Proustian Desire and the Queering of Masculinity in Gay Cinematic Romance

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Abstract:

Twenty-five gay films produced from 1987 to 2011 in Europe, the US, Argentina and Israel form the basis for this study on masculinity in gay romantic drama. The shared plot motif is a self-assumed straight man realizing that he is homosexual or fluid in his sexuality. The narrative trope of awakening from the folk tale "Sleeping Beauty" (1657) by Charles Perrault, and its revision in late 19th century feminist literature, is the common dramatic component of these gay films. There are similarities with early feminist literature in the representation of the repressive nature of social structures and the fracturing of hetero-normative gender expectations. The article argues that even as some of the hetero-normative conventions of the romance as a genre are upheld, because two straight-looking men perform both roles, masculinity is problematized and a queering takes place at the level of temperament

Keywords: Film studies, gay romance, queer theory, Proustian desire

Proust'ta Arzu ve Gey Sinematik Romantizm'inde Erkeklik

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Özet:

1987-2011 yılları arasında Avrupa'da, Birleşik Devletler'de, Arjantin'de ve İsrail'de, gey romantik dramasında erkeklik çalışmasını temel alan 25 gey filmi çekildi. Bu filmlerin olay örgüsündeki ortak motif, karşı cinse ilgi duyduğunu zanneden bir erkeğin, eşcinsel ya da cinselliğinde akışkan olduğunu fark etmesidir. Charles Perrault'nun (1657) zihin açıcı hikayesi "Uyuyan Güzel" ve onun 19. yüzyıl feminist yazınındaki revizyonu, bu gey filmlerinin ortak dramatik unsurudur. Sosyal yapıların baskıcı doğasını konu alan erken feminist yazın ile hetero-normatif toplumsal cinsiyet beklentilerinin kırılması arasında benzerlikler mevcuttur. Bu makale, romantizmin üslup olarak tasdik edilen bazı hetero-normatif geleneklerinde bile, zira zıtcinsel görünüme sahip iki erkek her iki rolü de icra eder, erkekliğin sorunsallaştırıldığını ve kuirliğin mizaç seviyesinde vuku bulduğunu öne sürmektedir.

Anahtar kelimeler: Film çalışmaları, gey romantizmi, kuir teori, Proust'ta arzu

The boy who has been reading erotic poetry or looking at indecent pictures, if he then presses his body against a schoolfellow's, imagines himself only to be communing with him in an identical desire for a woman. How should he suppose that he is not like everybody else when he recognises the substance of what he feels on reading Mme. de Lafayette, Racine, Baudelaire, Walter Scott, at a time when he is still too little capable of observing himself to take into account what he has added from his own store to the picture, and that if the sentiment be the same the object differs, that what he desires is Rob Roy, and not Diana Vernon?

– Marcel Proust[1]

I was determined that in fiction anyway two men should fall in love, and remain in it for the ever and ever that fiction allows…

– E.M. Forster[2]

Proustian homosexual desire is hidden desire; from others certainly but sometimes even from the self.[3] The fourth volume of Marcel Proust's *In Search of Lost Time,* Sodom and Gomorrah or Cities of the Plain, is fascinating for its story of closeted male homosexuality and the usefulness of female friends. In *Deceit, Desire and The Novel*, René Girard develops this element of Proustian homosexual desire as a generalized human desire and suggests that desire itself is mimetic, or imitative, and is therefore only accessible indirectly through the desire of others. This interpretation can, in Proust, be directly linked to the vicarious pleasure achieved by "the first sort" of homosexual men by watching straight women with their implied straight lovers (26).

[1] See *The Remembrance of Things Past,* Vol. 4: 27.
[2] Quoted by David Leavitt in the Introduction to the Penguin 2005 edition of *Maurice* (xxviii).
[3] I would like to express my gratitude and appreciation for the referees at *Masculinities*, and the participants in the GLQ panels at the PCA conference in Washington, DC in March 2013. In particular, I would like to thank Bruce Drushel for organizing the panels and bringing in so many interesting scholars and students, and Pamela Demory and Scott Stoddart who shared a panel with me. Other participants also provided valuable insights for this article, sometimes unknowingly, namely Thomas Piontek, Alex Malanych, and Traci Abbott.

Proust, however, also refers to a "second sort" of homosexual man who "seeks out women who love other women; who can procure for them a young man." Here neither the women nor the young men they bring into the homosexual man's orbit are straight. The stated pleasure is not vicarious even if it is to some extent shared, and the stated danger is jealousy rather than envy – and envy is Girard's focus so again, his work fails to apply because it lifts to the abstract what begins in Proust as a corporeal desire. In this article, my point of departure in Proust is specifically the expression of homosexual desire as an embodied craving for the male (and masculine) other as an achievable if socially complicated emotional and physical appetite. This article explores how there exists a genre of modern gay-themed films that represent the acknowledgement of homosexual desire in men as a gradual process. Full awareness is portrayed in these films as impeded in their consciousness by the social dominance of heterosexuality. These cinematic narratives can, and should be called, gay awakening films.

Within gay and lesbian studies and gay fiction living under the predominance and oppressive naturalization of heterosexuality is identified as a source of shame, and as potentially constrictive to developing a gay/lesbian identity.[4] My narrative point of reference in Proust is the elaboration of the young man's emergent consciousness of his desire in the first forty pages of Sodom and Gomorrah. This part is set apart from the rest of the narrative as Part One and was published separately in 1921. It is easy to elide this initial stage in Proust's story of the young "Galatea, awakened to life, in the unconscious mass of this male body" (24). The reference to the Galatea myth is to the sculptor Pygmalion and how his statue, Galatea, is brought to life and he marries her. The emphasis in Proust is on a woman-like (this is his descriptor) desire for another male and how its awakening within a man is like going from being in a state similar to a statue, a pretend or disconnected person, to being alive. Though the narrator vacillates in stating that the

[4] See e.g. Downs 1-6. While Downs accepts the existence of the homosexual-heterosexual binary, other scholars are suspicious of the dichotomy itself as inevitable and of single identities as desirable, see e.g. Bersani 34-35; Butler 1-5, 27-31; Reeser 77-81.

young man is both aware and unaware of his sexual inclinations to other men, there are several illustrations of obliviousness. In the reference to the boy who reads "erotic poetry" and misidentifies his own object of desire (27), there is, for example, room to interpret the "unconscious" state as ongoing and also as a product of socially ingrained heteronormative expectations. The narrator continues a little further on by suggesting that the young man will seek out and find male companionship and connection, but his sexual and romantic desire will be misdirected towards women (25). I would argue that the state of obliviousness or self-delusion described in this section in Proust can be linked to the first stage of a recurring pattern in gay-themed cinematic romances and that this pattern has strong cultural roots in the awakening plot. The homosexual variation of this narrative structure can be traced to the fairy tale "Sleeping Beauty" but also to Kate Chopin's feminist novel *The Awakening*.

The connection to "Sleeping Beauty" and *The Awakening*, in the films in this study, is the nature of romance as a catalyst to a different state of consciousness. Traditionally romance films are chick flicks. Men are presumed to prefer action over romance; thriller over drama. David Halpern argues that gay romance as a genre is inimical to gay eroticism (Halpern 97), while Vito Russo presents the claim that, "It is an old stereotype, that homosexuality has to do only with sex while heterosexuality is multifaceted and embraces love and romance" (Russo 132). Halpern focuses his ire on Ang Lee's *Brokeback Mountain* but the statement is contradicted by the over-representation of romance films about men and for men being produced by independent and usually male filmmakers that do not focus on sex or eroticism liberated from love or romance. Literally hundreds of these new gay romantic dramas have been produced in the last thirteen years, and several of these newer films have been voted as audience favorites without reference to their genre categorization at LBGTQ festivals and other film festivals. A multitude of questions are raised by these films, where gay sex is set within the frame of the well-established romance which, as a genre, is entrenched with hetero-normative conventions. What role do these gay

romantic films play in reproducing gay culture? In particular, what types of masculinities are portrayed and what is their relationship to traditional masculinity which is still such an integral part of straight romance? And what happens to the conventions of the romance as a genre when there are two male leads?

The first affirmative gay romance was Arthur Hiller's *Making Love*. It was produced for American television in 1982. This film portrays a self-assumed straight (and married) man, Zach (Michael Ontkean), who comes to accept that he is homosexual. He is awakened through meeting a man, Bart (Harry Hamlin), who is out and arguably comfortable with his sexuality. They share a strong mutual attraction. Thomas Piontek joins Vito Russo's in the attitude shared by gay critics at the release of this film in judging it as "timid and formulaic" (*Queering Gay and Lesbian Studies* 128).[5] I would argue that this judgment disqualifies the film's established genre, the romance. Piontek's objection can be qualified in part by a specific opposing cultural frame; one that celebrates eroticism and sexual exploration rather than commitment and domesticity as the goal of romantic love. There is a character in the film that represents a more liberated homosexuality. Bart represents gay men who simply refuse to accept a heteronormative regulatory framework for relationships. Even though, he is narratively rejected as immature and ultimately as losing out on the value of a committed relationship, it can be argued that this negative portrait is still an early attempt to show that this choice, this alternate homosexual lifestyle exists. Bart character deserves a second look if assimilation is to be problematized.

Roberta Flack's title track, "Making Love" also raises an important issue for modern queer studies in questioning the necessity of identifying as solely homo- or heterosexual as the lyrics claim that emotional attachment knows no sex limitations. At the end of the film, Zach retains a strong companionate affection for his ex-wife and is portrayed as missing her even as his new relationship is portrayed as stable and happy. Thus to claim that this film is "timid" does not hold

[5] The reference in Piontek is to Vito Russo.

water. It still has provocative ideas to offer. The romance genre is traditionally conservative in terms of its end goal, the HEA (happy ever after) ending, but it leaves loose ends that raise important questions. Directors and screenwriters are not only adopting the basic heterosexual plot but from an early stage adapted it to queer issues of sexuality and gender.

It is perhaps advisable at the outset to stress that I am not attempting to talk about actual gay men or gay identity in the individual sense but rather about gay culture and more particularly of cinematic narrative representations as a discursive form of cultural identity formation. 'Gay culture' is defined in this article in the same way that Halpern defines it, as a collection of conventionally attributed practices, not as a group of individuals, and that "most any statement one can make about a culture will turn out to be false as soon as it is applied to individuals" (129). In a similar move, Piontek differentiates between thinking about himself as homosexual and as gay (2006:52). Halpern usefully states that heterosexuals can and do "participate" in gay culture (135). I would add that in participating in gay culture, heterosexuals also reproduce it. This highlights the need for a critical attitude towards gay film. This is a valid consideration in this study as the sexuality of all the screenplay writers and directors, is not public knowledge – even where there is public conjecture.

This article is based on a segment of the gay romance market. Harry M. Benshoff and Sean Griffin identify three: "Weekend in the Hamptons" or group cast films, comedies and films representing "'straight' characters that turn out to 'actually' be gay" (270). This article centers on the latter though their characterization of the plot seems unfair and even demeaning. In this article, I will be dealing with a few of the twenty-five films that I have found that deal with man who assumes he is straight coming to terms with homosexuality in himself or in others. The films were produced in Europe, the US, Argentina and Israel from

1982 to 2011, though the majority were made after 2005.[6] The plot can be neutrally rephrased as the self-assumed straight man, who has accepted an imposed heterosexual schema (and tried to make it fit) but falls in love with another man. Due to the strength of this unexpected attraction, he must deal with doubts about his sexuality. The character may turn out to realize that he is gay, fluid or straight. Bisexuality is rare as a conclusion in these films, though it features as a stage in adjusting to homosexuality (explicitly in e.g. *Back Soon* (2007), and *Four More Years* (2010)).

The films are all post-Stonewall and the initiation of the public debate on civil rights and sexuality, but not completely past the Proustian idea that gay men suffer from the social inculcation of heteronormativity so that in their hearts they desire straight men.[7] Stated differently, this anxious desire reflects the overwhelming influence and fetishization of hetero-normative masculinity. It is a reflection of gay cultural (not individual) anxiety about being homosexual that is alleviated by the revelation of homosexuality as also present in the overtly masculine Other.[8]

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[6] *Making Love* (1982), *Partners* (1982), *Maurice* (1987), *Coming Out* (1989), *Beautiful Thing* (1996), *Regular Guys* (1996), *In and Out* (1997), *Edge of Seventeen* (1998), *Brokeback Mountain* (2005), *Coffee Date* (2006), *Shelter* (2007), *Back Soon* (2007), *Kiss the Bride* (2007), *Dog Tags* (2008), *Mulligans* (2008), *The Art of Being Straight* (2008), *Eyes Wide Open* (2010), *Plan B* (2009), *Humpday* (2009), Four More Years (2010), *The One* (2011), *Harvest* (2011), *Private Romeo* (2011), *Longhorns* (2011) and *Walk a Mile in My Pradas* (2011).

[7] Stonewall Inn in Greenwich Village in New York City was a meeting place for homosexual men in the late 1960s. In 1969, the openly and actively protested police raids. The resulting riots would lead to the formation of two gay rights activist organizations (Gay Liberation Front and Gay Activists Alliance) and the birth of three newspapers (*Gay*, *Come Out!* and *Gay Power*) that would promote sexual rights. See Stephen Engel's "Making a Minority" (Richardson and Seidman 395).

[8] Anxiety about being homosexual is still a relevant topic in American gay film but is rarely so harshly expressed in terms of self-hatred as in Howard's annihilation of Michael at the end of *The Boys in the Band* (1971) though it can be said to form a strong underlying motif in gay suicide films such as *Prayers for Bobby* (2009).

A Closer Look at the Awakening Trope

The basic plot motif in the films in this study uses one of the oldest tropes in Western narrative, the awakening trope. Zach in Jonah Markowitz's *Shelter* (2007) literally wakes up after a night spent at Shaun's and remembers that he let a man kiss him and fell asleep with him. He now has to deal with what that means. Logan (Windham Beacham) in Rob Williams's *Back Soon* (2007) wakes up naked in bed with a new male friend, Gil (Matthew Montgomery), and remembers that they had sex the night before. He has to come to terms with that. The same pattern repeats itself in Damion Dietz's *Dog Tags* (2008), Tova Magnusson-Norling's *Four More Years* (2010) and, of course, Ang Lee's *Brokeback Mountain* (2005). In other films the trope is less literal but its presence is still sub-textually there as realization dawns and is often linked to pondering on a bed even if there is no literal moment of awakening as the main protagonist begins to face his desire for another man.

In terms of romance, the awakening trope is directly linked to Charles Perrault's classic story "Sleeping Beauty" written in 1657. The most basic feature of this folk tale and thus of the awakening trope is that someone is awakened by someone else, whether metaphorically or literally. In the folk tale, the sleep state is literal, and the sex roles are determined: the prince rescues and kisses the princess, she awakens and they are married. His role is active. Hers is passive. Because of its direct links to marriage, the kiss has been read allegorically as the awakening of sexual desire, and the trope is now a cultural commonplace for the experience of sexually becoming aware of one's own desire for others.

Importantly from a gender and masculinity point of view, in the classic narrative, the protagonist needs someone else to wake them up. This traditional action motif recurs in the gay awakening films and is what makes them different from Tennyson Bardwell's *Dorian Blues* (2004). Dorian (Michael McMillan) reflects back on the moment of realization that he is gay but it comes to him when he is alone and even though the visual triggers the metaphor of awakening as he literally

wakes up in the middle of the night, he is still not the passive protagonist of a story that alludes to "Sleeping Beauty". Rather, the narrative trope that is activated by what happens next is the discovery trope. He actively seeks out ways to come to terms with and explore his sexuality. The story is traditionally masculine in its plot thrust even as the masculinity in the film is full of self-irony and gay cultural self-reflection. Romance is secondary and the story closes with a sense that even as Dorian has accepted his homosexuality and difference, he still has things to learn about himself before he will have the gay romance that he is looking for.

As a historical narrative, the romantic folk tale is heterosexual but Vladimir Propp's analysis of the component parts of folk tales points to a limited number of roles and functions (actions) that form the basic structure for all the tales. Both the roles and the actions are now referred to as motifs when they are found in later stories that can be read as alluding to elements in these earlier narratives. It does not take much to see that the stories can be pared down further and that the narrative roles can be stripped of their sex attribution. Biological sex is not significant for the deep structural pattern of any given tale. What is more basic is the roles or functions that the characters fill, and the relationship between that narrative function (hero, victim, lover, beloved) and the actions performed. What is revealed is the naturalization of gendered roles within the folk tales. Certain roles are associated with certain character traits. Men and older women are associated with planning, pursuit and proactivity. Younger women are associated with passivity, needing protection and rescue. This is significant because the stories are part of the backbone of Western culture and recur in the deep structure of many of the narratives written today – the awakening genre in gay romance is the current case in point.

Homosexual Masculinities

In his groundbreaking book, *Masculinities*, R.W. Connell proposed that recognizing "diversity in masculinities is not enough. We must also recognize the *relations* between the different kinds of masculinity:

relations of alliance, dominance and subordination" (37). Gay romances explore these relations and when "Sleeping Beauty" is used as the master plot, the casting of the main roles matters from a masculinity perspective – specifically whether the actors physically conform to subconscious gender expectation in relation to their narrative roles or not. Physically, visually, Walt Disney's "Sleeping Beauty" (1959) is the concretization of the folk tale. The prince is tall, dark, and handsome in the sense of having strong angular facial features. The princess is small, blond and delicate. This matters from a gender perspective because the characteristics are prototypical to some extent of the masculine and the feminine regardless of their lack of validity as representative.

In this important respect, all of the gay awakening plots differ from Proust's story. Though most writers talk about homosexuality in relation to Proust and Sodom and Gomorrah, the narrator uses the 19th century terms "inverted man" and "male invert." The implied theory of sexuality that he expounds is one of original hermaphroditism or bisexuality rather than absolute inversion or homosexuality (34).[9] For the narrator, and perhaps even Proust, hermaphroditism is there in the repeated image of a female consciousness in the male invert:

> The young man whom we have been attempting to portray was so evidently a woman that the women who looked upon him with desire were doomed (failing a special taste on their part) to the same disappointment as those who in Shakespeare's comedies are taken in by a girl disguised as a youth. … it is in vain that he keeps back the admission 'I am a woman' even from his demanding mistress… (25)

Significantly, from a theory of sexuality point of view, Sigmund Freud, who was a contemporary of Proust, dismissed the feminine consciousness explanation for male inversion in 1905. For Freud the idea that an inverted male possessed "'a female brain in a male body'"

[9] Historically the same terms were used to allude to homosexuals ("absolutely inverted"), bisexuals ("psychosexually hermaphroditic"), and those who "are occasionally inverted" due to the "inaccessibility of the normal sexual object" (Freud 14).

was "as frivolous as it is unjustified" (Freud 18). He was unwilling to believe that the majority of inverted men have not "retained the psychic character of virility, that proportionately they show but little secondary characters of the other sex" or in other words they feel and think like heterosexual men even though their desired sexual object is male (18). In this, he also differed from the narrator that Proust creates, who in contrast, opines that "inversion itself springs from the fact that the invert is too closely akin to woman to be capable of having any effective relations with her" (34).

A cinematic expression of a Proustian inverted male is Howard (Kevin Kline) in Frank Oz's *In and Out* (1997). Oz's film makes a point of Howard's homosexuality being linked to his effeminate behavior and his interests. His repression of his sexual identity is made a source of comedy because it is apparent to others even if he is unaware of it himself. The same correlation between outward demeanor and homosexuality is made in James Burrows *Partners* (1982). Kerwin (John Hurt) is indignant that "it shows," that is, that his way of presenting himself lets others know that he is gay. He is asked to come out of the closet because it won't make him "any unhappier than you already are." Undercover he assumes the responsibilities for the house work and the cooking. He is good at both. He takes care of Benson, who works out, and pays lip service but does nothing around the house. They both worry about the case and Kerwin turns out to be more helpful than either he or Benson expect. Neither film is a romance. They are both comedies, but from the perspective of fem gays in 2013, the humor is abject and non-progressive in terms of liberation.

As a representation of gay masculinity, the general disavowal of hyper-masculinity is complicated by the equal rejection of the Queen, the twink, the Nellie and anything overtly feminine in gesture or appearance unless the character has a limited or specific social function.[10] This

[10] For an interesting argument regarding this troublesome anxiety regarding atypical masculine behavior and dress, see chapter 3 "How Gay Theory and the Gay Movement Betrayed the Sissy Boy" in Piontek.

absence of the more effeminate gay man as a romantic lead can be interpreted as an indicator of gay *and* straight male anxiety of emasculation. This may explain why gay characters with overtly feminine behaviors are never the romantic lead. In Rolf Silber's *Regular Guys* (1996) and Stewart Wade's *Coffee Date* (2006), the function of Edgar (Tim Bergmann) and Kelly (Wilson Cruz) respectively is the same as that of Kerwin, to help the straight protagonist and perhaps straight audiences confront their own anxiety about homosexuality. The focus of the plot is on the straight character and the social need for tolerance, not on fulfillment of the fem gay.

The male leads in the romance films are average men who can easily pass for straight in conventional terms even if a few of them sometimes *choose* not to at times in the films, i.e. act in ways that can be considered non-representative in relation to dominant masculinity. With the ironic exception – considering its popularity – of *Brokeback Mountain* where a macho masculinity is foregrounded, the films in this study, for the most part, seem to consciously reject the butching up of the male characters. This suggests a repudiation of the fetishization of the overtly displayed hetero-normative masculine version of the gay Self – the one exception to this is the character of Bart in *Making Love.* He dresses in what Allen Young calls "Butch drag" and comes with the jeans, leather jacket and cigarettes (27); all markers of the Castro clone of the 1970s (Vito 83). He even has the sideburns if not the mustache.

There are always traditional markers of masculinity. To take a particularly explicit case, Bruno (Manuel Vignau) and Pablo (Lucas Ferraro) in Marco Berger's *Plan B* (2009) both give the impression of being typical young men in their twenties. The film has very little dialogue and the male characters start out as straight. They are handsome, scruffy-looking in a traditional working class sense, but there is little serious posturing. They wear sports jerseys and jeans. They spend most of the film with a shadow of facial hair. They hang out at the gym and enjoy lazing in front of the TV. However, if they have jobs or professional goals of any kind, they never talk about them. Though these two male leads are not characterized as being overtly effeminate in a

striking way, there are cracks in their masculinity that suggest less typical traits, such as their addiction to a daytime soap. This is represented as culturally questionable. The film opens with Bruno literally scoping out Pablo through a camera lens. Pablo is caressing a kitten, rubbing it over his face. It is image of sensual enjoyment and feminine care.

In terms of the romance genre, they are both dark and handsome. They are visually two prince charmings, yet when Pablo wakes up one morning, Bruno asks him who is taller, only to determine that he himself is taller. Nothing more is said. Pablo shrugs and laughs but he acts as if he is self-conscious. Bruno looks satisfied. Their reactions draw attention to the gendered nature of the verbal repartee. The fact that Pablo is barely awake during Bruno's demonstration of power is symbolic of the film as a whole as he is unaware of Bruno's meditated pursuit of him and thus Bruno's attempts to lure Pablo into homoerotic desire. This film is Argentinian so it would be interesting to look at the masculinity within this particular context more closely. For the purposes of this study, it is the repression of homosexual desire, and it awakening as well as the relative passivity of Pablo that is in focus.

Zach (Trevor Wright) in Jonah Markowitz's *Shelter* (2007) is a skate boarder and surfer. His attire is unremarkable in that it is typically masculine but it is significant that the clothes are socially unassuming. They are appropriate to his sex and his urban environment and present no challenge to other males. He is shorter than the man who will break through his repression, Shaun (Brad Rowe). Though Zach has a slighter build, he is not presented as a short man or as physically weak. His skilled surfing and skateboarding preclude the latter. In his interaction with Shaun, his relative physical attributes are, however, signs that given the heterosexual structural context are culturally decoded as relationally determinative in terms of who has more power. It is gender normative and thus anticipated that being taller and bigger will lead to a power advantage.

Unsurprisingly from this traditional perspective, Shaun is represented as having taught Zach to surf. John G. Avildsen's *The Karate Kid* (1984) with its mentor-student relationship is alluded to and forms a backdrop to their relationship. In a homosexual context, the older man initiating the younger man carries additional weight and alludes to the *erastes-eromenos* relationship in Classical Greece, which is usually referred to in positive terms.[11] In keeping with this ideal, Shaun is older, has had some professional success, and is a well-adjusted gay man. He is also the one who eventually leans over and kisses Zach. At the end of the film Shaun's arm is around Zach and around Cody in a typical display of traditional masculinity. It could be fraternal support, but given the romantic context, the specter of patriarchal normativity is there.

David Holst (Bjorn Kjellman) in *Four More Years* (2010) is the leader of a politically party and almost becomes Prime Minister. He is basically the same height as Martin (Eric Ericson) but has a slighter build. He is pale while Martin is ruddy. Again, the conformity to expectation is there, and while Martin is comfortable in casual wear and with his body, David is always shown in a suit and as physically less secure. In accordance with the visual coding of their bodies, Martin is the one who kisses David and takes the lead in their first sexual encounter. At the end of the film, Martin seeks David out to make their reunion possible, figuratively leading David to where they need to go. Physically then, there is a sense then that Zach and David conform to the sex role that they are playing, that is they can on one level be decoded as more

[11] Stephen O. Murray, for instance, talks about this in neutral terms as "age-graded male homosexuality" and rehearses the generally accepted statement that it "was the most-valued and only respected form across ancient Greece" (Richardson and Seiman 87). He avoids talking about its more specific nature. The Greek term for this relationship was *pederasty* or *paederasty*. Younger adolescent boys were "introduced into society" by older men in their late twenties (see the entry for 'erastes'). The institution appears to have been naturalized through convention. It is generally accepted that this introduction was sexual. It does not appear that the sexual inclination of the boys was a factor which makes it reminiscent of the feudal *droit de seigneur*. At some point, historians will need to deal with the power differential and the potential and probability of abuse within this social structure. They will also need to deal with the accepted view that histories are written by those in power rather than by those resistant to the social structures. Hopefully this examination will occur within the gay studies community.

traditionally feminine than Shaun or Martin. They accept attention and respond to it rather than leading in the relationship. This reading is supported by the general arc of the narratives.

It is also reinforced at the level of affect and general social behavior. In terms of temperament, passivity in both Zach and David is not limited to the sexual arena. While the princess in the classic tale is passive in the literal sense of being asleep, both of these male characters are metaphorically asleep in terms of their sexuality but also characterized by acquiescence and unassertiveness in general. This is an anomalous characteristic from the point of view of masculinity. However, it is a recurring feature of these films.

Richard A. Isay links passivity and submissiveness – implicitly through his discussion of gendered characteristics and the devaluation of the feminine – to straight men with Oedipal issues (94), and to homosexual boys who "have artistic sensibilities and interests, who may not be competitive or aggressive, who are sensitive and solicitous of the needs of others, who like pretty clothes and objects, are likely to be perceived as being more feminine than other boys" (129). The latter – "the pretty clothes and objects" – and the correlated interest in domestic chores and home décor are in practice not necessarily linked with the psychological traits and interpersonal styles. These gendered attributes should be considered separately. In the awakening films, at least one of the homosexual male leads is characterized by passivity and solicitude as well as a degree of submissiveness rather than proactivity and pursuit, but this is not correlated with effeminate gestures or domestic interests.

Zach is both acquiescent and nurturing. He is in his early twenties and living with his sister and her son. He takes care of his nephew as often as not and his sister anticipates that he will help her and be there to take care of Cody when she wants to go out for a night of fun. He is the responsible one who ensures that Jeanne does not drink and drive, and that Cody has shoes. He is artistic and does street art. He sacrifices his own future to be there for his family. When Jeanne starts to suspect and distrust his friendship with Shaun, he defends his behavior within a

hetero-normative framework and does not want to assert his own desires or wants outside the implicit social heterosexual norms. Narratively, her negative interpretation of his behavior disturbs him and is influential in his vacillation of his own acceptance of his same sex desire.

In *Four More Years*, David is married but it quickly becomes apparent that that the marriage is not conventional. His wife, Fia (Tova Magnusson-Norling), is more driven and more of a leader than he is, and she and his counselor, Jorgen (André Wickstrom), strategize and direct David's political life. He follows along and does what he is told. Figuratively, Fia wears the pants and David does not mind. He is, on the contrary, indecisive and prone to stress when he is left to his own devices in the realm of decision-making. His rebellion occurs when he meets Martin and after he has suffered a severe political backlash. Unlike David, Martin is ambitious and comfortable with his double life. He represents a relatively new figure in gay-themed film; the men who are at peace with living their lives partially in the closet. He has actively compartmentalized his life.[12] Ultimately, however, the compartmentalization fails in this film.

From one perspective, Zach and David fulfill a traditional female role and exhibit characteristics that are culturally marked as feminine. From a queer perspective, they represent a masculinity that is not bound by cultural expectation or normative behaviors. They are both masculine in their dress and pursuits. Zach has a modicum of aggressiveness that prevents him from being overtly cowardly. Yet, he is feminine in terms of a bent towards nurturing and passivity in relationships. Similarly, David has a powerful political position, but is unmotivated to demonstrate or develop that political power on his own. He enjoys the position but prefers to be directed. One does not cancel out the other. He is perhaps outwardly more successful in performing the hetero-normative masculine role publicly, but behind the façade, he releases control to

[12] For a discussion of the possibility that coming out is not always the best or only answer, see Stephen Pugh's work on older gay men and lesbians, "The Forgotten" (Richardson and Seidman 172).

someone else more or less entirely and is also marked by an insecurity regarding social normative behavior.

Adapting a Genre: A Straight Form Becomes Gay

Compared to "Sleeping Beauty", there is an important difference in modern romance generally that applies to the awakening plot in gay cinematic narrative: romance since the second half of the 18th century romance has been character-oriented rather than action-oriented. Pamela Regis has provided the model that is commonly used for talking about the romance as a modern genre. The romance script proceeds through eight steps, each one is about character and develops reader – or in this case – viewer understanding of character. In the exposition stage, society is defined and the couple meets. What is alternately called the "barrier" by Regis (32) and what in Roland Barthes's system of narrative codes would be the core enigma, is set up. This is the question that will drive viewer engagement and in the case of the awakening plot, this is the mistaken idea that at least one of the male leads has that he is straight. In the rising action the attraction is explored until a declaration occurs. Regis calls the next step dramatically, "the point of ritual death" (35). In the awakening plot in gay romance, it is the rejection of the idea of being homosexual, and it is always present. This is followed by the "recognition" and in gay romance it is the scene or scenes where the reluctant male lead overcomes his own hesitation in admitting his desire and wanting the relationship. The last step in heterosexual romance is "the betrothal" (37), which in gay romance is the renewed and accepted declaration of love and desire for commitment.

Though the gay awakening script has the steps set out in the traditional structure, it also has its own pattern that adds steps to it. Between the recognition and the final declaration, the point of ritual death recurs in magnified form. Initially, the acceptance of attraction to another man is accepted within the confines of the given relationship, but eventually the outside world intrudes in some fashion, and the

reluctant male lead withdraws. He does not want to be identified as homosexual or accept the effects it will have on his original heterosexual plan for his life. This second rejection or denial will eventually lead to a second recognition and the final declaration of love.

In both these differences – in the focus on character and in the additional steps added by the awakening script – the films in this study take after the use of the awakening script in 19th century feminist literature. This can be illustrated by looking at the convergence in plot development, that is, the stages or narratives steps, in Kate Chopin's iconic novel, *The Awakening* (1899), and James Ivory's celebrated film adaptation of E.M. Forster's novel, *Maurice* (1987). Both Chopin and Forster were contemporaries of Proust. Forster was also a personal friend. Both novels and Ivory's film spend more time than any other awakening narrative on the expositions stage which sets out the conditions that cause the repression of the unacceptable desire, and the difficulties the character has in dealing with it.

The repression can be linked theoretically to Stage 1 in Down's *The Velvet Rage* which looks at the difficulties for gay men in overcoming heteronormative expectations. This stage, Down suggests is characterized by shame and can lead to the rejection of the authentic self. It is externally rather than internally motivated, but must be overcome in order to achieve a healthy sense of self. Its discursive relevance to the gay awakening plot is that it can lead to "a pseudo-self, which wasn't a natural growth of our abilities, desires and intelligence. It was a self that would earn us validation by others, but our true selves remained hidden from everyone" (25). A key turning point in the genre is that the protagonists confronts the desire for external validation and overcomes it – or fails too in a few rare cases.

The femalle protagonist in *The Awakening*, Edna Pontellier, has been seeking validation through marriage to Léoncé and motherhood. The novel is set in 19th century New Orleans. Edna's marriage is neither

happy nor spectacularly unhappy, but follows convention.[13] Appearances matter greatly to Léoncé and Edna has done what has been expected of her. Robert LeBrun follows the local French custom of flirting even with married women without any expectation that the women will respond. Edna takes him seriously, and he awakens in her a sense of loss and possibility, as well as a slumbering sexual appetite. She gradually realizes that she is in love and wants to pursue a life with Robert.

It is possible to argue that *The Awakening* does not theoretically qualify for a romance. Lesley Gelbman has stated that the romantic relationship must be at the narrative center of the story.[14] Chopin's novel arguably focuses on other things aside from the romance, as much of the story narrates her gradual separation from Leoncé, and her evolving desire for social as well as financial independence. From a feminist perspective it can be argued that her relationship with Robert is not the core of the novel. Yet, in itself the contextualization of Edna's life does not disqualify the novel as a romance.[15] What makes *The Awakening* provocative and significant from a feminist perspective is that Edna does not want a second marriage that follows social norms in terms of her role or in terms of children. Yet, Edna's desire for independence is set in motion by her meeting with Robert and her love for him remains a key element throughout the novel. It is thus possible to argue that her relationship with him remains at the core of the story even in his absence. Living alone as a strong woman is not something she wants. She wants the right to pursue the man and the lifestyle she desires.

Secondly, the novel does not end happily. Jennifer Crusie reports on the consensus reached by the Romance Writers of America in 2000 that, "A romance is a love story that has an emotionally satisfying,

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[13] For an introduction to the historical context of the novel, see the Norton critical edition (1994) edited by Margo Culley. Two early analyses that look at the Victorian social norms and set out the general arguments are Gladys Milliner's "The Tragic Imperative: The Awakening and the Bell Jar" and "The Five Awakenings of Edna Pontellier" by Otis B. Wheeler. Milliner's article appeared in the Mary Wollstonecraft Newsletter in 1973. Wheeler's was printed in the Southern Review in 1975.

[14] See the staff article "What's in a Name?" It is web-based so there is no pagination.

[15] The first novel to focus on the female protagonist was a romantic novel: Samuel Richardson's *Pamela: or Virture Rewarded* (1740).

optimistic ending."[16] In terms of romantic narratives, this requirement is a modern feature and shows up a weakness in the modern definition of romance. In terms of its ending, *The Awakening* has links to the older tragic romantic legend or a Shakespearean romantic tragedy, where the couple is pit against society and its expectations. Edna's love for Robert is thwarted by convention. Initially, he rejects her by leaving to avoid social censure for them both. Eventually, he returns and they are reunited and declarations are made. However, it is a fragile happiness that is possible only in isolation from the rest of society – in a metaphorical closet as it were. Edna is quickly drawn away and back into what is expected of her as a woman and a mother. She does not overcome this second death to coin a generic term for a feature of awakening narratives, and it will become literal as she walks into the ocean. The reader is left to assume that she drowns as she swims out further and further and further beyond the point of return.[17]

Forster's novel is the touchstone for the modern gay novel. Like Proust's novel it was written in the early 20th century, in 1913-14, though not published until 1971. Just as *The Awakening* sets out how women could assume they wanted marriage and children when they did not, Forster enumerates both the causes and the potential consequences for homosexuals in a hetero-normative environment. In the exposition stage, Forster defines the society of his characters, and in doing so unveils the heterosexual foundations of several social institutions: the education system, the Christian Church, and the social and familial expectation to marry. He connects these social structures to his main character, Maurice, who is confronted in each stage of his childhood and at university with the dominant social norms that give visual prominence to heterosexuality, a legal system that prohibits it and publicly shames the individual with same-sex desires, sex education that

[16] Web-based essay reprint, no pagination.
[17] Bucking the general interpretation of the novel, Robert Treu argues that Edna survives in "Surviving Edna: A Reading of the Ending of the Awakening." *College Literature*. March 1, 2000: 21-36. Though it would be interesting to pursue this interpretation further in relation to Haim Tabakman's film "Eyes Wide Open," that lies outside the scope of this article.

makes homosexuality invisible and religion that makes it a sin triggering shame.

Forster's story thus unpacks the poisonous apple in "Sleeping Beauty" and links it to the heterosexual matrix of society, and its negative effects on individuals who do not conform. The matrix sets both women and men up to anticipate heterosexual marriage and children as expected and normal. The story of Maurice, and indeed Clive, thus narrates the socialization of heterosexual identity, and how individuals can be heavily influenced and molded in their perceptions of themselves and their personal relationship goals by social institutions. The parallel to this in *The Awakening*, is the socialization of gender roles and their intimate connection with romance and relationships. While Edna rejects the traditional feminine ideals, Maurice will eventually reject heteronormative relationship ideals. His relationship with Clive will eventually lead him to confront both his sexuality and his lack of interest in an academic education. He will reject dominant masculine ideals of intellectual superiority and socioeconomic power and align his allegiance with the working class even before his relationship with the Durham gardener, Alec Scudder (Rupert Graves).

Critics have argued that, "most readers have been struck by Forster's evident ambivalence towards the 'Love of Comrades'" (Quince 108). Rohan Quince continues "Forster's confused attitude towards his own, and therefore Maurice's, sexual orientation sends mixed signals to the reader." The argument is that Forster vacillates between blaming "Maurice's trauma" on his homosexuality and on a homophobic society. I would argue with David Leavitt that this is a misreading. Leavitt rejects Lytton Strachey's claims that Forster "goes too far" in representing Maurice's own "disapproval" of homosexuality (xxvi). Leavitt emphasizes that part of Forster's narrative argument is the insidious effects of internalized homophobia (xxvii). He claims in referring to the novel as a whole, correctly I think, that "defiance is its touchstone."

Where I differ from Leavitt is that I would argue that the internalized homophobia is further complicated by Maurice's

temperament. He is unwittingly complicit in the repression of his homosexuality. He has a passive personality – like the later characters Zach in *Shelter* and David in *Four More Years* – and his mental constitution, his general approach to life, is narrated in such a way that it is implicated in his own situation. He avoids self-honesty by letting feelings remain unarticulated. He avoids introspection because he generally avoids conflict. The social structures that support heterosexuality and make homosexuality invisible at best and deviant when articulated stunt his sexual and emotional growth and he misidentifies as straight by default – just as Edna has misidentified her desire for marriage as a desire for a conventional marriage with children. This is the barrier or complication. As a result, he lives in a symbolic sleep state that the narrator in Forster's novel calls living in "the Valley of the Shadow of Life" (Forster 15), until he meets Clive (Hugh Grant).

I would thus agree that in the film adaptation of Forster's novel, Ivory creates a visual representation of Maurice (James Wilby) as a man trapped in the tower of social expectation and heteronormativity. I would also agree with critics like Quince that the internal focalization of the novel is lost in the film, but not the conclusions reached about Forster or even the novel. I would instead argue that Forster has created a novel that explores links between temperament and personal agency, and thus the relative place of agency in consciousness. A significant difference between the novel and the film is that the novel is written in retrospect so that the character Maurice is narrated as simultaneously both aware and unaware of the extent and nature of his attraction to Clive. The reader experiences Maurice's own awareness of his past ambivalent acceptance of his affective and sexual inclination towards men and his struggle to overcome his own socialization which rejects homosexuality. Maurice's thought processes are rendered in their complexity and the character achieves a greater three dimensionality. This complexity in Maurice is lost in translation to the film, where Maurice appears as emotionally aware, but cognitively repressed. One way of reading this is that society is blamed and Maurice is exculpated, but this misses an equally important point in the novel I think: that

individuals with certain temperaments can be more severely affected than others by seemingly non-phobic but exclusionary social institutions.

Both romance and desire are driving forces in the narrative arc of the modern awakening story in general, whether 19th century feminist or gay. Social transgression is an integral part of the script as hetero-normative standards are pushed back and rejected as the ultimate goal in the character arc. Like Edna in Chopin's novel, Maurice is initially introduced as unaware of his passive acceptance of external norms as the source of his general dissatisfaction and his repression of his sexual self-expression. Edna is living in upper class domesticity where the major claims on her time are her duties as wife, mother and the social obligation to entertain. None of her duties appeal to her. It takes meeting the flirtatious young Robert for her to admit how dissatisfied she is with her life. Like Edna, Zach in *Shelter* is artistic but his art does not flourish until he becomes friends and accepts his attraction to Shaun. He must accept his own desire for independence from his family, and what he wants as a man and that includes his homosexually.

In the films where the passive character has pursued relationships, that action has been *with* the social flow and not against it. Edna has married a socially ambitious man that her father approves of, and in gay-themed narratives the men have pursued heterosexual unions. This is often the pattern in films where there is a prolonged closet theme. Zach in *Making Love*, Nathan in Chip Hale's *Mulligans* (2008) and Daniel in Caytha Jentis's *The One* (2011) live in a marriage to a woman for a number of years before they accept their attraction to men. It can be argued, however, that their lives are built on reactive choices rather than independent thinking. This is explicit in *The One* where Daniel (Jon Prescott) is clearly awakened before he walks down the aisle but feels he must conform in order to be accepted by his family and to achieve the validation he is seeking as socially successful (he wants entry to a specific conservative country club). Zach and Nathan both express elements of prior awareness, but also that these desires were purposely left unexamined.

In Haim Tabakman's Israeli film *Eyes Wide Open* (2010), Aaron (Zohar Strauss) is also married when he falls in love with another man. What makes the film unique is that Aaron belongs to a Hasidic community so the narrative is rich with rituals of faith and of belonging, from the touching of the *mezuzah*, implied frequent immersion, to the regularized male bonding of the *chavrut*. The film represents the fragility of inclusion and its basis in conformity. The masculine ideal is markedly different from the Western films in the study, but a heteronormative ideal of coupledom and the family is firmly in place. It gradually becomes apparent that homosexual acts are regarded as unholy and that the known perpetrator is subject to shunning as unclean and a vehicle of contagion.

Aaron is a conformist and a man of faith. He avoids thinking about his attraction to men, to Ezri (Ran Danker). His homosexuality is a source of anxiety but he implicitly questions what it is that makes his sexual desire unholy and eventually explicitly refuses to deny that his feelings for Ezri are life-affirming for him. However, he avoids confrontation until the moral guard makes it impossible. Forced by his torn allegiance to his wife and children to watch as Ezri is run out of the community, Aaron retreats. The ending is ambiguous as he is seen dipping himself the ritual three times in a body of water. The pond appears man-made, but in any case, it is the same water that he initially visited with Ezri. The act can be seen as a moral cleansing, but as the film closes he dips himself a fourth time and fails to surface. This open ending suggests a possibility of drowning that is very reminiscent of the ending of *The Awakening* where Edna walks out into the sea at the end of the novel also because of what her refusal to conform would do to her children.

Changes in the Narrative Pattern

I stated that in gay awakening films, the main character does not himself set out discover his sexuality or what he wants from relationships; that he is instead the object of desire of another main character who is the active agent. I observed that as a passive

conformist, he requires someone who directly or indirectly pushes him to deal with what he wants. There are exceptions to this pattern. Each one raises its own issues for masculinity in relation to homosexuality.

Frank Oz's *In and Out* from 1997 is an awakening film but not a romantic drama. Howard (Kevin Kline) is pulled out of the closet by Cameron (Matt Dillon), a former student, before he has even admitted to himself that he is in the closet. The film is a comedy, and like Todd (Jonathan Bray) in Stewart Wade's *Coffee Date* (2006), Howard is atypical in his behavior: he is fastidious about his clothes, into decorating and loves musicals. The motives of the student are not explored. A gay journalist, Peter (Tom Selleck), pushes Howard towards public acceptance. From the perspective of the awakening trope, Peter's function is to take up where Cameron leaves off and continue to prod Howard's sexual consciousness. However, from the perspective of gay rights advocacy there is something unsettling about Howard being an object of public rather than private desire. There is a subtext that the rights of advocacy trump the rights of the individual.

Another exception is in *Maurice*. Maurice and Clive are the human equivalent of two allegorical porcupines: they both back into the relationship and share their love very cautiously. They are each other's object of desire but neither accepts the ultimate responsibility of pursuit for the desire's realization. They push each other only tentatively. Forster created an enduring story of two gay men seeking to express their mutual desire and affection, and Ivory recreated it on the screen. The adaptation is fundamentally similar to the novel's characterization of both Maurice and Clive as reactive and responding to external influence in the shaping of their lives. Realizing the limits this type of characterization places on the story, it is thus not surprising that the ending of their relationship cannot be happy. It is in many respects a story that is primarily about Down's Stage 1,[18] shame and discomfort with one's discovered longings, and two opposing reactions to this. Significantly, Clive's consciousness struggle and closetedness predates

[18] See chapter 1-3 in Allen Down's *The Velvet Rage*.

his meeting with Maurice. The narrator states that Clive "had no doubt as to what he was" (59). Thematically, Clive represents the tragedy of the homophobic homosexual as he retreats mentally from embracing his desires and physically into a conventional marriage and a heteronormative lifestyle that is very public.

In *Plan B* Bruno is an active subject in relation to Pablo, but he is also a passive object being moved without fully realizing it until his friend, Victor (Damián Canduci), confronts him about his obsession with Pablo: "So, you like guys now?" The directness of the question is the last push he needs for his eyes to open that he is in fact attracted to and in love with another man. Bruno rushes out of his seat and throws up in the bathroom with visible vomit as if there is toxic he needs to disgorge. Berger does not shy away from graphically portraying the extreme level of the character's anxiety. When he comes back to sit with his friend, he tries to answer the question, "I have no clue, Victor. I don't know. I can't explain this." He is mentally not ready to go there, to think the words 'I am homosexual'. Victor, however, is not confused. He tells Bruno that he (Bruno) is crazy about Pablo. Bruno does not deny it.

Bruno is planning to actively pursue Pablo as part of a heterosexual revenge scheme. However, the object of his pretended desire becomes the catalyst for Bruno's own sexual awakening. Even as he pushes Pablo to cross the lines of heterosexual friendship, Bruno himself is also becoming emotionally and physically invested in a homosexual albeit unconsummated relationship. Pablo does not awaken, that is begin to consciously process his same-sex desires, until Bruno tells him openly, "I want you only for myself" and kisses his cheek. Pablo's reaction is stunned silence and immobility. The lack of a reaction is an outward sign of a mental block in processing. It is neither denial nor affirmation. It is mental fence-sitting. The inertia of his thoughts is visualized by how even when he moves, it is in ultra-slow motion. To illustrate an internal drive, however, the camera shows him looking over the wall at Bruno leaving.

Because lack of verbal skills is commonly associated with masculinity in heterosexual romantic relationship narratives, *Plan B* is significant because the male characters communicate so much with so few words. It undermines the idea that volubility or eloquence are necessary skills for intimacy and that lacking either is a gender deficit in masculinity or, phrased differently, that clear communication is a feminine skill. It does this without changing the basic nature of either character; the film depicts how just as they need time to verbalize for themselves what it is they feel, they also use symbolic gestures rather than sudden verbosity to explain themselves to each other.

Conclusion

The films in this study are not bound by national borders. They are readily available over the internet. Many are distributed through a variety of international and national companies and shown at different LGBT festivals. Only a few, however, reach mainstream audiences. This is unfortunate as they showcase masculinity within an atypical framework and by this I do not refer to the sexuality of the films but rather the sex of the participants. Because men play both roles with the films, they present a unique opportunity to look at masculinity in intimate relationships in a male context.

The films participate in the sociocultural debates on the nature of sexuality and masculinity. Much, but not all, of what Halpern calls "the official post-Stonewall creed" applies (57). The first of the three features is supported, that is "that gay men are no different from anybody else" – at least in appearance and the desire for monogamous relationships – and the concomitant idea "that homosexuality is a sexual orientation" and not a "culture or a subculture" (57). The films embrace a hetero-normative mainstream idea of couple-hood, and few of them reflect gay culture or gay communities *within* the narrative. The latter is problematic.

The second feature that Halpern opines is, "that sexual object-choice has nothing to do with gender style." This is a mark of current gay activism, and is supported in the films, but I have suggested that it is done in a way that is highly problematic. There is a flattening of gender styles in these gay-themed films through selectivity; that is, the male romantic leads are generally no different than straight male leads in heterosexual films in appearance, demeanor or interests. There is thus an absence of fem-gay romantic leads. It would be interesting to examine the roles of fem gays more closely. In particular, it strikes me that it would be productive to investigate the relationship between fem-male characters in gay-themed films to the "feminized, antiheroic male hero" in comedian comedy (Karlyn 159), since this genre focuses on the individual and lampoons heroic masculinity. Two contextual similarities are that comedian comedy does not have marriage as its objective, and the story worlds created are male-oriented.

Halpern's third feature in the gay activist assimilation creed is that, "gay sexuality has no relation to femininity." This is a gross overstatement in relation to the awakening films. Even as the male leads can pass for straight this superficial conformity with dominant masculinity is complicated by the presence of two male romantic leads, who perform both gender roles in relationships that mirror heterosexual relationships in many ways. The creation of passive personality types in gay-themed films is congruent with many of the ideals for femininity in heterosexual romance films. This needs to be further investigated.

As a group, the gay awakening films discussed in this study subvert dominant masculinity by rejecting the easy identification of the homosexual with outward behavior or interests, while simultaneously operating within a neo-traditional romantic framework that supports exclusivity, domesticity, and conservative masculine demeanor. The films do not reach for the Walt Whitman utopia of a gay camaraderie that is sexually inclusive and free of roles but they do problematize gender in terms of temperament attributes such as passivity, acquiescence, nurture and the prioritizing of intimate relationships.

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