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## ARE THESE QUEER TIMES? GAY MALE REPRESENTATION ON THE AMERICAN STAGE IN THE 1920'S AND 1990'S

James Russell Couch  
*University of Kentucky*, [jrcouc0@uky.edu](mailto:jrcouc0@uky.edu)

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## ABSTRACT OF THESIS

### ARE THESE QUEER TIMES? GAY MALE REPRESENTATION ON THE AMERICAN STAGE IN THE 1920'S AND 1990'S

Utilizing a model based on Queer theory and comprising four relational paradigms, this thesis examines specific dramas of Mae West and Terrence McNally in an effort to understand the multiple relationships between the text, the society and the culture in the production of a gay male identity and its representation on the American stage in the 1920's and the 1990's. Each relational paradigm is the product of a different twentieth century scholar and can be viewed as an individual lens through which one aspect of a drama or culture can be magnified, illuminated or distorted. These paradigms are: culture and power; science and sex; gender and performance; plus structurization and identity. The most significant paradigm, structurization, provides the culminating focal point for the contributions of the other relational paradigms. Through this examination, Mae West's dramas in the 1920's produced a prescriptive attitude toward the gay male in society, a thing to be cured. The dramas of Terrence McNally produced a subscriptive attitude toward the gay male, an equal human being who should not be marginalized. Ultimately, Broadway Theater can be seen as a site of cultural production that shapes the views of its audience as much as it is shaped by the larger society in which it exists.

**KEYWORDS:** Gay Theater, American Theater, Queer Theory, Terrence McNally, Mae West

James Russell Couch  
June 5, 2003

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ARE THESE QUEER TIMES?  
GAY MALE REPRESENTATION ON THE  
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By

James Russell Couch

Geraldine Maschio, PhD  
Co-Director of Thesis

Russell Henderson, MFA  
Co-Director of Thesis

Rhoda-Gale Pollack, PhD  
Director of Graduate Studies

June 5, 2003

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THESIS

James Russell Couch

The Graduate School  
University of Kentucky

2003

ARE THESE QUEER TIMES?  
GAY MALE REPRESENTATION ON THE  
AMERICAN STAGE IN THE 1920'S AND 1990'S

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THESIS

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in the  
College of Fine Arts  
at the University of Kentucky

By

James Russell Couch

Lexington, Kentucky

Co-Directors: Geraldine Maschio, PhD, Associate Professor of Theatre Arts  
and Russell Henderson, MFA, Associate Professor of Theatre Arts

Lexington, Kentucky

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Dedicated to my Partner, Barry E. Gray





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## Introduction

Are these queer times? The question is simple enough on structure and syntax, but the answer could not be further in the opposite direction. To answer this question is to delve into an explanation of one of contemporary society's most complex theories of cultural production and identity. So, how can a fairly recent theory be used to investigate the cultural production of an identity that, in the American 1920's, was, itself, a novel topic of discussion? I hope that by the end of this investigation, it will become clear that while Queer theory—a mode of critical analysis—came to fruition in the late twentieth century, it had its antecedents in full operation at the beginning of that century. Indeed, Queer theory has an important bearing on the cultural production of gay male identity in American theater throughout the twentieth century. This thesis explores gay male representation on the American stage and the process of cultural production of that identity within society. Given the complex nature of this chosen theoretical model and appropriateness of length for a master's thesis, I am limiting this study exclusively to gay-male representation. As George Chauncey says in the introduction to his work *Gay New York* (1996), "...the differences between gay male and lesbian history [and cultural production of identity] and the complexity of each made it seem virtually impossible to write a book about both that did justice to each and avoided making one history an appendage to the other" (Chauncey, *New York* 27). Therefore, while I will not directly address lesbian representation on the American stage, Queer theory has extensive roots in Feminist theory/criticism. Consequently, the exploration of lesbian representation on the American stage may be done utilizing the same process outlined in this thesis.

The ultimate goal of this thesis is to provide a template of investigation for other periods of American Theater/Performance history in the twentieth century. This template, however, is only one aspect of the thesis. Chapter One explores the many parts and workings of Queer theory as I have chosen to combine principles of the following scholars in the discourse of my arguments: Anthony Giddens, Theodore Adorno, Antonio Gramsci, Michel Foucault and Judith Butler. How do the combined works function within the thesis? Using an example of Queer theory as a highly complex telescope with each scholar's contribution to my examination of gay male representation acting as a lens within this telescope; the reader becomes the observer and the dramatic texts become the point of observation. These specific lenses comprise four

relational paradigms: 1) culture and power looks at the formation of hegemony (a concept of power characterized by political and cultural dominance) and how certain groups hold power over other groups as well as how the dominant group uses culture to maintain its position of power; 2) sex and science explores the scientific inquiry into sexuality and the creation of normal/abnormal sexual behavior or expression; 3) gender and identity assesses the relationships of gender to sex and the performative nature of gender in Western culture; and 4) structurization, the definitive lens, culminates the foci of the other relational paradigms in terms of how each works together in the social and cultural production of identity for gay men on and off of the American stage. It is important to note that Queer theory and its application is an infinitely complex system of analysis that refuses to apply a singularity of discipline upon its methodology. More simply stated, it is thoroughly interdisciplinary in its approach and multidisciplinary in its execution, since its parts and diagnostics come from sociology, philosophy, historiography, communications and theater.

Specifically, I must clarify a bit of vocabulary for the course of this thesis. The phrase, “dominant hegemonic system,” refers to the American middle-classes. This phrase is used as a critically important signification of the complexity of this investigation. As I will discuss at length in Chapter One, the usage of the reductive term “middle-class” in the discussion of hegemony belies the complex nature of the group for which the phrase is used. Middle-class, by one definition implies the status of one’s economic means and measure within a class system. When examining the economic, theological, social and even cultural practices of the middle-class, however, one begins to see that economic forces are not solely the means of power-differentiation within our culture. Through late twentieth century social scientists’ observations of hegemony or power-class, scholars have come to reassess the many positions and powers of the middle-classes (i.e. education, social status, regionalism). Therefore, it is more accurate in the framework of Queer theory to refer to this group as the “dominant hegemonic system” rather than its economic and reductive term middle-class.

Also important to the understanding of Chapter One is the discussion of modernism versus postmodernism. Some scholars argue that modernism, which begins with the advent of the First World War, comes to a close shortly after the beginning of the Second World War in the late 1940’s. However this study utilizes Anthony Giddens’ theory that the late twentieth century is a time of heightened or developed modernity. Giddens makes this important

distinction by defining the pre-modern era as a traditional culture wherein one's identity is not explored beyond one's place within the traditions of that culture. The modern era is a post-traditional society wherein its members tend to be more reflexive. "What to do? How to act? Who to be? These are focal questions for everyone living in circumstances of late modernity" (Giddens, 70). One of Giddens' proponents in communications and media studies states that the media (and arguably culture) do not merely reflect society but contribute to its substance—the process of identity formation is not merely reflective but reflexive (Gauntlett, 98). Giddens' series of questions in this quote are very important, since it helped to determine the selection of authors and plays for examination in Chapters Two and Three. In many ways, both dramatists propose answers to these questions for gay men through their representation in the plays.

Chapters Two and Three examine the lives and careers of two prominent figures in American Theater and culture of the twentieth century—Mae West and Terrence McNally. "Mae West? Why not William Inge or Tennessee Williams—two significant male playwrights who were gay?" There is some merit in objections to a heterosexual female playwright being compared to McNally, a playwright who is gay, but the argument favoring the inclusion of Mae West is a stronger one. Like the queer theoretical model, the selection of these playwrights came through a complex string of similarities between their respective decades in American history and their experiences in getting their works produced in New York. West's plays, *The Drag* (1927) and *The Pleasure Man* (1928) met with similar production experiences of McNally's *Love! Valour! Compassion!* (1994) and *Corpus Christi* (1998). Each had a play that almost, but not quite, made it to Broadway (*The Drag* and *Corpus Christi*) and one play that was produced on the Great White Way (*The Pleasure Man* and *Love! Valour! Compassion!*). Additionally, each had a play which created a great deal of protest (*The Pleasure Man* and *Corpus Christi*). The time periods in which each dramatist wrote her or his respective plays also possess similar qualities, binding them together within the confines of this thesis. During the 1920's, and in the aftermath of World War I, there occurred the first major shift in the American hegemonic system. This system began to assert its power as a stabilizing factor against new waves of immigration, against economically and morally bankrupt individuals of the upper classes, and against the eccentric, odd or "other" in American culture. Homosexuals, among other marginalized groups, were active targets. Conversely, and in an ironic twist, similarly the 1990's saw a shift within the dominant hegemonic system. Homosexuals, no longer marginalized

completely by the scientific community, were beginning to integrate into the system. However, within this process, some individuals were still marginalized. In essence, only some gay men and lesbians were reintegrated into the dominant hegemonic system, while others were being double-discriminated against in the process.

In the course of Chapters Two and Three, the dramas of each playwright are examined through the many lenses of the Queer theoretical model. The results illustrate how Mae West's dramas produce a prescriptive effect upon gay male representation while Terrence McNally's dramas produce a subscriptive effect upon gay male representation. The critical difference is that the prescriptive effect is one wherein society is being asked to view the homosexual as an unfortunate social disease that must and should be fixed. The subscriptive effect is one wherein society is asked to view a group of homosexuals as ordinary, albeit extravagant, members of society and should therefore be integrated into the dominant hegemonic system. Hence, the prescriptive dramas should be viewed as a "prescription" towards solving the problem, while the subscriptive dramas act as an assimilationist tactic by which those in power should embrace the subordinate group in society as similar if not equal.

The conclusion examines the role of Broadway as a culture industry and how Broadway extends both negative and positive forces in the representation of the gay male. Additionally, it explores the formation of gay male identity in America during the 1920's and 1990's. Broadway theater and its specific role as proliferator of socially acceptable art, operates in two specific fashions: as a model for cultural production throughout America as well as a mouth piece for social and political viewpoints. Throughout the twentieth century, the growing complexities of mass media and popular entertainment shaped Broadway. The conclusion looks at the importance of popular culture on the evolution of Broadway theater in the same manner as outlined by Giddens' theory of structurization. Ultimately, it is hoped that each remaining decade in the twentieth century may be analyzed in much the same way as in this thesis. It seems significant that the intricate systems of identity formation and gay male representation in theater may be seen through the relatively new application of Giddens' work to American theater.



## Chapter One

### Mapping the Landscape Queer

In this thesis, there are three geographical reference points. These geographies are the physical geography of Broadway; the cultural geography of the gay male; and the theoretical geography of the thesis itself. As a physical address running up through the center of Manhattan, Broadway also refers to the cultural institution of American legitimate theater defined as the theater district—and bound by union rules and a variety of regulations. Defined herein, Broadway is the cultural institution within the theater district. This distinction is necessary because of the important shifts that occur between the 1920's and the 1990's. The physical location of the theater district began on the Bowery at the south end of Manhattan in the 1860's. As time progressed, and theater owners, managers and audiences sought the “sanitation” of theater, and pushed “cleaner” and “family friendly” theatricals further up the island toward the “tenderloin” region of Manhattan in what is now known as Times Square. With small fluctuations, this is where the major commercial theater district has been contained from as early as the late 1920's to the present day. Therefore, the cultural geography of Broadway is centered on theatrical activities within the geographical location of the theater district. This geographical distinction is very important when considering the geography of the gay male in both the 1920's and the 1990's.

According to George Chauncey, Times Square was a veritable heaven for gay men by the 1930's, with an influx of gay residents and visitors to the area as early as the turn of the twentieth century (Chauncey, *Inventing* 315-6). This burgeoning subculture of gay men occupied primarily three locations within Manhattan: Greenwich Village in the South, Times Square in mid-town and Harlem in the North. It should be noted that while each area contained theaters, only Times Square theaters were considered to be a large part of the legitimate theater. There were, however, very important contributions to the American legitimate theater to be found in both the Village and in Harlem—both were birthplaces for what would later become very important cultural milieu, namely the “artist colony” and jazz respectively. By the 1940's, geographical centers of the gay subculture partially dissolved as New York City officials persecuted gay men in an effort to “clean-up” New York City. The subculture endured through

these oppressive times through a constantly changing geography—by moving throughout the city, never coming together in groups at the same location for more than a few months. By the 1970's however, Gay Liberation movements began to once again secure a sense of permanence to the geography of a “gay” New York by reclaiming sectors of Greenwich Village—particularly on Christopher Street. While there were few unsafe places for gay men in Manhattan in the 1990's, Greenwich Village and the Upper East Side seemed to be the modern centers of the gay subculture at the close of the twentieth century.

The final geography to explore is the theoretical geography of this thesis. Queer theory, much like the definition of Broadway, cannot be understood in terms of a single definition. Queer theory is defined as a deconstructive theory, a social constructivist theory and even as a non-definable method of analysis.

Broadly speaking, queer describes those gestures or analytical models which dramatise incoherencies in the allegedly stable relations between chromosomal sex, gender and sexual desire. Resisting that model of stability--which claims heterosexuality as its origin, when it is more properly its effect--queer focuses on mismatches between sex, gender and desire. Institutionally, queer has been associated most prominently with lesbian and gay subjects, but its analytic framework also includes such topics as cross-dressing, hermaphroditism, gender ambiguity and gender-corrective surgery. Whether as transvestite performance or academic deconstruction, queer locates and exploits the incoherencies in those three terms which stabilise heterosexuality. Demonstrating the impossibility of any 'natural' sexuality, it calls into question even such apparently unproblematic terms as 'man' and 'woman' (Jagose, Para. 2).

Andrew Wikholm, an anthropologist and the webmaster of [www.gayhistory.com](http://www.gayhistory.com) describes Queer theory in the following manner:

This school of literary and cultural criticism...analyze[s] texts...with an eye to exposing underlying meanings, distinctions, and relations of power in the larger culture that produced the texts. The resulting analysis reveals complicated cultural strategies of the regulation of sexual behavior that often results in the oppression of sexual dissidents who violate sexual taboos or don't conform to culturally sanctioned gender roles (Wikholm, Para 1-2).

But what about the study of theater and the performing arts? How can Queer theory examine the seemingly paradoxical world of the performing arts in its context of a modern society? Thinking critically about the long debate over whether art reflects life or life reflects art, the task more clearly presents itself.

If we wish to adduce rules of method, we might suggest that queer theorists suspect that we live in a paradoxical world and that attention to the history of function of paradoxes, as opposed to denunciation of them as failures of logic or reason, is a highly productive enterprise, both intellectually and politically (W.B. Turner, 17).

This is the point at which I found myself utterly confused and excited at the same time; the examination of the nature of paradoxes has excited and confused many critical thinkers. Applying Turner's dictum to the notion that art reflects life and life reflects art, the endeavor can be both provocative and proactive. Queer theory provides a medium for a valuable tool for analysis. A comparison of the representation of gay men on Broadway in the 1920's with representations of gay men on the American stage in the 1990's (art reflecting life) appeared productive. Rather than looking only at the social construction of gay male identity in these periods, I began to wonder about other theories which might help me understand how certain images of gay men in the dramas of Broadway were received by the public. Was there a reciprocity that further complicated the production of identity (life reflecting art)? The words of Wihholm began to haunt me—in order to understand the cultural production of a gay identity in these plays, I had to examine carefully several other factors in American society which govern identities and their expression in both the 1920's and the 1990's.

To begin this process, I needed a different way to look at the production of identity. Finding great comfort in the amorphous construct of Queer theory, I turned to a selection of twentieth century philosophers, social scientists and theorists to build a workable analytical tool under the auspices of Queer theory. Anthony Giddens, a social scientist, believes that the "structurization" of society places contemporary culture at the height of modernity. Further, he posits that the formation of identity in culture is the result of a highly developed and "modern" society that imposes upon its citizenry the task of creating stable personal narratives or biographies. Antonio Gramsci, a writer interested in the concepts of hegemony or system of power contributes to the establishment of the theory of the dominant hegemonic system and its influence upon society. Theodore Adorno, a philosopher, contributes his interest in how culture industries ascribe meaning to the masses within different power structures. The contributions of Michele Foucault, a philosopher, lie in his research and theories about power and sexual dissidence. The final scholar is Judith Butler, a theorist who posits that gender and sexual expression are performative and that neither have a referential singular model. These five

theories may be combined or structured into a relational paradigm through which dramatic texts may be examined: culture and power; science and sex; gender and performance; identity and structurization. Each theorist's work is discussed more fully in Appendix A; their contributions to the "structurization" paradigm of Queer theory is a very important way of understanding how structurization works in society and in the cultural production of gay male identity.

Imagining Queer theory as a special telescope—the reader as observer, the dramatic texts as the point of discovery and the following Queer theory methodology as the telescopic lenses that filter, analyze, magnify, distort and illuminate the discovery (texts). The three different parts of Giddens' ideas included in this thesis all work together in connection to other theorists and collectively create the final relational paradigm: identity and structurization. Structurization becomes the lenses of the theoretical telescope.

1) The basic description of Giddens' theory of structurization is best summarized by David Gauntlett, one of Giddens' major proponents in communications and media studies:

[h]uman agency (micro level activity) and social structure (macro level activity) continuously feed into each other. The social structure is reproduced through repetition of acts by individual people (and therefore can change) (Gauntlett, 94).

This idea of structurization has profound implications for how Queer theory functions in the analysis of gay male representation on the American stage. Assuming Giddens's hypotheses are correct, when enough people change their daily actions against certain social protocols or codes, the social codes themselves begin to change. Likewise, new social codes or protocols will elicit a new reaction from the individuals either in a positive or negative manner.

2) Congruent with structurization is Giddens' ideas about the reflexive nature of the self and the fluidity of identity. Each person's life symbolizes a biography that the individual continuously writes.

The existential question of self-identity is bound up with the fragile nature of the biography which the individual 'supplies' about herself. A person's identity is not to be found in behaviour, nor – important though this is—in the reactions of others, but in the capacity to keep a particular narrative going. The individual's biography, if she is to maintain regular interaction with others in the day-to-day world, cannot be wholly fictive. It must continually integrate events which occur in the external world, and sort them into the on-going 'story' about the self (Giddens, 54).

At what price do individual actions and the reactions of society come? Do individuals whose actions run counter to the established norms of society pay a price? Our human agency might create actions of larger social change, but they can also impact our overall narrative of life. Similarly, persons can perform their gender in any manner, so long as the performance portrays truth—it must fit into their life story. At the heart of this fluidity of identity, individuals may choose the course of their lives—identity is intimately bound to those choices.

3) Giddens believes that Western society has yet to enter into a new phase of development. He maintains that society is still in the modern era as opposed to other theorists who argue for a distinctive Postmodern era because individuals still contemplate their fragmentary identities in contemporary society.

What to do? How to act? Who to be? These are focal questions for everyone living in circumstances of late modernity—and ones which, on some level or another, all of us answer, either discursively or through day-to-day social behaviour (Giddens, 70).

These questions and the extension of modernity in the late twentieth century are very important to an understanding of how modernity, which had only just begun in the 1920's, then according to Giddens, reaches a golden age nearly seventy years later in the 1990's. This view, holding modernism to prevail throughout most of the twentieth century, creates a solid ideological link or continuum between the 1920's and the 1990's. This modernist continuum allows for a direct comparison of Terrence McNally and Mae West, placing McNally's work safely within the same boundaries of structure as West's dramas.

It is through an understanding of Giddens that other theorists come into focus—particularly Gramsci, Adorno, Foucault and Butler. Through the interplay of their theories, one can begin to see a continuous thread connecting the representation of gay men on the Broadway stage throughout the twentieth century. Gramsci's and Adorno's works fit together in explaining the nature of culture industries (i.e. Broadway) as a tool that is used by the dominant hegemonic system to control and/or monitor the other subordinate groups within society. To this end, how might theatrical entertainments affect their audiences? Or, even more importantly, what effect does one individual have on society based solely on his or her performance in daily life? Foucault's work suggests how science—particularly, those sciences that examine sex and sexuality—can create marginalized groups by categorizing both normal and abnormal

psychological and sexual behaviors. His work clearly explains the course of scientific inquiry relating to sex and sexuality during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. An explosion of research and discourse on sexuality led twentieth century scientists to classify normal and abnormal behaviors that should be controlled by the dominant hegemonic system. (West's dramas and the amount of scientific rhetoric used within her plays help to explicate this point).

Judith Butler's work serves structurization because it too focuses on the sciences as an explanation for the "normal" expression of the "other" in society, but delves more deeply into the personal and individual realm of the single person whose daily existence can be described as an intricate performance of a chosen gender. This personal choice to perform one's gender as he/she sees fit is exactly the kind of micro-level activity for which Giddens bases his theories of "structurization" and the fluidity of identity. Going one step further, Butler's work also creates an overall effect on society when the roles of gender are expanded beyond their polar male and female designations—an effect that has greater implications for other individuals within society. When these theorists' works are combined, they exemplify how structurization works within American culture and society in the 1920's and 1990's. They illuminate how McNally's and West's dramas become part of the formation process of gay male identity as portrayed in theater and realized in society.

## Chapter Two

### The Queens of Babylon in the Roaring Twenties

In the past, whenever I pictured the 1920's, I envisioned flappers in their fringed dresses, seductive women who freely explored themselves and the world around them. Speakeasies, prohibition, organized crime and jazz also came to mind. Until recently, I never thought about gay life in the American 1920's. But there was indeed a strong subculture beginning to build in New York—much of which was chronicled and explored by George Chauncey in his book *Gay New York* (1996). According to Chauncey, a particular brand of gay male began to be noticed in Greenwich Village and in Times Square—the pansy. The pansy was a highly effeminate male whose demeanor countered the socially accepted behaviors of the normal male with those of the female. This growing subculture, while vivid to behold at the city's many cafes and cafeterias, was not yet encapsulated into the forefront of the literary or cultural milieu. But in the 1920's, one woman dared to speak openly about the lives of gay men, and through the medium of theater this woman set a vivid picture of the gay male. Known for her sexual exuberance and innuendo, Mae West was never short on speaking her mind to the American public. She was both a hot commodity and a personification of scandal—she was the queen of Babylon in the Roaring Twenties. Her life and times, career and most importantly two of her dramas, *The Drag* and *The Pleasure Man*, are the subject and focus of this chapter. Although Mae West seemed to appear from out of nowhere, she was the perfect product of the new century and that product was the smart and sexy woman. While West's career spanned from the early 1910's through the 1970's, it is during the 1920's that she became a powerful force upon the New York stage.

In order to understand how the Twenties evolved, one has to look at the social atmosphere in the previous decades, in particular the Progressive movement in America. While several reform movements began early in the twentieth century, the most important to this investigation of Mae West and her dramas is the Progressive Era and its influence upon the transformation of theatrical entertainment in New York. The Progressive Era touched many areas of social, political and cultural life. The effects of the Progressive Era upon these areas of life were varied. The Progressive Era began in the late nineteenth century and was a guiding force for the social and political climate of the American 1920's. According to American history

scholar John C. Burnham, “the so-called revolution in morals became one of the lasting legacies of progressivism to American life. [R]eformers directed their campaign against two fundamentals of Victorian morality, the conspiracy of silence and the double standard” (Burnham, 885). While social reformers attempted to lift the oppressive veil of silence about sexually transmitted diseases, birth control, and prostitution with the aim of improving the health and welfare of American women, this openness to discussion and frank exploration of sexual matters only served to heighten sexual tensions in America. Authors, such as Kevin White, argued that the revolt against Victorianism led to a greater licentiousness of American society and that the Progressive Era expanded sexual expression among men and women of the early twentieth century (Wolcott, 1004-6). Likewise, attempts at ending the double standard by expecting a higher morality among men actually served to open women’s attitudes toward overt sexual expression. This new and open attitude toward sexual expression appeared as suggestive or questionable behavior to those proponents of the Progressive Era (Burnham, 889-891).

The Progressive Era attempted to purify sexuality through an open discourse. Though this attempt failed, the influence of Progressive ideas upon other areas of life experienced more success. The entertainment world served to accelerate the rapid progress of a more mobile and recreational woman in society. Kathy Peiss’s book, *Cheap Amusements: Working Women and Leisure in Turn-of-the-Century New York* explored how the world of popular entertainment in the late nineteenth century catered to men, creating homosocial environments. The presence of prostitutes and select other women were included in these homosocial environments but their function was not necessarily as a spectator or audience member. These women functioned as objects of conspicuous consumptions for the male members in attendance and not, arguably, for their enjoyment of the entertainments. The “clean-up” of the stage was intended to encourage women from more privileged classes to attend the theater. As women from the dominant hegemonic system entered the workforce, they gained not only freedom of movement (away from the home) but of economic freedom—purchasing power. The purchasing power of women served to “clean-up” the acts of the popular entertainments of the day. This purchasing power, it should be noted, sometimes put spending for entertainment above some personal spending needs (Peiss, 52-53).

With women increasing their spending, and therefore their presence at the theater, the world of entertainment began to mix, or as Peiss explains, the audiences of the entertainment



world became a heterosocial environment. Producers cleaned up these mixed entertainments to appeal to the ‘delicate’ nature of the woman. (Peiss, 163-169). Progressives, while ready to discuss matters of hygienic importance, hesitated and resisted sexual crudeness upon the stage. In addition to sexual reform, Progressives grappled with class issues as they attempted to modify the rowdy behavior of the “Bowery Boys” to conform to the hegemonic codes of behavior. Authors, like John Kasson and Robert W. Snyder have written extensively about this entertainment world and its engagement with propriety, class, and the creation of a heterosocial environment in the theater. Arguably, the kind of theater most changed was vaudeville.

Kasson’s book, *Rudeness and Civility* (1990), explores the general state and progression of American manners in the late nineteenth century. In his chapter on theater and entertainment, Kasson focuses on personal accounts and program literature to illustrate the modification of audience behavior during the last half of the nineteenth century. The most important modification of behavior occurs within the interaction between performance group and audience. Kasson’s body of evidence supports his position that audience behavior changed from a raucous and talkative group frequently commenting on the performance to a quiet and receptive group (Kasson, 239-43). Snyder’s book, *The Voice of the City* (1989), describes in great detail the sanitization of public entertainment from the perspective of several theater managers and proprietors. Snyder chronicles this sanitization of the stage from the licensing law of concert saloons in 1862 (Snyder, 9) through the taming of the “Bowery Boys” by Tony Pastor and to the creation of a family friendly vaudeville circuit by Keith and Albee. This sanitization of theater takes its first steps with the licensing laws of 1862 which dictated that all concert saloons had to be licensed and could not serve liquor on their premises. The New York State Legislature was attempting to curb vice, while adding legitimacy to the hard working performers (Snyder, 9). The second important step in the sanitization of theater came from a very popular performer and comic singer, Tony Pastor. Pastor began to see the profitability of attracting more established families to his performances, and in the 1870’s he began to perform a mix of traditional racy material with more respectable and sentimental fare that attracted more dignified members of society (Snyder, 18-19). The next, and arguably more substantial, step came through two very important proprietors of the vaudeville circuit. Under the auspices of B. F. Keith and Edward F. Albee (among others), vaudeville became respectable entertainment (Snyder, 33). But, despite

their best efforts, some performers, especially comedians, continued to engage in varying degrees of sexual innuendo.

One of these vaudevillians was a young woman born in August of 1893 by the name of Mary Jane West. According to her biographer, her first appearance as Mae—short for Mary—was at the tender age of seven in an amateur competition sponsored by the Order of Elks in Brooklyn. She grew up very fast, having read her first book about sex at the age of nine while staying at a friend's house (Leider, 47). She made her debut on the vaudeville stage in two original music reviews in 1911 called *A La Broadway* and *Vera Violetta*. By 1914 she was touring the Keith circuit—America's leading vaudeville performance circuit—in productions of *Sometime*, an original play, and *The Mimic World*, another original music review.

The same decades saw momentous, accelerated changes in the world of American entertainment. In following Mae West's course, we can at the same time track a not always sequential transformation from a period when local stock theater companies, music halls, and rough saloons predominate to the era of powerful syndicates that oversee tours in burlesque, theater, and vaudeville. We can share in the shifts in popular dance and music: from ragtime to blues and jazz, from the 1890's "kootch" through the pre-World War I dance craze to the shimmying teens and Harlem-drenched twenties and thirties. We can travel with her from vaudeville to the prestige of the legitimate Broadway stage, watching in the wings as audiences respond—not always favorably—to daring sexual suggestion (Leider, 11).

Her more notorious Broadway performances on the New York stage were in *Sex* and *Diamond Lil*, both of which she authored. Her broadest appeal to the public came in 1932 when she began making motion pictures in Hollywood. Not only did she appear in twelve motion pictures, but also wrote nine of the screenplays for those motion pictures. Mae West exemplified the career entertainer who successfully navigated through the changing rules and regulations of the theater world. While she successfully evaded the censors in many of her vaudeville performances with the subtlety of her innuendo, she could not escape the ire of censors when engaging the topic of homosexuality in her scripted dramas. There were, however, other people in the entertainment business who understood all too well the necessity of innuendo and subterfuge—gay men. Throughout her career, West was very well acquainted with gay men. With the growing "pansy craze" on Times Square and in the Village—gay centers of New York—and West's associations with gay men, it came as no surprise to many that the first gay male characters on the American stage were penned by West (Curtain, 68).

Early in her performing life, and continuing throughout her career, Mae West befriended, imitated, enjoyed, and defended many a drag queen and backstage homosexual; she often performed in vaudeville with female impersonators who in the early decades of this century were not marginal but in the theatrical mainstream. At least once as an adult and often as a child, she performed in male attire. She enjoyed queer camping comic turns, inviting effeminate men home to fix her mother's hairdo (Leider, 13).

She befriended—and hired—many gay men, but nevertheless referred to the 5,000 homosexuals who she said had tried out for parts in *The Drag* as “perverts,” victims of a “tragic” disease that needed to be treated, like cancer, and openly faced. ‘Some homosexuals are not to be blamed for their condition,’ she would write. ‘They are inverters or the ones born that way. Some, however, are perverts—become that way because of weak character or desire for new thrills’ (Leider, 156-7).

Mae West (and her popular status within the entertainment industry) placed her in an important position from which to speak about the gay male through her dramas. The theatrical world, in addition to other segments of the culture industry, created an environment wherein West's dramas indoctrinated audiences into a preferred mode of behavior—‘normative’ heterosexual behavior. The hegemonic system utilized the culture industry in different ways—legitimate theater and its censorship versus the untamed popular entertainments—the legitimate theater (a controllable commodity) held a “socially sanctioned” impression upon audiences’ consciousness. Broadway produced dramas that were “socially sanctioned.” Broadway theaters offered audiences culture which had been, in most cases, carefully screened and censored by agencies such as the Hayes Commission which placed censorial controls over the motion picture industry. Part of the censorship exercised over the theatrical world derived from scientific studies in the nascent fields of sociology and psychology that vilified homosexuals while reifying the normativity of the heterosexual. American analysts in the fields of psychology and psychiatry codified homosexual impulses and behaviors as psychopathic or dysfunctional, labeling homosexuality a social disease in the early twentieth century. This disease and its clinical diagnosis made their way into the popular culture of the 1920's. Embodied in Mae West's dramas, were situations and plot incidents with which the audience could associate as being homosexual. Her dramas clearly codified the gender behaviors of the day; each type of man in West's dramas exemplifies acceptable and unacceptable gender behaviors. The politicians and the critics admonished Mae West, not for breaking new ground, but for the

perceived sensationalism of her characterizations. Indeed, it appeared as though West was taking advantage of the sensational subject matter to boost her own coffers.

West introduced the gay male character to the stage, but a lesbian appeared as the very first homosexual character on the Broadway stage in a Yiddish play called *The God of Vengeance* by Sholom Asch (1917) (Curtain, 26-27). The play is set in a small Jewish settlement in Poland. The plot concerns a father and Mother who operate a Jewish brothel attempt to raise a respectable daughter by trying desperately to keep her from the goings-on below in the basement of their home. Rivkele, the daughter, allows curiosity to get the better of her, and begins a friendship with one of the prostitutes below. The shocking part of this play was a tender and emotional lesbian love scene between Rivkele and her prostitute friend. The scene seemed completely out of place and had not been written for a salacious purpose. Nearly ten years later, in 1927, a Frenchman by the name of Edouard Bourdet wrote a play, *The Captive*, that examined lesbian tendencies within one particular character. One New York columnist, commenting on the advent of lesbianism and homosexuality upon the stage, wrote, “Next we may have to look at ‘*The Captive’s*’ pale brethren, and then it will be over” (Curtain, 68). Bourdet’s play, which shocked the New York critics’ sensibilities played to sold-out houses for several weeks. Mae West, always told by her mother to go with what sells, immediately set out to write her play about the homosexual male. West seemed as eager to cash-in on sensationalism of the “pale brethren” (Curtain, 68) as she was to create change for the treatment of the homosexual in society. She wanted to expose the nature of homosexuality rather than just its existence as had been represented by Asch and Bourdet.

Intrigued and puzzled, she looked into the literature on homosexuality. ‘I read Frued and Ulrichs, who called gays Urnings. I learned a lot about the yearnings of Urnings.’ Ulrichs shared her belief that an invert possessed a woman’s soul trapped in a man’s body. When she happened to see a bunch of cops roughing up some boys after a matinee, she intervened. ‘Remember,’ she told the police, ‘When you’re hitting one of the gay boys you’re hitting a lady’ (Leider, 157).

The plot of *The Drag* (1927) opens in the home of Dr. James Richmond, a physician whose daughter Clair is married to his best friend’s (Judge Robert Kingsbury) son, Rolly Kingsbury. The central conflict rests in the secret that Rolly has had an affair with a young man David Caldwell, listed as an outcast. Rolly is currently trying to spark an interest from Allen Grayson, a Civil Engineer. Rolly’s wife, Clair, suspects that something is wrong in her

relationship with her husband and plans to spend time joining her Aunt Barbara in Europe to think about her marriage. Meanwhile, David Caldwell discusses his homosexuality with Dr. Richmond. Act II features a lengthy exposition where the audience is introduced to its first group of self-identified gay men. These gay men are Clem, the “Duchess,” Hal, Winnie and Rosco. The group is at the home of Dr. Richmond waiting to take home David Caldwell (the young and troubled homosexual from Act I). Enter Allen Grayson, who is introduced by Rolly to each gentleman. After the group of gay men leave, Rolly makes his affections known to Allen. Allen is taken aback. He is shocked that Rolly married a woman in order to conceal his true identity as a homosexual. As it turns out, Allen is very much in love with Rolly’s wife, Clair. At the beginning of Act III, the audience witnesses the ending of a “drag” party at the home of Rolly Kingsbury. After the guests leave, Rolly asks the butler, Parsons, if Allen had called. Parsons replies that Allen called to decline the invitation to Rolly’s party. Rolly exits upstairs, shortly after a gunshot is heard. The second half of Act III is the interrogation of Allen Grayson for the murder of Rolly Kingsbury. At a critical moment in the questioning, David Caldwell enters in the company of Dr. Richmond and confesses to murdering Rolly because he loved him. David also charges a punishment upon Judge Kingsbury, saying that when the Judge condemns David, he is condemning his own son as well—because they are both homosexuals.

*The Pleasure Man* (1928) follows a slightly different course of action than *The Drag*. This drama examines the lives of several vaudevillians during the show’s load-in to the theater and moves to their tragic ending at an after-performance party. The central conflict revolves around Rodney Terrill, a voluptuary (a sensualist), and his many indiscretions are revealed throughout the course of the play. In particular, it becomes obvious he had an affair with Mary Ann Arnold, the sister of one of the theater’s crew members. Throughout the course of the play, the audience doesn’t know that Ted, a member of the theater crew, and Mary Ann are related until near the end of the play. Ted finally seeks his revenge on Rodney at the production’s after-performance party held at the home of a local “drag” personality’s home by the name of Toto. At the party, Arnold waits upstairs for Rodney to bring up a young dancer from the party, and when he does, Arnold attacks Rodney, binds him, castrates him and Rodney bleeds to death. Arnold absolves himself of the crime by stating, “Men can fight dirt with dirt...and still fight for what’s clean—I was crazed—or I couldn’t have done it—but now I’m not insane—and I know

that what I did was right—and I'm glad...take me away now officer, I'm ready to go" (West, *Pleasure Man* 200).

The first point of examination for West's plays is revealed through an understanding of each play's relationship under the Culture and Power relational paradigm. In this paradigm, there appeared a direct usage of culture as means to reify the dominant hegemonic system. One very important supporting case for this relational paradigm existed from a law enacted to enforce decency upon the stage for New York audiences. The Wales-Padlock Bill was enacted by New York's Governor in 1927 to enforce morality censorship upon the American stage. This became, according to those in office, a moral principal and, "...as in all cases where a moral principle is involved, the Governor was found on the side of right-thinking people" (Warn, 1). The law was created to protect audiences against lewd, obscene and degenerate subject matters. The law also promised to hold theater owners responsible for the material being performed in their theaters.

First—heretofore it has been necessary to proceed against the play as a whole. The amendment permits the arrest of those who interject into the play an obscene act. Second—all plays, or parts thereof, which depict or in any way deal with the subject of degeneracy are prohibited. Third—Therefore the owner of the theater, like the ostrich, could hide his head in the sand and pretend not to know what was going on about him, ...From now on the owner or the lessee of the property will be held responsible for a violation on his property, and on the licensing authority may revoke the license and refuse to issue a new licensed for a period not exceeding one year (Warn, 1).

Because the legitimate theater of New York was seen as the purveyor of American culture and values, expressed sex degeneracy was forbidden material for the stage plays. That laws were enacted to control the culture industry should not shock those followers of Gramsci, who believe that the dominant hegemonic system exercised its authority over cultural production as a means to replicate those things that served the needs and wants of those in power. The dominant ideological force—in this case American politicians—exerted its privilege by using the scientific and media sectors to induce political and social cooperation in the enforcement of the hegemony. More simply, those in power used their position of privilege in society to gain scientific, news media and social reform support to induce complete cooperation of all individuals in the suppression of undesirable actions, products and art within the social group. They manipulated the culture industry to ensure a peaceful civilian complicity to the dominant group. The Wales-Padlock Bill was a concrete example of this concept in action. The dominant hegemonic system,

utilizing the law, exerted its force onto the culture industry as a means to control impulses of the other groups. *The Drag* was very susceptible to the Wales-Padlock Bill. Most theater managers on Broadway did not want to risk arrest and seizure of the theater for presenting *The Drag* and the production never progressed beyond its out-of-town try-outs. The last public performances of the production occurred in New Jersey, without much fanfare, and in the middle of the night (Curtain, 69-71).

Theater managers were not prepared for Mae West's subsequent play, *The Pleasure Man*, to be so susceptible to the Wales-Padlock Bill. West put homosexuals on the stage in *The Pleasure Man*, however, they were not intimately bound into the central conflict of the play; the homosexual characters were secondary to the plot. The major objections to *The Pleasure Man* came from the play's suggestive dialogue and provocative homosexual slang. The show was closed after the cast, West, the producers, and the theater managers were arrested for violating the Wales-Padlock Bill. Though the central conflict revolved around a heterosexual male, the homosexual characters and their mannerism chiefly caused problems for West and the producers during their trial. These homosexual characters were at the center of a legal debate which would last through 1932—four years after *The Pleasure Man* had closed. The legal documents show that the suggestive dialogue and the homosexual slang were particularly problematic. (It is very interesting to note that the severe situation of the play's ending and the voluptuary nature of Rodney Terrill cannot be found among the reasons for "degeneracy" of the play). According to notes from the Prosecution Arguments in *People vs. Mae West et. al.*, the following lines were of the most suspect nature:

SCRUBWOMEN: I've had it—Yes, more than once. I've had my time—Yes, with the whole fire department. [Act I, scene i]

PARADISE: I get down on my knees (pause) I'm a female impersonator. I sing mammy songs [Act I, scene ii]

(*People vs. Mae West*, #174820)

The prosecution pinpointed certain bits of action in the play which were not part of the written script, but were bits of action included within a particular scene. For example, the acrobats were, "described in a play full of men depicting and portraying male degenerates, [and] has a peculiar significance, which it otherwise might not have. As done by them it is [rest of the sentence omitted from record]. It consists largely of falling down" (*People vs. Mae West*, #174820).

Assuming that given the nature of the scene, coupled with the cryptic description of action offered by the prosecution, it was intimated that homosexual intercourse and or fellatio had been intimated in the production. Clearly, the prosecution wanted to argue that the play had violated the spirit of the Wales-Padlock Bill through its performance of subtext. Commercial Broadway Theater should be cleansed not only of its salacious and decadent dialogue, but also from the ravages of inappropriate subtext. If Broadway Theater can be seen as the purveyor of “socially sanctioned” art; and legal actions taken to ensure the purity of such an ideology then there was a direct relation of the culture industry between the hegemonic system and the general audiences of the Broadway Theater. The hegemonic system sent a clear message to the general public that homosexuality was clearly not to be portrayed and/or discussed within culturally sanctioned art.

The second relational paradigm, Sex and Science offers additional insights into West’s plays. This relational paradigm was what Michele Foucault called the *Scientia Sexualis* or the science of sex. With the advent of psychology and psychiatry, coupled with research in urology and reproductive medicine, psychopathic or dismorphic disorders related to homosexuality emerged as a particular interest of nineteenth century scientists. Both the social and medical sciences launched a staggering array of inquiries and studies into sexuality. Many of these studies lead clinicians to a diagnosis of dismorphic and or psychopathic illness or dysfunction in subjects/patients who exhibited the rare or nontraditional symptoms or behaviors that the studies had explicated. Sigmund Freud, Karl Ulrichs and Richard von Kraft-Ebing were among the leading scientists who amassed a staggering amount of photographic examples of hermaphroditism, urological dismorphic disorders and the bodies of transvestite men along with all sorts of statistical and medical jargon to codify and explicate the “abnormal” male. These studies and reports found their way into medical literature in the United States where,

physicians and scientists gained substantial authority in shaping public discourse about homosexuality. These self-appointed promoters of public health cast homosexuality as an anomalous, pathological condition and suggested that it was a perplexing byproduct of modernity (Terry, 27).

Mae West reportedly consulted medical journals extensively in the creation of her drama *The Drag*. Undoubtedly, West had done her research on the subject and nature of the gay male, given the clinical nature of the discussion.

DOCTOR: I know what I’m talking about...I’ve got a poor devil in there right now, whom you’d call a criminal perhaps—a degenerate—an outcast, and yet in



his own mind, he'd committing no wrong—he's doing nothing save what he should do—his very lack of abnormality is normality to him. I'd call him—a trick of fate—a misfit of nature ...He's only what he was born to be—a sexual invert.

Nature seems to have made no distinction in bestowing this misfortune upon the human race. We find this abnormality among persons of every state of society. It has held sway on the thrones of kings, princes, statesmen, scholars, fools! Wealth, culture, refinement, makes no difference. From the nadir to the zenith of man's career on earth, this shameless vice has traversed all the way. It is as strong today as it was centuries ago (West, *The Drag* 107).

In *The Pleasure Man*, the *scientia sexualis* is not aimed this time at the homosexual, but at the philandering Rodney. This admonition comes in Ted Arnold's confession at the play's end.

STEVE: But, my God, boy—you're not only a murderer! What you did was obscene!

ARNOLD: Obscene—Obscene—Mr. McAllister—when I was in college—in the laboratory—we experimented with rats—with vermin—with poisonous things—we worked on them—so that they could never propagate their own kind—the life I took from that man Terrill—was not higher or better than that of a poisonous beast (West, *The Pleasure Man* 200).

It should be very clearly and carefully noted that using Foucauldian principles, the marginalization occurring in these two plays is not the same for each one. While *The Drag* marginalizes the gay male vis-à-vis the very scientific explication of sexual inversion as non-normative, *The Pleasure Man* marginalizes the philandering heterosexual male.

Along with the notions held by Freud and Ulrichs (among others)—that gay men were actually male bodies inhabited by female souls—the images of the gay men in *The Drag* and *The Pleasure Man* all bear certainties of crossed genders. The performance of gender was very clear in depictions of the gay male, save for the character of David Caldwell. Caldwell's gender performance was much like the “intelligible” genders described by Butler—he was sexed male, performing the masculine gender (with slight modifications) but has homosexual desires and apparently acts on them. The gender performances of the other confirmed homosexuals leave little doubt about their gender choices. These examples of cut-and-dry gender roles were the main subjects of Judith Butler's arguments in her books *Gender Trouble* (1990) and *Bodies that Matter* (1993). That gender was reduced to a series of affectations and gestures exposes the performative nature of gender vis-à-vis Butler's theories. In the world of West's dramas, there

are multiple gender roles from which to choose, however, when a man chooses the “incorrect” gender script there are clear consequences for his behavior. While Butler asserts there are multiple gender “scripts” to enact, as is evident in the worlds of both plays, there are clearly punishments to be dealt out to those who transgress the acceptable gender roles. The consequences are particularly clear with the murders of Rolly Kingsbury in *The Drag* and Rodney Terrill in *The Pleasure Man*.

In the following sequence of dialogue from *The Drag*, there are fourteen “drag” characters in various states of women’s clothing in addition to the four other homosexual men that had been introduced earlier into the play.

PARSONS: Mr. Swanson, as the Duchess.

No. 1; My goodness here comes the Duchess.

No. 2: The Duchess!

No. 3: The Grand Duchess!

PARSONS: Mr. Hathaway, as the Doll.

No. 4: My God that’s Clem, the Doll.

No. 5: Clem, the Doll!

No. 6: The Doll! (Enter Taxi-Driver)

No. 7: She picked herself a grand taxi-driver!

No. 8: Taxi-Driver!

No. 9: He’s a taxi-driver!

No. 10: Rough trade, dearie!

No. 12: Rough trade!

PARSONS: Mr. Gillingwater!

No. 13: Hullo, Rosco!

(WINNIE comes down-stage center. Gives her usual scream.)

No.14: My God, where have you been?

EVERYBODY: Hello Winne—How are you? How are you?

(CLEM discovers the DUCHESS trying to make the taxi-driver).

CLEM: Listen, Bargain, if you don’t want me to clean out this joint, lay off of Civic Virtue before I knock you loose from that flat beezzer of yours. I’ve got what gentlemen prefer.

TAXI-DRIVER: What is this power I have?

CLEM: It’s certainly not your face, but that’s for me to know and she to find out, after I’m through—If there’s anything left (West, *The Drag* 131).

Within *The Drag*, this scene is very important, because the audience has just learned earlier that Rolly—although not performing the same gender script as the men in the scene above—is in fact a homosexual just like the others. Rolly cannot be “read” as a homosexual (by society or more importantly, by his wife) because he does not perform the mixed gendering as do the other men

in the scene. This juxtaposition establishes very clearly the marginal status of Rolly within the world of the play and therefore the dramatic tension increases. All of these homosexual men dressed in women's clothes and performing the aspects of physicalized femininity are in direct contrast to the gender script portrayed by Rolly Kingsbury in *The Drag*. In *The Pleasure Man*, Rodney Terrill is marginalized because of his over-indulgence in the masculine gender. He is physiologically male, with a masculine gender and heterosexual desire having obvious sexual encounters with the opposite sex. His admonition comes from another similarly gendered male who does not over-indulge his masculine desires.

STEVE: Still up to your old tricks? Listen Terrill, I know your kind and I don't have a hell of a lot of use for them either. I want to tell you something. I don't want any visiting in the dressing rooms while you're on the bill this trip, or I'll throw you out of here on your neck!

TERRILL: I told you before, I do not play to stage hands, neither do I take my moral instructions from any stage hands (West, *The Pleasure Man* 160).

The final relational paradigm is that of Structurization and Identity. T. S. Eliot once said that the nineteenth-century could not compete with "the immense panorama of futility and anarchy which is contemporary history" (Eliot, Para 7).

Modernism thus marks a distinctive break with Victorian bourgeois morality; rejecting nineteenth-century optimism, [the modernists] presented a profoundly pessimistic picture of a culture in disarray. This despair often results in an apparent apathy and moral relativism (Keep, McLaughlin and Parmar, Para 1).

The 1920's imbibed the pangs of war, the fracture of identity and the angst of moral relativism. Within its social world at least in New York, West's plays dramatize these issues. West's search to stem the tide of moral relativism where homosexuality was concerned, and her insistence upon solving gender ambiguity are very important goals. In fact, the complex interplay of the social sciences vis-à-vis Freud and Ulrichs with the individual actions of West as a playwright in reifying their aims suggested Giddens' theory of Structurization. The sciences—in this case the macro-level actions—had a direct influence on one individual's decision to write dramas—a micro-level action—and produced them on the stage. West's plays then became a macro-level action which had a direct influence on individual audience members who enacted their own micro-level actions in accordance with West's viewpoint or against it.

The scientific community as well as the community at large had marginalized gay men informing them that they were ill, born with this disease, and must be cured. Those who try to change their personal narratives will still be hunted down, as in the case of Rolly Kingsbury and David Caldwell. But the very lack of positive gender choices for gay men in these dramas belied the reality of many men whose experiences of gender were more multi-dimensional. (Such diverse and realistic gay characters would not be seen in New York until after the Padlock laws were finally lifted in 1968 after years of appeals from the theater community).

Mae West's status within the culture industry, and her personal beliefs on homosexuality positioned her ideologically within the dominant hegemonic system. One possible interpretation of the overall effect of Mae West's characterizations of gay men in the 1920's was a prescriptive one. Prescriptive in a sense that what Mae West offered in these particular dramas was either a possible solution for dealing with homosexuals or a demonstration of the consequences for gay men in society, placing these men in the marginalized group outside of the dominant group. This prescriptive attitude was an occasion for comment by members of the media, even if they didn't believe the merits of such a prescription.

It is a mighty daring theme, the first time that such a calcium light has been cast on those who will never get over to greet St. Peter—unless they fly over—that has ever been put on the speaking stage...The blood-red subject was laid bare with a scalpel of the surgeon, but done so nicely that it drove home a lesson... But it was life, if even not your life or mine. And it was put on, get this, to bring out the moral lesson of the play and the lesson there was to it all. A mighty lesson! (*Went to Be Shocked*, 1).

[The producers] ...attempted to secure the endorsement of the medical fraternity and the city officials to the effect that "The Drag" is educational and a remedial gesture on behalf of the 'Homos.' According to the "author" of "Sex," the Homos number one male in twenty in the United States and a larger percentage in Europe (*Ready to Raid*, 34).

The culture industry of the Broadway Theater served as a sounding board for the media and political machine of New York. In order to ensure the eradication of, or the solution to, the "problem" that the marginalized group had become, politicians needed a public justification for their actions against the gay male. The effective pressure of New York Theater critics and writers for trade magazines such as *Variety* and *Theatre Magazine* were as valuable as the Wales-Padlock Bill in keeping certain plays from appearing on the New York stage. As these

quotes show, the net effect of West's dramas had galvanized the media community of New York into a prescriptive attitude toward the gay male in society.

The Queer theoretical model can be used to explicate the prescriptive effect of Mae West's dramas on American audiences of the 1920's. Each of the relational paradigms within the Queer theoretical model are best summed up through Giddens' structurization theory as the culminating lens through which Gramsci, Adorno, Foucault and Butler come into sharp focus. If micro-level events—individual actions on the part of a single person—have effects on the larger social sphere, and macro-level events—rules, regulations, culture and media—have an effect upon individuals, then one begins to see how Mae West and her dramas contribute to this process. That is, gay men had direct contact with West and an effect upon her life and as a result she wrote plays about them. This was the process of a micro-level event. Furthermore, the production of her plays affected audiences, the media and government. That gay men impacted her life has been illustrated by biographer Emily Leider in her book, *Becoming Mae West*. Leider establishes the fact that *The Drag* and parts of *The Pleasure Man* were inspired by the many gay men whom West knew in her life (Leider, 152-161). The effects of West's plays upon audiences is harder to confirm, since *The Drag* closed before it was able to open on the Broadway stage and *The Pleasure Man* was closed by the Padlock Bill after its second night of performances. The effects of West's plays upon the media and politics, however, are quite palpable. Critics from both *Variety* and *Theatre Magazine* made harsh commentary on the nature of productions like *The Drag* and *The Pleasure Man*. One quote cites the harsh and salacious manner in which West approaches the subject of homosexuality while the second quote bemoans the general disarray of gender and decency in American theater of the 1920's.

This reporter approached the performance with every disposition to give it serious, unbiased attention. He took the attitude that this subject of sex aberration was fair material for the theatre under proper treatment, the theory being that sex perversion was as old as history, it never had been attacked by anything but silence and that if it could be brought into the open, examined and measured, it couldn't be any more pernicious a social horror than it was under the silent treatment. He still believes the subject if handled with discretion and tact and presented in a manner that does not offend public decency can be approached in the theatre with curative results. But as treated in 'The Drag' it illuminates nothing, serves no decent purpose and is altogether vicious...It is utterly without meaning. In the first act there is a crude attempt to give the play some semblance of a purpose. A doctor and a judge discuss the subject of homosexuality as a social evil. Once that is over there is no more pose of moral purpose to the play,

which degenerates promptly in to a jazzed up revel on the garbage heap (*Variety*, Plays out of town, 49).

Likewise, contributing columnist to *Theatre Magazine* in the 1920's and 1930's, Benjamin De Casseres found the preponderance of sex degeneracy a big problem on the stage.

[Americans] are extremists in everything. When we lit on 'Sex' we swung from Mrs. Grundy to Mae West. We even went further and changed the old adage, 'Well, boys will be boys,' in to 'Well, boys will be girls, and girls will be boys.' For, you see, our slowly evolving brain is only capable of conceiving sexes in two ways: sentimental slaver or back-fence meows. Just now the whole American sex-game that is played on the stage is back-fence meowing. It is libidinously naked, crudely obscene and often stinkingly unashamed... What I object to is these sex-plays being called dramas, comedies, plays. They are just feeders for the genito-box-office donkey-bray. Of course, they will tell us that these plays merely reproduce the boys and girls and the men and women of the times we live in. But a playwright, like a novelist or painter, must reproduce more than a mere picture of he times we live in... Let him satirize, excoriate, moralize or guffaw at his will, but he must invent something over and above the mere transcription of bald facts (De Casseres, 24).

Both journalists seemed to have more problems with the gender-play of the gay male than with the subject matter—especially when discussing homosexuality in the realm of science rather than that of culture or drama. The sentiments expressed by both journalists expose the underpinnings of what Foucault and Butler would later illuminate with their theories. Foucault in terms of the scientific and sanitary exploration of sexuality, devoid of artistic infusion, creates a marginalized view of the subject; and Butler in terms of the gender-bias displayed by each journalist and their unwillingness to concede the acceptable multiple gender roles.

This disposition against the “true” depiction of the gay male lays in stark contrast to the popular fascination with observing the gay male in his “natural habitat.” As Chauncey explains, there was a real tourist interest in the homosexual male whether he was at the cafeteria or at the local pansy-bar on Times Square; the general public seemed to be enthralled and disgusted by the display. Another journalist from *Variety* in the 1920's exposes this contrasting interest of critics and the public,

Miss West will not appear in the piece, about 40 young men from Greenwich Village are expected to, however, in addition to 12 principals, not from the Village. Rehearsals are being held daily [at] the 63<sup>rd</sup> Street [theater], with the chances that a good pre-gross might be rolled up if admission could be charged to watch the Villagers practicing (*60 Villagers*, 42).

The joke made here by the journalist is that if people were charged for viewing the Villagers rehearsing, there might be a boom in receipts, but there wouldn't be much made at box-office. Given the function of the media as an important role for the dominant hegemonic system in the reification of its own power, these journalists present a macro-level event in the structurization theory. These journalists influence a wide readership of their subscribers and theater-goers who would normally want them to screen their entertainment selections.

The next important macro-level event came from the political sphere. While the Wales-Padlock Bill was not the immediate concern for Governor Smith at the time *The Drag* was making its way toward Broadway, it became an important tool in sealing the fate of the drama. In an article dated February 9, 1927, in *Variety*, the reporter expressed that there was a reluctance to resort to strong censorship of the stage. There were however, strong levels of censorship in the making between the District Attorney, the City Commissioner and Governor of New York. By April 8, the tide had definitely changed. While the police had been ready to raid "dirt" plays as early as January of 1927, the law made it mandatory by April. Therefore, when West returned with her drama *The Pleasure Man* in 1928, although she had attempted to 'clean-up' the homosexual overtones in the piece, the Wales-Padlock Bill (created to protect the morality of the Broadway Theater audiences) assured the play's demise, despite its opening on the Broadway stage. After two nights, the entire cast, the producers, theater managers, and Mae West herself, were arrested and the show closed. From a political standpoint, this macro-level event sent a clear message to artists that the subject matter was now off-limits. Essentially, while the public had been made aware of the gay male through West's dramas—a micro-level event upon society—the macro-level events in form of responses to West's dramas created a stronger approbation against the gay male in society. The macro-level events in this case held much more power over society than had West's micro-level events. It takes a much larger number of micro-level events to effect changes in society. Therefore, the macro-level responses to West's dramas (a micro-level event) held a much larger effect upon society.

## Chapter Three

### The Bohemian Kings of the New Gay Nineties

Early in 1992, the United States ended a twelve-year run of conservative administrations and entered into a new American liberalism under the presidency of William Clinton. At this particular moment in the U.S., there seemed to be a longing for several major changes in social, political, economic and moral affairs—the need for a shift in focus from major corporations toward the working classes, the disenfranchised and the needy. Clinton, labeled a New Democrat by the press, embodied a liberalism which sought not only social reform, but a “centrist” position on economic and political policy. For good or bad, this centrist position has been one of Clinton’s lasting legacies in his eight-years as President of the United States. Many social reform groups that had fought the previous administration under George Herbert Bush found a more welcoming Presidency under Clinton. Many Gay Rights groups such as the Human Rights Campaign, The National Gay and Lesbian Task Force, Queer Nation and the National Gay Men’s Health Crisis, thought that a Clinton administration would make huge and sweeping changes for lesbian and gay Americans. This would prove not to be the case, as Clinton’s administration shifted its entire focus (in both social and political spheres) toward a centrist view. This centrist position left many promised changes for lesbian and gay Americans unrealized while offering small concessions in areas of AIDS research, breast cancer and a willing inclusiveness of sexual orientation in Hate Crimes legislation. (The acceptance of lesbian and gay marriages would remain dormant as President Clinton signed DOMA (Defense of Marriage Act) in 1996). By 1994, with the power shift in the U.S. Congress from Democratic control to Republican control, it became clear that Clinton’s interests in maintaining a centrist viewpoint on all issues became certain. Clinton’s administration began making numerous concessions to the newly elected conservative-controlled Congress, and to the conservative element that seemed to dominate society, which balked at many of Clinton’s earliest and more radical reforms (e.g., National Health Care). This conciliatory course of action extended toward issues which had far reaching implications for gay and lesbian Americans. Positively, there was a successful push by the Clinton Administration to increase national financial and political support



for AIDS research; negatively, gays in the military suffered set-backs and, in the end, “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell,” became the conservative compromise.

The entertainment industry, particularly the theater, enjoyed many new benefits with the Clinton administration. Under the conservative presidencies of George Herbert Bush and his predecessor, Ronald Reagan, many theater artists, who pushed the limits of decency, were systematically pulled out of the funding pool of the National Endowment for the Arts. In what many artists and supporters considered a contemporary McCarthy era in the arts, three performance artists were charged as perpetrators of degeneracy. Now known popularly as the “infamous three,” Karen Finley, Tim Miller and Holly Hughes were each singled out for their “Liberal” and “Godless” performance art and their funding was revoked permanently. The conservatives in Congress did not want the government sponsoring any kind of “degenerate” art, which may or may not have an undue influence on the American people. Karen Finley, a feminist Performance Artist, Tim Miller, a gay performance artist, and Holly Hughes, a lesbian performance, artist each suffered the wrath of the conservative members in the senate, including the loudest and most conservative of Senators, Jesse Helms of North Carolina. When the Clinton administration, and then sitting Democratic Congress, assumed office in January of 1992, there seemed to be a heavy sigh of relief from artists who sympathized with the “infamous three”. But like other social and political matters, relief was short-lived and fell short of a complete change. However, during the 1990’s, as in the 1920’s, popular entertainments became more explicit and sensational, while the “higher” arts shifted away from the conservative edges only slightly. There were, as in the case of Mae West, those artists who challenged the boundaries of respectability with varying results. Namely, Tony Kushner (*Angels in America: A Gay Fantasia on National Themes* 1992), Jonathan Larson (*Rent* 1996) and Terrence McNally (*Love! Valor! Compassion!* and *Corpus Christi*).

Terrence McNally, much like Clinton, took the centrist position in his Tony Award® winning play *Love! Valor! Compassion!* McNally chose to represent a mainstream viewpoint in his depiction of seven gay men and their converging lives. Terrence McNally has managed to have at least four of his plays and musicals produced on the New York stage each decade since 1964. Very few of his Broadway plays have dealt directly with the gay experience. A closer examination of his life and career will illuminate this disparity.

Born in St. Petersburg, Florida in 1939, Terrence McNally's parents (both New York transplants to the south) moved to Corpus Christi, Texas, while McNally was still a young boy. He saw his first Broadway show, *Annie Get Your Gun*, starring Ethel Merman, at the age of six. He heard Maria Callas for the first time on the radio at age fifteen and immediately fell in love with opera and the diva's voice (Richards, *Working Playwright*, H4). With a love for opera and the theater, McNally moved to New York City in 1954 to attend Columbia University. Nine years later, he found himself immersed in the world of theater, partially due to his romantic relationship with playwright, Edward Albee. McNally and Albee broke up in 1964, one year before the production of McNally's first play on the New York stage. His start in professional playwriting began on a rather sour note. According to Fruikin,

McNally never had to come out. The first time he hit the public eye, the New York press outed him. In those days, the only big news about McNally was his lover—Pulitzer prize-winning playwright Edward Albee. 'No one had ever heard of me other than gossip that Edward and I had lived together for about six years,' says McNally. 'So when my first play came out, it was reviewed as a play by a gay playwright.' ... *And Things That Go Bump in the Night* concerned an eccentric family living in self-imposed exile in their basement. It featured two gay characters. The critics savaged it. (Fruitkin, 32)

McNally still believes today that the homophobia of the 1960's helped to destroy that play. During that period, Stanley Kaufman, (one of New York's most outspoken critics) launched a crusade against homosexuals writing plays about heterosexual life—an often used example of the lingering homophobic and heterosexual bias that existed at the time (Hofler, 34). After being soundly scolded for his first attempts at writing a mix of gay characters and straight characters, McNally focused on the United States' involvement in Vietnam and the struggles occurring in Cuba with a series of short one-acts. In 1969, he tried to revive some of his earlier themes and began writing plays that he thought were a reflection of the world around him—exclusive of his gay life. He achieved success and garnered positive critical responses with his subsequent play, *Next*, a short play about a cynical middle-aged draftee attempting to avoid enlistment. By the mid 1970's, he was once again writing characters that were on the margin of society with his plays *The Ritz* in 1975 and *Bad Habits* in 1977. This shift back to writing plays with gay characters may have been due in large part because of the success of Mart Crowley's *Boys in the Band* in 1968 and the newly established gay rights movement beginning in 1969.

...And the theme of homosexuality which had lurked in the earliest plays moved downstage, but not in ways that aimed at conveying gay life authentically for a straight audience. Farce is farce, after all, and [these plays] are funny, but retreat from the intimacy and compassion that now seem to be keynotes of McNally's best work (Zinman, 14).

In 1978, McNally experienced his second major set back when his musical, *Broadway, Broadway* failed miserably before even making it to New York. He was devastated. "[He] sulked for a couple of years...He also drank and waited around for someone to start a McNally bandwagon. No one did" (Richards, *Working Playwright* H1). After several years of self-flagellation, he rewrote the musical, entitling it *It's Only a Play*. Manhattan Theatre Club produced it, which began a beneficial partnership between McNally and the theater. Artistic Director, Lynne Meadow decided to produce his next play, the very successful *Frankie and Johnny at the Claire de Lune* (1987). McNally's success continued in the late 1980's and throughout the 1990's. Despite the successes some members of the gay community criticized him, countering others who clearly applauded him. How had such a popular playwright arrived at such an eclectic reception?

'I'm always accused of saying that I'm not a gay playwright,' Terrence McNally insists. 'I'm not saying that at all. I'm a gay man who is a playwright. It's just not about my sexuality.' [...] However, in his work McNally never holds back. It's no small irony that this playwright—who shies away from gay issues off the stage—has addressed the gay experience more than any other playwright of his generation. [...] 'Why are they attacking me...Because I say I hate the expressions 'gay theatre, gay plays, gay playwrights? Those expressions are so limiting. It's a way to say to the rest of the world [that], you don't have to deal with me. I'm a harmless fairy' (Frutkin, 34).

Although McNally had begun reintroducing gay characters into some of his plays, some members of the gay and lesbian community felt that he was still neglecting a large part of American gay life. While *The Lisbon Triviata* (1989) contained a love scene between two men, the theme was more closely centered on the loneliness and isolation wrought by AIDS. Many of McNally's plays are centered on loss, understandably so, considering how many of his close and personal friends had died from this disease in the eighties (Richards, *Working* H5). Nevertheless, McNally was merely testing his audiences for what would come very soon. The

1990's saw a very successful string of McNally's plays that more directly addressed issues within the gay experience. *Lips Together, Teeth Apart* (1991)—two straight couples dealing with their gay neighbors on Fire Island is an indictment on homophobia and heterosexism; *Kiss of the Spider Woman* (1992) peers into gender and love in a maximum security prison; *A Perfect Ganesh* (1993) explores the emotional terrain of two dowagers who have lost their sons to AIDS. McNally wrote *Love! Valour! Compassion!* in 1994 (the play won the Tony Award® for best new drama and would later be made into a film by the same name). After the success of *Love! Valour! Compassion!*, McNally wrote *Pal Joey* (1995), an adaptation for television; *Master Class* (1995) which explores McNally's childhood icon (Maria Callas) and *Ragtime* (1997), a musical adaptation of the E. L. Doctrow novel, set in the Roaring Twenties (*Ragtime* does not feature any gay characters). McNally defended his play's lack of gay characters by stating, "[it] doesn't mean I don't do my bit for the 'cause' today'...I do my bit for the cause if *Ragtime* is a fucking good show and people say, You know, the book writer is a big queen" (Frutkin, 32).

By the Broadway opening of *Ragtime*, it looked as if AIDS was on its way toward becoming a treatable condition rather than a infectious death sentence with the introduction of new drug treatments, protease inhibitors. Following the success of *Ragtime*, McNally made a huge leap of faith, literally, with his 1998 Manhattan Theatre Club production of *Corpus Christi*. The play was not well received by either critics or audiences. Since that time, McNally has written librettos for *The Full Monty* (2000), *Dead Man Walking* (2000) and *The Visit* (2001), which is based on the original play by Frederick Dürrenmatt and the musical *A Man of No Importance* (2002) based on the 1994 movie by Sari Krishnamma starring Albert Finney. McNally's most personal plays are *Love! Valour! Compassion!* and *Corpus Christi*. He presents the message, 'It's ok, we are people too.'

In *Love! Valour! Compassion!* he painted a clear picture of a segment of gay men living in New York. There are the investment brokers, Arthur and Perry, who are in a relationship for over a decade; the successful, and stuttering, choreographer Gregory; the blind but oh-so-handsome Bobby; the musical queen Buzz, who also suffers from AIDS; the pianist John Jeckyll (who should have been named Hyde) and his twin brother James, who is also suffering from AIDS—both are night and day in temperament; and finally there is Ramon, the fiery Latin dancer who drives much of the play's conflict and ironically McNally's only character of color. These eight men spend their summer holiday weekends together in an unlikely brotherhood

reflective of the larger gay community. They are driven by differences of opinion, secret lusts, the desire to produce a special dance for an AIDS charity, and deeply passionate beliefs. The characters seem to thrive on each other—despite their many differences—realizing that in their world, they are the only ones upon whom they can depend. The location of the drama is set at Bobby and Gregory's lakefront home in upstate New York. Each person has come for the purpose of preparing a fundraising event for an AIDS charity, but the action focuses on the big and small desires and the daily wishes of each character. The central conflict is living—living while dying, living and loving, living and leaving. Ramon instigates an affair with Bobby that eventually leads to the couple's break up in the future; the failed relationship between James and John; the struggle for peace and love of James and Buzz under the specter of AIDS; and Arthur and Perry's on-going struggle to continue their life journey of mutual exploration. Each conflict appears insurmountable from the audiences' perspective and provides considerable dramatic tension. The complex perspectives of each character's life stand in stark contrast to the ending of the play when each character reveals to the audience the exact moment and circumstances of his own death. This contrast is in the simplicity and finality of each character's circumstances on Earth. At this moment, the audience confronts the bare humanity of each character aside from his actions and course in life. When faced with the humanity of each gay man, a sympathetic response is elicited from the audience. The audience feels that these gay men are not very much different than they are. This is the first point of initiation to the assimilationist viewpoint. Gay is equal to straight; therefore gay men should be accepted into the dominant hegemonic system.

McNally's journey to assimilate the gay man, takes a much riskier path with his 1998 play, *Corpus Christi*. This drama, with ritualistic elements and overtones, tells the story of Joshua—a gay Christ-like figure—and his disciples: John, a writer; James, a teacher; Peter, a fish seller; Andrew, a masseur; Philip, a hustler; Bartholomew, a doctor and James' lover; Judas, a restaurateur; Matthew, a lawyer; Thomas, an actor; James the Less, an architect; Simon, a singer and Thaddeus, a hairdresser. Each of the disciples plays other roles as necessary, with the exception of Judas and Joshua. According to McNally, "the play is more a religious ritual than a play. A play teaches us a new insight into the human condition. A ritual is an action we perform over and over because we have to" (*Corpus* vii). The play, which follows a basically correct chronological telling of the story of Jesus from birth through the crucifixion, takes liberties with certain experiences of Joshua/Jesus. For example, Joshua attends the prom in *Corpus Christi*,

Texas. He even talks to his friend Peggy while decorating for the prom and both Peggy and Joshua disclose who they would like to take to the prom. While Joshua reluctantly offers the name of a girl in his class, his real hopes would have been to ask a certain boy from school.

One thing that McNally hoped to achieve with this play was that he wanted the audiences to see the human side to these characters, particularly Joshua, in hopes that audiences would have a greater affinity for the humanity of the gay man. For this, McNally received the ire and wrath of the Catholic Church and fundamentalist religious groups who went so far as to threaten the lives of McNally, the cast, and those in attendance. A cautious individual might think that McNally went too far in his pursuit of assimilating the gay male into the dominant hegemonic system by challenging one of its biggest cornerstones—the Christian religion. But I think that McNally’s daring move says something important, given the controversy created by this play. McNally claims that,

I’m a playwright, not a theologian. But it would have been just as naïve of me to think that I could write a play about a young gay man who would come to be identified as a Christ figure without stirring up a protest as it would to think I could write a play about Jesus Christ Himself in which He would come to be identified as a young gay man without a lot of noses getting bent out of joint. I was not mistaken, the level of the dislike of gay men and the vehemence of the denial of any claim they might make for spiritual parity with the Christian “brothers” that *Corpus Christi* revealed was disheartening. Gay has never seemed less “good.” Once again, we had not come a long way at all, baby (McNally, *Corpus v*).

McNally’s career is an exercise in assimilationist politics, and represents a particular trend in American society in the 1990’s: the growing inclusion of gay men into the larger circle of the dominant culture. While many gay men have been economically part of the system, for most of the twentieth century they are stark outsiders to its moral world-view. The very process of “inclusion” or admission into the dominant hegemonic system is at the core of the assimilation vs. essentialism debate within the gay community. The essentialist viewpoint of gay rights posits that being gay is, by its very nature, unique, different and separate from being heterosexual. Furthermore, the essentialist viewpoint argues that being gay in America means recognizing that these unique distinctions between gay men and straight men create separate and equal social and cultural modes of expression. The assimilationist argument rests on the similarities between gay and straight, and argues that each is equal and not different from each other in any significant

way. Moreover, the assimilationist argues for the full inclusion and participation of the gay man in the larger society.

Assimilation serves to explain McNally's work and the complex interplay of Broadway, hegemony, science, gender and structurization that his plays reflect. Just as in Chapter Two, structurization becomes an important lens for exploring how McNally's plays interact and intersect with the relational paradigms of culture and power, sex and science, and gender and identity. Specifically, Broadway Theater as a section of the culture industry becomes the site of cultural reification, but it also becomes a tool of the marginalized groups—gay men—through the complete cycle of structurization. Beginning in the late 1960's and continuing through the 1990's, the scientific community starts to re-examine past studies of gay men as well as conduct new studies that seem to validate the "same" or "natural" arguments of the assimilationist point of view. During the 1990's, as in the 1920's, traditional gender roles relaxed, but like the 1920's the gender roles appear to be reorganized into acceptable and non acceptable modes of gendered behavior. According to Giddens and his theory of structurization, there comes an important shift in the social structure in the 1990's. His theories on the personal biography and structurization begin to see positive results. That a disenfranchised group (gay men) could even begin to exist in equal pairing within a group formerly seen as homogeneous in nature (dominant hegemonic system) is the very essence of the modern era and supports Giddens' theory of structurization. This idea of structurization and the personal biography can be tested with the dramas of Terrence McNally. Specifically, the dramas are examined by their reception from several areas: the culture industries and the dominant hegemonic system; through the advances in scientific inquiry; and through gender exploration. The two works of Terrence McNally selected for this thesis can be seen as creating a net effect of a subscripive attitude toward the gay man in the 1990's—a direct contrast to the *prescriptive* nature of Mae West's dramas in the 1920's. The subscripive attitude is the incorporation of the formerly marginalized group into the dominant group.

This subscripive attitude is analyzed through structurization and its relational paradigms. In the relational paradigm of Culture and Power, the 1990's Broadway Theater as Culture Industry more closely resembles the aspiration of Adorno for the culture industry. Adorno's hopes for true art are that problems in society could be solved only by showing the discord of a disordered world and, therefore, can prompt the audience for social change—not through diversionary pleasantries. The dramas presented by Terrence McNally in *Love! Valour!*

*Compassion!* and *Corpus Christi*, as diversionary as they are, create a new set of circumstances that threaten (or are perceived to have threatened) social stability by presenting the gay male as a member of society worthy of inclusion into the dominant system. The central conflict in these dramas hinge on their quasi-marginal relation to the larger society and through this dissonance shines the harmony that *could be* if only gay men were a part of the larger group. While legitimate theater on Broadway had become far less restricted (as the Wales-Padlock bill had been removed from the law in 1967), its economic livelihood was still intimately bound to the dominant hegemonic system's audiences. Fortunately, the "outlaw" entertainments or popular entertainments that do not rely upon legitimacy (television and cinema) began to have an effect on the culture industry of Broadway and receptivity of its patrons toward a previously ignored voice. Therefore, it is the "outlaw" kind of popular entertainment which produces a potentially liminoid (destabilizing or anti-structural) effect on the legitimate theater and culture.

This liminoid effect simultaneous upholds and usurps the dominant system through the culture industry. If the culture industry is a tool for those in power, how can it also be used to usurp that power? According to Gramsci, when an oppressed group reaches a certain level of energy generated from fighting the dominant hegemonic system, it can either revolt by force or utilize the same culture industry as a means to inculcate the dominant hegemonic system. In the latter, this inculcation extends to the point of reorganizing towards a larger and more complex hegemonic system, which no longer penalizes the formerly oppressed group (Stillo, html). In the brief respite from heavy oppression, the minority group can utilize the same Culture Industry and Media to begin stabilizing the hegemonic system in a fashion more amenable to the minority group.

A movement succeeds not when everything is perfect but when so much has changed that there's no going back. This is inarguably where we're at...think of those women and men at the first Mattachine demonstration in 1965 and then watch a tape of [President] Clinton's HRC speech...The glory belongs neither to Clinton nor exclusively to the folds at the HRC (though they deserve a round of applause) but to all of us—we worked hard for something that was once unimaginable to come to pass (Kushner, 72).

What accounts for the surge [in the successes of gay theater]? The gay civil rights movement, for one thing... Many artists have come out of the closet in life and insist on doing so in their work. Says Destiny's Kramer: "Ten years ago, we would have been fashioning heterosexual material. Now people just won't lie." ... Above all, as Congress and the states debate gay civil rights and President



Clinton prepares to certify the role of gays in the military, many gay writers see their milieu as inherently dramatic. Like Jews, blacks and women in prior decades, gays have promoted their struggle for equality into the spotlight. Says Angels author Tony Kushner: “We’re at a historic juncture. In a pluralist democracy, there’s a moment when a minority obtains legitimacy and its rights are taken seriously by the other minorities that together make up the new majority. That’s happening now for gays and lesbians (Henry, 63).

As was foretold by Gramsci, it would take a collective of minority opinions to create enough reverse pressure upon the majority to achieve a share in its power structures.

Unexpectedly, the reverse process of the Foucauldian relational paradigm of Science and Sex occurred with McNally’s plays and the late twentieth century. Beginning as early as 1941, social scientists along with medical scientists started to reassess the previous studies of sexuality with particular attention to homosexuality and other “abnormal” forms of sexual expression and physiognomy. The studies most influential in the beginning of this new approach to sexuality were conducted by Alfred Kinsey and, specifically, by Dr. Evelyn Hooker. Hooker’s studies on well-adjusted gay men proved a lack of psychopathology through an examination of comparative Rorschach test scores between normal heterosexual and homosexual subjects. Other researchers confirmed Dr. Hooker’s findings (Hooker, 452). Following their experiments, scientific, sociological and theological pro-gay information expanded. During the 1990’s, a staggering amount of research sought to disprove the previous psychological and medical studies of homosexuality and homosexuals published in the past, (over five thousand psychological studies conducted on homosexuality and homosexuals from 1957 to 2003 (PsychINFO, keyword search)). While it would seem that gays were beginning to be declassified as a marginal group, the scientific exploration of sexuality still presented gay men on a continuum, separate from but equal to heterosexual men. Understandably, this leads a great many gay men to the argument or position that being gay or behaving gay exists as a natural phenomenon and not inherently different than heterosexuality. Therefore, to be gay should not merit marginalization. This chance at ending the marginal status of gay men actually reverses what Foucault argues in the separation of the “abnormal” group. Foucault states that the *scientia sexualis* always places the homosexual outside of the dominant group. This *scientia sexualis*, however, still follows carefully his insistence on the increasing discourse of sexuality within the scientific community.

The third relational paradigm of Gender and Performance brought particular focus to the dramas of McNally. Following the theoretical framework set forth by Butler, the increased codification and values assessment of gender in the 1990's encouraged a greater understanding of the ways in which traditional binary gender roles no longer served modern society. While gender roles expanded beyond the strict binary of those found in the 1950's and 1960's, the gender binary of appropriate masculine and feminine behavior still regulated the public self. For example, individuals might accept a gay person but not if he was effeminate. John Clum, a scholar of gay drama and film, clearly displays the attitude espoused by many gay men that the effeminate homosexual should no longer represent the gay man of the 1990's.

America's image of gay men and gay men's self images have changed radically. Consider, for instance, the full page ad on page 3 of the February 1, 1993 issue of the *New Yorker*. The ad is for GAP menswear. The striking Annie Leibovitz photograph is a head and shoulders shot of Andrew Sullivan, the openly gay editor of *The New Republic*. While Mr. Sullivan is modeling a GAP t-shirt, the picture...focuses not on the body but on Sullivan's face, particularly his intense eyes. This is a picture of intellectual energy and piercing wit, qualities many gay men have valued and achieved, but also contained within a defiant, macho pose, complete with two day growth of beard. This is the gay man for the nineties—smart, powerful, attractive, but with the focus on what is above the neck. Sullivan's slightly defiant look says, "I'm here. I'm queer. Get used to it." That openly gay Andrew Sullivan, editor of a non-gay news magazine, is a model for a GAP ad is a great sign of the times. Sullivan's intense, defiant pose is the 1990's gay look.... The sissy image is gone and pity or tolerance are not enough... This new image is reflected and depicted in American gay drama in this decade. There are no more coded gay figures, no more calls for pity for moody, troubled young men, no more gay Camilles pleading for tolerance, and no more uncritical presentation of stereotypes (Clum, 229-30).

Unfortunately, even as groups of gay men became accepted, they began to codify gender for themselves—excoriating those who did not conform to the still-limiting strictures of gender play. Clum's quote exemplifies the gay community setting its own standards for acceptable images and representations of gender for the gay members within the dominant hegemonic system. As evidenced in the dramas of McNally, there are several gendered examples of the gay male without a crisis of masculinity to define or limit him. In *Corpus Christi*, many of the all-male cast members are required to play the roles of women at different moments within the script—thereby, pushing the most evident form of gender as performance. The identity of a person can change but cannot be wholly fictive—the personal biography of the individual must be coherent.

In the world of *Corpus Christi*, these multiple identities are necessary for the continuity of the story—just as in life, a person may change his gender script throughout the day without every compromising his identity or his personal biography.

In the fourth relational paradigm of Structurization and Identity, as Giddens argues, the 1990's society is only beginning to enter the latter phases of modernity—or coming to fruition within modernity (Giddens, 70). In this complex age, and with the availability of a wider range of gender roles, the individual expands his personal biography. Giddens' ideas on the “fluidity of identity,” (which is both quite simple and yet infinitely complex because of its reflexive nature) becomes less problematic for the individual to have a consistently changing narrative while still maintaining a true sense of self. Identity maintains its fluidity only because “structurization” of society has become more relaxed in its process—another hallmark of the modern era according to Giddens (Giddens, 70). These micro-level choices made on the part of the individual will continue to effect the macro-level actions and choices made by those in power. Therefore, if individuals continue to expand and validate new gender roles, the dominant hegemonic system would eventually accept these roles in an effort to maintain its own power—which now includes formerly marginalized groups.

One interpretation of the effect of Terrence McNally's characterizations of gay men in the 1990's was a subscripitive one. While his location in the Culture Industry positioned him ideologically outside of the dominant hegemonic system, there existed in the 1990's a reverse effect of the culture industries wherein the power and influence of gay artists began making assimilationist statements to the dominant system in an attempt to legitimize its needs and wants within the larger social fabric. Also important to this subscripitive effect was making use of scientific and sociological theories to reorder the hegemony in favor of accepting this particular vision of gay men into the larger social group because each shares the same core values. Once reassessed as valuable, even only warily, and positioned to enter the hegemonic system, the media and political forces utilize the culture industry as a source to convince the dominate hegemony to reorganize itself and include the minority. Not everyone was on the *Corpus Christi* bandwagon, but there were still those journalists who applauded McNally's efforts to reinscribe the spiritual nature of all humanity upon even the outcast gay man. With his drama *Love! Valour! Compassion!*, McNally truly sends his message out to the dominant group as a soft and endearing cry for inclusion of gay men into the dominant group. The final result of McNally's

dramas is a net effect upon society creating a subscripitive attitude toward the gay male in society.

As in Chapter Two, the subscripitive attitude is best observed using Giddens' theory of structurization. By the 1990's, considerable changes had already occurred within society—the birth of the gay rights movement in America, local and state legislation in many parts of the country had been created to protect certain rights of gay men and lesbians (ten U.S. states as of 1996) (ACLU, html). AIDS, too, had a profound impact on America social landscape and the rest of the world. So, shortly after McNally's career had begun in the mid 1960's, the social and political landscape for gay men in New York and throughout America began to change significantly. These changes paralleled his career and intersected his personal life in important ways. These events (the gay rights movement, AIDS and political changes in the world) exist on the macro-level and influenced McNally's personal life and career (micro-level events) in the creation of his dramas, particularly *Love!Valour!Compassion!* and *Corpus Christi*. However, like Mae West's plays, McNally's dramas served as very powerful catalyst for macro-level events in the media and in political posturings.

In the autumn 1994, McNally's play *Love!Valour!Compassion!* opened at the Manhattan Theatre Club. It was an overnight success and moved very quickly uptown to the Walter Kerr Theater on Broadway by January of 1995. At the Walter Kerr Theater, the production was performing at seventy-five percent capacity (*Economist*, 86). Steven Kanfer, a columnist for *The New Leader* compared this drama to Mart Crowley's *The Boys in the Band*, written nearly 25 years before. Kanfer says that, “[t]he progress and regress of homosexual life is usually left to the political propagandists on either side. You can get a more accurate, and less shrill, summary by comparing two comedies, staged 25 years apart” (Kanfer, 23). Kanfer's goal in comparing the two dramas was to highlight the level of acceptance of gay life from the 1960's to the 1990's—the 1990's being much freer and less antagonistic toward the gay male. Other journalists heralded McNally's piece as more universal—“to ask profound questions about the meaning of life (Kaufman, 774). By and large, a majority of critics (including the critic for the *New York Times*) acknowledged the presence of the gay male as unique to the drama, but more broad in its appeal to the human experience.

While the macro-level events from this particular drama might be obvious—an increase in the acceptance of the homosexual male—it is in direct contrast to the macro-level events

experienced by the 1998 Manhattan Theatre Club production of McNally's *Corpus Christi*. Journalists from *Variety*, *New York Times*, *Lambda Book Report*, *New Criterion*, *Commonweal*, *The New Republic* and *American Theatre* readily confessed that the largest draw-back of McNally's piece was that it was a ritual—not a drama. The center of the controversy in the media was from religious groups who vehemently rejected the dramatization of a 'gay' Jesus. From *American Theatre* to the *National Catholic Reporter*, critics condemned as well as praised Manhattan Theatre Club's decision to produce the play. Joseph Cunneen of the *National Catholic Reporter*, represented the more moderate of critical positions.

Although the notion of presenting Jesus as gay is at first disturbing to many—including a straight type like me—McNally deserves the benefit of the doubt...there is no reason to believe that he is being exploitative. If he was trying to be offensive, it was primarily to force people like myself to seriously consider his basic metaphor: Jesus the queer. He isn't offering a historical rereading of the Jesus story. Profoundly disinterested in recent New Testament scholarship, he includes bits and pieces from the gospels with the naivete of pre-Vatican II Catholic high school drama groups. Only theological thuggery would pronounce the play blasphemous. For members of the Christian Coalition, with their loathing for homosexuals and their assumption that gays are inherently evil, presenting Jesus as homosexual is contemptuous. For a homosexual playwright such as McNally, however, to do so would seem an effort to offer praise and to claim an identity with him (Cunneen, 13).

But the conservatives, like the Christian Coalition, sunk their teeth into this issue and used the media as a powerful tool to send out their interpretation of the piece. A very tragic turn of events would continue to divide social and religious figures. Not long after the run of *Corpus Christi* began in New York, a young gay man named Matthew Shephard was beaten nearly to death in Laramie, Wyoming. His body was strung-up on a deer-slaughtering rack in a classic crucifixion pose. He died two days later in an intensive care unit. While a clear line of cause and effect cannot be drawn between the macro-level event of McNally's play and the events in Laramie, Wyoming, there has been a continuation of religious attacks against gays and lesbians in America. The timing of Shephard's death added more emotion and relevance to McNally's production in theaters throughout the country. Capitalizing on the importance of these events, Moises Kaufman and the Tectonic Theater Project traveled to Laramie only four weeks after Shephard's murder to conduct hundreds of interviews with the hopes of ascertaining the precipitating factors in how this event had taken place so they could dramatize the events under

the title *The Laramie Project*. Although many folks claimed that Matthew Shephard got what he deserved, he became for many others a symbol of the hatred and homophobia that exists everywhere. Both dramas explore issues of gay men and society: *The Laramie Project* focuses on the role of the townspeople of Laramie, while *Corpus Christi* deals solely with gay men and Christian spirituality. These plays came at an important period in local politics throughout the United States. Those individuals in favor of the message of *Corpus Christi* might consider the tragic events of Matthew Shephard's life as a sign that Christ lives in each of us, while those against the play might consider it a just punishment for the young man's homosexuality.

Much like the experience of West and her drama *The Pleasure Man*, McNally has had numerous legal battles in trying to produce *Corpus Christi* in smaller towns throughout America. The macro-level effects of both McNally dramas seem to have equal and opposite effects on society. The effects of *Love! Valour! Compassion!* seemed to create less distance between gay men and the rest of the dominant hegemonic system in America. *Corpus Christi* has created legal ramifications intimately bound to political pressures across the United States and places a cap on legal gains for gays and lesbians. Since plays about homosexuals are banned in many smaller cities across America, further acknowledges that these dramas come in direct conflict with the conservative Christian ethics of those in political power. Both macro-level events of McNally's dramas have profound effects upon gay men as well—both inspire the gay man to be a whole individual. The gay male can be compassionate, funny, complex, sick, well, and spiritual. To society at large, it will take much more analysis to confirm a total subversive attitude toward the gay male, but there has been a greater increase in the acceptance of gay men in American, and I believe that media, the arts and more importantly popular culture, is largely the reason.

## Conclusion

### **Queer Principalities: Demarcating the Lines Between Broadway Respectability and Queer Alternatives**

So, again I ask, are these queer times? Can each decade be analyzed and in the process find that Broadway has produced an authentic gay male representation on the American stage? The answer is yes and no. That each relational paradigm of the queer theoretical model can adequately assess the cultural milieu and dramatic literature of each decade stands as a testament that these are definitely queer times. There remain several questions that this thesis cannot fully explore: If Broadway is the socially sanctioned art of the dominant hegemonic system, then how do other performance venues and other popular art forms negotiate the production of the gay male identity as it is formed and expressed throughout the twentieth century? If there are other performance venues that offer a more authentic representation of the gay male, then has Broadway Theater failed to present a “queer” representation of the gay male on the stage? Two factors interfere with the capacity for Broadway Theatre to present truly “queer” representations of gay men: first and foremost, Broadway Theater exists primarily as a discursive tool for the dominant group; and secondly, in its representations, Broadway Theater normally depicts one particular personality type that often illustrates a one-dimensional gay community.

The role of Broadway theater as a culture industry has been used both as a negative and positive force in the representation of the gay male and the formation of identity of the 1920’s and 1990’s. Broadway and its specific role as proliferator of socially acceptable art, operates in two specific fashions: as a model for cultural production throughout America; and as a mouth piece for social and political viewpoints. Through the twentieth century, Broadway has also been shaped by the growing complexities of media and popular entertainment. How then does Broadway theater act as a model for cultural production while also acting as a mouthpiece for social and political viewpoints? Specifically, in the course of this examination the production of a successful play on Broadway often means successful production of that drama throughout the American regional theater, community theater and academic theater. It also means, in contemporary theater practice, many productions of plays originate from the regional theaters and then progress to Broadway—either direction, the location of Broadway as the socially

sanctioned theater limits the scope of the drama to plots and ideas which do not greatly challenge the dominant hegemonic system. For example, West and McNally each had a successful gay-themed production on Broadway. However, the subject matter of *The Drag* and of *Corpus Christi* existed outside of the bounds of commercial theater respectability and was prohibited through political, legislative and religious pressures. In the same manner that these particular dramas were blocked, the pressures of the religious, political and legislative groups extended the will of the dominant hegemonic system, presenting in a clear voice the approbation of such material. Broadway theater acts as a mouthpiece for the dominant hegemonic system—West’s plays offering a prescriptive, or solution-based, remedy to the problem of the homosexual; while McNally’s plays offer a subscriptive, or power-sharing remedy for all members of society to accept the homosexual into the larger power structure.

As explored in Chapters Two and Three, there are numerous factors within the fabric of society that govern the scope and direction of Broadway Theater and the representation of the gay male. Are there alternatives that offer something different and perhaps richer to the scholar and audience member? Beyond Broadway Theater in the 1920’s, West’s plays disappear from the world of theater. In the 1990’s, McNally’s dramas are produced across America, published in a variety of languages and produced throughout the world. While scholars like Schlissel rediscover and unearth rare dramas from the past which have been lost (Schlissel found West’s dramas in 1974 in a manuscript collection in the Library of Congress (Schlissel, 1-3)), other scholars and revisionists reconstruct the collective gay and lesbian past. The proliferation of gay drama and culture in the 1990’s coupled with reclamation of gay and lesbian history from early in the century creates a sense of history and continuity that extends well beyond the geographies of Broadway.

But there are also alternatives that showcase more direct and diverse representations of the homosexual than does Broadway Theater. These representations come from the gay and lesbian community as well as from popular culture. This thesis neither takes into account the lavishly appointed productions of female impersonators (e.g. Julian Eltinge, Bert Savoy and Karyl Norman) nor does it take into account the public and private performances and readings of Gladys Bentley, Langston Hughes and the other queer luminaries of the Harlem Renaissance. Neither does it fully explore the artistry of Tim Miller, Holly Hughes or Karen Finley—the infamous three who defied conventional means to exhibit their art—their personal narratives and



bodies during the 1990's. While this list of artists from the 1920's and 1990's expands the breadth of gay and lesbian representation, what are these alternatives to the socially sanctioned artistry of Broadway? Under this question lies another and more important question. Where can someone go to see a discursive gay drama that speaks to the directly to the gay man and not to the dominant hegemonic system?

Gay and lesbian theater has often been dismissed by its critics as being a self-serving activity where the audience presumably subscribes to gay values and is therefore passive to the didacticism of the actors. This charge reflects the cultural anxiety of those in the mainstream who fail to understand the different degrees of gayness that exist. Gay theater rightly exists to enable the dynamic interaction between performers and audience who need to test and affirm their identities in a community-like atmosphere and in the spirit of renewal (Miller, 1).

If Broadway theater, as a part of the culture industry, is challenged by minority-based entertainments, could not the direction of the culture industry be eventually reversed from its original paradigm? Might the minority-based alternative theaters amass enough weight and fecundity as to have a greater influence on the dominant hegemonic system? There are hundreds of theater companies across America which produce gay theater: Act Out Productions, Columbus, Ohio; Bailiwick Repertory, Chicago, Illinois; Celebration Theatre Company, Los Angeles, California; Wings Theater Company, New York, New York; Out North, Anchorage, Alaska; The Theatre Offensive, Boston, Massachusetts; and Uptown Players, Dallas, Texas just to name a few. However, is theater too small to create such broad changes on its own anymore? Might television and cinema make the most sweeping changes through the usurpation of the Culture and Power paradigm? Using Giddens' structurization theory, do shows like *Will & Grace* (NBC), *Queer as Folk* (SHO), *Six Feet Under* (HBO) and the film industry's burgeoning gay and lesbian market have a much greater affect on the dominant hegemonic system? The production of *Love! Valour! Compassion!* had a total audience of 1,743,322 in its thirty-five week run at the Walter Kerr Theater (livebroadway.com), while the television show *Will & Grace* has a weekly following of 14,000,000 households (Nielsen ratings, Yahoo.com). I would say that it is very likely that cinema and television supersedes theater in their ability to affect a wider sociological change, given that each consumer who buys, rents or sees a gay or lesbian theatrical, movie or television show is creating those micro-level choices which drive the media moguls into producing more gay and lesbian entertainment—a macro-level event. Conversely, it is possible that Broadway Theater functions as a test market for select ideals and representations

of the gay male: The success of a Broadway play about gay men influences popular culture: once successful, producers market the drama nationwide (not for profit professional theaters) and mass media can begin to promote similar themes within the popular culture: popular culture influences new Broadway Theater opportunities. Could it be that Tony Kushner's play, *Angels in America*, paved the way for McNally's production of *Love! Valour! Compassion!?* Kushner's play was produced in 1992, McNally's in 1994 (the movie by the same name was produced in 1997). *Angels in America* won several awards including the Tony for best new play, and had an overall attendance of 441,557 over thirty-seven weeks of performances (livebroadway.com). Following these theater events, there appeared a brand new television series about a gay man and his best friend, a straight Jewish girl, *Will & Grace* (1998). Is this show a product of the macro-level activities on Broadway? If so, then what will the efficacy and popularity of *Will & Grace* contribute to macro-level events for further changes on Broadway. The micro-level events are happening all around the country. Millions of television viewers, affected by the macro-level events of the culture industry, are beginning to act differently toward the gay male in society. Very possibly the world will wake up one day and realize that gays and lesbians have been fully integrated into the dominant hegemonic system, without realizing that they had ever been missing.

## Appendix A Theories

### *Antonio Gramsci, 1891-1937*

Antonio Gramsci was born in Italy and suffered several setbacks early in his life before earning a scholarship to study at the University of Turin. While at university, he became quite involved as a social activist and met many Marxist contacts while at university. He later became the president of Italy's communist party after returning from a year in Moscow studying party politics. His outspoken condemnation of Mussolini landed him in a camp for political prisoners in 1926. At his trial in 1927, it is reported that Mussolini stated, "We have to prevent that this mind continue thinking" (Stillo, html). After his trial, he was sentenced to twenty years imprisonment and was sent to prison in Milan where he was refused access to communist literature. He gained permission to write in 1929, and began writing his life's work *Prison Notebooks* as a way to create something to last forever. After years of suffering in prison, he died in 1937. At the time of his death, Gramsci had written 33 volumes of *Prison Notebooks*; his sister-in-law smuggled the volumes out of prison and sent them to Moscow to be printed. Among Gramsci's contributions to the social sciences lay a crucial point of thinking for queer theory—hegemony. The system of power and the relation of groups who are subject to the dominant group are defined in Gramsci's works:

To search for historical substance, to place it in relations of production and exchange, leads to the discovery of how the society of man is split into two classes. Of course, the class which holds the means of production already knows itself. Even if in a confused and fragmented way, it is conscious of its own power and mission. It has individual goals and it coldly and objectively realized them through its organization... The systematization of real historical causality acquires the value of revelation for the other class: it becomes the principle of order for the immense shepherdless flock. The flock becomes conscious of itself, of the task which it must presently perform so that the other class can assert itself; it becomes aware that its own individual goals remain purely arbitrary, mere words, empty, emphatic and foolish ambition until it has the tools: until foolish ambitions becomes will (Cavalcanti, 11-2).

Relying on purely economic terms, Gramsci not only developed a new idea of class, he also illustrates that there are other groups which recognize the control under which they must toil. This became very important to the modern context because if one accepted gay men as a group, or "shepherdless flock" in subjection to the dominant hegemonic system, then one could more

clearly delineate the social/geographical location of gay men to the rest of society or more importantly to the dominant hegemonic system.

The bourgeoisie dissolved the feudal privilege of caste and rendered exchangeable the means of production—land, labor and capital. It ensured for itself the ownership of the natural and mechanical tools, and the freedom to produce, while it ensured to the labor the freedom to compete which the latter could use in order to improve its [own] conditions (Cavalcanti, 60).

As a further illustration, Gramsci illustrated that while the dominant hegemonic system has replaced, and in some ways made better, the conditions of society, the busy pursuits of the other groups were only working for the better of the dominant hegemonic group. This system constituted the basis of hegemony. While Gramsci's primary concern dealt with the economic forces that drive this system, he was also well aware of the ideological, theological and moralistic factors that permeated the concept of hegemony. This system therefore filtered into all areas of life and served to reify the dominant hegemonic system of power in society (Boggs, 39).

This is not to say that the power of the dominant hegemonic system is permanent or in a state of constancy. On the contrary, hegemony can, and does change over time through the collective will of the other groups. When enough pressure is placed, uniformly from the other groups, the overall hegemonic will shifts to accommodate the new realities of the total society (Stillo, html). This has significance for the gay male in society in the 1990's in America. This process of collective will, or through the steady force of multiple political and ethics groups, creates an overall shift to include specific, but not all, gay and lesbian individuals within the hegemony.

### ***Theodore Adorno, 1903-1969***

Theodore Adorno said that a, "successful work of art is not one which resolves contradictions in a spurious harmony, but one which expresses the idea of harmony negatively by embodying the contradictions, pure and uncompromised, in its innermost structure" (attributed quote). For Adorno, art and culture was a medium of control utilized by those in power to subjugate other groups. To counter this reality, he posited that true art illuminated problems in society within the structure and subject of its medium. His idea that the negative

exposes a positive solution was just another reason why paradoxes were a major focus under the guise of Queer theory.

Adorno was a member of the Frankfurt School, which was a social “think tank” utilizing heavily the principles set forth by Karl Marx. The Institute of Social Research, its German name, was a place to study the importance of science and philosophy with an interdisciplinary approach. The Institute, founded in 1923, operated as a part of the newly formed University of Frankfurt until the Nazi powers became too strong, and the members of the school had to exile themselves in 1933 to Geneva, Switzerland and did not return to Germany until 1953. Theodore Adorno, while an important member of this “school” spent most of his exile in the United States (1938-1953). Adorno’s research areas included philosophy, musicology and social science. Among his many essays and books about social theory, he also wrote extensively about music and culture. In an important scholarly work, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, Adorno and his colleague Max Horkheimer co-authored an authoritative essay on the effects of the culture industry upon society. They believed that the culture industry existed as nothing more than a very powerful tool of those in power to subdue and control the masses by occupying their time in the idle pursuit of entertainment. Art, music, drama, dance in addition to media all became tools of the dominant hegemonic system for the reification of their position in society.

While in the United States, Adorno studied the astrology column in the *Los Angeles Times* as it related to the influence of the “authoritarian group” (i.e. dominant hegemonic system), upon the individuals in society seeking guidance. This study was conducted over the course of a year, and was published in 1953 under the title *Stars Down to Earth*. Adorno’s analysis of the column has broad implications for all the media and arts. When analyzing aspects of the “happy ending” scenarios in the column, Adorno says,

[w]ithin this general pattern of the happy ending, however, there is a specific difference of function between the column and the other mass communications. Soap operas, television shows and above all movies are characterized by heroes, persons who positively or negatively solve their own problems. They stand vicariously for the spectator. By identifying himself with the hero, he believes to participate in the very power that is denied him in as much as he conceives himself as weak and dependent (Adorno, *Stars* 56).

But this is not always the case. At moments when social changes can be affected through individual action, the impulse to create radical change is denied.

Here...something shows up that is indicative of subtle psychological changes reflecting rather drastic social ones. [T]he column must acknowledge that the opportunities for the implementation of innovations and original ideas are extremely limited today for most persons. Thus, again cleverly relying on compulsive patters, the emphasis on imaginativeness is presented mostly in terms of business administration and business organization. Thus, the addressees are encouraged to make changes within the given organizatory framework, by necessity more or less routine provisions, which we may assume fall with the very narrow range of their influence or their knowledge and which have presumable little influence upon the real course of events (Adorno, *Stars* 91).

Through subtle manipulation in this culture industry, individuals are encouraged to make changes in their lifestyles. As part of his study, Adorno calculated the number of times certain categories were used in the interest of the manipulations of the article upon the individual. They are as follows: strangers, 1; neighbors, 2; experts, 5; family, 35; friends, 53; and authority figures, 48. Adorno adduces that this is not a coincidence, but rather a deliberate motivating force of the culture industry to manipulate situations of potential change. Specifically, individuals who are more likely to feel powerless against the dominant hegemonic system are ones which will find the most comfort from the culture industry.

For, while people recognize their independence and often enough venture the opinion that they are mere pawns, it is extremely difficult for them to face this dependence unmitigated. Society is made of those whom it comprises. If the latter would fully admit their dependence on man-made conditions, they would somehow have to blame themselves, would have to recognize not only their impotence but also that they are the cause of this impotence and would have to take responsibilities which today are extremely hard to take. This may be one of the reasons why they like so much to project their dependence upon something else, be it the conspiracy of Wall Street bankers or the constellation of the stars. What drives people into the arms of the various kinds of “prophets of deceit” is not only their sense of dependence and their wish to attribute this dependence to some “higher” and ultimately more justifiable sources, but it is also their wish to reinforce their own dependence, not to have to take matters into their own hands—a wish, true, which is ultimately engendered by the pressure under which they live (Adorno, *Stars* 114).

His point is very important because in both the 1920’s and 1990’s, the media—in addition to the dramas examined—serve as a modifier for public thought and opinion. Entertainments in particular become a double-edged sword. According to Adorno, individuals immerse themselves into the arts and media for escape from social responsibility as much as for a search for truth and meaning in life through the arts. In this sense, the arts and the media are

both sensational pursuits. Newspapers and popular magazines with their sensationalist aura surround the cultural production of dramas containing characterizations of gay men. These characterizations and their sensationalist aura create a negative effect upon the general public and their opinions of those gay men who could be found openly in society. Therefore, these culture industries could in some way affect the behavior of the general public in the course of their attitudes and behaviors toward gay men in society. What remains to be seen is the effect on society that the individuals make.

The elements of Gramsci's ideas combine with Adorno's in the creation of a relational paradigm within the discussion of the Queer theoretical model. As seen below, Gramsci's ideology of hegemony illustrates the differentiation between the Dominant Group (seen on top) and the Subordinate Group (seen on bottom). It should be understood that the dominant group stands for the dominant hegemonic group in this discussion. Adorno's ideology of culture industries, illustrated by the words "Culture Industries" in the form of a large "V" shape pressing down upon the Subordinate Group bridges these two groups together. This relational paradigm completes the first lens in the observation of our dramatic texts in Chapters One, Two and Three, and constitutes a single lens within the framework of the queer theoretical model: A direct relationship exists between the dominant hegemonic system and all subordinate groups through the use and manipulation of the culture industries of the period. Furthermore, this relationship is more often than not a situation wherein the culture industries reify the world view of the dominant hegemonic system.



**Figure 1**

### ***Michel Foucault 1926-1984***

Michel Foucault, a French philosopher and social scientist, believed that sexuality in Western society has much more to do with power than with feeling. His groundbreaking work, *The History of Sexuality, Part I* (1978) stands as one of the most quoted sources on modern sexuality and how it has been codified by science and utilized by authoritarian power structures to marginalize certain segments of society. Namely, and for the purposes set forth in this document, gay men have been systematically marginalized, rather than repressed, through a process which Foucault calls *scientia sexualis*—the science of sex. Marginalization was the key factor. While Foucault does not deny there appeared in the seventeenth century a general shift in the discourse of sex, he emphatically claimed that there appeared a veritable explosion of discourse on sex. The terminology and frame of discourse regarding sex and sexuality became highly codified and scientific. Foucault described the general approach and methodology of sexuality in the West as ways of knowing. A scientific and systematic dissection of what constitutes “normal” and “abnormal” sexual behavior in the adult human and the tracing of it back to a biological basis was the foundation of the *scientia sexualis*. This countered the Eastern, among other, views on sexuality that Foucault described as *Ars Erotica*—or the erotic aesthetic. The *Ars Erotica* exists as a way of knowing sex through the pure pleasure of it; through an evaluation of its immediate and tangible results for the individual. The *scientia sexualis* evaluated biological, psychological, psychiatric and physiological gender and sex. This contrast described, in essence, the very differences between Eastern and Western views of sexuality, but more importantly outlined the very nature of sexual examination and discovery in the West. Secondly, this *scientia sexualis* in our society didn’t create a repression or oppression of sexuality, but created instead an explosive discourse on sexuality which set differentiated sexualities apart from one another in clearly defined categories. This system of power—the dominant hegemonic system—made use of this scientific information to enforce the marginalization of certain sexual groups. Specifically, the appearance of the homosexual derived through this *scientia sexualis* in the late nineteenth century.

Westphal’s famous article in 1870 on “contrary sexual sensations” can stand as its date of birth—less by a type of sexual relations than by a certain quality of sexual sensibility, a certain way of inverting the masculine and feminine in oneself. Homosexuality appeared as one of the forms of sexuality when it was transposed from the practice of sodomy onto a kind of interior androgyny, a hermaphroditism



of the soul. The sodomite had been a temporary aberration; the homosexual was now a species (Foucault, 43).

Additionally, since the eighteenth century, Foucault argued that there have been four different “mechanisms of knowledge” that explored sex and sexuality: the hystering of women’s bodies; a pedagogization of children’s sex; a socialization of procreative behavior; and a psychiatrization of perverse pleasure (Foucault, 104-5). Each “mechanism of knowledge” delineates “normal” behaviors from “abnormal” ones. This very process of setting apart the normal from the abnormal created a marginalization of the “abnormal” group from the “normal” one. Once marginalized, what happened to the power of an individual outside of this dominant hegemonic system? Foucault argued that systems of power make use of the *scientia sexualis* to “correct” abnormal behaviors or conditions for the good of society (i.e. the dominant hegemonic system). This question prevailed in the first half of the twentieth century—what happened to the gay men in the 1920’s to affect the way in which they were viewed in the arts and entertainment industry? Michele Foucault’s theories on sexuality illustrated how one group in society had been marginalized. Foucault’s work performed an important role in the study of sexuality in the modern context because he brought to light the prevalence of sexual discourse in previous eras. Rather than see sexuality, in any form, as repressed, one should view sexuality as something which has been fervently discussed, examined and exalted in society. Since sexuality has been dissected into categories of “normal” and “abnormal,” bifurcation only marginalizes those members which qualify as “abnormal.” This process of marginalization only happens after political and social organizations use the scientific studies as the foundation for enacting legal codes for governing sexuality.

The second relational paradigm within the Queer theoretical model used in Chapters One, Two and Three becomes the marginalization of gay male vis-à-vis *scientia sexualis*. In figure two, the words, “Michel Foucault—Marginalization and Scientia Sexualis” create two separate spheres. The larger sphere, containing the words “Dominant Group” represents the dominant hegemonic system whose members theoretically all exhibit normal sexuality. The smaller sphere containing the words “Subordinate Group” represents gay men, whose “perverse pleasures” have been categorized as abnormal and, therefore, not compliant. Therefore, the arrow that originates within the “Dominant” sphere ends in the “Subordinate” sphere. The arrow represents the actual marginalization of the subordinate group. This illustrates the relational paradigm of: Science and

Sex or the marginalization of the gay male in society. As one lens of the Queer theoretical model, this relational paradigm will be used to illuminate ways in which both decades in American history make use of the scientific community in order to validate their relationship between marginalized groups and the dominant hegemonic system.

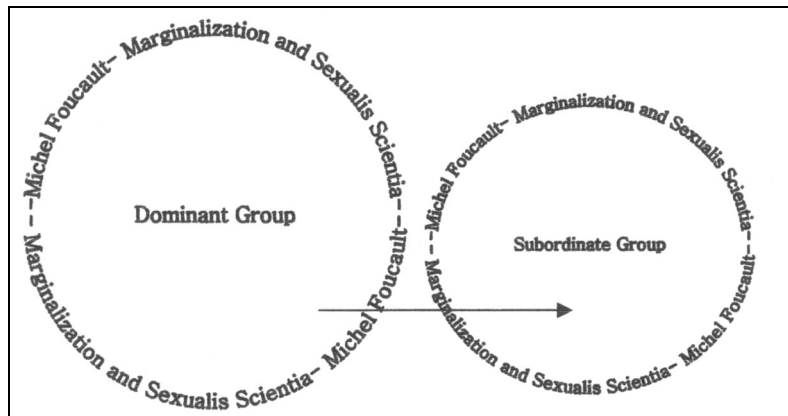


Figure 2

**Judith Butler 1956-**

Judith Butler created a theory and philosophy based in power, sexuality, gender and identity. She published *Gender Trouble* in 1990, and created a fervent discourse in the academic world. Based partly on Michele Foucault’s work, Butler takes the notions of gender, sexuality and power one step further. Gender, Butler asserts, is not a fixed identity, but a fluid one. Modern society has erroneously come to accept gender and sex as interchangeable terms. Sex, is determined by physiology, and gender by actions, not by sex. Gender is a set of attitudes, behaviors and actions that are interpreted by others as masculine and feminine because our modern contemporary society only upholds two genders based on the sex of individuals. Butler asserts that very infrequently does one individual exhibit a polar gender behavior. Butler believes that gender is at its essence a performative identity based on a model for which an original does not exist. Therefore, although there exists a single ideal of the masculine gender and the feminine gender in society—every individual exhibits a fluid expression or performance of gender along the entire spectrum of gender from masculine to feminine. Butler also asserts that there does not have to be an either/or binary of gender expression in society, but that there can be multiple genders or even that gender should never be considered finite-fixed or

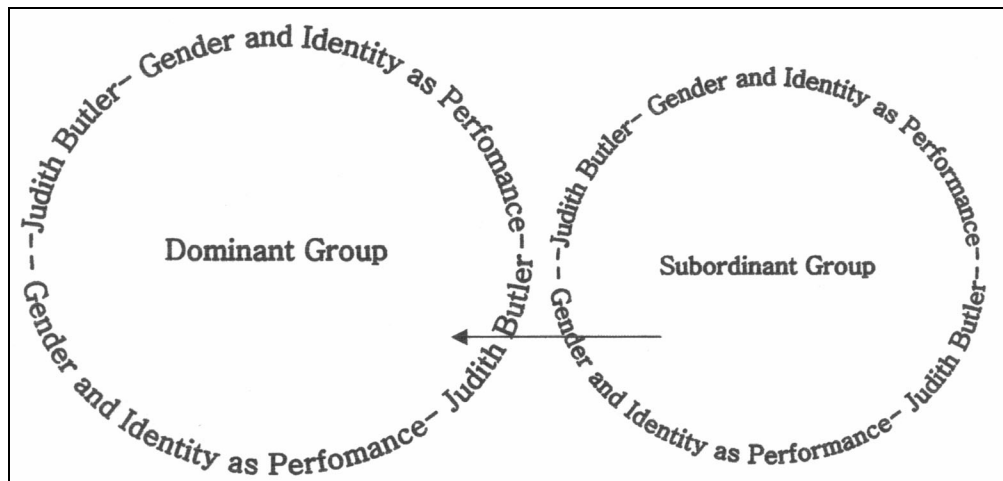
unchangeable. Therefore, if gender is fluid, then a person's sexual expression, or sexual orientation—which comes from gender not from sex—should not be viewed in terms of normative versus non-normative, but simply in terms of how they are expressed as a natural extension of that person's performed gender. Butler states that persons who conform to the binary pairing of sex and gender to masculine and feminine are “intelligible” genders.

“Intelligible” genders are those which in some sense institute and maintain relations of coherence and continuity among sex, gender, sexual practice, and desire. In other words, the specters of discontinuity and incoherence, themselves thinkable only in relation to existing norms of continuity and coherence, are constantly prohibited and produced by the very laws that seek to establish causal or expressive lines of connection among biological sex, culturally constituted genders, and the “expression” of effect of both in the manifestation of sexual desire through sexual practice (Butler, *Gender* 23).

Individuals who are sexed male and gendered male may or may not still perform the “desires” and “sexual practices” that are historically attributed to both the male sex and gender. Building upon Butler's idea, those individuals whose gender explodes the coherence and continuity among sex, gender and sexual practice and desire might be considered individuals having unintelligible genders. These unintelligible genders are the ones that most confound the political figures in American society who assume that nature follows biology. Butler does, however, believe the material body (sex) is still a crucial point of identity (Butler, *Bodies* 50-55).

Keeping in mind that when viewed in relation to Foucault, if gender is fluid and changeable, then sexual expression is a matter not of marginalization but of perpetual coexistence—nothing more, nothing less. Butler, along with Freud and Ellis—both social scientists of the early twentieth century—would say that sexual expression based on fluid gender never constitutes a necessity for homosexual behavior as “abnormal” because it is one of many possibilities within the matrices of sex, gender power and identity. This fluidity of gender posits the argument in favor of a gender continuum to replace our modern culture's binary gender system. In essence, Butler takes the marginalized group, as Foucault expressed, and reintegrates these individuals into the dominant group under a gender continuum rather than a gender binary system. She does so on the basis that gender, desire, sexual practice are all fluid aspects of one's identity and that the performance of these are never set in stone. All of this integration comes at a very heavy price in terms of hegemonic power. The hegemony becomes complicated in that without clearly defined gender and identity, there no longer exists as many marginal groups—

and therefore, much fewer groups to control. This constitutes the third relational paradigm within the discussion: Gender and Performance. Figure 3 illustrates how Butler’s theories act to reintegrate formerly marginalized groups back into the larger society. Shown are two spheres created from the words, “Judith Butler—Gender and Identity as Performance.” Within the larger sphere are the words, “Dominant Group” and represents the dominant hegemonic system. Within the smaller sphere are the words, “Subordinate Group” and represents the gay male in society. The arrow, that originates from the Subordinate sphere, shown ending in the Dominant sphere. The arrow illustrates the reintegration of the marginalized group into the dominant hegemonic system. When used to examine the dramatic texts and decades in Chapters One, Two and Three, this relational paradigm will explore the performative nature of gender and sexual identity in relation to the larger dominant hegemonic system.



**Figure 3**

***Anthony Giddens 1938-***

Anthony Giddens has been hailed as Britain’s most prolific sociologist but has also been one of the most reviled among the postmodernist scholars (Gauntlett, 91-2). Particularly important to the study of Queer theory and its relation to this thesis were very recent developments in his critical and theoretical writing: the theory of “structurization”; the fluid nature of our identity; and that these constitute our contemporary society’s existence in modernity not in the postmodern as a separate era. Giddens holds a Ph.D. in Sociology from University of Cambridge and is the Director of the London School of Economics and Political

Science. He is a very close advisor to Tony Blair, Prime Minister of Brittan, as well as a major force behind the policies of the new Labour Party in England.

Giddens' theory of structurization focuses all of the previous theorists' work. The three different parts of Giddens' work included in this thesis all work together in connection to other theorists and collectively create the final relational paradigm: Identity and Structurization. Structurization, then, becomes the lenses of the queer telescope. The basic description of Giddens' theory of structurization is that,

[h]uman agency (micro level activity) and social structure (macro level activity) continuously feed into each other. The social structure is reproduced through repetition of acts by individual people (and therefore can change) (Gauntlett, 94).

This idea of structurization has profound implications for what Queer theory does in the analysis of gay male representation on the American Stage. In his theories, when enough people change their daily actions against certain social protocols or codes, the social codes themselves begin to change. Likewise, new social codes or protocols will then elicit a new reaction from the individuals in a positive or negative manner.

Congruent with "structurization" is Giddens' ideas about the reflexive nature of the self and the fluidity of identity. Each person's life is a biography which is being continuously written by the individual.

The existential question of self-identity is bound up with the fragile nature of the biography which the individual 'supplies' about herself. A person's identity is not to be found in behaviour, nor – important though this is—in the reactions of others, but in the capacity to keep a particular narrative going. The individual's biography, if she is to maintain regular interaction with others in the day-to-day world, cannot be wholly fictive. It must continually integrate events which occur in the external world, and sort them into the on-going 'story' about the self (Giddens, 54).

At what price do individual actions and the reactions of society come? Our human agency might create actions of larger social change, but they can also impact our overall narrative of life. Persons, similarly, can perform their gender in any manner, so long as it is not entirely fictive—it must fit into their life story. At the heart of this fluidity of identity is that individuals choose the course of their lives—identity is intimately bound to those choices.

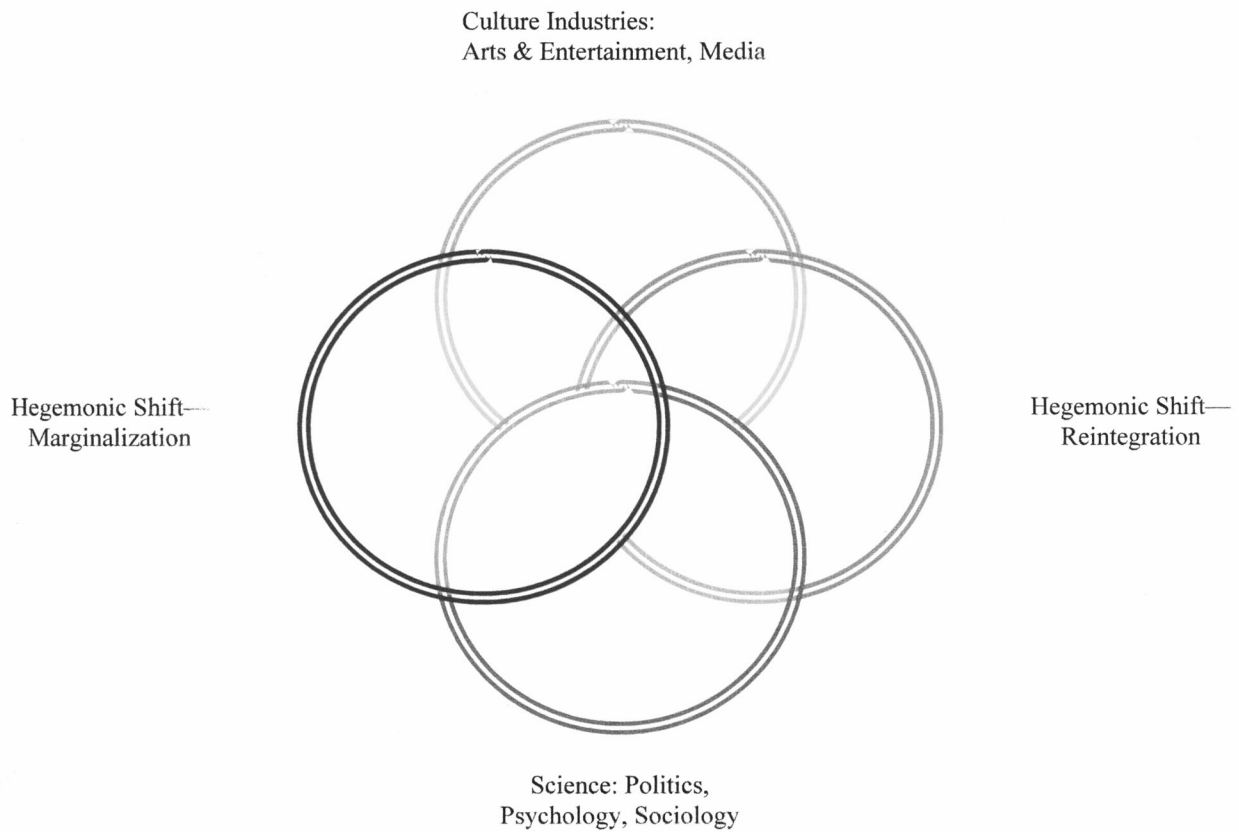
Giddens believes that Western society has yet to enter into a new phase of development—he maintains society is still in the modern era as opposed to some theorists who argue for a distinctive Postmodern era.

What to do? How to act? Who to be? These are focal questions for everyone living in circumstances of late modernity—and ones which, on some level or another, all of us answer, either discursively or through day-to-day social behaviour (Giddens, 70).

These questions and the extension of modernity in the late twentieth century are very important to an understanding of how modernity, which had only just begun in the 1920's, then according to Giddens, reaches a golden age nearly seventy years later in the 1990's. This modernist continuum allows for a direct comparison of Terrence McNally and Mae West, placing McNally's work safely within the same boundaries of structure as West's dramas. Through the complex interplay of their theories, one can begin to see that a continuous cycle of the representation of gay men from their first appearances on the Broadway stage to their appearances at the close of the century. Note that in figure 4, there is a continuous cycle of marginalization and reintegration created by the constant changes made in both the culture industries and the sciences. Pictured in the figure are four circles joined together (in a Venn diagram) each circle intersecting and overlapping the other circles in the diagram. The circle at the top is labeled as the "Culture Industries: Arts & Entertainment, Media." On top and to the right is labeled as "Hegemonic Shift—Reintegration." On top of that circle and on the bottom of the diagram is "Science: Politics, Psychology, Sociology." The final circle and to the left of the diagram is "Hegemonic Shift—Marginalization." When viewed together, one can see a cycle of hegemonic power shifts between marginalization and reintegration which is mediated by Science and the Culture industries.

Coupling Giddens' theory of "structurization" with the fluidity of identity, and applying them to each of the other relational paradigms: Culture and Power; Sex and Science; Identity and Performance, one final relational paradigm emerges which simplifies the overall process into a cycle of hegemonic shifts in power. The paradigm of Culture and Power can mediate a power shift either to integrate or to marginalize as easily as can the paradigm of Sex and Science. But looking more closely at the Venn diagram, one can see that each paradigm overlaps the other at some points and are free from influence at the opposite end. Under "structurization," an

individual's actions can have as much effect as the macro-level events that social structure has upon the individual. Furthermore, the individual's personal narrative will either change or be changed by the reflexive process of the individual. This individual might be represented by the very center of the Venn diagram, because the centrality of the individual in the modern era is the focus of social interaction within each of the dramas examined in this thesis. Through the use of the Venn diagram, one can see the influence of any single relational paradigm on the drama being examined.



**Figure 4**

These four relational paradigms are the important lenses of examination for Mae West's and Terrence McNally's lives and dramatic works in their respective historical periods. Through these paradigms, both subtle and not-so-subtle influences can be discerned in the identity formation of the gay male through the dramatic works of McNally and West and that these influences are as much a cultural production of identity as they are sociological ones.

## **Appendix B**

### **Mae West (1893-1980)**

#### Plays Written

Sex, 1926  
The Drag, 1927  
The Pleasure Man, 1928  
Diamond Lil, 1928  
The Constant Sinner, 1931  
Catherine Was Great, 1945

#### Actress Filmography

Night After Night, 1932  
\*She Done Him Wrong, 1933  
\*I'm No Angel, 1933  
\*Belle of the Nineties, 1934  
\*Goin' To Town, 1935  
Klondike Annie, 1936  
Go West Young Man, 1936  
\*Every Day's a Holiday, 1937  
\*My Little Chickadee, 1940  
The Heat's On, 1943  
Myra Breckenridge, 1970  
\*Sextette, 1978

\*Denotes the she also wrote the screenplay for the film.

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## Appendix C

### Terrence McNally (b. 1939)

#### Plays Written

##### *1960's*

And Things that Go Bump in the Night, 1965  
Noon, 1968  
Boticelli, 1968  
¡Cuba Si!, 1968  
Witness, 1968  
Next, 1969  
Bringing it all Back Home, 1969

##### *1970's*

Where has Tommy Flowers Gone?, 1971  
Bad Habits, 1973  
Whiskey, 1973  
The Ritz, 1975  
\*Broadway, Broadway, 1978

##### *1980's*

\*The Rink, 1984  
It's Only a Play, 1986  
Frankie and Johnny at the Claire de Lune, 1987  
The Lisbon Triviata, 1989  
Andre's Mother, 1990

##### *1990's*

Lips Together, Teeth Apart, 1991  
\*Kiss of the Spider Woman, 1992  
A Perfect Ganesh, 1993  
Love! Valour! Compassion, 1994  
Pal Joey, 1995 (adaptation)  
Master Class, 1995  
\*Ragtime, 1997  
Corpus Christi, 1998  
\*The Full Monty, 2000  
\*Dead Man Walking, 2000

##### *2000's*

\*The Visit, 2001  
\*A Man of No Importance 2002

\* Denotes that he wrote the book for the Musical/Opera

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## Vita

### James Russell Couch

Born January 16, 1973  
Georgetown, Ohio

#### Education

BA, Theatre                      Berea College, Berea, KY                      1998  
*Performance & Directing*

#### Experience

##### Teaching:

*Teaching Assistant*  
*University of Kentucky, Department of Theatre*                      *August 2001-Present*

*Theatre Instructor*  
*Upward Bound, Lexington Community College*                      *Summer 2001*

*Assistant to Professor, Theatre History*  
*University of Kentucky, Department of Theatre*                      *September 2000-May 2001*

##### Professional:

*Director of Marketing*  
*Lexington Children's Theatre*                      *December 1999- July 2000*

*Marketing Associate*  
*Lexington Children's Theatre*                      *November 1998- December 1999*

*Theatre Instructor*  
*Lexington Children's Theatre*                      *January-December 1999*

##### Educational:

*Intern*  
*Lexington Children's Theatre*                      *June- November 1998*

*Student Labor*  
*Berea College Theatre Laboratory*                      *1996-1998, 1992-1994*

## Artistic Achievements

### Plays Written:

24 April 2001	<u>The Holiday Engagement.</u>	Lucille Little Black Box Theater, Lexington. University of Kentucky
21 July 2000	<u>Ashes for Gold.</u>	The Learning Stage, Lexington. Lexington Children's Theatre
30 June 2000	<u>Queen of Bees.</u>	The Learning Stage, Lexington. Lexington Children's Theatre
26 April 1996	<u>Families: Of Love, of Hate, of Choice.</u>	Tharon Musser Experimental Theater, Berea. Berea College                      Berea, KY

### Directing:

March/April 2001	<u>The Sisters Rosensweig.</u>	The Carriage House, Lexington. Studio Players
20 July 2000	<u>The Red Hat.</u>	The Learning Stage, Lexington. Lexington Children's Theatre
Nov/Dec 1999	<u>A Christmas Carol.</u>	Kentucky Touring Production Lexington Children's Theatre

### Acting (Representative Roles):

Dorine	<i>Tartuffe</i>	1997	Berea College Theatre
Trigorin	<i>The Seagull</i>	1997	Berea College Theatre
Joe Benjamin	<i>God's Favorite</i>	1997	Berea College Theatre
Captain Collins & Shitty Meg	<i>Our Country's Good</i>	1993	Berea College Theatre
Barry Klemper	<i>The Boys Next Door</i>	1992	Berea College Theatre
Lucious O' Trigger	<i>The Rivals</i>	1992	Berea College Theatre

## Panel Presentations

6 March 2003	twentieth century Pink Cycle: Gay men on stage in the 20's & 90's <i>Southeastern Theatre Conference</i>
7 March 2002	Everything I Needed to Know, I Learned in Grad School <i>Southeastern Theatre Conference</i>

## Honors and Awards

1998	Paul Power Award for Directing	Berea College
1997	Alfred J. Perrin Best Actor Award	Berea College
1994	Irene Ryan Nomination	Berea College/ Irene Ryan Foundation