into the dance couplings than was intended; as with the Dickson Experimental Sound Film, these men are only dancing together because no women are available for them to dance with. *Tom Brown of*

*Culver*, discussed at length in the previous chapter, also features a similar scene. Following the bonding of the two men while scrubbing the deck, they go ashore with other sailors at an unnamed location in the Middle East and get involved in a series of adventures when Lloyd comes across his girlfriend, who also happens to be in the same country (coincidence figures heavily within the narrative of *Sailor-Made Man*). The girl is then kidnapped, and Lloyd and Young set about freeing her. What seems like the ending of the film is remarkably similar to the later *What Price Glory*, with Lloyd having to leave his girlfriend once more as the sailors make their way back to the ship. He kisses her goodbye, and then runs after Young and falls in beside him, just as Quirt falls in beside Flagg in the later film. However, there is a coda to the film in which Lloyd proposes once again to his girlfriend, this time in semaphore from his ship to hers. Knowing that Lloyd has rescued his daughter, this time the father has no choice but to consent, thus ending the film with the traditional heterosexual couple, rather than the coupling of the two male buddies.

Vito Russo, in his book *The Celluloid Closet*, makes the connection between Harold Lloyd and the sissy character, writing of his films that “Lloyd’s inveterate weakling, perennially dubbed ‘foureyes,’ was made to discover his own intrinsic value through constant trial of his manhood” (Russo, 1987: 17). While Lloyd did indeed play the shy mother’s boy in a number of his films, Russo seems to miss the point when it comes to *Sailor-Made Man*. He writes that in the film

scores of sailors are dancing together on the deck of the battleship. Lloyd, ever the victimized weakling, dances with the sadistic bully of the story, who cuffs him soundly whenever the captain turns his back. Thus the effeminate man, the symbol of weakness, takes it on the chin for everyone, becoming the scapegoat for the

unstated homoerotic activity of the real but insecure men around him.

Russo, 1987: 18

What Russo seemingly fails to notice is that Lloyd's character is not the same here as in many of his other films. Instead of being a shy and retiring sissy, the character here is remarkably self-confident, even *over*-confident around women. While there are shades of *Algie The Miner* within the narrative, Lloyd does not have to go off and prove he is a man as Algie does in that film, but simply that he is not a slacker who is all too willing to live off his family's money.

Returning to the cycle of war films made in Hollywood in the late 1920s and early 1930s, it is worth noting that it is not just within the big-budget, prestigious films that the buddy relationship can be found. Smaller, less ambitious films also contained similar pairings of characters. One such film is the war comedy *Behind The Front* (A Edward Sutherland, 1926). This film got remarkably favourable reviews at the time, with *Film Daily* stating that the film stars "Wallace Beery and Raymond Hatton as a couple of buddies ... [and has] been filling the Rivoli with joy seekers" (Anon, 1926: 6). While there is a certain emotional detachment from the characters when compared to films such as *Wings* or *What Price Glory*, this is still an archetypal buddy relationship, with the two men joining the army at the same time rather inadvertently (not dissimilar from Lloyd joining the navy in *Sailor-Made Man*). While not sworn enemies as such, Hatton plays a thief who is being hunted by Beery, a policeman. When in the Army, Hatton knows Beery is the policeman, but Beery does not know Hatton is the thief. As with *What Price Glory*, both men set their eye on the same girl, but there is still a suggestion that they are just as interested in each other, with Beery

saying to Hatton “you’re bound to get her, you’ve got sex appeal”. While the film plays today as something of a cheap and cheerful rip-off of *What Price Glory*, this film was actually released nine months prior to that more prestigious film. Even so, the war film cycle was already in motion by this point, and a number of war-themed plays featuring buddy relationships were also playing to packed houses (including the stage version of *What Price Glory*), suggesting that the format for the war buddy film was established very early on within this cycle of movies, and we need to remind ourselves that a number of films from the cycle are lost.

One of the most atypical of the Hollywood war films, and one rarely mentioned in work on World War I films, is the unlikely named *Noah’s Ark* (Michael Curtiz, 1928). This is a part-talkie which, like the earlier *The Ten Commandments* (Cecil B Demille, 1923), features a modern day narrative as well as one set during the years of the Old Testament. Curtiz’s film attempts to draw parallels between World War I and the story of Noah’s Ark. For the first hour or so this is a relatively straightforward war film. However, following an explosion, a number of characters find themselves trapped underground, which is the cue for a religious minister to read to his captive audience the story of Noah’s Ark, which takes up the majority of the second half of the film. In the World War I section, George O’Brien and Guinn ‘Big Boy’ Williams play two friends, Travis and Al, who find themselves in a train wreck on the night that war is declared. They rescue a young German girl and take shelter just over the French border. When the news reaches them that war has been declared, they take a horse and cart and escape into the night before the authorities reach them. The narrative takes a number of unlikely twists and turns, but suffice to say that Travis marries the girl, who persuades everyone that she is American as she happens to speak English perfectly.



However, Travis is made to feel guilty by Al for not helping the war effort when Al enlists. Eventually Travis enlists as well, but only after Al has gone off to war.

The relationship between Travis and Al is a curious hybrid of romantic friendship and the buddy relationship described earlier in this chapter. We are informed relatively early on that the young men have been friends since childhood, and when they are in France they share a room in which their beds are in close proximity of each other, despite the room being large enough for this not to be the case. Travis and Al's relationship has a number of elements of romantic friendship about it. When the two men are reunited a few months after joining the army, their reaction to seeing each other is akin to that of two lovers who have been separated. They make eye contact across the room, move towards each other and then embrace tightly. The camera centres on George O'Brien's face during the embrace, his eyes welling up with emotion at being reunited with his friend, and he even goes as far as planting a firm kiss on his friend's neck. Despite this, the men seem too old, even too masculine, for this type of intense relationship. The romantic friendship is one associated with youth and innocence, and takes place prior to heterosexual relationships, but George O'Brien's famed muscled physique doesn't give the impression of innocence and youth in the way that Charles Rogers' slight build in *Wings* does, for example. When O'Brien filmed *Noah's Ark*, he was just a year older than Richard Arlen when he filmed *Wings*, but the effect is quite different. Whereas it is suggested that Arlen was playing a young man in his late teens in *Wings*, there is no such suggestion in *Noah's Ark*, and the character of Travis is clearly in his mid-to-late twenties and, even more importantly, married.

So, what kind of relationship is this? To a modern viewer the whole scene seems somewhat homoerotic, and this is only emphasised just a few minutes later when Travis accidentally fatally wounds Al on the battlefield and embraces his dying friend in a sequence which is clearly influenced by the death of David in *Wings*. However, it is the biblical sequences which may hold the key as to how this relationship was intended to be viewed at the time. In the telling of the story of Noah's Ark, each actor within the war story plays a parallel character, and in the case of O'Brien and Williams, they play brothers, two of the sons of Noah. What the film seems to be telling us therefore, albeit in a rather heavy-handed way, is that this seemingly romantic attachment of two men in the trenches is actually akin to the love a man has for his brother and family. Once again, therefore, we are presented with a relationship between two men that might seem homoerotic, or to have a homosexual subtext, to a modern viewer but which, when placed in an historical and social context, has a very different nature altogether. While *Noah's Ark* isn't a traditional war film, it emphasises how familial roles were often taken by fellow soldiers. *Noah's Ark* complicates this by presenting us with Travis and Al as lifelong friends rather than meeting in the army, but this is ultimately explained away as brotherly love rather than a romantic friendship.

Here, then, are a series of Hollywood war films from the late 1920s which, in many ways, share the same structure and/or types of characters. Rother writes:

To help the audience comprehend the war experience better, a remarkably large portion of the films that were made at the end of the 1920s and the beginning of the 1930s about World War I used the same artistic trick. A small number of soldiers, mostly from the lower ranks, are the focus of the action. The history of this group in

the course of the war, ever more members dying, provides the narrative means for bringing the realities of the war home to the audience. This formula includes one of the most important conditions for successful films, the emotional involvement of the spectator.

Rother, 1999b: 222

While this was the case for major war films in America, this formula was largely ignored within the films being produced during the same period in Europe. The American films are in many ways human dramas, with the audience developing an affection for many of the young soldiers as we follow them through their conscription, training and war experience (and often death). However, the European films do not afford us this luxury. Instead, the heroes are often anonymous, even characterless, giving the audience an altogether more detached viewing experience. This is perhaps best exemplified by looking at Pabst's 1930 war film, *Westfront, 1918*, based on the novel *Vier von der Infanterie* by Ernst Johannsen, a novel which Andrew Kelly says is "a grim and bitter book, which lacks the humanity of Remarque" (Kelly, 1997: 89). This is also a much bleaker film than *All Quiet on the Western Front*, with which it is often compared. The humanity of that film is simply not present here. If, in that film, we as an audience bond with the characters, in *Westfront, 1918* that is not possible; we know nothing about these people, not even their names. Kester writes:

Of the four infantryman, only one is referred to by his proper name, Karl (Gustav Diesl), while the others are designated by intellectual, geographical and military names: the Student (H. J. Moebis), the Bavarian (Fritz Kampers) and the Lieutenant (Claus Clausen) ... This was a conscious choice on the part of the director, since in the book, most of the protagonists do have proper names.

Kester, 2003: 129

The coldness and brutality which dominates this film was also picked up on in contemporary reviews. Mordaunt Hall wrote in the *New York Times* that “the film is undoubtedly another good argument against war, but it is not good entertainment. ... Granted that the producers of the film wanted to strip war of all its glamour, [but] they might have added to the value of their film by a suggestion of subtlety” (Hall, 1931: 25). A year earlier, an article had appeared covering the Berlin premiere of the film. Here it is written that “G. W. Pabst (*sic*), who directed it, is one of Germany’s best, but he has not been able to form this chaos to a completely satisfying unity.” (Trask, 1930: X4). Both reviewers praise various elements of the film within their respective articles, but both also seem to find that there is something missing when compared to war films being made in America at the time. The lack of concentration on a human story of the war results in it not being “good entertainment” or a “satisfying unity”.

This anonymity is not just present within Pabst’s film, or even just within German films. The French documentary-style drama *Verdun: Visions d’Histoire/Verdun: Visions of History* (Leon Poirier, 1928), retelling the story of the trench battle of Verdun also does not include names for the characters, “using anonymous characters like the French soldier, the German soldier, the boy and the mother to highlight the suffering of all the French people in the war” (Kelly, 1997: 106). Three years later, a German film was made re-enacting the same battle. *Donaumont – Die Hölle von Verdun/Donaumont – The Hell of Verdun* (Heinz Paul, 1931), like *Verdun: Vision d’Histoire* and *Westfront, 1918*, eschews character names, but also goes one step further in that the men at the centre of the film seem to have no individual characteristics at all:

There is no group with clearly defined individuals and types at the centre of *Donaumont* – just as the primary objective is not capturing the war experience of the soldiers. The director chose to leave the ‘group’ in *Donaumont* anonymous and did not provide them with characteristics that go beyond the military. The group is completely absorbed in the military routine, and is a conglomeration of the ‘human’ machine. The decision not to individualise history is connected to the attempt to reconstruct one specific event of the war: the course of the war, not the human experience, is meant to be the centrepiece of *Donaumont*; the film did not intend to explore the experience of war, but rather its mechanics.

Rother, 1999b: 223

While Rother suggests that the film is about the mechanics of war rather than an individual’s experience of it, this does not hide the fact that *all three* of the films discussed here are much colder, detached affairs than those being made in Hollywood. In the main, the characters in these films are not just nameless, but they also have no background (or, rather, not one that we know about), and the first time we meet them is on the battlefield. The Student in *Westfront, 1918* is perhaps better drawn than others, and we do at least get to see him away from the battlefield as he becomes involved with a French woman but, even so, he does not have the fully-rounded personality of Paul in *All Quiet on the Western Front*. Much of this appears to be because we are not allowed the privilege of seeing the men enlisting, being trained and bonding with each other. As Rother writes, *Westfront, 1918* “does not start in peacetime or show civilians joining the War. [Pabst’s] film starts with soldiers who have already been in the trenches for a long time. The participants are slowly and very sketchily identified – they have no ‘past’ of their own, only distinguishing features” (Rother, 1999a: 230). He sums up the nature of the film by suggesting that “*Westfront 1918* does not really recognise a ‘world’ outside the War” (Rother, 1999a: 232). While one could argue that these are intended to be everyman figures, this simply does

not hold up to scrutiny as it is impossible to identify with these characters due to the coldness with which they are portrayed. It seems instead that these are intended to be anonymous figures so that the audience *cannot* identify with them, for to do so would have put a human face on the massive human losses endured by German and France during the conflict, something which I will discuss further later.

The failure within these films to recognise life outside of the war, combined with the anonymous protagonists, means that they are generally devoid of depictions of the camaraderie, romantic friendships and buddy relationships that are so common in the American war films of the period. The men in *Westfront, 1918* are friendly with each other and help each other, such as when one man steals food from an officer to give to the Student when he is worn out after running across the battlefield to deliver a message, but really significant bonds between the men are conspicuous by their absence. If movies such as *All Quiet on the Western Front* are commenting on gender issues as Chambers suggests, their European counterparts are far more interested in explaining the technicalities of trench warfare, and both *Verdun: Visions d'Histoire* and *Donaumont – Die Hölle von Verdun* do this with aplomb through their documentary-style and their use of animated maps etc. It should be remembered these films were not without precedent within Europe. Feature length documentaries were not uncommon, and neither were films that mixed documentary and dramatic elements. For example, Benjamin Christensen's 1922 film, *Häxen*, moves from lecture sequences to dramatic sequences with ease, and even Richard Oswald's *Anders als die Andern*, discussed at length in Chapter 1, contains a relatively lengthy lecture from sexologist Dr Magnus Hirschfeld in the middle of the dramatic narrative. The German and French films discussed here seem to fit more within this format than they

do within the structure used in the American films of the period. However, what they gain in their historical accuracy, they lose in their coldness and general emotional detachment with the audience. However, this emotional detachment was not exclusive to European films, and had been present, at least in part, in a cycle of American war films made a decade earlier.

### **Back to the Beginning: The first war-film cycle**

Ten years earlier, an American film was made which was effectively a combination of what might be called the Hollywood and European tradition of war films discussed above. *The Lost Battalion* (Burton L King, 1919) is a film that tells the true story of a U.S. Army division that gets cut off from the rest of the army and surrounded by the enemy for six days towards the end of World War I. During those six days they have no access to food or water, and are only rescued after a carrier pigeon gets a message out for them (the pigeon went on to be awarded the Distinguished Service Cross). The story of these six days takes up the second half of the film, with re-enactments of the battle and the use of animated maps as found in the European films *Verdun* and *Donaumont* of a decade later. Where possible, the soldiers play themselves in the film – many putting in surprisingly good acting performances – while those that died during the war are played by actors.

The first half of the film has a very different tone, telling the story of how the various soldiers came to be in the battalion in question. This section is in the style of a traditional narrative film as we see the various young men enlisting, going through training and then being shipped out to France for combat. While this first half an hour

or so does not produce the same emotional attachment to the men as in films such as *All Quiet on the Western Front*, at least each character does have a name and his own back story, even if we are presented with too many men for us to engage with them all (or even remember who they all are). There are genuine moments of camaraderie here, and signs of male bonding not seen in the European films of the late 1920s. The men are much more tactile here, often putting their arms around each other and, when getting some rest directly before moving into battle, sleeping in close proximity of each other with the limbs of one soldier resting on those of another.

There is a similar image to this in *Shoulder Arms* (Charlie Chaplin, 1918) in which soldiers are literally lying on each other as a trench fills up with water (see fig 4.2). This sequence in the Chaplin film has a more homoerotic feel to it than the one of the men sleeping in *The Lost Battalion*; in *Shoulder Arms* the men aren't just resting on each other, they are almost entangled in a position more associated with a loving couple (with one man resting his head on the other's chest) than two men simply trying to get comfortable in poor conditions. Because of this, the resulting images appear to be more akin with romantic friendships than a buddy relationship. It can be argued that Chaplin was able to present such images to his audiences because they came under the cover of comedy. Audiences were invited to laugh at the sight of men literally sleeping with each other, rather being asked to take them seriously. Viewing these images as comedy may have been funny, but taking them seriously may well have been terrifying. As discussed in chapter two, America's reaction to the sissy was to laugh at him or as one newspaper article states: "Laughing at him will do as much to cure him as compulsory football" (Anon, 1922: 2).





Fig 4.2: Depiction of the trenches in *Shoulder Arms*

In *The Lost Battalion* the feeling of camaraderie evaporates as the elongated battle sequence takes over. There are no breaks in the action for the audience to find out how the various individuals we have been introduced to are coping, although we do occasionally get to see one injured or killed. It is only at the very end of the film that we catch up with the various individual characters again in an overlong sequence in which they return home and/or are presented with medals for bravery.

The wording of contemporary reviews of the film once again leans towards imagery of the group of soldiers as a family unit. *The Washington Post*, for example, repeatedly refers to the young men as children: “They were children fighting under a born leader, children who for the first time learned in the depth of the Argonne forest what liberty meant what the Stars and Stripes stood for and what democracy really was (*sic*)” (Anon, 1919a: 54). Although the film was made nearly a decade before those in the second wave of World War I films, reviewers were already viewing the formula of

conscriptioin-training-battle as tired and repetitive. The review for the film in *Film*

*Daily* reads:

As photoplay entertainment the picture is far, far too long and not very timely. The prologue leading up to the time the men reached France is composed of sequences devoted to the old stuff of showing how its members came from all sorts of New York homes and places from the highest to the lowest. Of course, this is all true; but so much already has been written about this and so often has the same thing been seen on the screen before that it becomes tiresome.

Anon, 1919b: 3

Referring to this as “old stuff” would suggest that a lengthy series of similarly-structured American war films and/or fictional accounts in popular literature had preceded it. This may very well have been the case but, if it is, then we are at the distinct disadvantage of only having a handful of such films still at our disposal, and surprisingly little reference to such a film cycle in trade journals at the time. Certainly *Hearts of Humanity* (Allen Holubar, 1918) begins with a relatively lengthy section about home life in Canada which plays more like a rural drama rather than the opening of a war film. However, war is then announced and we follow three brothers as they enlist and then get shipped out to Flanders as the epic story continues. While there are genuine scenes of affection between the young men at the heart of the film, this is hardly surprising as they are all from the same family. And so, once again, we have a film which has a similar formula to those of the second wave, but which does not contain the same buddy-style relationship that characterises those films.

Other films from both sides of the Atlantic during this period are also devoid of the camaraderie and close friendships seen during the later cycle. A film such as

*Civilisation* (Reginald Barker et al, 1916), despite having scenes in the claustrophobic setting of a submarine does not contain such relationships, although, perhaps because of the allegorical and religious aspects of the narrative, regarding this as a war film might be misleading. This anti-war film appears to take its lead from what is one of the earliest examples of a feature film with a pacifist theme, *Ned Med Vaabnene/Lay Down Your Arms*, a 1914 film from Denmark, directed by Holger-Madsen. Similarly, this does not contain examples of close buddy-style friendships either, although perhaps this is hardly surprising as these may have been mistaken as a positive element of the war. Even the 1919 British film *Comradeship* (Maurice Elvey) is devoid of these relationships, despite its title.

It is clear, therefore, from what films remain from this period, that the buddy relationship simply was not visible within the first cycle of war films, whether American or European. The nearest this cycle comes to representing such relationships appears to be in a film such as *The Lost Battalion*, or in a comedy like *Shoulder Arms*, but, even when a buddy relationship or romantic friendship is portrayed it is often only for a small segment of the film and then it is cast aside so that the rest of the running time can concentrate either on comedy or showing the mechanics of the war.

It appears that the element of the buddy friendship, largely missing from this first cycle of World War I films, contributed to the popularity of the later, second film cycle. For example, in a review of *The Big Parade*, the film is praised because “it has been written and directed and played as if through the eyes of the doughboy who went forth for the glory of adventure” (Reid, 1926: 47). Later in the same review it is

stressed that “we see the social life of the soldiers” (ibid). The writer, Laurence Reid, is singling out for praise the various elements within the film that were not present in the first cycle, most notably the fact that, instead of being detached from the soldiers on the battlefield, audiences are now being encouraged to identify and empathise with them. In other words, the technical details of how the war is fought – a significant aspect of the first cycle – would, in the second cycle, be eschewed in favour of a human story, and that humanity remains a key aspect of the war genre to the present day.

### **The Influences of Literature**

The question remains as to why the second cycle of war films, which started in the mid-1920s, is brimming with examples of both buddy relationships and romantic friendships whereas the earlier cycle is not. Also, why do these types of friendships only appear in American film, and not in those from mainland Europe. In this final section of the chapter, I will put forward the argument that the later cycle of films is influenced by those who served in the war. While, for example, war poetry was being published in newspapers during the war itself, it was only on an individual poem-by-poem basis. It was, in the main, only after the war that these poems were collected together into volumes and could be viewed as a record of what life was actually like in the trenches. What is more, it was only after the war that the memoirs of those that fought in the conflict began to be published and, of course, only then that former soldiers began writing and directing films influenced by their own experiences.

So, is it possible that the second cycle of films were so influenced by these various

factors that they are completely set apart from the first cycle in their attitudes to war? Sarah Cole appears to suggest that the result of literature of and about the war was significant in how people viewed it. She writes that “many narratives of the post-war decade (which experienced a war-remembrance boom) share the desire to recuperate a cultural investment in male fellowship, and this extolling of comradeship often increases as the war recedes into the category of history” (Cole, 2001: 473). It is understandable that, as time passed on, there was a kind of fervour to find something positive out of an event as horrific as the First World War, and the comradeship and close bonds between the men in the trenches and elsewhere seem to be that token “positive”. Campbell takes this further, likening the war experience to the idea of coming of age. He writes that war...

...can, indeed has, been seen at the ultimate rite of passage: a definite coming to manhood for the industrial age, in which boys become men by confronting mechanical horror and discovering their essential masculinity, perhaps even their essential humanity, in a realm from which feminine presence is banished.

Campbell, 1999: 204

Campbell’s comment about discovering “humanity” is key here, for it is almost as if this is the factor that is missing from the first cycle of war films; all of the key ingredients are present and correct, except for the human element which makes the audience connect with the characters on screen.

Before looking specifically at some individual writings from those who fought in the war, I would like to return momentarily to Sarah Cole’s article which talks about male intimacy and World War I. She suggests that the war conditions allowed for a

relaxation of society's boundaries with regards to male intimacy. She says that "the assertion that masculine comradeship provides the only sustaining relation in a time of moral and physical degradation appears to sweep aside tensions that ordinarily inhere in such relations – tensions involving the body, the individual's conflict with the group, the troubled relation of tradition to modernity" (Cole, 2001: 470). The intimacies that took place between the men in the trenches were extraordinary acts at an extraordinary time. I should make clear at this point that when I refer to "intimacies" I am not referring to acts of a sexual nature, but simply to two men caring for each other both physically and emotionally in a way that would not have been permissible during peacetime, and it is this type of intimacy which is portrayed in films such as *All Quiet on the Western Front* and *Wings*.

So, let us turn to some of the writing itself and, in particular, the war poets who "created an icon who ceaselessly asserts, in Siegfried's Sassoon's words 'my killed friends are with me where I go,' and it is this voice...and its broad resonance for half a century of writers and critics – that helped to constitute a specific language in the canon of British modernism" (Cole, 2001: 470-1). There is a notion in some of these works not just of camaraderie or friendship, but of a feeling of lives being combined and literally becoming one. The opening of Herbert Read's poem *My Company* is as follows:

You became  
In many acts and quiet observances  
A body and a soul, entire.

I cannot tell  
What time your life became mine:

Herbert Read in Gardner, 2007: 87



affection for his men and not of one private for another. This in turn can be associated with the idea of the buddy relationship described in the opening section of this chapter, in that one man is older or more experienced than the other, thus setting them apart from the romantic friendships discussed more fully in the previous chapter. Read's poem was first published in 1919, just as the first cycle of films was coming to an end and thus too late to have had any impact on those films.

Herbert Read was not alone in capturing this love of an officer for the men in his care. Edward de Stein achieved the rank of Major during World War I, and his poem *Envoi* reads in a similar vein:

How shall I say goodbye to you, wonderful, terrible days,  
If I should live to live and leave 'neath an alien soil  
You, my men, who taught me to walk with a smile in the  
ways  
Of the valley of shadows, taught me to know you and  
love you, and toil  
Glad in the glory of fellowship, happy in misery...  
Edward de Stein in Gardner, 2007: 147

As with some of the films made a decade after this was published, here again we see the comradeship present on the battlefield viewed as the only thing allowing the writer to get through the war. As Paul says to Kat in *All Quiet on the Western Front*, "you're all I've got left." What is perhaps most fascinating here is that these depictions of friendships, loyalties and the love of an officer for those under his command are not far removed from the kind of relationships advocated by the German Adolph Brand discussed at length in the first chapter of this thesis. Brand believed in friend-love, but also in the love of a teacher or mentor for his pupil, something which is clearly being evoked in these poems.



Bearing this in mind, perhaps it is rather ironic then that the homosexual war poets Wilfred Owen and Siegfried Sassoon were actually believers in the *other* mode of thought on homosexuality in Europe at the time, that championed by Hirschfeld. Campbell writes that “Owen and Sassoon were influenced by Edward Carpenter’s theories of homosexuality which, as we can discern from the title of his primary text on the subject, ‘The Intermediate Sex’, fall decidedly within the gender inversion trope” (Campbell, 1997: 828-8)<sup>56</sup>. Rupert Brooke, whose sexuality is still being debated but who admitted to having dabbled in homosexual sex, has a slightly more romanticised tone to his poems about his fellow soldier. For example, his final, unfinished poem, entitled simply *Fragment*, contains the lines

I would have thought of them  
--Heedless, within a week of battle--in pity,  
Pride in their strength and in the weight and firmness  
And link'd beauty of bodies, and pity that

This gay machine of splendour 'ld soon be broken,  
Thought little of, pashed, scattered. . . .

Brooke, 1915

While there is something homoerotic about a phrase such as “link’d beauty of bodies”, other poems and poets are far from romantic. Isaac Rosenberg’s poem *Louse Hunting* anticipates another element of the American war film discussed earlier, the casual nudity which we see in films such as *Two Arabian Knights*, *The Big Parade* and *All Quiet on the Western Front*. The poem is literally about problems with lice and how one man discovering they are on his clothes causes everyone else around him to panic.

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<sup>56</sup> Carpenter was a British sexologist of the time whose beliefs were very much in line with those of Hirschfeld.

The poem is almost shocking in its candidness, opening with the lines “Nudes, stark and glistening/Yelling in lurid glee” (Isaac Rosenberg in Gardner, 2007: 132). The fact that the men are appearing naked in front of each other is ignored by those involved here in their pursuit to get rid of the creatures. Rosenberg writes of “a shirt verminously busy/Yon soldier tore from his throat” and, later, “Then we all sprang and stript/To hunt the verminous brood” (ibid).

Earlier, in my discussion of *All Quiet on the Western Front*, I discussed an incident involving a soldier soiling himself after hearing his first bomb blast and how matter-of-factly the incident was handled within the film. Once again, this matter-of-factness derives from literature about the war, in this case the book upon which the film is based. In the very first chapter of the novel there is a candid description of the communal latrines. Paul, the narrator, tells us “I can still remember how embarrassed we were at the beginning, when we were recruits in the barracks and had to use the communal latrines. There are no doors, so that twenty men had to sit side by side as if they were on a train” (Remarque, 1929: 5). While there is embarrassment at first this, like any form of self-consciousness at nudity, soon disappears. The passage continues “Since then we’ve learnt more than just how to cope with a bit of embarrassment...Out here in the open air the whole business is a real pleasure” (ibid: 6). This type of relaxed attitude to nudity and bodily functions is translated to both this film and the earlier *Two Arabian Knights*.

It is important to remember that the events depicted in these poems did not just occur to the poets and writers, but to all who served during the war. Therefore, when directors who had also served started making films about the conflict it was almost

inevitable that scenes from being de-loused to tender moments of romantic friendship would find their way into the narrative. This was simply not possible during the first wave of films, for the men making the films were viewing the conflict from the outside and not from within in the way that those that came later did. While some of the Hollywood directors who served during the war would not have been stationed on the iconic Western Front, the experiences of comradeship were likely to have been of a similar nature.

During the war, William Wellman, the director of *Wings*, was himself a flyer stationed in France. A 2006 book by his son, William Wellman Jr, collects together excerpts from his father's letters and diary entries from World War I, as well as some of his later reminiscences. These sources suggest that the kinds of friendships and loyalties between men that we see in the films of the late 1920s, including *Wings*, were also experienced by the director. When his fellow-flyer and friend Thomas Hitchcock died, Wellman wrote:

We trained together at Avord. Went through acrobatics together at Pau. Ended up together at the front at Luneville in the Alsace-Lorraine. Flew patrol together, shot up enemy airdromes together, shot down a German Rumpler and a Fokker together. Lived together...Hell, we did everything together, and on two occasions he saved my life. Tom was a ten-goal polo player, Tom was a ten-goaler in everything.

William Wellman in Wellman, 2006: 45-46

Lewis Milestone, director of *All Quiet on the Western Front* also served during the war, spending his time in the Signal Corps. These directors, writers and poets, then, all saw the war from the inside, a view which was not available during the late teens and

therefore not incorporated into the films of this period. The earlier films often have the feeling of watching events from a safe distance, so safe in fact that we rarely get to properly know the men themselves. Tellingly, *The Lost Battalion* does have shades of the later films within its first half hour or so, but this film was acted by those who actually fought in the war rather than “real actors”. While we do not know for certain, it is certainly feasible that stories and anecdotes from the participants found their way into the film narrative itself; it certainly seems too much of a coincidence that this is the one early film that contains anything remotely bordering on a depiction of romantic friendships or buddy relationships *and* was acted by the soldiers themselves. To summarise, Campbell writes “to use the language set forth in Eric Leed’s *No Man’s Land*, combat is a liminal experience that sets the veteran irrevocably apart from those who have not crossed the ritual threshold of war” (Campbell, 1999: 204), and this is something which appears to be proven within the war film.

While this answers many questions, it raises others. If the American films of the second war film cycle could include these types of influences, then why didn’t the European films of the same period? In some cases, the answer is obvious. For example, Kelly writes of Pabst, director of *Westfront, 1918*: “Though he was involved in the war, [*Westfront, 1918*] was not based on personal knowledge of the trenches. He served out the whole four years in a prisoner-of-war camp, having been arrested as an enemy alien on his return from the United States in the autumn of 1914” (Kelly, 1997: 87). Pabst, then, like the directors of the earlier films, was still viewing the war in the trenches as an outsider and, as has been discussed earlier, the novel on which the film is based is a much colder, detached affair than, for example, Remarque’s novel.

There is a bitterness, aimed at both the loss of life and (in Germany at least) loss of national pride, attached to the war films produced during the late 1920s and early 1930s in mainland Europe. If battlefield comradeship and loyalty were positives taken from the conflict by Britain and America, Germany in particular took no positives from the war, and the sense of loss was exacerbated by the regulation of the Versailles treaty in 1919. Michael Burleigh writes:

Germany lost all her overseas colonies and the territories claimed by her neighbours; union between Germany and Austria were forbidden; limitations were imposed on the size and nature of her armed forces, and officer cadet academies, the General Staff, tanks and the incipient air force were abolished. There were to be reparations, as yet unspecified, by way of atonement for allegedly causing the war, as reflected in Article 231 ascribing sole 'war guilt' to Germany.

Burleigh, 2000: 46

Bearing this in mind, and the huge German losses during the war, perhaps it was only inevitable that German war films in particular would be cold, bitter affairs. A decade on, the country was still feeling the effects of the war in a way that no other nation was, and a once mighty nation had been belittled by the events.

And what of the German war poets? Relatively little is written of them, but a tantalising news article reveals that their poems were often patriotic affairs rather than centring on the more human side of the war. Historian Nicolas Beaupre is quoted in the article as saying "It wasn't like English poetry which was overwhelmingly pacifist...There were pacifist war poets too – but they remained a minority" (Nicolas Beaupre, quoted in Furlong, 2004). Furlong writes that, other than an anthology of this patriotic verse published in 1919, the poems remain "hidden away in the archives"

(Furlong, 2004). The few examples of German war poetry available to us today certainly portray more of a patriotic fervour than those from Britain and America discussed earlier. One anonymous poem shows the vast difference in the style and content:

Should the enemy threaten us even more,  
We Germans fear him no more.  
And should he be so strong,  
He will not take our position.

Anon, 1915a.

What we can see, therefore, is that the German films of the second cycle were influenced by a very different series of factors than those from America and were never going to feature portrayals of friendships, camaraderie and loyalty in the trenches in the same way. If America and Britain had romanticised the conflict in order to make the stories and films based on it more palatable, then Germany and France had gone to the other extreme, concentrating solely on the technical aspects of war and eschewing the human element altogether. While the outcome of the war was obviously very different for these two countries, they both suffered huge loss of life during the conflict (mortalities for each country were more than UK and American deaths put together). In addition, the long term effects of the war were great for both countries, with Germany suffering economic and political turmoil following the Versailles treaty, and with 4 million citizens in each country being wounded in the conflict. Bearing this in mind, it is hardly surprising that the cinema of France and Germany avoided reminders of the human face of the conflict in the years following the war.

## Conclusion

If the last chapter showed a set of films influenced by romantic friendships that were prevalent in America around the time of the birth of cinema, this one shows the influence of both literature and personal experience on the filmic text. While the first cycle of films on both sides of the Atlantic could never be called documentaries or even drama-documentaries (although *The Lost Battalion* comes closer than most), these rarely-discussed movies were less about the story of the soldier and more about the battle itself. This all changed in America during the second cycle when personal experiences were interwoven into the narrative, and the war film became less about tactics or intricacies of the war itself, and more about the individual and the human stories. While the depictions of intimate friendships and loyalties may seem somewhat romanticised to us today, these seem to represent the experiences of those within the war, as we can see through letters, diaries and poems.

Once again, there is a chasm between the onscreen portrayals of masculinity and male friendships from America and those from Europe when we examine the cycle of films from the late 1920s. The European films are much more detached affairs, with films such as *Westfront, 1918* and *Verdun* not allowing audiences the privilege of getting to know the soldiers, and instead concentrating on the mechanics of the conflict. This seems at odds with the differing views on sexuality and masculinity in America and Europe at the same time, with the American films depicting relationships which very much tie in with the Adolf Brand mode of male friendships.

However, these characterisations and on-screen friendships relate at least in part to those that we have seen in the previous chapter, and seem to be a logical extension of

the romantic friendship. While America was publicly suffering from a perceived masculinity crisis, film was portraying a very different situation, one which was informed by personal (and, for the most part, private) experiences of romantic friendships and war-time comradeship. It also shows strength of character on the part of those sharing their experiences via the films they were making (and the memoirs, novels and poems they were writing). And yet, while these characters (and those playing them) may have been viewed as examples of a weakening of masculinity, they can also be seen as characters who are secure in their own sexuality – secure enough to become emotionally attached to another man and admit it in public. Perhaps with America lagging behind Europe in its understanding of, and willingness to accept, the notion of sexual orientation, men did not feel that such relationships could carry consequences. If sexuality was not commonly understood at the time, these men could hardly be accused of homosexuality, or worry about the possibility of it themselves. While the Rhode Island trials discussed earlier showed suggestions of an understanding of sexual orientation forming in America, this was a news story that was in the public eye in the period between the two American First World War film cycles and, with no similar high profile cases taking place, largely forgotten about by the time of the second cycle of films.

While American films were portraying buddy and romantic friendships in their military-themed films, European cinema was avoiding portraying friendships of *any* kind in their war films. For once, the differences in the films of the two continents had little to do with different understandings of masculinity or sexuality, but simply an unwillingness to portray the humanity required in order for audiences to be reminded of the massive losses endured by their respective nations. Instead, these films were



often an uneasy mix of documentary-style recreations of key battles and the military strategies behind them, and reminders of the coldness and stupidity of war.

However, aside from the war film genre, American films of this period were becoming more and more influenced by European ideas, art, literature and style and, as the next chapter will demonstrate, nowhere would this be more noticeable than in the horror film.

## Chapter Five

### **Madmen, Murderers and Monsters: Queerness in the early Horror Film**

Perhaps because Robert Wiene's *Das Cabinet Des Dr Caligari/The Cabinet of Dr Caligari* (1920) has been so extensively examined within academic circles, it comes as something of a shock to realise how little has been written about the early horror film in general. In most histories of the horror movie, those films made prior to the 1930s Universal cycle which began with *Dracula* (Tod Browning, 1931) act as little more than a brief prologue to the rest of the story. Even those films from other studios made at the same time as the first Universal cycle are often overlooked. Carlos Clarens's 1967 book, *An Illustrated History of the Horror Film*, does provide a reasonably detailed analysis of the early horror film although, ironically, many of the films he discusses were considered lost at the time of writing and Clarens had to rely on publicity materials, reviews and other contemporary accounts of the films he was discussing. Thankfully, many of the films considered lost in the 1960s have since been rediscovered and are available for examination today. Clarens's work, however, is a relatively straightforward history of horror rather than a scholarly exploration and analysis of the genre. In many ways it provides the groundwork that later, more detailed, analyses of the genre built upon, with the exception of the silent era which has, thus far, received little academic attention. Recently, a number of books cataloguing silent horror films have been published, most notably that by Soister et al (2012), which provides a detailed article on each film, pulling together contemporary

reviews where possible. However, although this work provides us with much information on the films in question, it does not provide us with a history of the silent horror film, and nor does it draw conclusions from the wealth of materials presented to us.

Many fail to recognise the horror genre as even existing prior to the early thirties. Elsewhere, *Uncanny Bodies: The Coming of Sound Film and the Origins of the Horror Genre*, the title of Robert Spadoni's book on early horror (2007), firmly places the formation of the genre *after* the silent period with earlier films simply laying the foundations. This is a belief commonly-held by film historians. Roy Kinnard writes that "before *Frankenstein*, in the silent era, there were no horror movies as the public thinks of them today, although there were certainly many films containing terrifying scenes and horrific plot elements" (Kinnard, 1995: 1). Kim Newman agrees, stating that the "German expressionist films, the grotesque Lon Chaney melodramas and the Broadway-derived comedy 'chillers' of the 20s ...were not perceived by their makers or audiences as horror films" (Newman, 1996: 12-13). However, it appears that this is not the case. A 1921 article in the *New York Times* entitled *Gov. Miller On His Task*, which deals among other things with the issue of film censorship, finds the governor of New York stating that the "sex element passes over the head of the younger children so that they are not harmed by it – but the horror pictures, the blood-and-thunder serials, are just as bad" (de Montalno, 1921: 4). While this naming of the genre appears to be unusual for the time, it does at least suggest that a specific set of films with certain recognisable attributes were being grouped together by audiences at least ten years prior to what has been believed. It also gives support to Tybjerg's comments on the origins of the genre. He writes: "To claim that the cinematic horror

genre begins with *Frankenstein* is to give a historicist definition of the genre where its very existence depends on it being named and recognised by filmmakers and audiences” (Tybjerg, 2004: 16).

This chapter deals almost exclusively with the horror film and, in particular, the use of the figure of the “queer monster”. Both of these terms need some explication before we can proceed. As Mark Jancovich has discussed, the term “horror film” has meant different things at various points during the cinematic past to audiences, reviewers and academics (see Jancovich 2000a, 2005, 2009). In fact, the term “horror film” is not thought to have been used until the early 1930s, with reviewers and publicity prior to that seemingly preferring terms such as “chiller” and “thriller” instead with which to describe the film genre. Looking back, therefore, we have the temptation to transplant our current well-established genre categories on to older films. For example, Lon Chaney is often regarded as a “horror” star today, but in fact the films he made at the peak of his popularity in the mid-to-late 1920s are probably best viewed as grotesque melodramas, even if parts of them are certainly “horrific”. Work has yet to be undertaken to find out how, prior to around 1932, what we today call “horror films” were understood generically by both audiences and the industry.

For the purpose of this chapter, I use “horror” firstly to designate films with some form of supernatural or other-worldly element, or films which lead us to believe there is such an element at work only for the final reveal to show us that the ghost or other supernatural being was actually just the work of an imaginative criminal as in, for example, *The Cat and the Canary* (Paul Leni, 1927). In other words, we are entering a diverse world of ghosts, vampires, monsters (man-made or otherwise), the fantastical,

and mad scientists. The other group of films that are referred to as “horror” in the following pages are those dealing with fanatical, sinister villains and murderers, such as *The Most Dangerous Game* (Irving Pichel and Ernest Schoedsack). Horror films today can be roughly divided into two distinct groups: slasher movies featuring human murderers, and films featuring some form of supernatural element, with the occasional film which merges both elements. It should therefore come as little surprise that the same general divide was present in horror films from the 1910s, 1920s and early 1930s. What I am *not* including in this chapter are thrillers or murder mysteries that might have been referred (or alluded) to as “horror” or “chillers” in contemporary reviews, but which we would no longer regard as such today. For example, *Thirteen Women* (George Archainbaud, 1932) is described in the *New York Times* as “horror without laughter, horror that is too awful to be modish and too stark to save itself from a headlong plunge into hokum” (A.D.S, 1932: 13). However, the film itself is a relatively straightforward mystery thriller in the style of Agatha Christie.

The term “queer monster” is even more difficult to pin down. After all, queerness in film is much more difficult to pinpoint than the explicitly homosexual characters discussed elsewhere in this thesis, or characters such as sissies and fops. The term “queer” is key here because of the nature of the characters being discussed in this chapter, and because of their ever-evolving, and sometimes unrevealed, sexualities. In the vast majority of cases within this chapter, it would be incorrect to suggest that the characters are gay or bisexual; instead they seem to have a far more fluid sexuality and refuse to be pigeon-holed within the clearly-defined categories we use today. This marks a change in approach from the previous two chapters, which have examined relationships represented explicitly on the screen. With this chapter, we enter the

world of encoded queerness. While the codings in the horror films discussed in the following pages are often more subtle than those used around the character of the sissy, discussed in chapter two, the same principals apply. The intention here is to examine and re-evaluate these films and to try to understand what would and would not have been read as queer by contemporary audiences.

Robin Wood suggests that there is an “obvious basic formula of the horror film: normality is threatened by the monster” (Wood, 1978: 26). Bearing this in mind, this chapter concerns itself with two types of “monster”, a term I am using as an inclusive one to encompass all supernatural beings, murderers and mad scientists. The first type of queer monster is the one which attempts to disrupt a heterosexual coupling in order to keep the male for himself. This group of queer monsters seems to be found more commonly in movies that are not wholly supernatural affairs, and will be discussed in the pages that follow with reference to films such as *White Zombie* (Victor Halperin, 1932) and *The Most Dangerous Game*. The second type is the monster which appears to be attempting to spread homosexuality among the masses as some form of contagion – although, once again, this is suggested implicitly rather than explicitly within the texts. An examination of this type of queer monster finds us entering a world of werewolves and vampires as found in films such as *Nosferatu* (F W Murnau, 1922) and *Dracula* (Tod Browning, 1931).<sup>57</sup> Unsurprisingly, there are moments when these two types of monster cross over, such as in *The Mask of Fu Manchu* (Charles Brabin, 1932), in which the title character not only plans to come between the heterosexual couple at the heart of the film, but also to have control over the male and become ruler of the masses.

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<sup>57</sup> See: Schaffer, 1994: 381-425

It is worth mentioning from the outset that these two types of monsters are not exclusive to the horror film; there are queer characters in other films of the period which attempt to disrupt the happiness of the heterosexual couple, for example. In order to explore and explain this, I would like to briefly deviate from the discussion of the horror film and turn my attention toward a little-known film from 1925: *Parisian Love* (Louis J Gasnier, 1925). This is a film starring Clara Bow which was thought to be lost for a number of decades but which resurfaced in 1998 and was released on home video the following year by the American company Kino. Bow is paired with Donald Keith in the film (her regular co-star during this period) and the two star as “apache” dancers Marie and Armand, living in Paris, who are also part of a band of thieves. When one night they find a business card for a university professor on the floor of the cafe where they are dancing, they decide to go to the professor’s house and burgle it, assuming he is out for the evening. However, after breaking into the house, they find that the professor is at home after all and they try to make their escape. Marie is shot at, but escapes unharmed despite the newspaper reporting the following day that she is thought to have died of a gunshot wound. Armand on the other hand suffers a knife wound, but is protected from the police by the professor, Pierre Marcel, who tells them that Armand is his friend. When the police leave, Armand collapses, suffering from blood poisoning. Marcel nurses Armand back to health and Armand agrees to stay with the professor for another six months as long as he is allowed one hour away. Marcel agrees and Armand visits Marie’s home. He is told that Marie “has gone forever” and, despite the fact that she has only walked out of the house where she has been living following an argument, he believes her dead. Marie finds out where Armand is being kept and decides to get revenge on the professor by wooing

him and then marrying him in order to get his money.

The plot of this film is complex and yet important in order to understand the relationships and characters within the film. The professor, Marcel, certainly appears to have a romantic interest in Armand. When Armand initially collapses following the robbery, Marcel kneels beside him and holds his head in his hand, caressing his hair in a scene reminiscent of the more famous sequence in *Wings* (William A. Wellman, 1927) in which Charles “Buddy” Rogers cradles his dying friend Richard Arlen in his arms, stroking his hair and finally kissing him on the lips as Arlen dies. This film is discussed fully in the chapter on romantic friendships. There is no kiss here, but the subsequent events result in more evidence of homosexuality than can be found in the much-discussed *Wings*. When Armand awakes following his collapse on the night of the attempted burglary, he is in bed and wearing pyjamas, meaning that Marcel has stripped and re-dressed him while he was unconscious, and suggests a violation of privacy. When Marcel is nursing the bed-ridden Armand, he does so more as if the man was his lover than someone who tried to rob him: meals are brought by Marcel to Armand in bed; Marcel is tactile with him and often seen to invade his own personal space; and Armand appears to be hidden from the maids in the house, suggesting that Marcel is keeping Armand for himself.

Clara Bow’s character, Marie, seems to have little doubt as to why the professor is interested in her boyfriend. When Armand goes on a trip to London a few months later to patent a burglar alarm he has invented she says to her friends “Armand has gone to London, but it was not I he kissed goodbye”. It is worth noting here that the professor has introduced Armand to a young woman at this point who could be classed as



Armand's new girlfriend, but she is featured so little in the film that her role seems to be little more than window-dressing, and intertitles make it clear that it is not to her Bow is referring. She is much more explicit in a later intertitle, saying of Armand that "Pierre Marcel has stolen him from me – and for that he will pay". Further intertitles later in the film also actively encourage the queer reading of the film. When Marie and Marcel become engaged we are told "All Paris whispered when Pierre Marcel was married – he had been so aloof from love". And finally, when Marcel realises that he has torn apart the relationship between Armand and Marie, he says "I have made you a gentleman, but you have made me a thief" suggesting that he has stolen Armand's affections from Marie. The metaphors of theft and possession here also suggest the differing relations of power between the different characters. Marcel steals Armand from Marie and literally owns him; Marie then woos and marries Marcel, thus freeing Armand. At the end of the film, it is Marcel who is left with nothing, offering a divorce to Marie and leaving Paris behind completely as he sets sail for America using the ticket intended for Armand.

No doubt due to its relatively recent discovery, the film is one which, despite its apparent queer content, has not been discussed in academic writing thus far. Although the relationship between Marcel and Armand is not explicitly spelled out as homosexual, it is difficult to read it in any other way – although Armand does appear to be oblivious to the affection felt towards him by the professor. His apparent naivety makes him appear more of a victim of Marcel than someone who tried to burgle him. What is more difficult to ascertain is how the film would have been understood at the time it was released, not least because of the fact that all of the characters we are supposed to have sympathy with have dubious morals, with both Marie and Armand

being thieves, and the professor seemingly grooming Armand for his own ends. Despite this, it is the professor who is more sympathetic than Bow's character, Marie, who acts with selfish motives throughout. Armand, on the other hand, is at least shown throughout the film as being grateful for the kindness the professor has shown him.

The film, with its convoluted narrative, has the feeling of being just thrown together, which may well have been the case being one of thirteen films starring Bow in 1925. It was not produced by a major studio, but by B P Schulberg Productions and distributed by Preferred Pictures, which Schulberg filed for bankruptcy just two months after *Parisian Love* was released. Schulberg then joined Paramount the following year, bringing his star Clara Bow with him. The fact that the film was produced by a small, independent company may be the reason why the narrative and characters enter territory that was not normal Hollywood fare. It seems not a coincidence that just nine months prior to the release of *Parisian Love*, Bow had appeared in a dour melodrama entitled *Capital Punishment* (James P Hogan, 1925) for the same company which purported to be a serious examination of the issue. It appears that these films could be classed as forerunners to the exploitation film which would come into its own around a decade later, most notably with *Reefer Madness* (1936), which was directed by Louis J Gasnier – the same director as *Parisian Love*. While *Parisian Love* is not a horror film, the character of Marcel is almost an archetype of the first type of queer monster I wish to discuss within this chapter: a man who attempts to come between the heterosexual couple at the heart of the film by exerting power through his implicit homosexuality. As with the previous chapters on the college and war film, horror is primarily discussed here as it is within this genre

that the most examples of these narrative elements and characterisations can be found, but there are exceptions to this rule in the same way that *Wings* includes a romantic friendship but it is the college film where most of these relationships appear. This is not, therefore, a general examination of the notion of genre itself, nor of specific horror conventions.

I also wish to explore beyond the simple notion of the queer monster and examine other queer elements within the early horror film, such as the use of the double or *doppelgänger*. Once again there is a need here to look beyond the explicit elements of narrative, dialogue and characterisation within these films, although perhaps this should not be surprising as horror films are often set within twilight worlds where the monsters (human or otherwise) are hiding in the shadows. This is not a world where everything is black or white, and so there is no reason why the sexuality of the characters should be clearly defined either.

Unlike the other case studies in this thesis, there is a distinct lack of divide between the American and European films. The reason for this is relatively simple in that the source text, normally a novel or short story, often comes from one side of the Atlantic, with the film adaptations coming from the other, most notably *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* and *Frankenstein*. In some cases there are multiple cinematic takes on the same text, such as *Nosferatu* and *Dracula* both having their roots in Bram Stoker's novel *Dracula* (or, at least, the stage adaptation of it). I will show therefore how the content of the source text, and the social conditions under which it was written, affects the queer representations we might now expect from the relevant film-making region after the detailed explorations of the previous chapters. For example, I

will be asking whether the 1885 law outlawing homosexual acts in Britain inadvertently helped to shape literary works such as *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* (also adapted for the stage just a couple of years after publication) and *The Picture of Dorian Gray* and, if so, how this was translated (or not) to the screen in the surviving film adaptations.

More than any other chapter within this thesis there have been frustrations with regards to the availability of certain films. For example, at least seven screen adaptations of *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* were made between 1912 and 1920, but only four are known to survive today. Likewise, there were at least seven adaptations of Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* during the 1910s. Five of these are considered lost, one is in private hands and is thus unavailable for viewing and the remaining version, produced by Thanhouser studios in 1915 is incomplete.<sup>58</sup> Despite these lost films, a number of key works that were considered lost when Clarens wrote his history of horror films in the 1960s are now available, even if in truncated or fragmented form, giving scholars the opportunity to piece together the history of the origins of the horror film in a way which would have previously been impossible.

### **Mass Murderers and Master Criminals**

I would like to start my investigation of the horror genre by looking at two American films from 1932: *The Most Dangerous Game* and *The Mask of Fu Manchu*. These two films, both featuring elements of the grotesque and the perverse, are basically sensational thrillers. The horror element occurs due to the extremes that the criminal in each film will go to in order to get what they want. Both seem more than willing to

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<sup>58</sup> I would like at this point to thank Ned Thanhouser for making this version available to me for the purpose of this thesis.

torture their victims for their own gain, and this is shown (particularly in *The Mask of Fu Manchu*) in great detail on screen. One could argue that this torture element is presented to audiences for their pleasure, a kind of forerunner to the so-called “torture porn” which dominated the horror genre during the first decade of the Twenty-first century.<sup>59</sup> Benschhoff refers to *The Mask of Fu Manchu* as “queerly perverse” (Benschhoff, 1997: 57). Meanwhile, Barrios states that these films “carried their gayness [close] to the vest, with eroticised views of hunky leading men (Joel McCrea and Charles Starrett) and villains whose gayness seemed barely sublimated beneath a veneer of sadism” (Barrios, 2003: 65). Whilst the homosexuality of Pierre Marcel in the previously-discussed *Parisian Love* is reasonably explicit, the queer elements of the story which was the source for the 1932 film *The Most Dangerous Game* are masked somewhat in the film version by the addition of a female love interest played by Fay Wray. Richard Connell’s original short story has no female characters at all. The film tells the story of Robert Rainsford (Joel McCrea), a renowned big game hunter, who finds himself shipwrecked on a remote island. The only house on the island belongs to a Russian, Count Zaroff (Leslie Banks), who offers Rainsford his hospitality until a way can be found to get him off the island. Zaroff already has two other guests, Eve and Martin Trowbridge, a brother and sister, who have also been shipwrecked. Eve (Fay Wray) has worries about Zaroff’s motives, and one night believes her brother has come to harm at the hands of the Count. On investigation it appears that Zaroff also has a love of hunting, but he hunts “the most dangerous game”: men. Rainsford and Eve are horrified when they realise that Zaroff has purposefully moved the markers of the safe channel in the sea in order to secure himself more men to hunt through the recurring shipwrecks. Zaroff wants Rainsford to

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<sup>59</sup> This cycle of films, including the *Saw* and *Hostel* franchises dwell less on scare tactics and more on grisly details of psychological and physical torture.

join him on a hunt, believing the two hunters should work together, but Rainsford refuses and he and Eve are given a twelve hour head start before Zaroff starts his hunt for them. If they survive the few hours until dawn then they are free to leave the island. Eventually, Zaroff believes he has killed Rainsford and takes Eve back to the house, but Rainsford is not dead, finds his way back to the house and kills Zaroff in a fight before leaving the island on a boat with Eve. The key difference between the original short story and the film version is that the story is much more condensed in the original, with the characters of Eve and Martin Trowbridge completely absent, leaving just Zaroff (a General rather than a Count) and Rainsford.

If Pierre Marcel in *Parisian Love* can be seen as a predatory gay male,<sup>60</sup> then Zaroff takes this considerably further by *literally* hunting men and trying to persuade Rainsford to do the same, attempting to convert him into a hunter of “the most dangerous game”. Robert Lang writes:

When Zaroff, in a male-bonding attempt, invites Rainsford to hunt men with him, Rainsford recoils in horror and disgust. What Zaroff wants him to do is perverse. Chief among the perversions implied by the hunt is a sadistic homosexuality, which is very much present in both the short story and the film but always coded in cross-writing, displacement, or erasure.

Lang, 2002: 55

That Zaroff is encouraging Rainsford to partake in the sport of hunting men seems to be a direct reflection of the apparent fear within the American press during this period that homosexuality and/or effeminacy was somehow contagious and that the so-called

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<sup>60</sup> He does, after all, not give Armand much option but to stay with him. While Pierre does not threaten Armand with telling the police who and where he is if he doesn't comply, it is still a hold he has over him. As mentioned earlier in the chapter, he is also tactile with Armand, stroking his hair and stripping and redressing him when he is unconscious and unable to object.

“pansy craze” would somehow eradicate traditional masculinity by infecting those who came into contact with it. I will return to the theme of contagion later in this chapter. Rainsford is seen both within the short story and the film to fight Zaroff’s suggestions even if it results in him losing his life and, in the film, Eve’s life too. The biblical connotations of Eve’s name can also not be seen as coincidental. As in the bible, she is seen as the only woman in an otherwise all-male world and, as such, her survival is essential for heteronormativity to return to the world of the film. While Zaroff *does* take Eve back to his house after he believes Rainsford to be dead, his interest seems to be more in keeping her as a form of trophy for killing such a noted hunter than in making love to her. Zaroff is simply not interested in hunting women, and cannot seem to divert his gaze from Rainsford when he appears at the Count’s house in his tattered clothes following the shipwreck.

Rainsford’s physical appearance does not appear to be coincidental. He is played by Joel McCrea who, out of the five vehicles he made in 1932, spends much of three of them displaying his physique. While he has multiple shirtless scenes in *Bird of Paradise* (King Vidor, 1932) and *The Sports Parade* (Dudley Murphy, 1932), those in *The Most Dangerous Game* have a very different feel to them. In the other two films he is being presented to the audience as a thing of beauty, as something to be looked at, and the state of semi-dress is natural in the context of the films. *Bird of Paradise* is set on a South Sea island and, in *The Sports Parade*, the shirtless scenes come in the form of a boxing match. In *The Most Dangerous Game*, however, McCrea is effectively stripped of his clothes during the hunt which takes up the second half of the film. Without Zaroff hunting him, the state of undress would not occur. His clothes become more and more tattered as the hunt progresses, revealing more and more of his body

and legs the closer that Zaroff gets to capturing him and keeping him as the ultimate trophy. As it is the hunt led by Zaroff which is causing his clothes to get tattered, one could suggest that it is effectively Zaroff taking off Rainsford's clothes one by one. The homoeroticism between the two men is even more palpable in the short story, in which Rainsford first appears at Zaroff's house totally naked after he has been shipwrecked. Even in liberal pre-code Hollywood cinema this would never have been permissible but, despite this and the heterosexualisation of the story through the introduction of the female character, the film version manages to capture the homoerotic tension which is present throughout the source material.

In his article on the 1960 historical epic *El Cid*, Mark Jancovich writes that "the image of the male body always raises the problem of homosexual desires that must be disavowed and oppressed" (Jancovich, 2000a: 80). Of the strategies he outlines that can achieve this, two are relevant in relation to *The Most Dangerous Game*. The first is that the gaze "can be deflected onto a female body so that the male body becomes a point of identification rather than objectification" (ibid). This is a process which is clearly at play here, and is achieved with the introduction of the character of Eve, whose dress becomes torn and tattered as the hunt progresses. Jancovich also talks about a reliance on sadism in which "desire for the male body is disavowed by making its display conditional on punishment" (ibid). While Jancovich is speaking specifically about the historical genre, the same reliance on sadism is present here. However, the problem here is that the punishment/torture that the body receives at the hands of the aggressor can also be viewed as a manifestation of sadistic homosexual desire. The hunt in itself is sadistic in its very nature, and it is quite clear that Zaroff gets pleasure from being the hunter in this situation. However, it could also be argued that Rainsford



also gains enjoyment from the situation. While he goes back to the castle in order to rescue Eve and escape the island, one imagines this could have been achieved without the final lengthy fight with Zaroff, suggesting that there is pleasure for both men in the games they are playing against each other.

Contemporary advertisements for the film do not explicitly refer to queer elements of the narrative and characterisations, although some of the terminology that *is* used certainly seems to highlight the more unusual aspects of the movie. A double page advertisement in *Film Daily* states that *The Most Dangerous Game* is “a story of far-flung fancy” and tells potential viewers that the film “[plunges] into the strangest world of all – THE WORLD OF IMAGINATION – creating a picture that hurls precedent out the door and ignores tradition with a thrill-charged romance born of adventures never even dreamed ‘til now” (Anon, 1932c: 4). One could argue that the queer element “hurls precedent out of the door” and “ignores tradition”, while the word “fancy” or “Aunt Fancy” was a nineteenth century slang term for homosexual, and therefore its use here is notable. Meanwhile, the film was described in a review as “weird and shivery, plenty” (Blaisdell, 1932: 34). While these comments do not explicitly refer to a queer element in the film, we will see as this chapter progresses that words such as “weird”, “strange”, “fantastic” and “sensational” are repeatedly used in contemporary reviews and articles to describe the films discussed in this chapter. While these are not established or recognised code words for homosexuality, their repeated use appears to suggest that their appearance in an article may well have been as a way indicate queerness within a film.

Zaroff was not the only villain on the screen in 1932 with an explicit desire for men

who attempted to come between heterosexual couples within the narrative. *The Mask of Fu Manchu* saw Boris Karloff's only performance as the master criminal. The film is both sadistic and homoerotic in the extreme as Karloff subjects his victims to various dastardly tortures, including one in which the character of Terry Granville, played by Charles Starrett, is strapped to a table whilst nearly naked and injected with a serum (a word which Karloff seems to take particular delight in saying during each of his films) which forces the young man to do anything which Karloff asks of him. The sexual connotations of such a scene (a sub/dom relationship or encounter) are likely to have been intentional in a film which seemingly lacks any form of restraint with regards to content or taste. The film seems intent on shocking, scaring or revolting the audience, whether by showing or referring to torture, sadism, near-nudity, sexism or sex. *Fu Manchu* even takes delight in informing us how the victim of one of the tortures will soil his own clothes. Even by pre-code standards this was out of the ordinary, and there is little doubt that the film would have been heavily censored had it been made just a couple of years later once the Production Code had come into force. The film is racist even by 1932 standards, with both caucasian and Asian characters insulting each other's race with alarming regularity, with the print currently available on DVD and shown on TCM restoring cut footage which exaggerates this racism even further.

Myrna Loy, who played Fah Lo See, *Fu Manchu*'s daughter, is said to have described her character as a "sadistic nymphomaniac" (Johnson, 1997: 65). This appears to be quite an adroit summation of the character, for when Terry Granville is being whipped (just shirtless and hanging from the ceiling in this scene which takes place shortly before that involving the serum), Fah Lo See asks her father "he is not entirely unhandsome is he, my Father?" *Fu Manchu*, who has come in to the room to watch the

whipping replies: “For a white man, no.” While Fu Manchu has a daughter and has therefore been involved sexually with a woman, he admits here that he can tell a handsome man when he sees one and takes visible delight time and time again when restraining and torturing his victims, all of which are men. In fact his home seems to be the 1930s equivalent of a sadistic sex dungeon to which he lures men into in order to torture them with his various toys, seeing how long it takes for them to give in to his demands, which are sometimes for information and at other times for actions.

His sexuality is also brought into question by the fact that he “seems to be perpetually surrounded by half-naked slave boys, both African and Asian” (Benshoff, 1997: 57) and by his physical appearance. An article in *Film Daily* also picks up on this, and talks of the “huge oiled bodies of the half-naked Negroes [taking] on a new and sinister significance” (Daly, 1932: 4). Gregory W Mank suggests a campness when he writes that his “Ann-Margret smile, false eye-lashes, Adrian-designed gowns, dragon-lady fingernails, and lispng, come-hither delivery, has created a wild, kinky, archfiend of a Fu; part Yellow Peril, part Frederick’s of Hollywood” (Mank, 1994: 69). Karloff’s costumes in his role as Fu Manchu do at least bear some resemblance to the loose-fitting, flowing garments worn by the designer in *The Broadway Melody*, and even by Conrad Veidt as Paul in *Anders als die Andern* in the scenes where the violinist is relaxing at home in exotic far-eastern dressing gown-type attire. While it is impossible to pigeon-hole the characters of the European films of the period in the way that it is those from America, perhaps Paul would fit best into the sissy stereotype. Bearing this in mind, while Fu Manchu’s costumes are linked with the more effeminate style of homosexual characters of the period, his actions are at the

other extreme, and threatening to traditional masculinities not because of their femininity but because of their viciousness.

A threat to traditional masculinity seems to be a key factor in each of the three films discussed so far in this chapter. Each of these villains and/or predators are presented to us in one way or another as heterosexual: the Professor in *Parisian Love* falls for and marries Clara Bow's character; in *The Most Dangerous Game* the Count literally plays the game with Rainsford with the winner getting to keep Eve for themselves; and in *The Mask of Fu Manchu*, the title character has a daughter and so has presumably had a heterosexual encounter in the past. However, each of them are also portrayed as having elements to their characters which undermine this heterosexuality and, in each case, it is this element that they are seen attempting to pass on to their victims, whether by grooming in *Parisian Love*, persuasion in *The Most Dangerous Game* or by the serum which makes the recipient do the criminal's bidding in *The Mask of Fu Manchu*.

These films are playing to the fears of a diminishing masculinity that were prevalent at the time they were made, and also to the fear of one man having control or power over another and the threat of that power being used in a sexual way. This leads to the narrative device of innocent men falling prey to sadistic homosexuals. While calling thieves and big game hunters "innocent" might seem like stretching credibility, we can at least use the term with regards to sexual activity or naivety. Although Rainsford could hardly be assumed a virgin, it is clear that he has given his life to his work rather than settling down with a wife and leading a traditional heterosexual existence. This character is seen much more within the western genre, most notably within the figure of the lone rider, outlaw or gunman who has never settled down. While these men are

no doubt sexually active, they also spend much of their time either alone or in the company of other men, suggesting that their outlet for sex is severely limited, whether in the desert, riding through the Grand Canyon, or hunting game in the jungle as Rainsford is. But this notion of falling prey to homosexuals harks back to the Newport trials of 1920, discussed in chapter 2, in which sailors were seen by authorities to be lured into homosexual activities by the gay community on Rhode Island.

If the idea of a man being forced to do another man's bidding surfaces in *The Mask of Fu Manchu*, then it is taken considerably further in another film from the same year, *White Zombie* (Victor Halperin, 1932). In the film, Bela Lugosi plays 'Murder' Legendre, the owner of a mill in Haiti whose entire work force are people who he is controlling after turning them into zombies. A young couple, Madeline and Neil, have been lured to Haiti to get married by an older man, Beaumont, who actually wants to take Madeline away from her fiancé so that he can marry her himself. Madeline refuses his advances, however, and Beaumont turns to Legendre for help. Legendre gives Beaumont a mixture, a drop of which is to be added to Madeline's wine, which will give the appearance that she has died. After Madeline has "died" Legendre turns her into a zombie similar to those working at the mill. Once this has happened, Beaumont realises that this is not what he wanted after all and begs Legendre to turn her back, but he refuses and instead sets about turning Beaumont into a zombie as well, adding some drops of the mixture into a glass of wine before handing it to him. Meanwhile, Neil meets an old priest who confides in him his suspicions that there is something amiss on the island and that Madeline might not be dead after all. They set about solving the mystery together, with the film climaxing at Legendre's cliff-top house and Legendre plunging to his death over the cliff. His death releases Madeline

from the zombie state he has been keeping her in, thus reuniting her with Neil, her fiancé.

Homosexuality and/or queerness is less in evidence for much of this film than it is in either *The Mask of Fu Manchu* or *The Most Dangerous Game*, and yet it bubbles underneath the surface before erupting during the final third of the running time. Benshoff sees the film as one which “plots several homosocial triangles before revealing the homosexual desire that lurks beneath them” (Benshoff, 1997: 66-67). Like so many of the films which will be discussed in this chapter, the spectre of queerness is literally unspoken (or, at least, unheard):

Beaumont offers to give Legendre anything he wants if Legendre will help him win Madeline from Neil. In answer, Legendre reaches out and touches Beaumont’s shoulder, then looks to his zombie servant. A tilt shot from foot to head of the bare-chested zombie answers his gaze, and in an objective medium shot, Legendre leans over and whispers his price in Beaumont’s ear. ‘No – not that!’, cries Beaumont, but he takes the drug anyway, and uses it in the very next scene.

Benshoff, 1997: 67

The *New York Times* review of the film also draws attention to the scene, with the reviewer telling us that “all the actors have strange lines to say but appear to enjoy saying them. Those given to Mr Harron seem, on reflection, to be the most fantastic – if a superlative of any sort is allowable in a discussion of *White Zombie*. ‘Not that’ he says at one point. ‘Better death than that’. Yes indeed, much better.” (L.N., 1932: 18).<sup>61</sup> It is worth noting once again how this sequence is being described by using the

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<sup>61</sup> It should be noted that Mr Harron’s character of Neil Parker does not say this line in the film. It is said by Beaumont, played by Robert Frazer.

words “strange” and “fantastic”, adding to the suggestion that these were used in contemporary articles to indicate queer content.

If one can only summarise as to what Legendre whispers in Beaumont’s ear in this scene, it becomes obvious later in the film. When Beaumont realises that Madeline is now a zombie, and just a shadow of her former self (and, more importantly, unable to love him), he asks Legendre to bring her back. But Legendre is not interested. Instead of bringing Madeline back, he drugs Beaumont and sets about putting him into the same zombie state. As Beaumont realises what is happening, Legendre tells him bluntly “I have taken a fancy to you, Monsieur,” a line which has echoes of Zaroff wanting to keep Rainsford as the ultimate trophy of the big hunt in *The Most Dangerous Game*. Despite the horrified look on Beaumont’s face, there is still a moment a few scenes later when, while still in the process of turning into a zombie (why it takes longer for him to turn than Madeline is conveniently unexplained) he places his hand on top of Legendre’s while the two men sit at a table. By this point, Beaumont can no longer talk, and it could be argued that he is simply trying to get Legendre’s attention, to try to persuade him to change his mind, but the gesture seems too intimate, too gentle, for this. Instead it reads that Beaumont has given up fighting against what is going to happen and is giving himself to Legendre after all, resulting in what appears to be another sub/dom relationship akin to that attempted by Fu Manchu after the injection of the serum. In fact Legendre manages to come between not one but two heterosexual couples – firstly Neil and Madeline, and then Beaumont’s attempted union with Madeline. As with the name “Eve” in *The Most Dangerous Game*, Madeline seems a particularly appropriate name here, with this tale of faked and half-deaths harking back to the American Gothic of Edgar Allan Poe, with the

character of Madeline appearing in possibly his most famous work, *The Fall of the House of Usher*.

*White Zombie* is an unsettling experience even eighty years after it was made. An independent production, made on a low budget and with leftover sets from *Dracula*, it manages to be considerably more eerie than that film, aided and abetted by Lugosi's surprisingly restrained performance, the cinematography and the nods towards German Expressionism. It has much in common with a film which premiered just a few months prior: the Carl Theodor Dreyer film, *Vampyr* (1932). Like *White Zombie*, this is an intensely eerie film, aided and abetted by the unique look of the film, through soft, misty-like cinematography achieved by accident during the early stages of filming and then exploited by Dreyer throughout the film. However, despite being loosely based on the lesbian vampire tale, *Carmilla* by Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu, and being directed by Dreyer, a man who had already tackled a queer storyline in *Michael*, there is little specifically of queer interest in *Vampyr*. This may even come as a surprise to modern audiences considering the queer content of many vampire films and stories over the last 125 years. As Richard Dyer writes, "the vampire seems especially to represent sexuality, for his/her interest in humans is not purely instinctual, and s/he does not characteristically savage them – s/he bites them with a bite just as often described as a kiss" (Dyer, 1988: 54). Clarens goes further, stating that the vampire legend has "attendant hints of necrophilia, sadomasochism, and homosexuality" (Clarens, 1967: 21). However it can be argued that these three categories are linked elsewhere in the films discussed in this chapter, most notably *White Zombie* and *The Mask of Fu Manchu*. While neither contains explicit necrophilia, one is a narrative centred on the walking dead, while the other features the injection of a serum which



puts the recipient under his master's control, thus losing his individual will and making him akin to a zombie-like state. The classic vampire novel, *Dracula* by Bram Stoker, contains more than a hint of homosexuality within its text. Near the beginning of the novel, when the Count walks in on the female vampires with Harker, he tells them: "How dare you touch him, any of you? How dare you cast eyes on him when I had forbidden it? Back, I tell you all! This man belongs to me!" (Stoker, 1897: 46). He goes on: "Yes, I too can love; you yourselves can tell it from the past. Is it not so? Well, now I promise you that when I am done with him you shall kiss him at your will" (ibid).

This comment in particular suggests that the Count is going to use Harker in some way. While we now know due to the popularity of the story that this refers to bloodsucking, to original readers of the text this would have been more unclear, as they would not have already been familiar with the narrative in the way we are today. Once again, there is also the notion here of being owned ("this man belongs to me!"), something which we have already encountered in all the films discussed in this chapter. In *White Zombie*, all the zombies are owned and controlled by Legendre. In *The Mask of Fu Manchu*, the master criminal controls the mind of Terry Granville after injecting him with a serum. And in *The Most Dangerous Game*, Zaroff is keen to win the hunt and keep Rainsford as his trophy. This sense of one man owning another seem inextricably linked to sexual fetishes, in particular sub/dom or master/slave relationships. This in turn is associated with the fear in America during this period, discussed in previous chapters, that homosexuality was somehow catching or that people would fall under the influence of a homosexual and somehow be "turned". This was not just an issue in America, however, as the same fear manifested itself in the

UK, particularly in the policing of public toilets in an attempt to prevent homosexual liaisons. Talmadge writes that “in London during the 1920s, plain-clothes agents from the Metropolitan Police worked in pairs for a maximum of two months because of the risk that they would be recognised, but also for fear of ‘contagion.’” (Tamagne, 2006b: 187).

F W Murnau’s unofficial adaptation of *Dracula, Nosferatu* (1922), manages to lose much of the homoeroticism of the original novel. This is partly because of the different nature of the vampire himself (Dracula in the novel and Count Orlok in *Nosferatu*). In Murnau’s film he is very different from the creature described within the book. In the novel, Harker describes the Count’s pointed ears, pointed teeth and “peculiarly arched nostrils” (Stoker, 1897: 24), but he does not appear to be immediately frightened of him. Indeed, he even describes the Count as giving him a “hearty salute” (ibid: 26). In *Nosferatu*, however, Murnau takes the Count’s peculiar physical attributes to extremes, with his vampire an odd, rat-like creature with hunched shoulders who seems quite incapable of giving anyone a “hearty salute”. Whereas Stoker’s vampire comes across as hospitable, even charming, during Harker’s first meeting with him, Murnau’s vampire comes across as neither. Despite the almost legendary status of the film, Clarens writes that “it is crude, unsubtle, and illogical, whereas the book is perfectly logical within the boundaries of fantasy” (1967: 21), and it is difficult to disagree with him. While Max Schrek’s impersonation of Count Orlok is now almost legendary, it *does* mean that the film lacks logic. In the book, Harker is taken in by Dracula’s charms and politeness and only slowly realises that something is amiss. And yet, in Murnau’s film, the idea that anyone would be taken in by the “charms” of Orlok lacks credibility. Instead of being merely naive as Harker is in the

novel, Hutter, the film's equivalent of the character, simply appears stupid, resulting in the audience losing sympathy and empathy for him. It is only when he cuts his finger while slicing bread and Orlok moves towards him, wanting to take the finger and insert it in to his mouth so he can suck the blood from it, that Hutter realises something is wrong. This is the key queer moment within the film. The insertion of the finger into Orlok's mouth is symbolic of oral sex, but the film does not stop there. When Hutter awakes the following morning, his shirt has been unbuttoned and he has a bite on his neck. Orlok has literally penetrated Hutter while he was asleep, although Hutter is merely mystified rather than horrified at his condition. Dyer writes that the timing of the vampire attack is important when it comes to reading a queer dimension into the narrative. He says "it is at night when we are alone in our beds that the vampire classically comes to call, when we are by ourselves and as we commonly think when we are most ourselves" (Dyer, 1988: 56), thus suggesting that the vampire is little more than a representation of subconscious sexual desires. This notion of repressed (sexual) desires is important to this chapter, particularly when we link it to social history directly prior to when these stories were written and films were made. I would therefore like to turn my attention to a discussion of film adaptations of two novels written directly after the criminalisation of all sexual acts between two men, a law which literally drove homosexuality below the surface of Victorian England.

### **19<sup>th</sup> century Literature, Culture and Society And The Horror Film**

There were two "monsters" at large in 1880s Britain. The first was Jack the Ripper and the second was homosexuality. Homosexuality was more visible in the UK than in America, and certainly more discussed within the scientific and medical

communities. The British sexologist Havelock Ellis was a contemporary of both Ulrichs and Hirschfeld, for example, and, like them, believed that homosexuality was a natural phenomenon. Ellis theorised that “homosexuality was simply an anomaly of nature, something that appeared throughout the animal kingdom and had been present in ancient times” (Miller, 1995: 16), although he did not believe in the Third Sex theory. Ellis’s work began to be published in 1890, and his book on homosexuality was published in 1897, delayed by a couple of years due to the death of his proposed co-author, John Addington Symonds, who had written two books on the subject in 1891, and had been the first to use the term “homosexual” (see Miller, 1995: 15-19) . The various testimonies in the Oscar Wilde trials are also suggestive of what we would today call a “homosexual community”. As with America in the 1920s (and evidenced in the Newport trials), although there was little recognition by heterosexuals in everyday life of sexual orientation or homosexual communities, evidence suggests that homosexuals themselves had formed their own circles and communities by this point and viewed themselves as homosexuals rather than simply men who committed homosexual acts.

The Criminal Law Amendment Act of 1885 stated the following:

Any male person who, in public or private, commits, or is a party to the commission of, or procures, or attempts to procure the commission by any male person of, any act of gross indecency shall be guilty of misdemeanour, and being convicted shall be liable at the discretion of the Court to be imprisoned for any term not exceeding two years, with or without hard labour.

This new law had a significant effect on the homosexual community. Frankel writes

that the law

succeeded in driving homosexual practices further underground and only heightened anxieties about homosexuality in Britain. The key language in the amendment – ‘gross indecency’ – was broad enough to encompass any sexual activity between men, regardless of age or consent, and it was under this statute that Wilde and many other homosexuals were prosecuted in Britain.

Frankel, 2011: 8

The influence that the further criminalisation and driving underground of homosexuality had on horror fiction of the time is remarkable; homosexuality literally became the monster hiding in the closet. The recurring theme of duality began to emerge in British fiction, and novels and short stories began to be written about people leading dual lives – most notably *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* by Robert Louis Stevenson and *The Portrait of Dorian Gray* by Oscar Wilde who, himself, fell foul of the change in the law following his affair with Lord Alfred Douglas in the early 1890s.

*The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* was published in 1886, less than one year after the change in the law. In her article “Dr Jekyll’s Closet”, Elaine Showalter makes a strong case for linking the writing of the novella to the recent changes in the law as well as events in Stevenson’s own life. Regarding the latter, she writes that “biographers have long hinted that Stevenson’s own double life was more than the standard round of brothels and nighttime bohemia” (Showalter 2000: 191). Showalter goes on to say that “Stevenson was the object of extraordinary passion on the part of other men.” (ibid). One can only wonder, therefore, if Stevenson was driven to write the story following the changes to the law and the effect it had on his private life. If

reading the work for the first time, and without prior knowledge of the story, one could be forgiven for thinking that the tale was about an illicit affair between Jekyll and Hyde, particularly with the hints of blackmail that are given throughout the book. Stevenson may well have been using this as a red herring, ultimately leading the reader to think the book was about an illicit affair when in fact this is not the case. Frankel writes that “the criminalisation of private acts between consenting adult males encouraged male prostitutes and domestic servants to extort money from patrons and employers (Frankel, 2011: 9). Showalter, however, goes further and says “[the novella] can most persuasively be read as a fable of fin-de-siecle homosexual panic, the discovery and resistance of the homosexual self” (ibid, 192). Looking at the book from this point of view, it is easy to reconsider one’s interpretation of various passages. For example, when Mr Utterson and Mr Enfield’s friendship is described at the beginning of the novel, we are told “It was a nut to crack for many, what these two could see in each other, or what subject they could find in common” (Stevenson 1886: 1). Given the historical context, this hints at a homosexual relationship – what could the two men see in each other if their relationship is *not* homosexual? The sentence has a similar tone to the intertitle in *Parisian Love*, discussed earlier in this chapter, which read “All Paris whispered when Pierre Marcel was married – he was always so aloof in love”. Neither comment outwardly suggests homosexuality, and yet the wording is such that it is difficult to come to any other conclusion. These quotations both play on the notion that the *appearance* of what was happening between two men was just as important, and could be equally as dangerous, as what was *actually* happening. Gossip about suspicious behaviour was something to be avoided at all costs. Because of the change of the law in the year before the publication of the story, the following passage is particularly intriguing. “I make it a rule of mine: the more it

looks like Queer Street, the less I ask.” “A very good rule, too,” said the lawyer.”” (ibid, 4) Queer was slang for homosexual even as far back as the 1870s, and the fact that it is a *lawyer* that says that the rule is a good one is particularly important if we are to adhere to Showalter’s theory regarding the possible subtext of the story and Stevenson’s own lifestyle.

Whereas Jekyll was a fictional character leading a double life, Oscar Wilde was leading a double life of his own at around the same time. Despite being married with children, Wilde was having an affair with Lord Alfred “Bosie” Douglas, eventually leading to his trials for gross indecency in the 1890s under the new laws of 1885. Wilde’s novel *The Picture Of Dorian Gray* featured heavily in the trial and in it, like Jekyll, Dorian is portrayed as having a double life after his wish comes true that his portrait grows old and displays his sins as he himself remains looking forever young. Dorian’s double life is portrayed as how he looks innocent on the surface, but is actually leading a corrupt life full of various (unnamed but hinted at) vices. Again, the few hints that the novel gives lead us to think that some of these vices are of a homosexual nature. In the novel, Lord Henry Wootton, a friend of Basil Hallward, the painter of Dorian’s portrait, gives Dorian a book which was “simply a psychological study of a certain young Parisian, who spent his life trying to realize in the nineteenth century all the passions and modes of thought that belonged to every century except his own” (Wilde 1891: 121). This could certainly be referring to the Criminal Law Amendment Act of 1885, and the fact that homosexuality between males did not “belong” in Victorian England. The book that falls into Gray’s possession is thought to have been based on Joris Karl Huysmans’ “A Rebours” which, interestingly, translates as “against nature” (Mighall 2003: 244). Again, this leads us to think of

homosexual connotations, even if the idea of homosexuality being “against nature” was contrary to scientific thought in Germany at the time.

The use of blackmail as a device to suggest homosexuality in *The Picture Of Dorian Gray* is more explicit than in *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*. In Chapter Fourteen, following Dorian’s murder of the painter Basil Hallward, he approaches a former friend, Alan Campbell, whom he asks to dispose of the body for him. He reminds Campbell “We were friends once, Alan.” (Wilde 1891: 162). In the same conversation, Dorian resorts to blackmail, threatening to send a letter (containing what information we can only guess) to an unspecified address. “If you don’t help me, I will send it. You know what the result will be” he says. (ibid: 163). He goes on “You treated me as no man has ever dared to treat me – no living man at any rate ... Now it is for me to dictate terms” (ibid). This suggests that Dorian was “used” in some way by Campbell, perhaps sexually, and it certainly infers that Campbell was the dominant force in their relationship, even if we do not know the exact nature of that relationship.

Returning to *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*, Benschhoff suggests that Mr Hyde is used as a metaphor for homosexual repression. He writes that “for many people in our shared English language culture, homosexuality is a monstrous condition. Like an evil Mr Hyde, or the Wolfman, a gay and lesbian self inside of you might be striving to get out” (Benschhoff, 1997: 1). The link between sexual repression and the horror film was first made by Robin Wood in his article “Return of the Repressed”, published in 1978. In this article, Wood suggests that repressed desires are manifested within the horror genre both through dreams (which in turn links in with Dyer’s comments on the timing of the vampire attack) and the notion of an alter ego or double. He writes that



the “doppelganger, alter ego, or double, [is] a figure that has recurred constantly in Western Culture, especially during the past hundred years. The *locus classicus* is Stevenson’s *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*, where normality and monster are two aspects of the same person” (Wood, 1978: 26). Bearing this in mind, I would like to examine the surviving silent film adaptations of *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* to see how this idea is transferred to the screen. Benschhoff (1997), Wood (1978) and Dyer (1988) have all made compelling connections between homosexuality and horror, both within filmic adaptations of key texts and the source novels themselves. An examination of this series of adaptations of a single source text therefore gives us the opportunity to track how these connections were signified in films during the 1910s, a decade when films not only became longer but also more complex and subtle from the point of view of narrative, character and direction. All surviving and available silent adaptations were made in America, something which allows us to investigate how the social climate of 1880s Britain, which moulded Stevenson’s story, was translated to Hollywood film. These films also allow us to establish how the cultural concerns regarding masculinity in America, discussed in previous chapters, were mapped onto the horror genre.

The earliest surviving and available film version was produced for the Thanhouser Film Corporation in 1912. The film, starring James Cruze and directed by Lucius Henderson, is a mere twelve minutes long and therefore is a somewhat truncated version of the story. Of all the silent versions available today this is the only one which does not add a heterosexual romance to the all-male narrative of the source text. Instead it simply is a series of short scenes giving the basic elements of the narrative within its restricted timeframe, and thus is unable to present us with much to discuss when it comes to adaptation, characterisation or queerness. This form of screen

condensation of full-length novels was a common practice by this time – earlier examples range from ten minute versions of *Ben Hur* (Sidney Olcott et al, 1907) to *Frankenstein* (J Searle Dawley, 1910). It was only during the early 1910s, as the popularity of longer films started to increase, that film adaptations of novels could begin to give a faithful and complex rendering of the source text other than simple representations of key scenes.

The 1913 version of the story, directed by Herbert Brenon, runs for nearly half an hour and was released through the fledgling Universal Film Manufacturing Studios (later Universal Studios), thus making it the very first “Universal Horror”. The film stars King Baggot as both Jekyll and Hyde. While Stevenson’s novella contains an all male cast of characters, with the exception of an unnamed maid, here a female love interest for Dr Jekyll is included, effectively heterosexualising the story in a similar way that the introduction of the Fay Wray character heterosexualised *The Most Dangerous Game*. All subsequent silent and early sound film adaptations that are known to survive also include a love interest for Jekyll. One can only surmise at the motives for introducing extra characters and subplots in an adaptation of a novel which runs for under thirty minutes. Perhaps it was simply a case that American film by this point had a set of conventions which had become popular with audiences, and one of them was a female love interest for a male protagonist and *vice versa*. It should also be remembered that the first big stars of the movies were female, so the making of a film with an all-male cast may have been looked down upon by studio bosses. It could also be that the story left too much open to interpretation if Jekyll was left as a single man. However, the most likely reason for the addition of a love interest was that the 1887 stage adaptation of the story, dramatised by Thomas Russell Sullivan, included

such a character. We can only surmise as to why Sullivan saw it necessary to add a love interest into the narrative, but the most likely motive seems to be to simply make the narrative more conventional. As previously discussed with regards to films such as *A Florida Enchantment* and *Dracula*, it was not uncommon for cinematic adaptations to be based on the adapted stage play rather than the source novel, and is certainly what could have happened both here and in the later adaptations.

The introduction of a female character has a double effect with respect to sexuality. While it informs the audience that Jekyll is heterosexual, it adds to the suggestion that the appearance of Hyde is a way of manifesting some form of repressed homosexual desire, most notably because he effectively comes between Jekyll and his girlfriend, Alice – something which is repeated in later adaptations as well. Jekyll has already stalled dates with Alice, giving the excuse that he has too much work to do at his medical practice for the poor, but when he is due to go to the opera with her and her parents he is unable to because he has taken the potion and becomes Hyde for the first time. The fact that Hyde appears when Jekyll is due to go out with both his girlfriend *and* her parents suggests that some form of panic is taking place over commitment, with a meeting with the parents suggesting a move forward towards that commitment. While it could be argued that Jekyll is unaware of what the results of taking the potion will be, it could also be argued that taking the potion for the first time just before he is due to go to the opera with Alice and her parents is a form of deliberate sabotage of the date, and something from which their relationship never recovers.

In 1920, two American adaptations of the story made it to cinema screens. The lesser known (and lesser regarded) of the two is that starring Sheldon Lewis and directed by

J Charles Haydon. While this was a feature-length version of the tale, the currently available print runs for around forty minutes. Despite being made seven years after the version starring King Baggot, this appears to be the more crudely made film. Whether this is partly due to the ravages of time meaning that the current print in circulation is missing some sections and pieced together from various prints, or whether the film was first screened in this way, is difficult to ascertain. Either way, the flow from shot to shot is very uneven, with shots of one scene intertwined with shots from another in an apparently inept attempt at parallel editing. Unlike the previous two versions, the setting is transplanted to contemporary New York. Once again, there is a female love interest for Dr Jekyll, this time her name is Bernice, and once again a date at the opera is missed after the potion is taken for the first time.

While this is a crudely made film, it suggests a queer subtext in a way that none of the other silent versions do. While it was clearly made to cash in on the success of the more prestigious John Barrymore version which had opened a few weeks earlier, this is far from a carbon copy of that film, and the lack of sheen here allows for an effectively darker atmosphere. The intertitles are key in communicating this, and successfully raise the ante with regards to queer content. One intertitle reads: “In order to better cover his dual nature, Dr Jekyll hires quarters for his other self in the squalid tenement district”. While the reference to Jekyll’s “dual nature” might more obviously suggest his good and bad side, it could also be a reference to his (bi)sexuality, especially as we have seen that Hyde has come between Jekyll and his girlfriend. Also of interest here is the reference to Hyde living in the “squalid tenement district”. Each of the four silent adaptations has Hyde living in what might be called the seedier part of the city (whether London or New York). This contrasts

with Jekyll's own house, which is in a more respectable area of the city, and his upper class status. The Sheldon Lewis and John Barrymore versions of the story were made at the same time as the Rhode Island trials were taking place and being reported in newspapers (see chapter two), so it would have been apparent to many Americans just what sins were taking place in these parts of town. Another intertitle in the Sheldon Lewis version refers to "Hyde, the evil genius, harkening to the voice of the Tempter". Would it be going too far to suggest that the "Tempter" was homosexuality? Possibly not, for by the end of the film not only has Hyde come between Jekyll and his girlfriend, he has attacked her as well; a symbolic attack on respectable, professional, heterosexual life.

This version of the novel hints towards queerness the most, which may be the reason for the rather surprising ending. At the end of the film Jekyll/Hyde (he is changing from one to the other with remarkable rapidity by this point) is behind bars and is being strapped into the electric chair. At this point, the film cuts to Jekyll back at his home and asleep in the chair. It has all been a dream, but Jekyll has seen enough to decide to stop meddling with science and to give up on his research and experiments with regards to man's dual nature. The it-was-all-a-dream ending seems very convenient considering the content of the film in general, and one has to wonder if the ending was tacked on in order to placate those who might object to the film's rather risqué content which had gone before. A dream ending can also be found in the 1914 film *A Florida Enchantment*, directed by and starring Sidney Drew. In this film, discussed in Chapter Two, a mischievous woman finds out that a mysterious seed can make women become men, and vice versa, while keeping the same body. They "change the gender of the soul while retaining the old body – thus becoming fantasy

versions of what gays and lesbians were considered at the time, a man trapped in a woman's body and vice versa" (Barrios 2003: 21). The film therefore contains a number of scenes in which members of the same sex (at least from the outside) are seen to be romancing or dancing together. As with the Sheldon Lewis version of *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*, however, the risqué content of the main part of the film is played down due to the all-a-dream ending.

The other surviving version of *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* from 1920 stars John Barrymore in the title roles and is an altogether more accomplished and well-respected film than those discussed thus far, especially when compared to the over-the-top performances and inadequate editing and direction of the version starring Sheldon Lewis. However, the queer element is played down considerably in comparison to that version. Both the Barrymore version and the talkie remake of 1931 (Robert Mamoulian) feature elements of that other Victorian tale of duality, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. Just like Dorian, Hyde finds himself visiting a cheap theatre or music hall and falling in love with someone he meets there. Carlos Clarens writes that "there are echoes of *The Picture of Dorian Gray* in the youthful doctor's quest for forbidden pleasures and, later, in Hyde's sinister forays into Soho" (Clarens, 1967: 40). For the first time, not only did Jekyll have a love interest, but Hyde does as well – another addition to the story which was retained in later adaptations. In the 1920 version, she is an Italian dancer called Gina, and in the later 1931 version it is a young woman who Jekyll had treated a few days before after she had been beaten by a man. In *The Picture of Dorian Gray* it is at the music hall that he meets Sybil Vane, an aspiring actress with whom he falls in love before finishing the affair when she performs badly when Dorian takes his friends Lord Henry Wotton and Basil Hallward to see her.

Clarens writes that “the introduction of [Hyde’s love interest] serves to expand the character of Hyde from the child-beating murderer of the original into a more sexually complex personality” (Clarens, 1967: 41). While it certainly fleshes out the character of Hyde, it is not necessarily the case that he is more sexually complex. In many ways he is *less* complex and simply puzzling now that his heterosexuality has been confirmed in this film version.

Like *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*, *The Picture of Dorian Gray* was brought to the screen seven times during the period 1910-1920. Only two of these seven film versions survive, and only one was available for viewing for this thesis, due to the other being in private hands. The 1915 version, made by the Thanhouser Film Corporation and directed by Eugene Moore, survives only in fragmented form, with the beginning of the film missing and the surviving footage starting just after Dorian has seen Sybil for the first time. We therefore are unable to see Dorian entering the poorer part of London for the first time and how it is characterised. The film’s length would have been approximately half an hour, and so is, again, a severely truncated version of the story, and somewhat bowdlerised – Sybil does not commit suicide when Dorian breaks up with her, and Basil Hallward is not murdered. Harris Gordon makes for a surprisingly plain Dorian in comparison to the fragile, porcelain-like features of Hurd Hatfield in the Hollywood version of 1945. However, a contemporary review tells us that “Harris Gordon plays the title role in sensational fashion” (Anon, 1915e: 675). While the film avoids any references to queerness, it is quite explicit with regards to other vices that Dorian indulges in – at one point he is seen snorting cocaine.

In both the case of *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* and *The Picture of Dorian Gray* it is the

versions that are *not* available to us today which may have been the most interesting. Gay director F W Murnau directed an unofficial version of *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* in 1920 under the title *Der Januskopf*. Little is known about the film today, although a film version of the story directed by Murnau with Conrad Veidt in the lead roles and Bela Lugosi playing his servant is intriguing. Also intriguing is the lost version of *The Picture of Dorian Gray* from 1917, directed by Richard Oswald who went on to make *Anders als die Andern* (see chapter one). Interestingly, an advertising poster for this film does still exist. Benschhoff writes that it

shows a figure consistent with that era's understanding of the male homosexual. Dorian Gray stands next to a vase filled with heart-shaped leaves; the figure himself wears a stylish tuxedo, patent leather slippers, bracelets and make-up, has rounded hips, arms akimbo with one on the pedestal and one on a hip, crossed legs, cocked head, flowered lapel, and a slightly bored, bemused expression on his face.

Benschhoff, 1997: 21

What Benschhoff fails to mention is that the picture he is describing is of almost cartoonish nature, and is remarkably like a character from a Punch cartoon lampooning Oscar Wilde from the 1880s or 1890s.

The seven screen versions of *The Picture of Dorian Gray* are split between those produced in America and those produced in Europe. However, this is not the case with *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*, with nearly all of the films based on the story being produced in America. This continual interest with the story can, perhaps, be linked with the growing publicity surrounding the sexual psychopath, with Estelle B Freedman's article on the panic surrounding the sexual psychopath during the 1930s



and 1940s itself being titled “Uncontrolled Desires” (Freedman, 1987). While Freedman’s article centres on the rise of the sexual psychopath during the 1920s and the response to the panic surrounding sex crimes during the following two decades, American newspapers were referring to sex crimes as early as 1915 – the heart of the decade that saw the “uncontrolled desires” of *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* adapted for the screen on a number of occasions. *A Home Problem*, an article in a Kansas newspaper from 1915, contains a number of comments which connect with the Robert Louis Stevenson story. Dr Jekyll in the story is a doctor and well-respected man who socialises within upper class social circles. What is more, it was also thought that Jack the Ripper might also have been a doctor, and the newspaper article stresses that sex crimes are committed by people of all classes. It states that “the further and deeper one goes into life, the surer that one is that sex crime is not restricted to class or caste, nor education nor environment” (anon, 1915b: 1). It is also interesting that the article gives sex and sex crimes an animalistic nature, referring to sex as a “brute instinct”, and even sounds a little like Dr Jekyll himself when it refers to the sex crime as “the beast that sleeps within man” (ibid). A newspaper article from 1921 verifies the idea that those who commit sex crimes can come from all walks of life, stating that the criminals are often intelligent and well educated. A Professor of Criminology wrote in the article that “You’ve been told that the (*sic*) almost all mentally deficient, that the prisons are filled with feeble-minded (*sic*), that a man commits a holdup or a revolting sex crime because he is only a child in intellect. That’s a pleasant theory...But it is not true” (Adler, 1921: 3). Bearing these articles in mind leads us to believe that these film adaptations of *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* and *The Picture of Dorian Gray* can be seen as a reflection of the rise of sex crimes in society during this period, in the same way that the proliferation of on-screen romantic friendships were a reflection of the

friendships forged by young men during World War I.

We should also not forget that only two years after the initial publication of *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*, London was subject to the crimes of the most famous sexual psychopath of them all, Jack the Ripper. While it would be going too far to suggest that Stevenson predicted their murders in his work, if Showalter's assumptions about his double life are to be believed, it would be likely that the author was familiar with the over-crowded, lower-class areas of London where the murders would eventually take place, and perhaps realised that living conditions could result in such a series of crimes. It certainly seems more than a coincidence that the publication of the novel and the production of the multiple silent film versions both coincided with a wave of sex crimes.

## **Conclusion**

In the previous two chapters we have seen through an exploration of a specific genre or group of films a definite split as to how male-male intimacy was represented within the films of America and those of Europe. However, as this chapter has shown, that clear divide is not evident with regards to queerness within the silent and early sound horror film. Instead, there is a distinct muddying of the waters as source material from one continent is adapted and translated for the screen in another. Some of the films discussed in relation to the war film or romantic friendships were based on plays or novels but, in most cases, these were from the very recent past and the source material was created within the same continent and so shared the same social and political history as the film. This is not the case when discussing the horror film, for texts such as *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* and *The Picture of Dorian Gray*

were taken from their British roots and made their way to the screen in America, thus transporting the social environments in which they were written and amalgamating them with the social environments of America. When this is taken into account, it comes as little surprise that, while the adaptations of *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* available for discussion here were all made in America, there are clear influences from Europe within them when it comes to representation of queerness.

Perhaps more surprising, at least in the first instance, is the way in which the queer aspects of the films are dealt with less sympathetically in the German films than in those made in Hollywood. The queer aspects of *Nosferatu*, for example, are often grotesque in nature, taking the characteristic attributes to extreme in order to make their points. However, when we place this alongside those films discussed during the previous two chapters, we realise that this is not the only time that queerness or male-male intimacy has been dealt with less sympathetically in Europe than in America. In fact, the examination of films throughout the second half of this thesis have shown that, away from the core group of European films discussed in chapter one, the American films are often more sympathetic in their portrayals than those made in Europe. There is, of course, a vast difference between a film such as *Anders als die Andern* and *Nosferatu*. One is a film fighting for the decriminalisation of homosexuality, and the other is, to all intents and purposes, a genre film. It appears that away from films with a political cause or, in the case of *Vingarne* and *Michael*, prestigious literary adaptations, a pattern emerges showing that the European representations of queerness and male-male intimacy, particularly in genre films, is less sympathetic than those from America, or is actually shied away from altogether.

## Conclusion

This thesis has taken a very different approach to examining queer representations and male-male intimacy in early cinema than research previously carried out by Russo, Barrios and others. Instead of applying modern understandings of sexuality to films that are nearly a century old, the aim of this work has been to strip away modern interpretations and extraneous information as much as possible when reading the films and, instead, to place them within their historical and social contexts to try to ascertain not only the intentions of the filmmakers but also how audiences of the time understood the films and the characters within them. This historical approach has allowed for a better understanding of what films meant at the time in which they were produced, but also it has allowed for us to gain information about the period through the films themselves. To add to this, the comparative analysis of films from America and Europe within this historical approach has led to some often surprising conclusions about the films of these regions – conclusions which would not necessarily have been reached via other methods.

Since previous work on the subject of queer representations by earlier film scholars such as Russo (1981/87), Dyer (2003) and Kuzniar (2000) was published, many previously lost films have been rediscovered and made available for research and

study. The availability for study of *Tom Brown's Schooldays* (1916), *Parisian Love*, *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1915) and others has had two main consequences. Firstly, it has enabled a deeper and more detailed exploration and examination of queerness in films during the silent and early sound periods. While there are a vast amount of films that are still lost or unavailable for viewing, we can at least now begin to fill in the missing pieces when it comes to a history of queer film. After all, initial writings on this subject were as much studies of individual films as they were of film history as a whole. Often, too few films were available for study to be able to reliably suggest whether those texts that researchers *did* have access to were part of a trend or a singular occurrence. Now, with more films available to us we can start to see the wider picture rather than simply concentrate on isolated works that were chosen by the lottery determining which films are lost and which survive. We can now see how films fit together with each other, whether as part of an output by a particular director or star, as part of a genre, or as part of a trend within a national or regional film industry. While there are still huge blank spaces in the cinematic jigsaw puzzle due to lost films, at least *sections* of the jigsaw are coming together, allowing us for the first time to study groups of films such as, for example, those of the early horror genre as shown within the pages of this thesis. To be able to discover trends within early film, especially when studying them for examples of queerness (which was hardly a common occurrence in films of the time), is a significant step forward, the importance of which should not be underestimated when it comes to the study of film or social history.

The second consequence that these rediscovered films have had is to complicate our understanding of films of the period, and even disprove ideas and theories that

previous scholars might have had. While in some cases these “new” films have proven or helped to verify theories or ideas about certain films or genres, other rediscovered films have done quite the opposite and have complicated our understanding and, in some cases, caused us to rethink certain sections of film history completely. For example, prior to this thesis, *Algie the Miner*, made at Alice Guy Blaché’s Solax Studios, had been viewed as the earliest surviving film to feature what has become known as the sissy character. However, in recent years a film directed by Blaché herself from six years earlier in 1906, *Les Résultats du Féminisme*, shows that the sissy was being used in film prior to *Algie* and, to complicate our understanding even more, in a *French* film rather than an American one. Prior to this film coming to light, the sissy was very much thought of as a stock character of American origin, and one that was effectively a censor-friendly alternative to homosexual male characters. However, the discovery of Blaché’s film shows that the initial use of the sissy has much more to do with gender than with sexuality.

It is worth nothing here that it is not just new *films* that have come to light since previous work on this subject. The rise of the internet has allowed for the sharing of other materials of equal importance. For example, the Media History Digital Library<sup>62</sup> has made available for all scholars and researchers thousands of film magazines and trade journals from the first half of the twentieth century, and in a searchable format. Likewise, collectors across the globe are using the internet to share rare images, stills, postcards, programmes and press books in a way that researchers twenty years ago could only have dreamed of. With so many films from the period discussed in this thesis presumed lost, this type of ancillary material has been essential to my research,

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<sup>62</sup> <http://mediahistoryproject.org/>

and I thank the many (mostly anonymous) individuals who have so willingly offered their collections for use in this research.

The blurring of the lines between representations of gender and representations of sexuality has been a key finding of this piece of research. I have demonstrated that, within this period of filmmaking, gender and sexuality should not, and cannot, be regarded as entirely separate discourses. Whereas previous researchers have viewed these films from a modern viewpoint, my own work has attempted to strip away all of this extraneous material and looked at the films within their historical context, and shown how they reflect the social, political and scientific views of the time in which they were made. This method has resulted in some interesting and often surprising findings, particularly with regards to films that have already been examined by others. For example, by examining the group of films set in training academies and colleges in light of Rotundo's work on the romantic friendship which was prevalent in America in the nineteenth century, the climactic scene in *Wings* can now be read from a completely different viewpoint. Rather than Jack and David's kiss being viewed as a manifestation of undeclared homosexual love between the two men, we can now see it as a reflection of the romantic friendship, a comradeship which once again blossomed in the trenches of World War I, as can be seen by an examination of the letters, memoirs and poetry of those that served in the conflict. Adding to this, my re-examination of the war film has shown that there was a clear difference in the structure of those films made in the 1910s in America and those made in the 1920s, with the latter reflecting the friendships of war in a way that the first cycle had not. Whereas the earlier films were made as an outside view of the war, the second cycle often involved contributions from those who had served during the conflict, or were

influenced by the writings of those that had. This gives these films something of a different emphasis, giving us a sense of what life might have been like on the battlefield, with the comradeship between the men far more important to these films than the actual mechanics of war which dominated many movies from the first cycle (and those from mainland Europe during the late 1920s and early 1930s).

The placing of these films in their historical context has been key to this thesis, and has facilitated a comparison of films from Europe and America and, more importantly, an understanding of *why* the differences that this has highlighted occurred. Indeed, this was one of the original goals of this thesis. It is clear that the contextualising of the films has been essential to this process. For example, it has allowed us not only to view the European films of the period as a reflection of the theories of Dr Magnus Hirschfeld, but also for possibly the first time to realise just how much of an influence Adolph Brand was on these films as well. Because of their differing views of homosexuality, suggesting that both of these men had an influence on a single film has previously been thought to be impossible – or perhaps even just simply not thought of at all. However, my examination of the films and their historical contexts in the first chapter of this thesis proves that, despite the theories and thoughts of these men being seemingly incompatible, a number of films *do* betray both of their influences – not least *Anders als die Andern*, a film co-written by Hirschfeld himself. While the film informs the audience through a relatively laborious lecture sequence given by Hirschfeld (playing himself) of the theories of the third sex, earlier scenes depicting a flashback of the protagonist's schooldays contain representations of the friend-love advocated by Brand (which, in turn, has similarities with the romantic friendships of America). Despite both Hirschfeld and Brand working towards the aim of a repeal of



the German law which punished homosexual acts between men, there were also major disagreements between them. This leads one to wonder if the concessions to Brand's own thoughts within the script of the film were perhaps in part to placate matters and, perhaps, to prevent a backlash from Brand's own supporters. With most of Hirschfeld's papers destroyed by the Nazi regime, this is something we will probably never know the answer to.

We are lucky enough to have a number of surviving films from Germany covering the years 1919 to 1928 which contain depictions of male homosexuals. However, the depictions are so disparate that it is almost impossible to see a trend developing, and therefore these films only "make sense" when we place them within the political situation of the time with, for example, the less than sympathetic view of homosexuality contained within *Geschlecht in Fesseln* from 1928 betraying the move to a more right-wing government with increased censorship, banning ban on pornography, and so on. Once again, it is the lost films that are as interesting to us as those that survive. For example, the postcard containing an image from the 1917 lost film *Das Bildnis des Dorian Gray* (see page 43) directed by Richard Oswald, shows Dorian Gray wearing a very similar garment to that of the protagonist in *Anders als die Andern*. This would suggest to us that these oriental-style garments with cavernous sleeves were associated in some way with queerness at the time in which these films were made, and therefore that perhaps gay men were somehow exoticised by German society at this time.<sup>63</sup> Once again, being able to see a trend developing in the films we have available to us is of much more use in putting together a picture of queer representations than a number of films with disparate images that simply do not

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<sup>63</sup> Previous work on race and representation has highlighted the construction of Asian men as feminised. See, for example, Marchetti, 1993.

(or will not) fit together.

Trends are much easier to trace in American films than those of Europe, not least due to the sheer volume of films produced by Hollywood during the period which has, therefore, led to more films surviving (in number, if not percentage). However, in the case of American films, these trends have been noted and pieced together by previous scholars from Russo (1981/7) to Barrios (2003). The key here is not finding the trends, but understanding what they mean and what they can tell us about the time in which the films were made. As stated earlier, the association of the sissy character purely with homosexuality has proven to be misleading. It has become clear through the discovery of Alice Guy Blaché's 1906 film *Les Résultats du Féminisme*, that the sissy was also an expression of concerns regarding gender issues. After all, this is a film warning us of what the consequences of feminism might be in the future – men acting as women, doing the sewing and household chores, and wearing flowers in their hair. The plot of the film, such as it is, is all to do with gender, and little to do with sexuality. What is more, whereas the cinematic sissy has previously been thought of as an American invention, Blaché's use of the sissy when she was still making films in France shows that this was probably not the case. In fact, there is even a strong case to be made that Blaché *brought* the character to America. Shortly after arriving in the States, not only did she oversee the production of *Algie the Miner*, in which a sissy is told by the father of his girlfriend to become a "man" if he wants to marry her, but she also remade *Les Résultats du Féminisme* under the title *In the Year 2000*. While that film is now lost, it is surely too much of a coincidence that the earliest known surviving film from America which includes the sissy character (*Algie the Miner*) was produced by the woman who had just arrived there from France and had directed a

film with similar characters in her native country back in 1906? In other words, has the rediscovery of *Les Résultats du Féminisme* resulted in us finding the origins of the sissy on film, and do all later uses of the character-type owe a debt of gratitude to Blaché? This is something which is impossible to prove beyond doubt, but evidence certainly now points towards this scenario. Such a scenario would also explain one of the conundrums associated with the sissy type, namely why his characteristics bare such a resemblance to those of the gay men described in Hirschfeld's theories when those theories were not generally given credence in America, and why that character was used so prolifically during the mid-1910s and the 1920s. That Blaché was influenced to some extent by the theories and modelled her feminised male characters on them, and *then* brought those characters to the American film industry, would certainly explain how European ideas not believed in America ended up being portrayed in many American films. However we should not forget that, as it developed, the cinematic sissy also owed aspects of its character to antecedents in both the theatre and literary works. While the sissy on film is often quite different to that which featured on stage and the printed page, issues of gender and, often, class are common to all types.

My re-examination of the sissy character in American film during the 1910s, 1920s and early 1930s has shown that there are two distinct character types that have thus far been brought together under the overarching term "sissy". As explained above, the sissy itself has some traits associated with the third sex theory of Hirschfeld in which a gay man was thought to have the body of a man but the soul of a woman, while a lesbian was the opposite. These male characters often behave in a kind of imitation of women or girls, and also often wear floaty, feminine garments and/or lip rouge.

Again, this would indicate that these characters are based on Hirschfeld's idea that a woman was trapped inside a man's body. However, when these characters came into the hands of American writers and directors, something changed. Remembering that Blaché's sissies were actually primarily comments on gender role reversals that may or may not occur as a result of feminism, their roles were then altered as they appeared in films by others. As we have seen, in 1916's *Behind the Screen* there was a distinct link between these characters and homosexuality as well as comments on the erosion of masculinity. But there is a problem here in that the history books tell us that homosexuality simply was not recognised at this time in America. The medical profession at the time believed that men committed homosexual acts but not that this had anything to do with their genetic make-up. In other words, it was a conscious decision on the part of the individual and not a result of nature. And yet *Behind The Screen* shows that homosexual acts were linked with certain types of behaviour away from the bedroom – such as a manner of dress, walking, posture etc.

So, how does all of this fit together? One possibility is that the medical profession did not reflect the views of society at the time. After all, we know from the trials that took place in Rhode Island during the late 1910s and early 1920s (discussed in chapter two) that homosexual communities were already in existence, and that individuals had their own roles within that society. Therefore, even if much of society and the medical profession did not believe in sexual orientation, it appears that homosexuals themselves *did* and realised that they were set apart from the rest of society. However, there is evidence to suggest that the idea of sexuality *did* exist outside of homosexual circles. During the Rhode Island trials, a (heterosexual) investigator told the court that “it was common knowledge that if a man was walking along the street in an

effeminate manner, with his lips rouged, his face powdered and his eye-brows pencilled, that in the majority of cases you could form a pretty good opinion of what kind of a man he was...a ‘fairy’” (Chauncey, 1985: 191). The investigator isn’t saying that he was recognising a man who simply took part in certain activities, but that he recognised a particular *kind* of man, and one that he even had a name for: “fairy”. This would suggest the recognition of a particular orientation rather than the recognition of a man who happened to partake in sex with another man.

By the mid-1920s, the other character type previously classed as another form of sissy had appeared. This is the character I have referred to as a “fop”. Whereas the sissy is, more often than not, ridiculed by other characters within the filmic world, the fop generally isn’t. Instead of wearing the effeminate, flowing garments of the sissy, the fop is dressed smartly, often in an evening suit. He is also witty, clever, and is often liked by other characters within the world of the film. Whereas the sissy is seemingly based on elements of Hirschfeld’s theories, the fop is not. In fact, at the time of writing, his ancestry is still relatively unknown, although there is certainly an argument that the witty, clever persona could be derived from Oscar Wilde – most notably because of his seemingly endless ability to produce witticisms at a moment’s notice. If the fop’s antecedent is indeed Wilde, it seems somewhat ironic that the fop seems to not be present at all in European films of the period, especially as the examination of obituaries of Wilde from 1900 provided in the introduction to this thesis suggests that Wilde was “forgiven” for his homosexuality much earlier in Europe than in America.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> Louise Wallenberg has written of the introduction of the fop into Swedish films of the sound era (See Wallenberg, 2009: 71-88)

This thesis has shown there to be many differences between queer representations in the films of Europe and those of America, and yet these differences are perhaps not as distinct or obvious as might be expected. What is more, in some cases the differences that have shown themselves have gone against expectations. This is particularly true in both war films and those featuring the friendships of young men in college films, or those centred on life in military academies and other institutions. Considering Britain's long association with boarding schools, and the literary tradition which contains characters who are close friends at boarding school (such as *Tom Brown's Schooldays*), it seems somewhat surprising that it is in America that these characters appear most in film and not Europe. While these boys with close bonds do appear occasionally in European films, it is certainly in America where this type of friendship is used more often and is most developed. Again, the reason for this has been wrapped up in historical context, most notably the issue of the romantic friendship popular in the nineteenth century. While a common occurrence in America at the time, the subject was not commented upon in detail in academic or scholarly writing until Rotundo's article from 1989. However, once historical contexts are placed alongside the filmic texts, parts of the puzzle once again start piecing together. This, again, is true in the war films of France and, in particular, Germany. These films do not contain the buddy relationships or romantic friendships that make such regular occurrences in American films. However, Germany had lost a great deal more through World War I, not least its pride. American films, including those such as *Journey's End* with a British director at the helm, had taken the war and somehow focussed on more positive aspects of it, in particular the friendships and humanity between the men who served in it. The German films not only avoided doing this, but they also even avoided giving the soldiers in their films fully-rounded characters and, in a number of

cases, not even names. If American films showed that the allies seemed resolved to find something positive to take from the war experience, the films of Germany showed bitterness and often a focus on the mechanics of war rather than the human element.

Despite this, the romantic friendships which Rotundo speaks of, and which are present in the American college and military academy films, have a great deal in common with the notion of friend-love that Brand advocated. In fact, the similarities are startling. However, it seems safe to assume that Brand and his followers were not aware of the types of friendships taking place between young men in America, not least because they seem only to have been written about in then-unpublished journals, diaries and private letters. While romantic friendships were seemingly not looked down upon, they appear to have not been spoken of openly either. In other words, Brand did not get his ideas from what was happening in America. It seems therefore that on the two separate continents, non-sexual intense friendships between boys (which would include much physical contact) were taking place and were not rare occurrences.

Of all the groups of films explored in this thesis, the horror genre is, perhaps surprisingly, the one that has received least academic attention. While much has been written on the relatively few German Expressionist films, in particular *Dr Caligari*, as well as American horror in general from Universal's *Dracula* onwards, the early horror film of the 1910s and 1920s has barely been touched upon in academic work. While in the past this has been due to films being lost or unavailable, enough films have now been recovered to warrant a full length scholarly work on the subject. There are two encyclopaedic type works covering the era (Kinnard, 2000; Soister et al, 2012) but, aside from this, the genre during this period has received relatively scant attention.

A much more conscious exchange of ideas was taking place between Europe and America with regards to the horror genre. British literary works such as *The Picture of Dorian Gray* and *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*, both of which can be read as having queer content, were being filmed in both Europe and America. While the European adaptations of these books (within the period covered by this thesis) have now been lost, the American films clearly show a heterosexualising of these seemingly queer texts (written in part as a reaction to the strengthening of the laws against homosexual acts in the UK), although even the addition of a girlfriend for the protagonist in three of the adaptations of *Jekyll and Hyde* could not completely eradicate the queer element of that text. In many ways, the use of the queer as a monstrous entity in the horror film sits at odds with the benign or even positive images found in the other groups of films discussed. In the college films, the romantic friendship is seen as a stepping stone towards a first heterosexual relationship, and as a kind of rites of passage. In the war film, men are seen giving comfort, helping and caring for each other in times of need when family, girlfriends and wives are not around to take on these roles. But in the horror film, queerness is used for disruptive purposes, and to keep apart the heterosexual couple.

In comparing the films of Europe and America, it is clear that, despite the differences in styles and representations, it was America that was influenced by Europe in the main and not the other way around. We have seen how the sissy character, probably the most commonly used queer character during the period, was brought from Europe and popularised by the French female director Alice Guy Blaché, and how the character she created was seemingly influenced by the theories of Dr Magnus



Hirschfeld and his followers. Also, we have seen how the horror film was influenced by European literary works and, therefore, the political and social contexts in which those novels and stories were written.

While this has been the first full-length study of queerness in silent and early sound cinema, there remain many areas to explore within this period. This thesis has concentrated solely on representations of male queerness, and one covering female queerness would promise to be just as fruitful and quite unique from this study, as laws surrounding female homosexuals were often quite different to those covering males in both Europe and America. Likewise, while the topic of cross-dressing in German cinema of the period has been covered to some extent by Kuzniar (2000), this is also an under-researched topic when looking at silent cinema in general. Finally, we should not forget that silent cinema went beyond the boundaries of Europe and America. Much Australian cinema from the period survives, and yet very little has been written about it – and nothing, to my knowledge, in relation to queerness. The same can be said for Latin American cinema, more and more of which is finding its way on to DVD and is therefore available for study, even if sometimes only through grey market releases. Research into all of these areas would only help to provide those remaining pieces of the puzzle.

By contrasting and comparing queer representation and male-male intimacy in the films of America and Europe, this thesis has produced some surprising results. Not only have some questions, such as that regarding the origins of the sissy character, been given probable answers, but we are also now forced to rethink earlier work on this subject. Previous work, largely concentrating on a relatively small group of films,

portrayed European cinema as having been considerably more sympathetic in these areas. However, by examining a larger, more diverse, group of films and ancillary material, I have shown that this was not always the case, especially in films that do not rely on queer issues for their main narrative drive. Films such as *Anders als die Andern* and *Michael* have previously been viewed as representative of how queer sexualities and male-male intimacy was portrayed in European film from the 1910s through to the early 1930s. This thesis has shown that these films are the exception rather than the rule and, once we move away from films with a significant queer narrative and/or political agenda, representations of queerness and male-male intimacy are often either dealt with less sympathetically than in American films, or are simply not present at all.

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