

COMING OUT in The Arts:

The LGBTQ Presence in Film, Painting, and Literature ... Silents to Stonewall, 1896-1972

WHO IS THE LGBTQ CHARACTER IN THESE SCENES?



SIGN OF THE CROSS (1934)



SIGN OF THE CROSS (1934)



DRACULA'S DAUGHTER (1936)



REBECCA (1940)



www.agefotostock.com
ZUJ-20020609-DVC-S87-0011168

LAURA (1944)



ROPE (1948)



YOUNG MAN WITH A HORN (1950)



ALL ABOUT EVE (1950)



STRANGERS ON A TRAIN (1951)



STRANGERS ON A TRAIN (1951)

JOANNA PETTET
as "Kay"

JESSICA WALTER
as "Libby"

MARY ROBIN REDD
as "Pokey"

CANDICE BERGEN
as "Lahey"



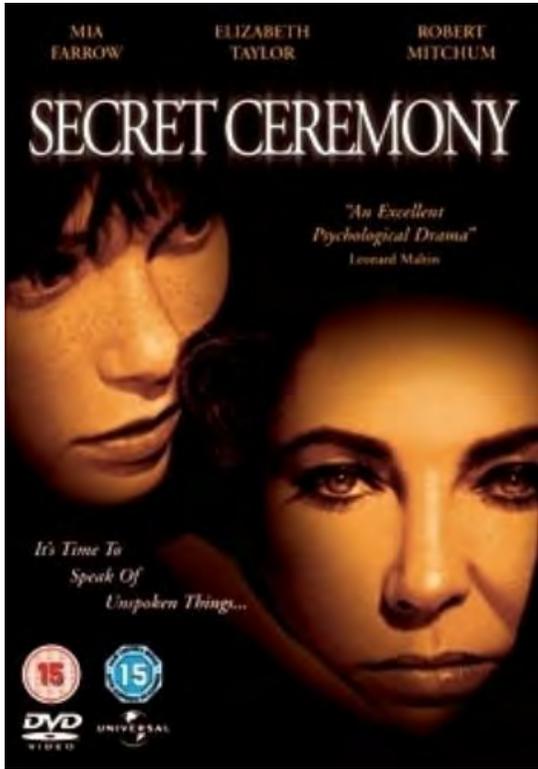
ELIZABETH HARTMAN
as "Priss"

KATHLEEN WIDDOES
as "Helena"

JOAN HACKETT
as "Dottie"

SHIRLEY KNIGHT
as "Polly"

THE GROUP (1966)



SECRET CEREMONY (1968)



WOMEN IN LOVE (1969)



Macho JAMES BOND VS the implicitly LGBTQ Villain. ...



Dr. No (1962)



From Russia With Love (1964)





Goldfinger (1965)





Thunderball (1965)



You Only Live Twice (1967)



Diamonds Are Forever (1971)

THE LGBTQ FACE IN THE ARTS: from Silents to Stonewall, 1896-1972

The history of LGBTQ cinema stretches almost as far back as movies themselves, although, interpretations are always debatable. This presentation covers 76 years, during which time LGBTQ screen characters became steadily more visible on the screen. This era pre-dates the AIDS epidemic, which found powerful expression in a number of films during the 1990s.

To start, it's generally agreed that the dancing men in the Edison short *The Gay Brothers*, 1896, represent the first identifiable same-sex coupling in cinema, but, nothing is known about intentions behind this brief scene.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fAEjJSeBTel>

The term *homosexual* did not appear until the later 1800s. But degrees of awareness were present in society. Sometimes through public scandals, such as the trial and imprisonment of Oscar Wilde. (He is best-known for his novel, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, later a successful movie in 1945.)



And sometimes from the mid-19th century until World War I it was evident in painting or advertising.



Simeon Solomon - *Sappho and Erinna* (1864) Jean-Alphonse Roehn – *Women Disturbed by a Cat* (c. 1855)



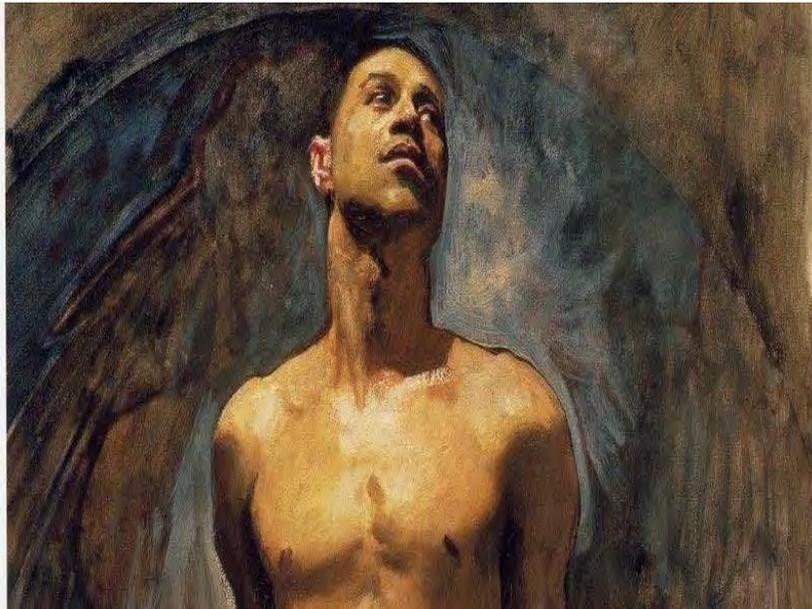
Louise Abbéma - *Self-Portrait* (1876)



John Singer Sargent – *Young Man in Reverie* (1876)



Man Wearing a Laurel (c. 1876)



Male Nude - Thomas E. McKellor (1917-1920)



Self-Portrait (1906)



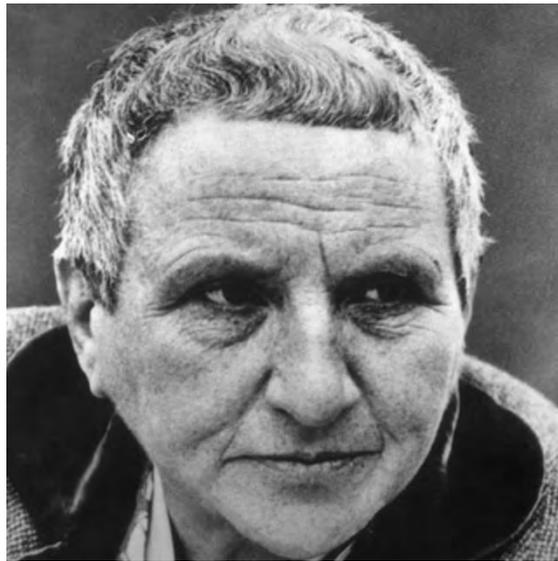
Charles Demuth – *Dancing Sailors* (1918)



Self-Portrait (1907)



Félix Edouart Vallotton - *Gertrude Stein* (1907)



Also noteworthy from this period were gay artists such Eugène Jansson (1862-1915) from Sweden and Sascha Schneider (1870-1927) from Germany. They explicitly focused on male nudes, with scenes

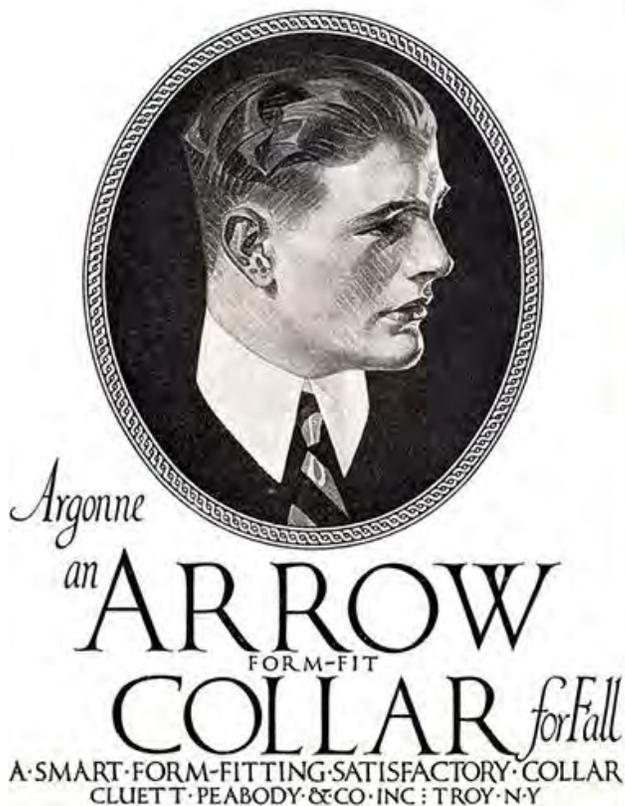
depicting two or more men together. No specific sexual activity was presented, but their works highlighted bonding and male intimacy.



J.C. Leyendecker and his advertising art



1907



1915

Key Points about LGBTQ Cinema 1896-1972

For Hollywood, movies are business – they are about profitability. Art has played a role, but the focus has been on financial results: what sells gets made (and re-made). Over the years, films with LGBTQ content often failed commercially at the box office. As a result, studios were reluctant to fund further productions.

1. Being a largely dollar-driven business, American movies seldom took the lead in social change – they took a cue from what was already underway in society, what was already finding acceptance. The Hayes Code tightly monitored film content into the 1960s, and it clearly excluded any explicit LGBTQ content. European films, historically, have been more free to address LGBTQ themes because of less restrictive guidelines.
2. Artists also had greater freedom with LGBTQ themes with writing and the visual arts. Censorship had an impact, but there was no governing code.
3. Many ground-breaking LGBTQ films came from books or plays, not from Hollywood scripts. Having been successful on the stage or in print, Hollywood was willing to take a chance on making them.



Queen Christina (1933)

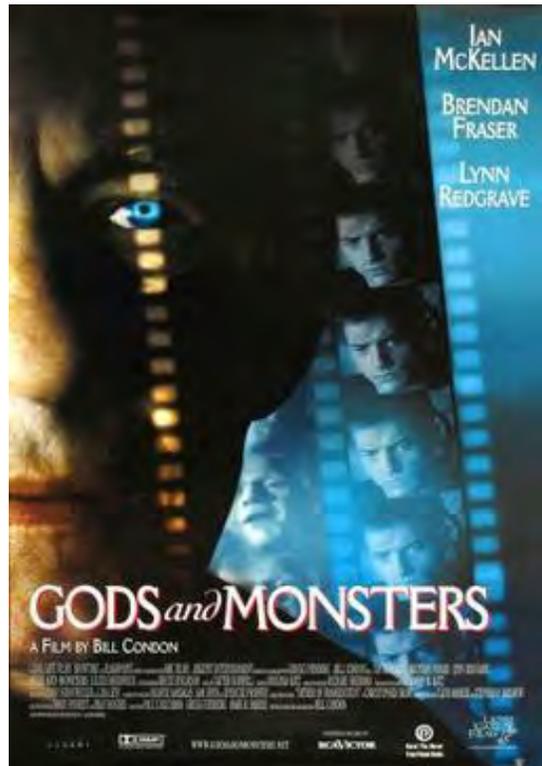
4. For a variety of reasons, lesbians, direct or implied, were more tolerated than gay men. In the 1930s Hollywood showed scenes of woman kissing each other; but male-to-male kissing did not occur in Hollywood movies after *Wings* (1927) until the 1960s.



Wings (1927): the first male-to-male screen kiss in a major US film ... and the last for a long time.

5. Identifiable LGBTQ persons were rarely shown with intimate or long-term relationships. They were usually presented as being outside the norm: unmarried (alone), sexual predators, or as pathological criminals. As a result, they were punished in the plot.
6. In the past, few Hollywood personalities were open about their sexuality: the film industry was cautious, conservative about the image it presented to the public. There was no shortage of homophobia, either.
7. Members of the film industry had more personal freedom if they were *behind* the camera, as opposed to being in front of it. This was especially true for fashion, makeup, and set design specialists. Famous Hollywood fashion designers in the 1930s and 1940s included Adrian (Gilbert Adrian Greenberg), Travis Banton, and Orry-Kelly (John Kelly), and Walter Plunkett. All were gay.
8. Hollywood also had many LGBTQ directors: F.W. Murnau, James Whale, George Cukor, John Schlesinger, Dorothy Arzner, and Edmund Goulding, among others.

Like German director F.W. Murnau, James Whale (1889-1957) was open about his sexuality, highly unusual for the 1930s. A fictional account of his later life and death was the award-winning film *Gods and Monsters* in 1998. (The part of Whale was played by the gay actor Ian McKellen.)



There have been too-many-to-count LGBTQ actors and actresses. Guessing “who is / who isn’t?” is one of the oldest parlor games in Hollywood. But from the early days of Hollywood, being “outed” publicly as LGBTQ would mean the end of an acting career. That is why a number of LGBTQ actors and actresses went through motions of publicly dating members of the opposite sex, or even of going through what was called “a lavender marriage.” And taking on the role of an LGBTQ character could be hazardous to a film career, too – “guilt by association.”

William “Billy” Haines (1900-1973) was a popular film star in the 1920s, compromised by his long-term relationship with another man. The studio head at MGM, Louis B. Mayer, told him that he could either marry to hush the rumors -- or quit acting. Haines left acting and went on to a successful career as an interior designer. His clients even included Nancy Reagan. He and his partner, Jimmy Shields, stayed together for over 50 years. Their friend, Joan Crawford, used to declare, “They have the best marriage in Hollywood.”



Many early films made in the US have been lost, so it is difficult to know how LGBTQ-type characters might have appeared. One early discovery from 1912 is the 10-minute film comedy *Algie, the Miner*. It involves an effeminate “city slicker” who is sent to the West to develop more manliness. This short demonstrates what was generally associated with gay men in the early 20th century: girlish behavior and a lack of masculinity.



One of the most exotic figures in Hollywood was the silent film legend Alla Nazimova (1879-1945). Nazimova was a Russian stage actress who moved to New York City shortly after the turn of the 20th century to pursue a career in acting. She became one of the most popular movie stars in America. At one point she was Metro's highest paid actress. Her career floundered after directing several pictures that failed at the box office.

That Nazimova was a lesbian was common knowledge in the film community. She was associated in relationships with a number of different Hollywood actresses. But interestingly, she was a close friend of Nancy Reagan's mother – and was selected to be the godmother of Nancy Reagan!

Nazimova later formed her own motion picture company, which produced a famous, albeit disastrous, screen version of Oscar Wilde's *Salomé* (1922). The film, in which Nazimova starred, was filled with stylized and decadent imagery and contained several scenes of stereotypically effeminate male characters. In fact, much – in not all -- of the cast was reported to be LGBTQ. *Salomé* was, however, a critical and financial failure – although it has enjoyed more favorable evaluation in recent years.



Alla Nazimova

TIMELINE

- **1896-1934:** LGBTQ-type characters were presented outsiders, often as exaggerated stereotypes: *less-than-masculine* or *less-than-feminine*. **MEN ACT LIKE WOMEN, AND WOMEN ACT LIKE MEN.** Some tolerance of these on-screen characters was shown, until the Hayes Code began to control film content.
- European films, however, could be more daring, especially in Germany before the Nazi era.
- **1934-1960:** The Hayes Code regulated what was allowed on-screen. Recognizable LGBTQ-type characters were presented often as pathological, reflecting the influence of psychology and its view of same-sex attraction. They were murderous, predatory, prone to commit suicide, unhappy ... outsiders who were less-than-masculine or less-than-feminine.

- **1960-1972:** LGBTQ characters gradually became more visible and assertive, less pathological – even normal and well-adjusted. The more positive presentation reflected changes in US society and elsewhere with attitudes on race, gender, and sexuality. These changes included the coming-out associated with the Stonewall Uprising in New York (1969) and the visibility of the Gay Liberation movement. This period saw the end of Hayes Code restrictions, and the arrival of films from other countries with more sympathetic presentations of LGBTQ individuals and scenes of same-sex intimacy.

The Post-War World: The 1920s



Nils Dardel - *The Dying Dandy* (1918)

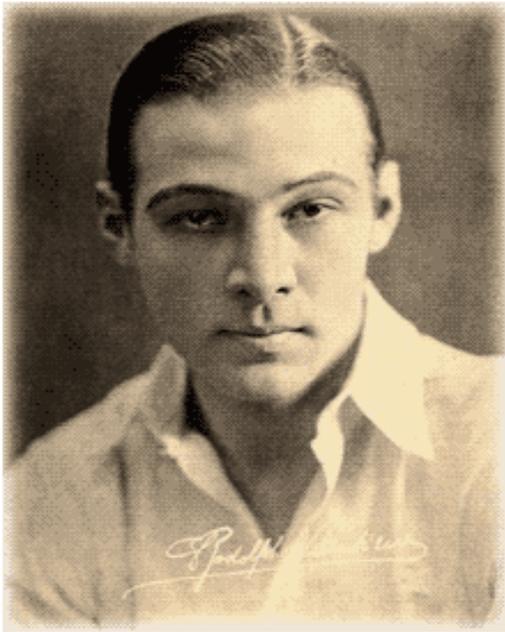


Bar (1920)

In the aftermath of the horror and destruction in World War I, the 1920s was a time of clashing developments. Technology advanced rapidly, as radios became more common, airplanes crossed global distances for the first time, and sound was introduced into movies. In America, woman gained the right to vote and the Harlem Renaissance brought forth a flowering of artistic talent in the African-American community.

In glaring contrast, the 1920s in America were also marked by the rising power of the Ku Klux Klan, with frequent lynchings of African-Americans and race riots that caused massive loss of life; anti-immigrant sentiment led to restrictions on those who were allowed to come to the US; the eugenics movement exercised great influence in universities, museums, politics, and literature; anti-Catholicism was a powerful force, enough to pull the usually-Democratic South away from the 1928 presidential candidate, Alfred E. Smith.

This was a time of strongly-defined gender roles. Yet styles of this time reflected blending. Women wore clothing that de-emphasized the figure and were characterized by short – even mannish haircuts. The leading male sex symbol from 1920s film was Rudolph Valentino, who was often denounced (out of envy?) by other men as being effeminate, a “powderpuff.”



Rudolph Valentino



There was, in this environment, a greater LGBTQ presence – in some select quarters, especially in Europe.

Berlin emerged as the capital of LGBTQ visibility ... something evoked in Christopher Isherwood's "I Am A Camera," the source for the later musical and movie, *Cabaret*. Several explicitly gay movies were filmed in Germany during this period, coupled with political activism. Examples of German cinema are: *Different from the Others* (1919); *Mikaël, Chained: The Story of the Third Sex* (1924), the story of two male lovers; and *Pandora's Box* in 1929 which played up the strong sexual attraction between two women. (One of them winds up as a victim of Jack the Ripper.)



Different from the Others (1919)



Pandora's Box (1929)



Girls in Uniform (1931)



Zarah Leander



The Great Love (1942)

LGBTQ self-expression is also found in art from both sides of the Atlantic, especially with gender-fluid imagery and homoerotic portraits.



Rudolf Schlichter – *Ladies' Saloon* (1923)



Tamara de Lempicka – *Duchess de La Salle* (1925) *The Green Turban* (1930)



Otto Dix - *Sylvia von Harden* (1926)



Romaine Brooks – *Una, Lady Troubridge* (1924)



Self Portrait (1923)



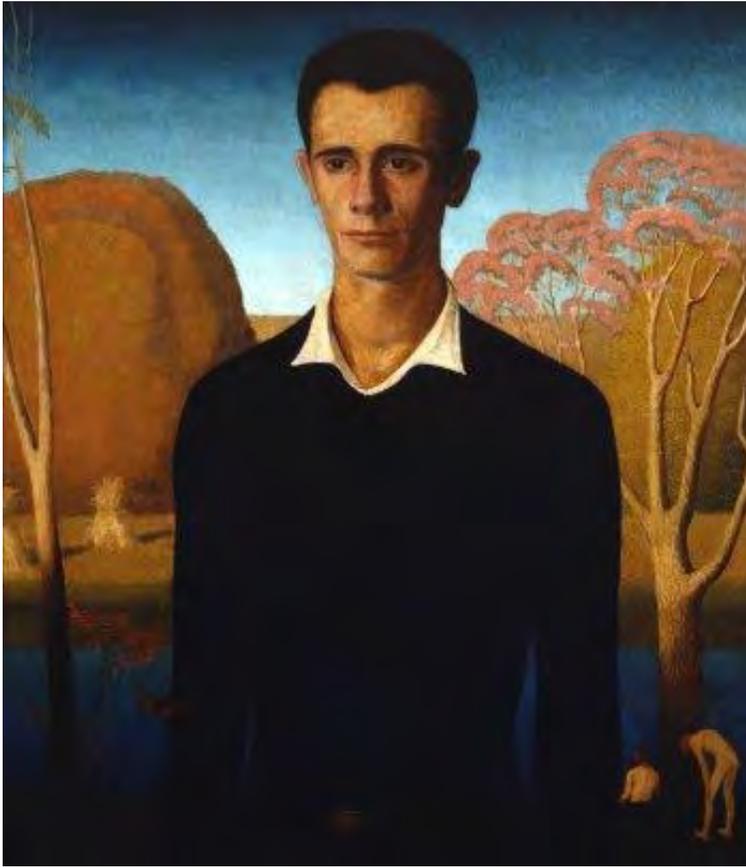
Lilius Torrance Newton - *Self-Portrait* (c. 1929)



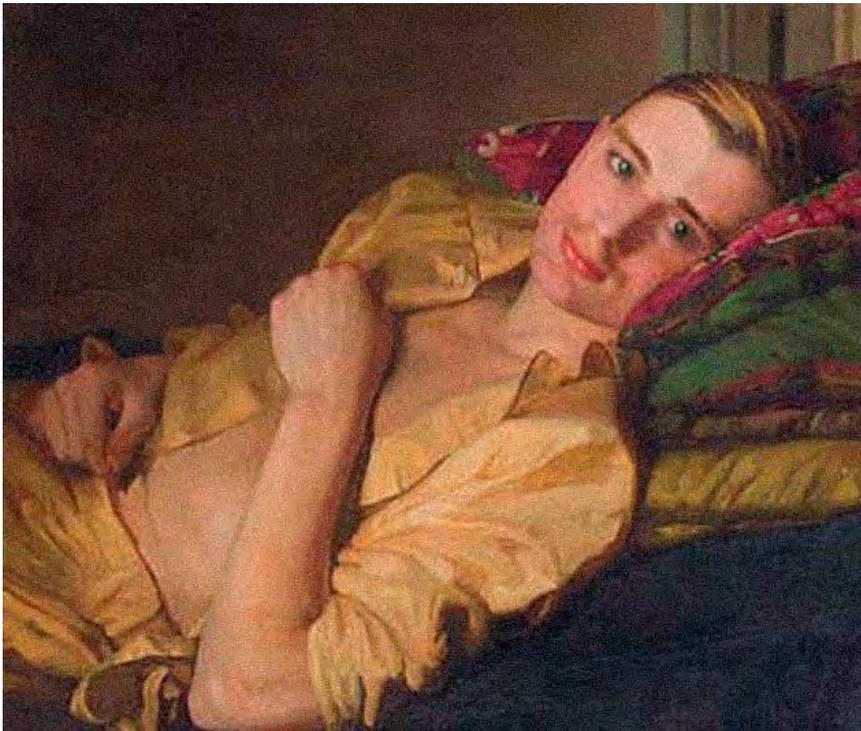
Elise Kingman (1930)



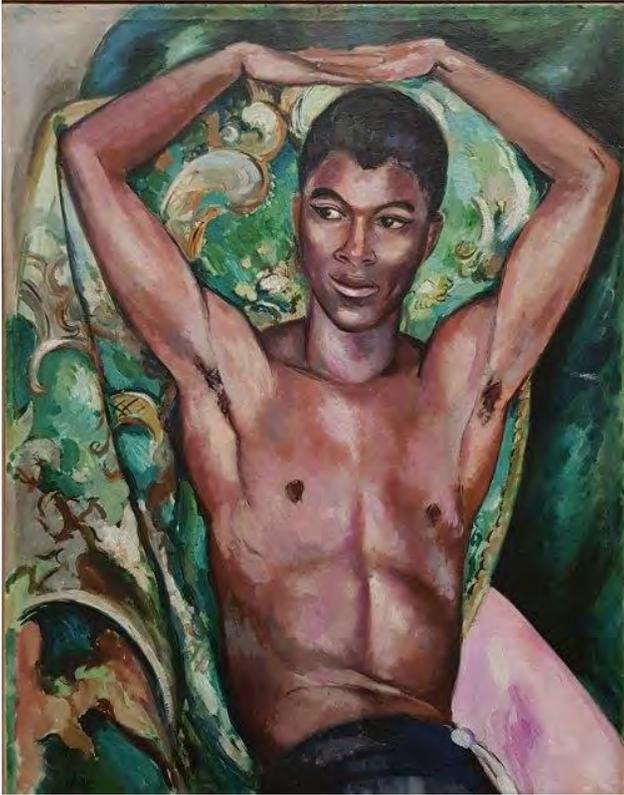
Glyn Warren Philpot - *Black Man and Hibiscus* (c. 1932)



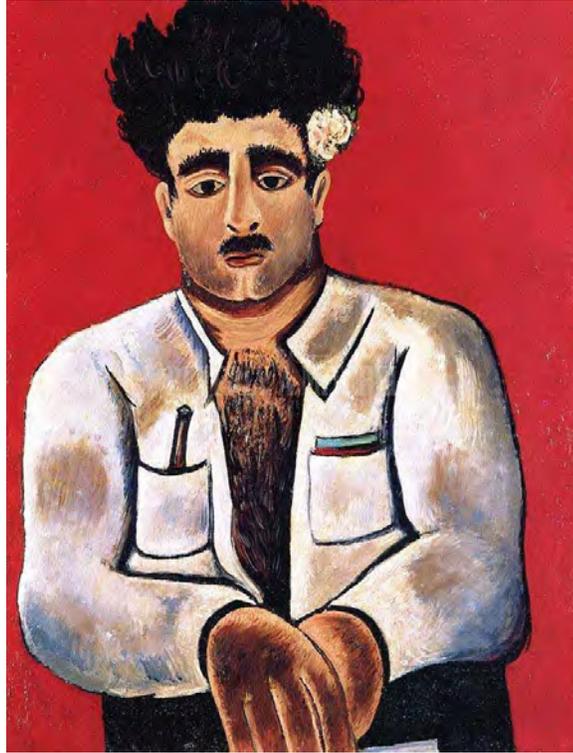
Grant Wood - *Arnold Comes of Age* (1930)



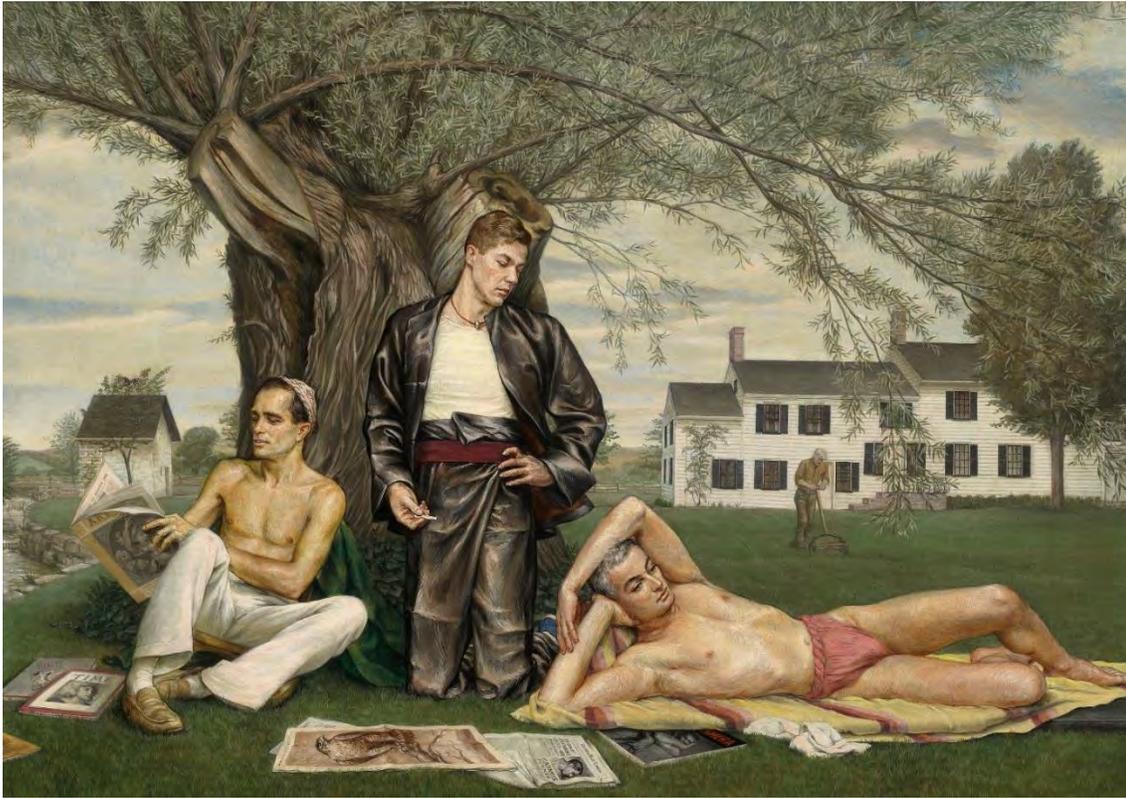
Konstantin Somov – *Picture of a Man Reclining* (c.1936)



Edward Wolfe - *Patrick Nelson* (c. 1938)



Marsden Hartley - *Adelard the Drowned* (c. 1938)



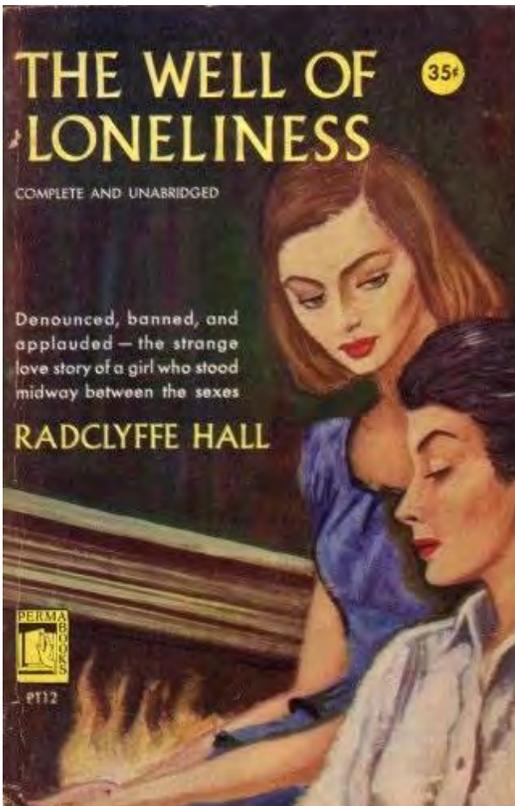
Paul Cadmus - *Stone Blossom: A Conversation Piece* (1939-40)



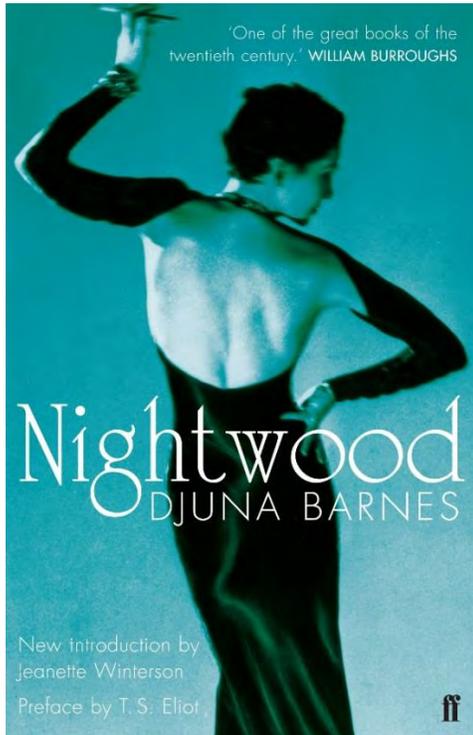


Hannah Gluckstein (*Gluck*) – *Medallion* (1938)

Self-Portrait (1942)



This ground-breaking and highly controversial novel was published in England in 1928.



A later lesbian-themed novel was *Nightwood*, from 1936.

★ **Starting with sound pictures in the late 1920s and 1930s LGBTQ characters began to appear in talking films as ... FEMALE SEDUCTRESS OR MALE SISSY**

The first known depiction of an obviously gay character in US sound films occurs in the 1929 musical *The Broadway Melody* (1929). The nameless character, a costume designer (Drew Demarest), is seen fussing over women's accessories in a big musical show. When he complains that he didn't design the narrow doorways that endanger the hats worn by the chorus girls, a mannish older female responds, "Yeah, if you had designed them, they would have been lavender!"



The Broadway Melody (1929)

In the 1934 musical *Wonder Bar*, set in a Paris nightclub, there is a short scene where a handsome man asks a dancing couple if he could cut in. The female, expecting his attention, agrees -- only to see him

dance off with her male partner. The star of the movie, Al Jolson, then rolls his eyes and declares, “Boys will be boys!”

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=57HgZLPOdvY>

Lesbian-themed characters were less visible during this time, but one dazzling exception was the German-born actress Marlene Dietrich in *Morocco* (1930), where she gives a face-on kiss to a female audience member in a nightclub, and walks around dressed in a top hat and tails.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cBa-jw8NH5I> (50 sec. – 65 sec.)



Marlene Dietrich: *Morocco*

These transgender elements were downplayed through the rest of her film career. But as a successful nightclub performer later in her life, Dietrich played up bi-sexual content, once again, wearing a top hat and tails. She regularly included the romantic song, “I’ve Grown Accustomed to Her Face” to conclude her show.

Women They Talk About (1933) featured explicit reference to a predatory female inmate.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RJq03LDqrO4>

Cecil B. DeMille included lesbian elements in his film about Christian martyrs in ancient Rome, *The Sign of the Cross* (1934). A wicked pagan woman conducts a seductive dance to entice a noble Christian virgin to commit sin, contrasting Roman sexual depravity with religious virtue ... and the attempt fails, inevitably. The scene in later years was cut from the movie.

The sissy, was something of a breakthrough in 1930s cinema, either serving as a comic addition, or assisting the heterosexual hero's attempts to succeed sexually or romantically with a leading lady. The sissy also managed to outlast the arrival of the Hayes Code.

Sissies represented sophistication and style in high society. Musicals like *The Gay Divorcee* (1934) and *Top Hat* (1935) showcase characters like Edward Everett Horton and Franklin Pangborn. However, these roles presented as fussy middle-aged and single men, with no hint of a sexual or romantic life of their own. In reality, both actors were gay, and Horton enjoyed a lifelong relationship with another man.



Franklin Pangborn (1889-1958)

The arrival of the Motion Picture Code in 1934 brought about sweeping changes. It came as a response to pressure from religious and political groups to “clean up” American movies and to ensure that strong moral values and outcomes prevailed in the script.

The Motion Picture Production Code was the set of industry censorship guidelines that governed the production of the vast majority of United States motion pictures released by major studios from 1930 to 1968. It is also popularly known as the Hays Code, after Hollywood's chief censor of the time, Will H. Hays.

The Motion Pictures Producers and Distributors Association (MPPDA), which later became the Motion Picture Association of America (MPAA), adopted the code in 1930, began effectively enforcing it in 1934, and abandoned it in 1968, in favor of the subsequent, currently-used MPAA film rating system.

The Production Code spelled out what was acceptable and what was unacceptable content for motion pictures produced for a public audience in the US. This included sexual activity of any kind (even between a married couple), inter-racial romance, drug use, punishment for crime, etc. Any direct depiction of LGBTQ characters or same- sex activity was strictly prohibited.

Under the Hays Code, any criminal activity or sexuality that deviated from heterosexual and marital norms *always* had to be punished. *OUTSIDERS, watch out!*

★The 1940s and Film-Noir saw the emergence of ... THE KILLER

The 1940s saw the appearance of murderous homosexuals with Judith Anderson in the Alfred Hitchcock movie *Rebecca* (1940) and Clifton Webb in *Laura* (1944).

Here an elegant and single older man develops an entangled and co-dependent – but apparently sexless -- relationship with a much younger woman (Gene Tierney). When she appears to reject him for a full-fledged – and sexual -- relationship with a macho police detective (Dana Andrews), he goes on a murderous rampage, but does not escape unpunished.

In one scene he conducts an interview from his bathtub with the macho Dana Andrews. Nothing is shown, but the implication is that the naked older man is trying to seduce the straight man. Unsuccessfully, of course.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ThmrifWeltw> (1:22-1:40)

In the 1948 Alfred Hitchcock film, *Rope* – based upon a play by Patrick Hamilton from 1929 -- two young men (John Dall and Farley Granger), murder a former classmate, in their apartment. They commit the crime to launch a mind game: they want to prove their superiority by committing the "perfect murder".

Then they proceed to host a cocktail party, while the body is concealed in a chest in the living room. The dead man was an expected guest, and the party continues while people wonder what became of him. In the end, of course, the killers crumble as James Stewart figures out what has happened, and police sirens signal the justice is finally on the way.

In the 1950 film *Caged*, Hope Emerson (heavysset and tall) plays a mannish, powerful female character. She is the sadistic prison matron who cruelly torments the inmates. She makes mention of a male boyfriend, but consistently comes across as a brutal lesbian – and is knifed to death in the dining hall, while the killer is cheered on by the rest of the prisoners.



Hope Emerson: *Caged* (1950)

Another 1950 film *All About Eve*, which won the Oscar for Best Picture, contains coded LGBTQ characters in the New York theatre world. Eve Harrington (Ann Baxter) and George Saunders (Addison DeWitt) are vicious and amoral in their drive for success and control: *Killer to killer*, they say.

Although allied, there is no indication of a sexual or romantic relationship between them. They are not killers, but outsiders because their destructive and self-serving behavior runs counter to the norms and values of the world in which they live.

You're an improbable person, Eve, and so am I. We have that in common. Also a contempt for humanity, an inability to love or be loved, insatiable ambition – and talent. We deserve each other.

Strangers On A Train (1951) is an Alfred Hitchcock production drawn from a novel by the lesbian writer, Patricia Highsmith. Much of the movie is set in Washington, DC.

The film concerns an implicitly gay character (Robert Walker as Bruno, who is single) who proposes to a prominent tennis star (Farley Granger as Guy, who is seeking a divorce to marry a Senator's daughter) that they trade murders: Bruno will kill Guy's nasty wife, and Guy will kill Bruno's wealthy father.

Guy refuses – but Bruno goes ahead with his share of the proposal, and then seeks to implicate Guy as the man who strangled his wife. Nothing sexual happens, but the chemistry between the two men suggests powerful same-sex attraction. Bruno is clearly murderous, but he displays charm, determination, and stylish dress.

His greeting, "Hi ... Guy" is intentionally seductive. (Naturally, his character does not outlive the movie.)

The 1954 Western, *Johnny Guitar*, highlighted sexual tension between Joan Crawford and Mercedes McCambridge. Joan Crawford plays a straight – but manly and independent – female lead, against Mercedes McCambridge, who is coded as a raging and vengeful lesbian. She dies in a shootout, the out-of-control lesbian killed by the brave and strong heterosexual female.

★In the 1950s – Lily Tomlin said, "**No one was gay in the fifties; they were just shy.**"

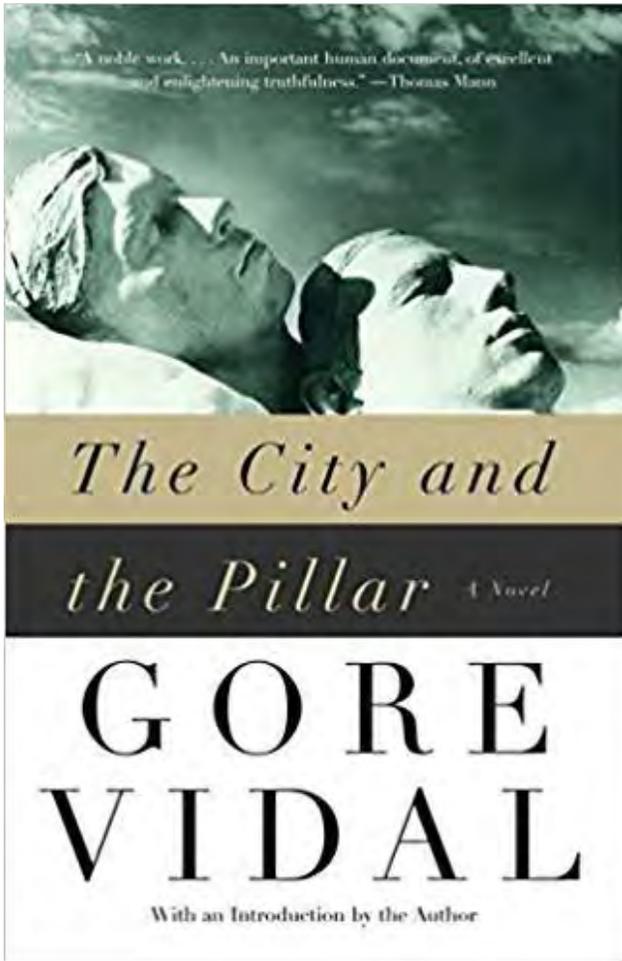


Paul Cadmus – *Night in Bologna* (1958)

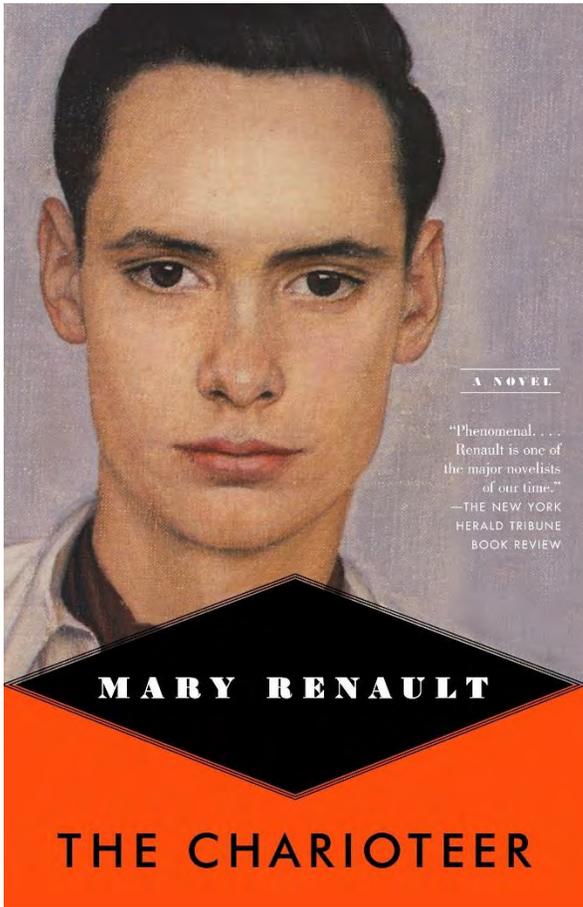


Tom of Finland (Touko Valio Laakson), 1950s – 1990s

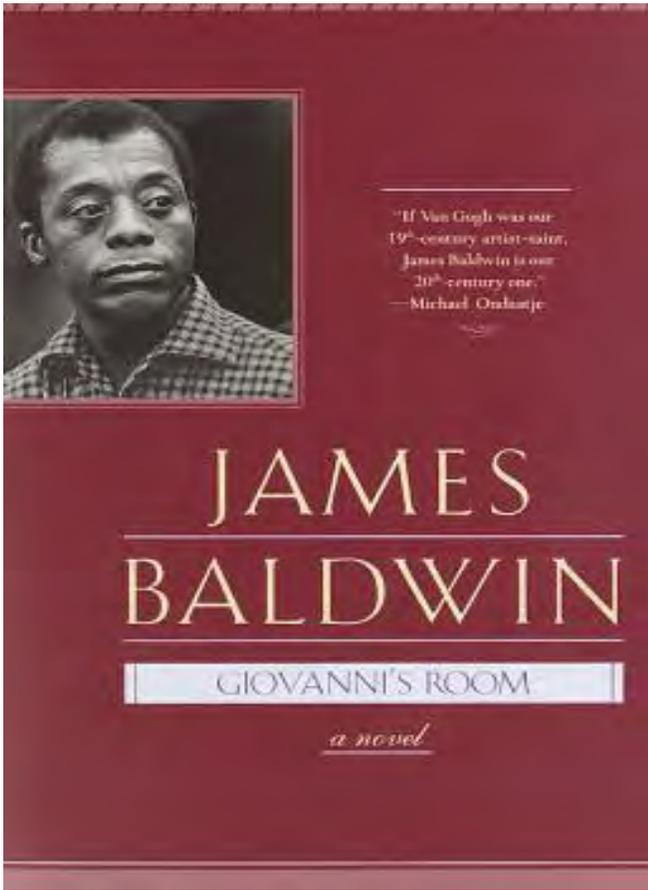
Significant English-language LGBTQ books from the late 1940s and 1950s include:



1948



1953



1956



Psycho (1960)



Psycho: Anthony Perkins

Although it was released in 1960, *Psycho* represents a fusion of two LGBTQ themes that bridge the cinematic period from the 1940s through the 1950s: the killer and the shy young man. Anthony Perkins' performance encompasses both themes as a man with a completely-split personality.

The gender-bending element of the plot was also controversial. The fact that Norman Bates is a cross-dresser is not disclosed until the end of the movie. At the police station, a question is asked about why Bates was dressed that way. The police officer, ignorant of Bates' split personality, bluntly utters that Bates is a transvestite. The psychiatrist corrects him and says, "Not exactly". He explains that Bates believes that he is his own mother when he dresses in her clothes.

While further eroding the influence of the Hay Code, *Psycho* set a new level of acceptability for violence, deviant behavior and sexuality in American films.

The 1953 ground-breaking survey of American sexual mores, The Kinsey Report, created astonishment by showing that a high percentage of men acknowledged experiencing same-sex activity: 37%. The Kinsey Report went on to state that approximately 10% of all males were largely homosexual.

During this period the public was generally aware that many celebrities were, in fact, LGBTQ. These included performers such as Noel Coward, Liberace, and John Gielgud; and well-known authors, such as Somerset Maugham, Truman Capote, Tennessee Williams, and James Baldwin.

The 1950s also saw the first signs of LGBTQ activism in the US, with the formation of LGBTQ organizations such as the Mattachine Society and the Daughters of Bilitis. Both groups sought to advocate for civil rights and job protections ... none of which existed at the time.

In the 1950s, the "sad young man" - the sad and shy homosexual, still an outsider -- appeared in films like *Rebel Without a Cause* from 1955 with Sal Mineo as the gay character. True to form, dies in the end, with his love for James Dean unfulfilled.

Tea and Sympathy was derived from a successful Broadway play by Robert Anderson. In the 1956 film, John Kerr struggles with the accusation of "Sister-Boy" while attending a private boarding school because he has no interest in sports or other male pursuits, but does like the arts.



Deborah Kerr & John Kerr: *Tea and Sympathy* (1956)

To resolve his struggle and prove his heterosexuality, Deborah Kerr intervenes; she begins to remove her clothes at the end of the movie, saying “Years from now when you talk about this -- and you will -- be kind.”

Suddenly Last Summer (1958) was based upon a Tennessee Williams play, in which a seductive Elizabeth Taylor serves as bait for her homosexual cousin, enabling him to meet young men. In a flashback, the young men turn on him because of his sexuality – and kill him.

In 1958 Paul Newman and Elizabeth Taylor starred in another film version of a Tennessee Williams play, *Cat On A Hot Tin Roof*. The film watered down direct implication that the absence of a sexual relations between the couple resulted from the hero’s love for a dead male friend.

Tennessee Williams was unhappy with the cinema result, and the movie failed to win major awards, despite a huge box office. LGBTQ content was still too delicate to handle.



Paul Newman and Elizabeth Taylor: *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* (1958)

Then, in 1959 director Bill Wilder put top stars Tony Curtis and Jack Lemmon into drag for almost the entire length of a comedy set in the 1920s. In *Some Like It Hot* two male protagonists go into female disguise in order to escape the Chicago Mob.



Tony Curtis & Jack Lemmon: *Some Like It Hot* (1959)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1wP9Mu1NKXk> (17-50)

There's often a tendency in such work for a man-dressed-as-a-women to overplay his masculinity, and how the role does not fit. But Tony Curtis and Jack Lemmon make vigorous efforts to behave like women. Their lives depend upon successfully playing the transgender roles – especially when members of the Chicago Mob show up at their hotel in Florida.

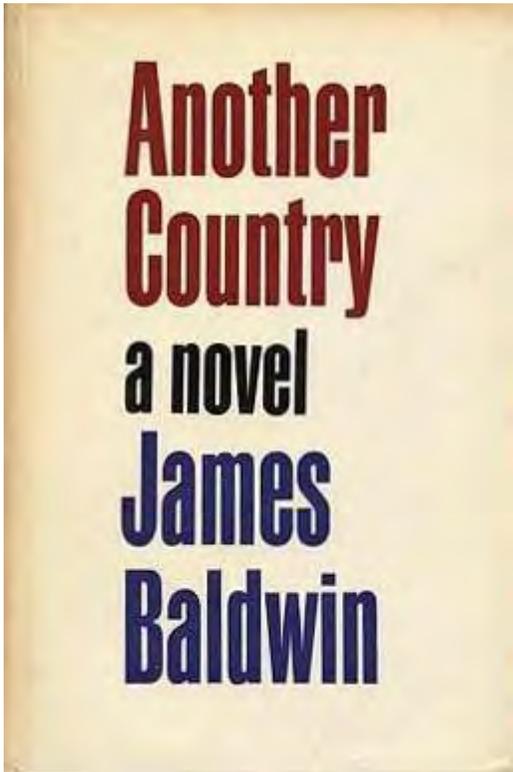
Curtis manages to retrieve his heterosexuality by wooing the beautiful Marilyn Monroe. Jack Lemmon, however, begins to live the part – being dressed as a woman reveals another side of himself – and winds up entangled with an older millionaire, played by Joe E. Brown.

The movie concludes with Jack Lemmon trying to explain why marriage between them won't work. Finally, he is compelled to deliver the truth, ripping off his wig to declare: "I'm a man!" ... only to have Joe E. Brown dismiss that obstacle with the last line, "Well, nobody's perfect."

Some Like It Hot made \$25 million at the box office -- a huge sum for the time.

★In the 1960s, the LGBTQ presence began to emerge as fact, not just a suggestion: the sexual revolution impacted film as it did society.

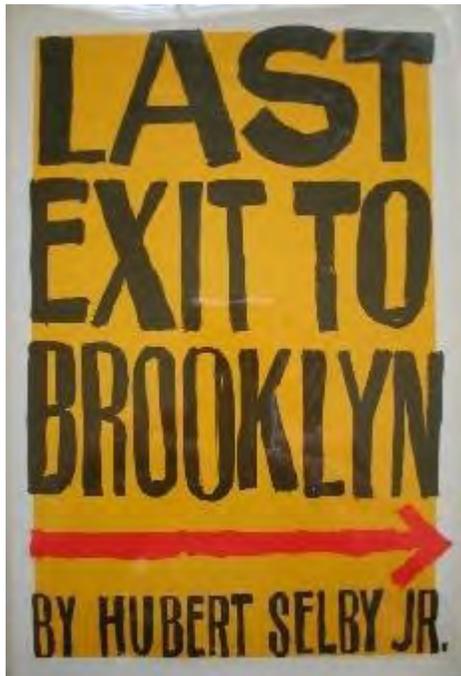
Significant English-language LGBTQ books from the 1960s include:



1962



1963



1963



1968

One of the major epics set in ancient times included a gay subtext. *Spartacus* (1960) offers a scene where a Roman senator (Laurence Olivier) attempts to seduce a handsome slave (Tony Curtis). This

section was cut from *Spartacus*, and only restored years later. Again, the contrast is between freedom-loving, virtuous slaves and decadent Romans.

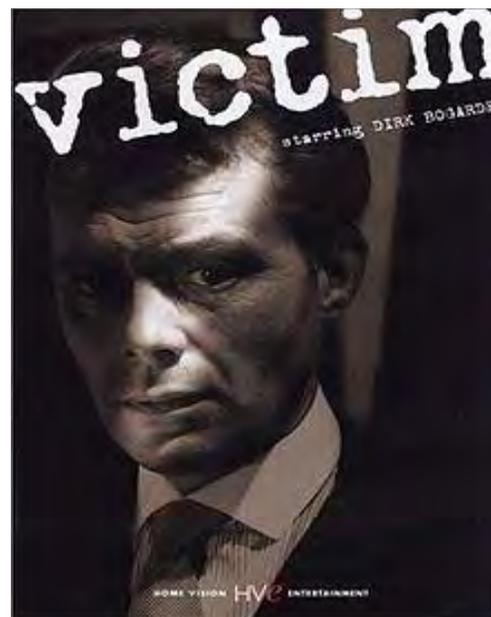


Tony Curtis and Laurence Olivier: *Spartacus* (1960)

Of course, in ancient Rome such efforts to achieve mutual consent would have been unnecessary: masters had total control over their male and female slaves, and could take whatever sexual liberties they pleased.



Dirk Bogarde: *Victim* (1961)



In the 1961 British production *Victim*, Dirk Bogarde portrayed a blackmail victim who decides to push back against the ring that has exploited and intimidated others in London. He is willing to risk the truth to be set free. The movie was the first English-language film to use the word “homosexual” on-screen, and also included a scene of graffiti vandalism, **FARR IS QUEER** scrawled across the house.

In the UK the film was "recommended for adults only," an X-rating which usually applied to pornography or horror at the time. In the US, the movie was considered so shocking that it was refused a seal of approval from the American Motion Picture Production Code, resulting in a limited release to only a few theatres in New York. (When it was re-issued on VHS in 1986, it was rated PG-13!)

A landmark movie was 1962's *Advise & Consent*, where Don Murray plays the US Senator with a history of gay experiences. He faces blackmail by a fellow member of Congress and commits suicide. At one point, he makes a visit to a gay bar in Washington – the first time such a setting had been shown in an American movie. The clientele is stereotypical: flamboyant and effeminate.



Don Murray & Inga Swenson: *Advise & Consent* (1962)



But, interestingly, the film showed the blackmailer as being condemned and ostracized by his Congressional colleagues; the dead senator is seen as a tragic victim.

That same year, Shirley MacLaine is accused in *The Children's Hour*, of being in a lesbian relationship ... and also kills herself. The original story was a play by Lillian Hellman from the 1930s; the implied content was so scandalous at the time that the play was banned in many cities.



On the other hand, *Sodom and Gomorrah* (1963) -- which would have been expected to show divine judgment for some kind of LGBTQ activity -- deleted such suggestions: the ancient biblical cities were destroyed because of dancing girls, torture, and the mistreatment of slaves!



However, the picture does provide one memorable quote, when the evil Queen Bera welcomes everybody with, “Hebrews and Sodomites: Greetings!”

In the 1964 film *The Best Man*, drawn from a play by Gore Vidal recently revived on Broadway, an unscrupulous and vicious conservative candidate for president (Chuck Robertson) is accused of having been involved in a gay relationship while in World War II. He refutes the charges, but loses his presidential bid.

The movie was noteworthy for using the word “homosexual” in the dialogue again – which went beyond the traditional pattern of simply hinting at a character’s orientation.



Cliff Robertson: *The Best Man* (1964)

Other films with discreet LGBTQ characters produced during the first half of the 1960s include *Walk on the Wild Side*, *Lawrence of Arabia*, *The Haunting*, and even *Goldfinger*. LGBTQ content was featured with *Inside Daisy Clover* (Robert Redford is the bi-sexual lead), *Reflections in a Golden Eye* (Marlon Brando plays a closeted Army officer), *The Sergeant*, and the documentaries *Portrait of Jason* and *The Queen*.



Marlon Brando: *Reflections in a Golden Eye* (1967)



The Sergeant (1968)

From the 1960s British films with LGBTQ elements include *A Taste of Honey*, *The L-Shaped Room*, *The Leather Boys*, and *Darling*. The content of British cinema reflected more progressive attitudes in England, beginning with the government's Wolfenden Report in 1957, which recommended that consensual same-sex activity between adults should be de-criminalized. Ten years later legislation was finally passed to that effect by the British Parliament. (And in 2013, the UK approved same-sex marriage nationwide.)

Noteworthy in 1966 is a well-to-do, cool, and elegant lesbian member of *The Group*. Her role was filled by Candice Bergen ("Lakey"). A film about college classmates during the 1930s, it was based on a best-selling novel by Mary McCarthy. Lakey's lesbian identity is explicit, without apology. She returns from Europe with an aristocratic lover, and while her friends are shocked, they still conduct themselves politely. Good manners win out over any bias.

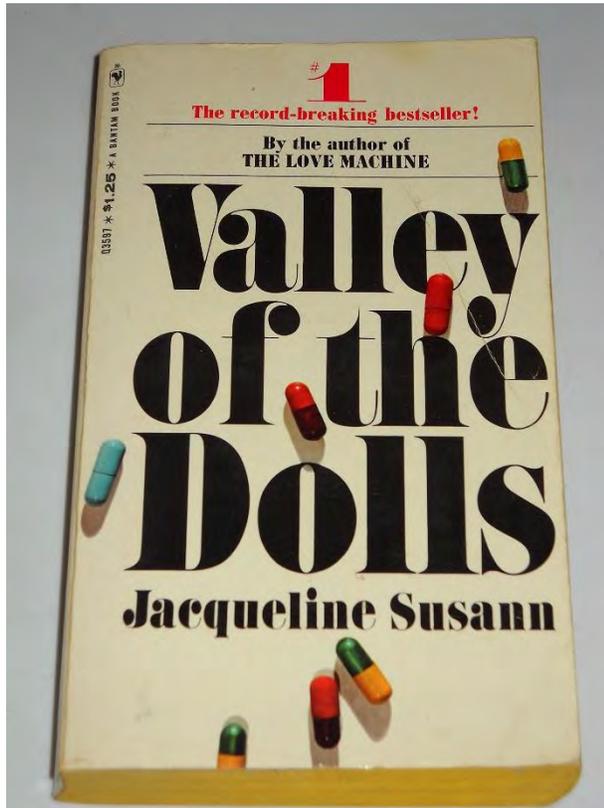
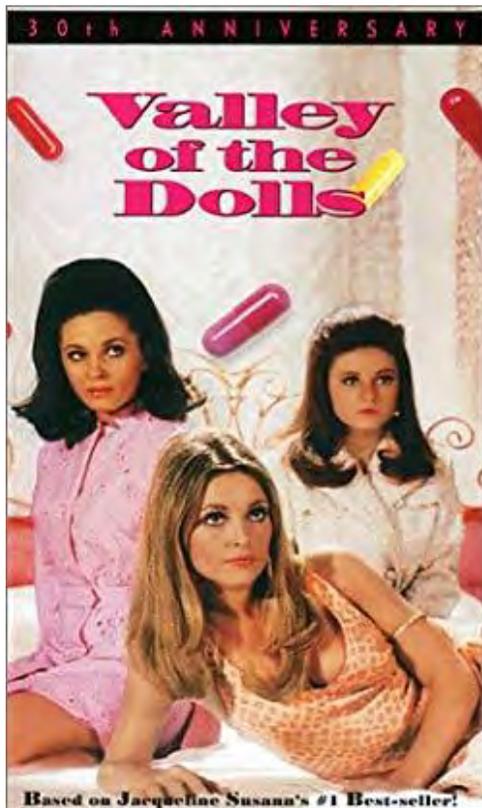


Candice Bergen & Lidia Prochnika: *The Group* (1966)

Larry Hagman plays the brutal alcoholic and womanizing husband to one of the characters in the movie – and it is his wife’s loyal and lesbian friend who delivers the come-uppance at the ending of the movie. (The word “lesbian” is used in the film, however – and Larry Hagman actually called Candice Bergen “Sapphic.”)

As films throughout the 1960s began to push boundaries, LGBTQ content increased. But some films remained very cautious about what they discussed or displayed.

The best-selling novel *Valley of the Dolls* was also made into a hit 1967 film. Written by Jacqueline Susann, it was a splashy best-seller about three stage stars, their love affairs, and drug use (“dolls”). Much of its popularity came from what was considered daring sexual content. However, a lesbian subplot was removed entirely when the film was made, and the only LGBTQ content was disparaging references to “fags.” Ironically, *Valley of the Dolls* now enjoys iconic status in the gay community!



The Fox (1968) was drawn from a novel by D.H. Lawrence. Sandy Dennis and Anne Heyward make a relationship together in the Canadian woods, only to be unexpectedly challenged by a macho heterosexual portrayed by Keir Dullea. His arrival ultimately tears them apart: Anne Heyward begins a sexual relationship with him, and Sandy Dennis loses her life ... symbolically struck down by a big upright tree. However, at the end, it is unclear whether Anne Heyward will find happiness with a man.



The 1968 movie *The Lion in Winter* was drawn from a successful Broadway play by James Goldman. The fictional story concerns the conflicts, ambitions, and schemes of the English royal family during a Christmas gathering in the year 1183.

Among those present is the king's oldest son, Richard – later to become the famed monarch, Richard the Lionhearted (with Anthony Hopkins in the film role). Although the model of a manly mediaeval warrior, he harbors a passionate love for the young French king, Philippe (Timothy Dalton), with whom he had a previous relationship. The Christmas gathering brings them together for the first time in several years.

- *French King Philippe* (Timothy Dalton) “You never write.”
- *English Prince, and later King, Richard* (Anthony Hopkins): “To anyone... I never wrote because I thought you’d never answer. You got married?”
- *Philippe* “Does that make a difference?”
- *Richard* “Doesn’t it?”
- *Philippe* “I’ve spent two years on every street in hell.”
- *Richard* “That’s odd ... I never saw you there. You haven’t said you love me?”

While Richard hopes to rekindle the relationship, Philippe brutally discloses to Richard’s father that he was victimized. While the romantic aspect humanizes Richard’s character, Philippe is shown as cynical and calculating, using Richard’s desire serve his own ends.



Anthony Hopkins & Timothy Dalton: *The Lion in Winter* (1968)

This gay content is overshadowed in the larger drama with an all-star cast, but was presented simply as part of the story. In fact, the English royal family seem to find nothing unusual about it!

And sometimes LGBTQ themes were promoted in advertising when the film really contained no such content. *Secret Ceremony* (1968) suggested that it was about a lesbian affair between Elizabeth Taylor and Mia Farrow. (“It is time to speak of unspoken things.”) In fact, it was about a co-dependent relationship between a mother who had lost her child and child who had lost her mother.

During 1969-1972 numerous movies with explicit LGBTQ characters were produced. Among them are the Italian film *The Damned*; *The Staircase* from England (Richard Burton and Rex Harrison are an aging pair of lovers), *The Music Lovers*, also from England and directed by Ken Russell (Tchaikovsky struggles with his sexuality, with Richard Chamberlain as the composer); the German production, *The Bitter Tears of Petra von Kant*; and *Fortune and Men’s Eyes*, from Canada (set in a prison – where Don Johnson becomes a sex slave).

© 1954 MGM

© 1954 MGM



The Killing of Sister George from 1969 tells the story of an aging British soap opera star, caught in a downward spiral of alcoholism and a complicated relationship with her younger lover (Susannah York). The star loses both her job and lover to a predatory TV executive, played by Coral Browne.



The Killing of Sister George received an X-rating for explicit and revolutionary lesbian content, including a love-making scene between Susannah York and Coral Browne, but the movie did not sell successfully with US audiences.

That year *Midnight Cowboy* was also released -- and went on to win the Oscar for Best Picture, an amazing outcome for an X-rated movie. The movie's British director was John R. Schlesinger, who was openly-gay; he later directed *Sunday Bloody Sunday*, which featured an explicit LGBTQ plot line.



Jon Voigt & Dustin Hoffman: *Midnight Cowboy*

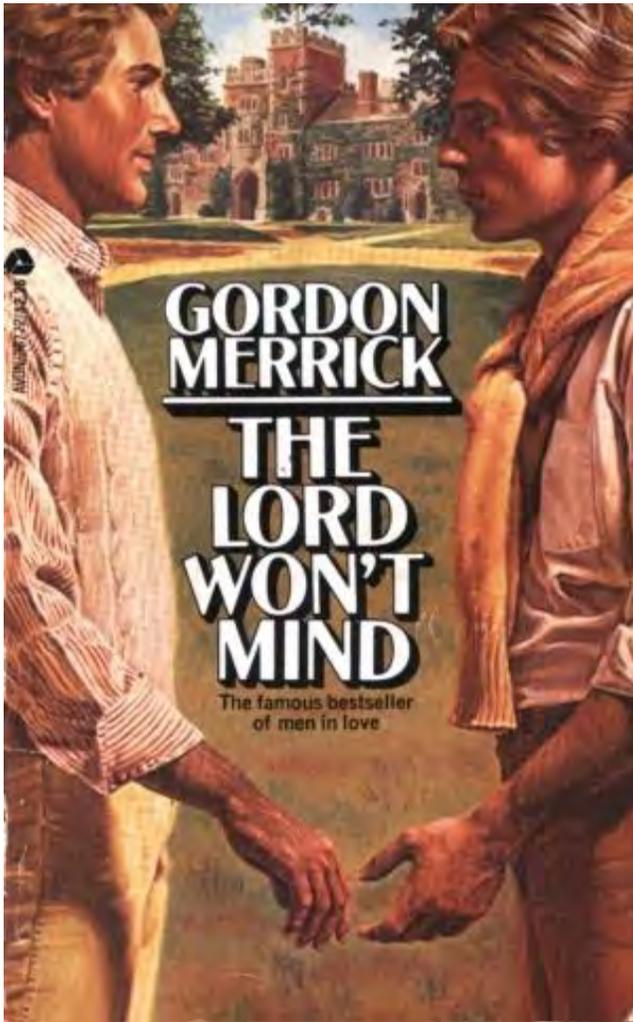


Jon Voigt & Brenda Vaccaro

Midnight Cowboy was basically a bromance between Jon Voigt and Dustin Hoffman, not a relationship of two male lovers. But the film contained gay content – a naïve hustler (Jon Voigt), who had been brutalized by his experiences back in Texas, fails in his efforts to get rich by making love to New York women who will pay for his services. He resorts to soliciting sex with men instead.

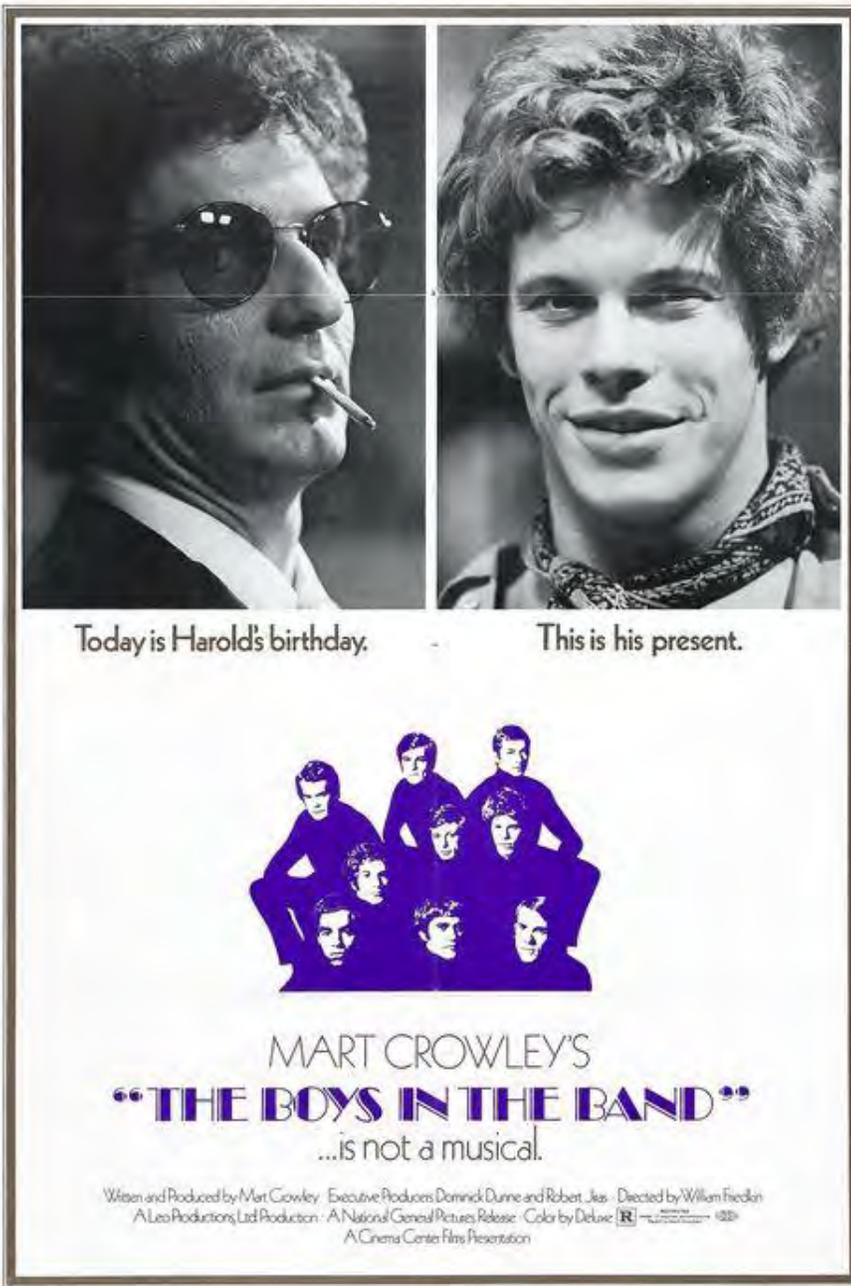
He is also accused, playfully, of being gay when he cannot perform sexually with one woman (Brenda Vaccaro). The accusation drives him to prove that he is straight by virtually raping her.

★In the 1970s, the LGBTQ presence in film became visible and even assertive ...



This 1970 novel spent 16 weeks on the *New York Times Bestseller List*, and became part of a trilogy written by the author. “I say, if it’s love, the Lord won’t mind. There’s enough hate in the world.”

Also that year, *The Boys in the Band* was a ground-breaking film drawn from an off-Broadway play by Mart Crowley. (It has recently been revived on Broadway.)



The story pulled together various gay male stereotypes in a birthday party in Manhattan. The arrival of a “straight” guest throws the gathering into turmoil. Fueled by alcohol and self-loathing, the characters reveal themselves, their loves, and their fears. These disclosures indicate that life will change for some of the characters, but not for others.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6vRqfZFy15c> (9:50-10:50)



The Devils (1971) is an extravagant, lurid film also from Kurt Russell, loosely based upon an historical episode in France during the 1600s. It was considered so sacrilegious that it earned X-ratings in the US and the UK, and was even banned in other countries.



Vanessa Redgrave: *The Devils* (1971)

A parish priest (Oliver Reed) is accused of the instrument for possession by the devil of an entire convent of nuns. After a series of outrageous exorcisms, the priest is condemned a burned at the stake. A sub-text in the movie depicts *the-king-as-a-queen*: King of France Louis XIII (Graham Armitage) is a flamboyant homosexual, who opens the film by presenting himself semi-nude on stage in a drag show for the court.



The Devils (1971)



Björn Andrésen & Dirk Bogarde: *Death in Venice* (1971)

Based on the novel by Thomas Mann, *Death in Venice* from 1971 depicts a writer (Dirk Bogarde) visiting Venice while a cholera epidemic takes hold, and confronting two of life's choices: to follow reason or passion. He becomes obsessed with an androgynous young boy (Bjorn Andresen). They do not speak, but only exchange looks.

The writer seeks to recover his youth as his obsession for the young boy grows. At the end, his fixation, his failure to leave the city, dooms him. He dies on the beach gazing at this elusive vision of physical beauty and impossible love.



Cabaret (1972) is probably the best-known and most long-lasting of films from this time, due to its great box office success and the many awards it received. The film was based upon a successful stage musical, which was drawn from a book by the openly-gay British writer, Christopher Isherwood.



Helmut Griem, Michael York, and Liza Minelli: *Cabaret* (1972)



Joel Grey: *Cabaret*

Cabaret is set in early 1930s Berlin, at the end of the Weimar Republic, as Nazism began to emerge as powerful political and social force in Germany. While no explicit LGBTQ activity is shown, the lead male character (Michael York) admits to being bisexual. He and his lover (Liza Minelli) have both wound up in the bed of another man (Helmut Griem). The original musical only hinted at the LGBTQ content, but subsequent stage versions have become more explicit about the lead character as a gay man.

And the Master of Ceremonies (Joel Grey) in the shabby nightclub is portrayed as a drag queen. He earned an Oscar for this performance.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hBIB8RAJEEc> (0:00-:30)



Peter Finch, Murray Head, Glenda Jackson: *Sunday Bloody Sunday* (1971)

Directed by John R. Schlesinger and a British production, *Sunday Bloody Sunday* (1971), tells the story of a young bisexual designer (Murray Head) and his simultaneous love affairs with a consultant (Glenda Jackson) and a Jewish doctor (Peter Finch). The film is noteworthy for being one of the first mainstream films with an LGBTQ-focused story.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fAiOBFhs8As> (39-1:22)

What stands out is how Finch's character is shown as normal and well adjusted. The film ends with an understanding by the man and woman -- who both shared love with Murray Head -- that time has come to move on. Daniel Hirsh (Peter Finch), facing the camera, says at the conclusion:

People say to me, he never made you happy. And I say, but I am happy. Apart from missing him. All my life I've been looking for someone courageous and resourceful. He's not it. But something. We were something.

SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY on LGBTQ Film History

- **The Celluloid Closet ... Vito Russo (1995)**
- **Open Secret: Gay Hollywood: 1928-1998 ... David Ehrenreich (1998)**
- **Behind The Screen: How Gays And Lesbians Shaped Hollywood, 1910-1969 ... William J. Mann (2001)**
- **Screened Out: Playing Gay In Hollywood From Edison To Stonewall ... Richard Barrios (2005)**
- **Out At The Movies: A History Of Gay Cinema ... Steven Paul Davies & Forward by Simon Callow (2008)**
- **How To Be Gay ... David M. Halperin (2012)**