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# “SOMETHING’S MISSING HERE!”: Homosexuality and Film Reviews during the Production Code Era, 1934-1962

by Chon Noriega

In the second act of Tennessee Williams’s 1955 play, *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*, Big Daddy confronts his son Brick, who has become an alcoholic and refuses to procreate with his more than willing wife, Maggie the Cat. Perhaps, he suggests, there “was something not exactly right” in Brick’s friendship with Skipper, a football buddy who drank himself to death. Unlike the play, the 1958 film adaptation dances around an unnamed problem, until at one point Big Daddy roars, “Something’s missing here!” In the end, that something turns out to be a case of idol worship that Skipper betrays. And Brick, freed of the “powerful smell of mendacity,” invites Maggie to bed.<sup>1</sup>

The *New York Times* film reviewer Bosley Crowther found Big Daddy’s line—“Something’s missing here!”—emblematic of what the Production Code Administration or Hays Office had done in prohibiting the suggestion of homosexuality in the film: left the filmgoer “baffled” at the lack of “logical conflict” and character motivation. While Crowther used the film’s pivotal scene to warn readers, some reviewers even argued that the homosexual motivation was not missing after all, but merely muted or left to the imagination.<sup>2</sup>

These various interpretations were possible because, as one Hollywood insider lamented, “Magazines and newspapers have no Hays office—yet!”<sup>3</sup> The Code’s authors, however, were more concerned with the power of film’s “apparent” mimesis than with the “cold page” of books and newspapers.<sup>4</sup> Their lack of concern with the “cold page” is ironic, since films were often based on popular novels and plays that dealt with themes the film adaptations could not, and, as *Variety* pointed out in 1936, “There’s nothing to stop reviewers’ commentaries and analogies to the original. And that’s not going to hurt b.o. either.”<sup>5</sup> In other words, reviews would generate interest on the basis of reading against the grain of censorship.

Like the Code’s authors, film critics tend to examine the film itself, and not the discursive acts that surround a film and play a sometimes central role in shaping its meaning(s).<sup>6</sup> Contemporary gay and lesbian film criticism of Production Code era films operates on the same principle, with the added limitation that historical evidence and homosexual “images” either do not exist or were

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censored. Thus, in order to ensure “the survival of subcultural identity within an oppressive society,” gay and lesbian film critics have employed a wide range of interpretive strategies to recuperate a history of homosexual images from the censored screen. The emphasis, therefore, has been on “subtexting” censored films from a singular presentist perspective.<sup>7</sup>

In contrast to these methods, film reviews provide an excellent historical source that—as Robert Allen and Douglas Gomery note in *Film History: Theory and Practice*—can reveal the “frames of reference” that reviewers disseminated to their moviegoing readers.<sup>8</sup> While it would be impossible to establish a direct correlation between—for example—Crowther’s review of *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* and a reader’s reception of the film, one can nonetheless state that Crowther put the question of homosexuality before readers to think about and perhaps use in one way or another. It is this discursive fact that “subtexting” overlooks, since, as Michel Foucault argues, such an approach depends upon the notion of unmitigated repression that it alone transgresses: “The central issue, then (at least in the first instance), is not to determine whether one says yes or no to sex, whether one formulates prohibitions or permissions . . . but to account for the fact that it is spoken about, to discover who does the speaking, the positions and viewpoints from which they speak, the institutions which prompt people to speak about it and which store and distribute the things that are said.”<sup>9</sup>

The question, then, becomes not whether certain films have—in retrospect—gay and lesbian characters, subtexts, stars, or directors as an anodyne to censorship, but how homosexuality was “put into discourse,” and the role censorship played during the Production Code era. Censorship (what Foucault calls a silence) was not a distinct and self-contained process, but instead “an element that functions alongside the things said, with them and in relation to them within over-all strategies.”<sup>10</sup>

In order to understand better “the things said,” this essay will examine a particular instance in which informed film reviewers could and often did speak about homosexuality in film during the era of the Production Code restrictions: when they responded to films adapted from literary sources that dealt with homosexuality.<sup>11</sup> The thirteen films identified and six periodicals tracked are not meant to be comprehensive, but instead to provide the parameters for a discursive analysis of the period.<sup>12</sup> (See list at end of this article.) The periodicals include *The New York Times* and *Time* as well as four audience-specific magazines: *The New Yorker* (upscale urban), *Commonweal* (liberal Catholic), *Films in Review* (film fan) and *Variety* (trade).

The methodology I propose here is to neutralize the value judgments inherent in much gay and lesbian film criticism, and examine instead the “occasion” of reviewers’ statements on homosexual sources, subtexts, images, and audiences. The only other study to rely on film reviews is Vito Russo’s groundbreaking book, *The Celluloid Closet*. Unfortunately, Russo, as I will demonstrate later, quotes well known film reviewers out of context in order to prove a monolithic anti-homosexual bias, an assertion that has just begun to be challenged.<sup>13</sup> Because he

judges film reviewers of the 1930s through the 1950s according to contemporary standards, Russo overlooks the contradictory and changing attitudes toward homosexuals that are reflected in and reinforced through Production Code era film reviews.

Indeed, significant conflicts and changes occurred within that bias over time: reviewers engaged in a “conspiracy of silence” in the 1930s and 1940s, began to identify and condemn homosexual “overtones” and “angles” in the 1950s, and found qualified sympathy for homosexuals in the early 1960s. Overall, film reviews moved from an emphasis on morality to one on psychiatry. In addition, the treatment of male homosexuality and lesbianism differed, highlighting some of the conflicts in the prevailing sexual ideology of the period.

Before beginning, it is necessary to understand the social movements and legal changes that in 1934 resulted in film censorship and—at the same time—protected books, magazines, and newspapers from similar censorship. That year, a federal appellate court rejected the precedent set in an 1868 English case, *Queen v. Hicklin*, that published texts could be censored on the basis of isolated passages that were believed to have the power to “deprave and corrupt.” The decision opened the way for more sexually explicit literary production.<sup>14</sup>

Censorship of movies, however, was possible because in 1915 the Supreme Court had ruled that movies were “a business pure and simple . . . not to be regarded . . . as part of the press of the country or as organs of public opinion,” a decision that would not be reversed until 1952.<sup>15</sup> Thus, also in 1934, rather than risk possible state and federal censorship as well as anticipated boycotts by the ten-million-member Catholic Legion of Decency, Hollywood studios proffered strict self-regulation, empowering the Hays Office—now under Joseph Breen—to enforce its four-year-old Production Code. The Code, concerned with the moral impact of film, decreed that “[n]o picture shall be produced which will lower the moral standards of those who see it. Hence the sympathy of the audience shall never be thrown to the side of crime, wrongdoing, evil, or sin.”

Although the Code placed numerous restrictions on sex, it was most emphatic about homosexuality, which was not named as such, but instead as a corruption of “sex”: “Sex perversion or any inference of it is forbidden.”<sup>16</sup> The prohibition on homosexual content would last the longest of the restrictions on sex—until October 1961—as the Production Code began to collapse in the mid-1950s along with the studio system upon which its control depended.

Thus from the start, a gap was created between film and the printed word that allowed reviewers to note, challenge, and even contradict the absence of homosexual content in films, especially when the literary source dealt with these themes.

**A Conspiracy of Silence.** In the 1930s and 1940s at least three films were released based on plays or novels in which homosexuality was central to the plot: *These Three* (1936), *The Lost Weekend* (1945), and *Crossfire* (1947). These films were widely praised as “problem” or “social-consciousness” pictures that dealt

with, respectively, malicious gossip, alcoholism, and anti-semitism. Film reviewers were quick to note the popular literary sources and to allude to “necessary” changes, but the expunged homosexuality was not much talked about. In fact, only two of the fourteen film reviews named the censored material as “lesbian” and “homosexual.”<sup>17</sup>

There was very little comment on male homosexuality in the reviews of *The Lost Weekend* and *Crossfire*. That the films are based on novels in which homosexuality is the main motivation is mentioned only twice in ten reviews: *The New York Times* noted that in *The Lost Weekend* a writer’s alcoholism is blamed on writer’s block rather than, as in the novel, “an unconscious indecision in his own masculine libido”; and *Time* briefly noted that in *Crossfire* the motive for murder is changed from the victim’s being homosexual to his being a Jew.<sup>18</sup> Nonetheless, all film reviews cite the original sources, both bestselling novels, Charles Jackson’s *The Lost Weekend* (1944) and Richard Brooks’s *The Brick Foxhole* (1945). *Variety* even suggested that the popularity of the novels would spark box-office interest, but it did not reveal the differences between the novels and films, although something “unusual” and exploitable is hinted at with regard to *Crossfire*.<sup>19</sup> The film reviews that note these changes—though most do not describe them—agree that the changes are “to remarkably advantageous effect,” although a few note that *The Lost Weekend* presents an “oversimplification of Don’s reasons for drinking.” The lack of character motivation, however, is seen as “a minor detraction,” and not an argument for retaining the character’s latent homosexuality in the film version.<sup>20</sup>

The consensus among film reviewers and society at large that homosexuality was an “unsavory theme” explains the general silence of the period. The laws (and public perception) that mere exposure to isolated passages about homosexuality could “deprave and corrupt” were just beginning to change for *printed* material. Film reviewers in mass circulation newspapers and magazines might have still believed that talking about homosexuality would adversely influence readers. In addition, censorship forces such as the Production Code, the National Office for Decent Literature of the Catholic Church, and private citizens’ groups created an atmosphere that made a “conspiracy of silence” preferable even to public condemnation of homosexuality. As John D’Emilio notes in *Sexual Politics, Sexual Communities*, “to avoid trouble, publishers and newspaper editors engaged in a form of self-censorship that kept homosexuality virtually out of print.” The “conspiracy of silence” would predominate even during World War II, when manpower requirements meant that the military had to tolerate the million or more homosexuals in its ranks. The war has been likened to a nationwide coming-out experience, made possible as the military and civilian sectors organized themselves into sex-segregated, non-familial environments. After the war, however, American society would reaffirm traditional gender roles and heterosexual relationships, a shift that would involve open persecution of homosexuals.<sup>21</sup>

*Crossfire* and *The Lost Weekend* were produced shortly after World War II, but before the Kinsey report on male sexuality unintentionally magnified the

homosexual “threat” into something that had to be talked about. The persecution of homosexuals in the military began before the war ended, but these actions were done under the “conspiracy of silence.” Open condemnation would not become the norm until the 1950s.<sup>22</sup>

The “conspiracy of silence,” however, was not a monolithic reaction to homosexuality in the 1930s and 1940s when it came to lesbianism, as the film reviews for *These Three* demonstrate. All four reviews noted that the film was an adaptation of Lillian Hellman’s 1934 stage play *The Children’s Hour*, explaining or suggesting that the play dealt with two female teachers accused of lesbianism. Film reviewers agreed that *These Three* “improved upon the original” by rewriting the lesbian conflict as a heterosexual triangle. The change “was simplicity itself” and “obviously a sounder premise than the first.” Lesbianism as an exploitable subject was not necessary to sell the film: “the film version is an even more appealing presentation for popular consumption,” better than the “unsavory original theme.”<sup>23</sup>

Film reviewers described lesbianism in the original source as “an abnormal relationship,” “unnatural affection,” and “abnormal misbehavior.”<sup>24</sup> The word “abnormal” refers to moral and not psychiatric deviance, since lesbianism is seen as leading to “tragedy.”<sup>25</sup> In her essay on the 1931 German film *Maedchen in Uniform*, B. Ruby Rich notes “the tradition of [representing] lesbianism as tragic, powerless, passive, and in particular, fatal to its adherent.”<sup>26</sup> That “tradition” of responding to lesbianism as a moral threat to the social order dominated film reviews. *The New York Times* even conflated lesbianism with dramatic tragedy in faulting *These Three* for “lack[ing] the biting, bitter tragedy of *The Children’s Hour*.”<sup>27</sup> But such a fault was seen as minor, given that all reviewers applauded the changes required by the Production Code: a heterosexual triangle was tragedy enough for filmgoers.

The fact that *The Children’s Hour* was in its 71st week on Broadway when the film opened might partially explain the increased attention. But since *The Lost Weekend* and *Crossfire* were based on recent bestselling novels, popularity alone is an insufficient explanation. The reason for the different treatment has less to do with lesbianism per se than with the context within which the discussion of lesbianism took place.

In the 1920s and 1930s, D’Emilio writes, “lesbians lost the protection that came from a distinct culture of women and a Victorian sexual ideology that placed constraints upon heterosexual expression.”<sup>28</sup> In other words, the “exposure” of lesbianism—which remained largely invisible since there were few places where lesbians could meet in public<sup>29</sup>—took place as a consequence of broader changes in the normative roles of white middle-class women. Thus the anti-lesbian literature of writers, doctors, and social reformers can be seen as part of a reaction to changing sexual values for women brought about by the feminist movement, the commercialization of sex, and an economic structure that enabled young women to live and work outside the purview of family and marriage.<sup>30</sup> The proscribed shift in values that the anti-lesbian literature sought was from a

Victorian sexual ideology to an affirmation of heterosexual eroticism in the companionate marriage.

Both *These Three* and *The Children's Hour* affirm heterosexual eroticism, while undermining on a moral level the autonomous female teachers and the homosocial sphere of the all-girl school. In the 1920s, plays such as *The God of Vengeance* (1922) and *The Captive* (1926) condemned lesbianism, although censors and social reformers quickly forced these plays to close in New York.<sup>31</sup> The success of *The Children's Hour*, however, as well as the comments in the film reviews for *These Three*, reveal an impulse to supersede the "conspiracy of silence" in order to establish lesbianism as the tragic consequence of deviance from normative female gender roles in the 1930s.

Radclyffe Hall's bestselling lesbian novel *Well of Loneliness* (1929), which appropriates contemporary medical theories of congenital homosexuality in order to promote legal and social tolerance, is a notable exception to the above tragedies. The medical discourse, however, seems to have had little effect on the popular media. For example, the *New York Times* drama critic J. Brooks Atkinson dismissed medical explanations for lesbianism as mere "excuses," preferring instead a "tragedy of consequences." Even homosexual patients, as doctors often noted, neither considered themselves abnormal nor sought treatment for their sexual behavior. On the other hand, both pro- and anti-homosexual congenitalists, psychoanalysts, and psychiatrists, as well as Hall, tended to place homosexuality *cum* medical problem within a larger moral framework, wherein ethical behavior could perhaps forestall a "tragic end."<sup>32</sup> Nonetheless, Hall's intervention and the growing public acceptance of Freudian psychoanalysis would set the stage for film reviewers' responses in the 1950s and early 1960s.

**Open Condemnation.** In the 1950s, several factors combined to make homosexuality the exploitable subject it had not been before, and between 1954 and 1959, at least five films based on novels or plays with central homosexual characters drew heavy comment. In 1951, Hollywood found itself ill-equipped to respond to the phenomenal growth of television that presaged an era of home-oriented entertainment. The House Committee on Un-American Activities had already purged Hollywood of hundreds of talented writers, directors, and actors, creating widespread paranoia. And—under the 1948 consent decrees of *U.S. v. Paramount*—studios would have to divest themselves of distribution and exhibition holdings by 1953.

The consent decrees brought an end to the studio system, which had centralized not just film production, but also film censorship. Theaters could now show "unapproved" foreign and independent films—in 1952 the Supreme Court reversed its 1915 ruling that denied films free speech protection, permitting the U.S. release of Roberto Rossellini's *The Miracle* (Italian, 1947). In the next six years, the Supreme Court would use the 1952 decision to invalidate all the principal statutory censorship criteria except "obscenity."<sup>33</sup>

The *Miracle* decision gave Hollywood filmmakers a legal basis in addition

to the financial impetus for challenging the Production Code.<sup>34</sup> In addition to such heterosexual taboos as adultery and miscegenation, filmmakers exploited homosexuality, which had become a talked about popular concern after World War II, when the Kinsey reports made Americans fear that homosexual behavior, like communism, was everywhere.<sup>35</sup> In the McCarthy era, numerous government employees—mostly male—were asked, “Are you now or were you once a homosexual, and/or a Communist?” The anti-homosexual movements ironically made the “problem” worse, since homosexuals responded to these attacks with greater efforts to become more cohesive and politicized. The strengthened homosexual communities provided support and protection, but also increased the popular concern and fear that underlay the anti-homosexual movements, and so on.<sup>36</sup>

The pressures within the film industry as well as changes in the sexual discourse, led the Production Code Administration to begin evaluating a film as a whole, rather than applying specific restrictions to isolated words, lines, and scenes. Even though the restrictions on homosexuality would remain intact throughout the 1950s, the shift in perspective permitted *heterosexual* expressions that had been kept off the screen for two decades.

The *Miracle* decision and a more lax Production Code Administration, however, also resulted in the 1954 release of a highly censored version of the French lesbian film *Olivia* (1951), which had failed in earlier attempts. The film, renamed *Pit of Loneliness* in order to capitalize on Radclyffe Hall’s popular lesbian novel, thus became the only film between 1934 and 1961 “about” lesbianism, despite the fact that censors eliminated all scenes that they thought alluded to lesbianism and would therefore “corrupt morals.” Marketing a lesbian film that had no identifiable lesbian content presented a dilemma that required an advertising campaign, an exploitive title, and the revelations of film reviews to inform the public what the film was in fact about.<sup>37</sup>

Although the consensus continued to be that lesbianism should be tragic and teach a moral lesson, the reception of *Pit of Loneliness* reveals that film reviewers’ attitudes toward lesbianism as a film subject had changed since *These Three*. In 1936, film reviewers judged the heterosexual *These Three* better than the lesbian *The Children’s Hour*. In 1954, however, film reviewers considered *Pit of Loneliness* “polite, discreet and finely wrought.”<sup>38</sup> *Variety* no longer referred to lesbianism as an “unsavory theme” as it did with *These Three*, but rather as “a touchy theme” that the film handled intelligently.<sup>39</sup> The changes between the two films are even more telling than the changes in film reviewers’ attitudes. *These Three* had been rescripted into a heterosexual triangle from a play about a false accusation that two teachers were lesbians. With *Pit of Loneliness*, film reviewers praised a film about an actual butch-fem couple who ran an all-girl school.

The continued emphasis on moral consequences justified more vivid portrayals of lesbians. Film reviewers wanted to see more “than the familiar schoolgirl ‘crush’ that [appears to be] the complicating factor.” There is a prurient or voyeuristic element to these demands for more lesbian depictions. In talking

about “secret affections” among the teachers and students, the film reviewers used a language evocative of the “faintly purplish hue” attributed to the film itself.<sup>40</sup> Consider the following passage from the review in *Time*: “The young girls, exquisitely suggestible, divide as the pair has divided, some *du côté de Mlle. Julie* [the more active, more masculine], the others devoted to Mlle. Clara—all innocently, giddily suspended in the nameless tension of the emotional contest. As it fills every room and scene with the breath of girls in the bud, with an air of girlish whispers, forbidden perfume and muffled laughter, *Pit of Loneliness* falls nothing short of magic.”<sup>41</sup> Magic? The film review seems to fall nothing short of D. H. Lawrence, with *magic* being a code for vicarious eroticism among the presumably male readers of the conservative magazine.

But if in one sensual description the reviewers seem to applaud the film for sustaining an erotic lesbian subtext, or “nameless tension” between girlish (read, innocent) pubescence and “forbidden perfume,” in the next passage the reviewers bring that construct crashing down upon its moral consequences. Lesbianism, we are told, threatens deep “emotional danger,” “personal perdition,” and “the possibilities of evil.”<sup>42</sup> Ironically, the film reviewers also acknowledge that the characters themselves fail to grasp fully these consequences. Their failure to do so, however, was seen as a dramatic failure, and not a sign of a lesbian identity that could stand outside the “moral” framework of heterosexual norms (and male-centered eroticism): both characters should have been made to “display [more strongly] the ravages of [their] moral mangle.”<sup>43</sup> Even the eventual suicide of the “passive” teacher fails to achieve catharsis in the “tragedy.” Here it becomes apparent that the tragedy the film reviewers talk about does not apply to the characters in the film, but to the readers and potential audiences whose voyeurism must be contained within an anti-homosexual morality. As Frank Pearce describes the process, readers get to “live through the forbidden experiences and gain the additional pleasure of moral indignation.”<sup>44</sup> In the early 1960s the emphasis in reviews would shift from morality (tragedy) to psychiatry (treatment), a shift that would rely on the common idea of catharsis as the goal for filmgoers.

Unlike lesbianism, whose tragedy took place in the now-suspicious female homosocial sphere, male homosexuality was seen as an individual problem. Nonetheless, the moral-cathartic framework explicit in the review of *These Three* and *Pit of Loneliness* would be implicit in the reviews of films based on novels or plays about male homosexuality. In 1956, *Time* ridiculed the Hollywood censors for answering “no” to what should have been rhetorical questions: “Is the U.S. moviegoer old enough to be told that there is such a thing as [male] homosexuality? Is it decent to suggest that there are worse things than adultery?” Given a moral hierarchy with homosexuality at the bottom, censorship was “prudish and unnecessary.” The moral hierarchy also justified adultery and other heterosexual expressions as long as it staved off something worse: male homosexuality.<sup>45</sup>

Something even more significant, however, was beginning to happen. Despite the active censorship of homosexual material in films, reviewers in the mid-1950s began to identify homosexual characters and to make comments on the nature

of the film vis-à-vis its homosexual “overtones,” “undertones,” “themes” and “angles.” In the stage play original of *Tea and Sympathy* (1956), a married woman has sex with an effeminate student to dispel accusations (and his own self-doubts) that he might be homosexual. Her husband, the housemaster, displays excessive “manliness” to hide his own fears that he is homosexual. Only the *New York Times* claimed that the housemaster “is still quite plainly something less than a bona fide man” in the film version.<sup>46</sup> Remarkably, all reviewers agreed that the effeminate student feared that he might be homosexual, a motive that was supposed to have been censored and changed. Film reviewers identified several homosexual characters in *The Strange One* (1957). The film, based on Calder Willingham’s novel and play *End as a Man*, which chronicles coming of age in a decadent Southern military academy, is said to include one character who refuses to use the common shower “for obvious reasons and has no interest in the opposite sex,” and another “who has written a revealing novel about Jocko [the strange one] and hopes to be more than his Boswell.” In addition, the main character, Jocko, is identified as a “sadist,” whose motivation is “repressed homosexuality.” *Variety* even reported that “three minutes of [homosexual] scenes were deleted from the original print,” an important—if isolated—sign in the press that filmmakers were challenging the Production Code.<sup>47</sup>

In *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* (1958), as with *The Lost Weekend*, the character’s repressed homosexuality is recast as a heterosexual problem. Film reviewers, however, found Brick’s homosexuality “hinted at” or mentioned “fleetingly”; and while some reviewers claimed that the new explanation for Brick’s not sleeping with his wife “replaces any hint of homosexuality,” all felt it to be too little, too late. Thus the original source could be brought to bear on the ambiguous or unexplained parts of the film: “Even without specifics, the homosexual nature of the attraction between the two boys is *not left in doubt* for those familiar with the [Tennessee] Williams play.”<sup>48</sup> Given the changes in the interpretation of the Code on other fronts, replacing a homosexual motivation with a heterosexual one was no longer perceived as “simplicity itself.” For the first time, a film reviewer even implied that homosexuality would provide the “logical conflict” lacking in the film version.<sup>49</sup>

The emphasis in these reviews, however, was not on the homosexual *per se*, but on what homosexuality did to a film. Although these films were recognized to have homosexual characters, reviewers—with the exception of those in *Films in Review*—did not describe the male homosexual at length. He was merely “unmasculine,” “a sort of perverted Peter Pan,” and an “evil seducer” with “twisted affections.”<sup>50</sup> These are the only descriptions from twenty film reviews; and all but one refer to *Suddenly, Last Summer* (1959), the first censored film “openly” about a male homosexual. Likewise, Mlle Julie in *Pit of Loneliness* is described just twice, as the “masculine” one and, in congenial terms, as an “inverted character.”<sup>51</sup> By limiting the description of or comment on the homosexual characters, the film reviews shift the focus from homosexual identity

(intrinsic to the characters, and representative of a social phenomenon) to homosexuality-as-narrative-device.

Perhaps the strongest evidence that film reviewers rejected the discourse of homosexuality as identity comes from a film fan magazine that began publication in 1950, the same year that persecution of homosexuals in government became a public issue. *Films in Review* was published by the National Board of Review, which between 1909 and 1921 had acted as “the country’s first experiment with voluntary nongovernmental prior censorship.”<sup>52</sup> In the 1920s, the National Board of Review was considered too lax and liberal to be able to “improve” the content of films without government censorship.<sup>53</sup> Since 1950, its main activity had been the monthly publication of *Films in Review*, which carried on a crusade against what it saw as “pernicious propaganda for sexual degeneracy” in films, and thus mirrored the conservative tenor of the 1950s anti-homosexual crusades in government, the military, and local police forces. Unlike other publications, *Films in Review* outlined what it saw as both the causes and consequences of “sexual degeneracy.” The review for *Suddenly, Last Summer* credits the film with “expos[ing] clearly the foremost cause of male homosexuality”: a mother’s emasculation of her son.<sup>54</sup> The cannibalistic murder of the homosexual is seen as “one of the horrible fates that can overtake a particular kind of sex pervert.” And to bolster his point, the film reviewer cites an as-told-to fact: “Something very close to what this film hints at, I am told, actually happened to some wealthy British and American perverts in Morocco.” But more important, *Films in Review* denounced what it saw as homosexual propaganda, the “most potent lie” being “the idea that homosexuality is congenital.”<sup>55</sup> In denouncing the congenital explanation as propaganda, *Films in Review* did not attack a discredited medical model but the homosexual identity that arose from it.

*Films in Review*, however, did not so much dispel as confirm (albeit in vituperative and appropriative terms) a homosexual identity that provided gays and lesbians with a distinct perspective on censored Hollywood films. Other reviewers also inferred a homosexual audience in discussing the new “homosexual angle” or “homosexual overtones” in these films. Those interested in that aspect were identified by *Films in Review* as “sex perverts” and “odd-balls of all sorts” who found their homosexual propaganda or self-delusions openly defended.<sup>56</sup> *Variety* argued that “homosexual themes [do not] figure to be” popular with filmgoers, but thought that given the controversy, *The Strange One* would be popular with “masculine audiences,” perhaps a coded acknowledgment of a homosexual audience.<sup>57</sup> *Time* described *Suddenly, Last Summer* as “a psychiatric nursery drama, a homosexual fantasy of guilty pleasure and pleasurable punishment.”<sup>58</sup> For these film reviewers, the problem with the inferred homosexual audience was that it ignored the moral consequences that made the homosexual characters unsympathetic and thus made the films viable under the Production Code. The moral and legal framework of the Code, however, was about to be challenged. When the moralistic Code could no longer prohibit homosexuals on

the screen, reviewers would shift from moral criteria to psychiatric ones, and in the process find “sympathy.”

**Sympathy and Illness.** The 1950s witnessed a weakening of the Production Code to restrict specific representations such as adultery, prostitution, and miscegenation. By the beginning of the 1960s, the only specific restriction left was that on “sex perversion.” In the 1960s, filmmakers themselves put even more pressure on the Production Code Administration. In the fall of 1961, two films went into production that would deal with homosexuality, while several others were planned. William Wyler, who directed *These Three*, announced that he would make a faithful version of Hellman’s *The Children’s Hour*; while Otto Preminger began his adaptation of Allen Drury’s political novel *Advise and Consent*. Preminger, notorious for successfully challenging the Code’s other restrictions, played a prominent if not influential role in the Code’s decision to permit homosexuality on the screen.<sup>59</sup> Behind the scenes, Arthur Krim, president of United Artists, threatened to release the films without a “seal of approval” unless the Code was amended.<sup>60</sup> On October 3, 1961, the Production Code Administration relented: “In keeping with the culture, the mores and values of our time, homosexuality and other sexual aberrations may now be treated with care, discretion and restraint.”<sup>61</sup> The change was an effort to maintain control, at least over how the homosexual was depicted or “treated,” a word with significant medical overtones. But the change—which included the Code’s use of “homosexuality” in place of “sex perversion”—also acknowledged another, more important fact: that the “mores and values of our time” had become more permissive regarding sexual representations.<sup>62</sup>

Between January and June 1962, five films were released that dealt with homosexuality, almost as many as in the previous three decades. One did not receive a seal of approval from the Production Code Administration, but was released nonetheless. Even without the seal of approval, *The Victim* (British, 1961) was reviewed in all the publications being considered. The liberal Catholic magazine *Commonweal* even disagreed with the Production Code Administration’s claim that the film made pleas “‘for social acceptance of the homosexual.’”<sup>63</sup> Still, the consensus among reviewers was that of the Production Code Administration and society at large: films should not and, for the most part, did not condone homosexuality.

*Time* and *Films in Review* alone argued that some films represented either “implicit approval of homosexuality as a practice” or “undisguised propaganda for homosexuality.”<sup>64</sup> Two criteria were used to identify approval of homosexuality. First and foremost, it was that which was *not* said that signified approval: the moral and medical causes of homosexuality. The references to “nature” as the cause, or statements that “I can’t help the way I am” were seen as promoting a congenital explanation of homosexuality. The other criterion was based upon whether portrayals of homosexuals violated cinematic codes for the immoral or abnormal character. In other words, the same logic in which the villain wears

black should apply to the homosexual so that the audience can quickly identify him or her as a moral and medical deviate.<sup>65</sup> Thus the reviewer in *Time* objected that in *Victim*, “almost all the deviates in the film are fine fellows — well dressed, well spoken, sensitive, kind.”<sup>66</sup> And as if that wasn’t bad enough, normal people were portrayed as the villains: “The only one who acts like an overt invert turns out to be a detective. Everybody in the picture who disapproves of homosexuals proves to be an ass, a dolt or a sadist.”<sup>67</sup> Another aspect of these codes had to do with how the homosexual reacted to his or her “condition.” Homosexuality should not be acceptable, even to the homosexual. The film reviewer in *Films in Review* complained that in *The Children’s Hour*, one teacher informs the other about the accusation brought against them “with no shock . . . as though sexual relations between women were normal.” The reviewer made manifest the violation of filmic codes or conventions in a parenthetical statement that “such a reading, in that context, is *dramatically* defeating.”<sup>68</sup>

Now that homosexuality could be a film subject, film reviewers attempted to establish the proper limits for its reception. The first, obviously, was that it could not be condoned. Nonetheless, reviewers wanted to see “real” homosexuals, not caricatures. Film reviewers wanted neither “reticence” nor “sensationalism,” but something in between: “entertainment.” Homosexuality *could* be dealt with as “an urgent social problem” and still provide “stimulating entertainment.”<sup>69</sup>

In fact, reticence would not be tolerated. Reviewers criticized *The Children’s Hour*, which included the lesbianism that *These Three* avoided, as “prim and priggish.” Even the 1934 play was seen as “a little behind the sophistication of . . . [its own] times.” The premise was considered “socially absurd”: “It is incredible that educated people living in an urban American community today would react as violently and cruelly to a questionable innuendo as they are made to do in this film.”<sup>70</sup>

While modern society’s “sophistication” now permitted false accusations of lesbianism, there were indications that reviewers also expected less reticence toward the real thing. In its review of the adaptation of Nelson Algren’s *Walk on the Wild Side*, *Variety* claimed that “the absence of boldness in treatment [of a lesbian madam] renders the completed product just a little sterile. . . . Since the matter was decided upon in the first place, why not more deliberately?”<sup>71</sup> What is interesting about this and similar reviews is that the lesbian madam does not appear in the novel, making the reviews perhaps the first to identify a homosexual character where there was no literary basis for one.<sup>72</sup>

Although reviewers criticized reticence, they still felt the need for some restrictions. The *New Yorker* proclaimed that “the New Frontier in Hollywood lies largely in the once forbidden underground of sexual deviation.” These subjects could provide “possible sources for works of art” if taken “seriously.” But, the magazine cynically added, given that Hollywood “nearly always vulgarized usual subjects, who can dare hope that unusual subjects will fare any better?”<sup>73</sup> Most reviewers criticized *Walk on the Wild Side* and *Advise and Consent* for using homosexuality as “sensationalism” or “commercialism.” Similarly, reviewers praised

films like *Victim* for being “mature” and “intelligent” about homosexuality, warning readers that those “who drop in expecting any sensationalization of the homosexual problem [*sic*] are in for a disappointment.”<sup>74</sup> The reviewers might be referring to homosexuals seeking validation, heterosexuals caught up in the “current curiosity about psychopathology,” or both.<sup>75</sup> In either case, the reviewers use “sensationalism” as a catchall term that can be applied to people who go to these movies for the wrong (that is, immoral) reasons.

While “entertainment” was a value applied to all films, it had specific connotations when it came to films about homosexuals. Good entertainment presented a “realistic” homosexual who could evoke certain responses in the audience or film reviewer. It is these responses that are important to the reviewers and not the qualities that describe a “realistic” homosexual, often summed up in the phrase “not a caricature.”<sup>76</sup> In this sense, the “realistic” homosexual of the early 1960s was similar to the “tragic” one of the 1950s.

The response film reviewers felt appropriate was “sympathy” or “tolerance” for people with a medical condition. Intentional or not, the medical discourse neatly sidestepped the Code’s prohibition on sympathy for homosexuals and other sinners and violators of divine, natural, and human laws. According to *Commonweal*, “one is nearly moved to tears for the ill-fated teacher [in *The Children’s Hour*]; and one would like nothing better than to pack her off at once to a good psychiatrist.”<sup>77</sup> The assumption is that “homosexuality is a serious (but often curable) neurosis”; it is “something that is probably more medical than criminal.”<sup>78</sup> Reviewers were sympathetic toward the homosexuals in *Victim* insofar as they were victims of “an antiquated [British] statute” that “labels a homosexual a criminal,” encouraging blackmail.<sup>79</sup> *Commonweal* hoped that “*Victim* may even do some good” in changing the British laws.<sup>80</sup> Reviewers, however, did not discuss American laws on homosexuality, even though lawyers had begun to challenge these laws and the social injustice in the legal system.<sup>81</sup> The medical model precluded discussion of social injustice beyond the (foreign) film at hand.

Reviewers assumed that the public knew—or should know—that homosexuality was a psychiatric problem and not a congenital one. Even *Commonweal*, a Catholic periodical, cites the predominance of psychological explanations for homosexuality as early as 1956 in its review of *Tea and Sympathy*: “Surely every college, at least since 1940, has discovered psychology and has provided a dean or competent instructor to guide its young people.”<sup>82</sup> The students are to be guided away from fears about congenital homosexuality. The “discovery” of psychology in 1940 can be attributed to the emigration of numerous German Jewish psychoanalysts to the U.S. in the late 1930s and to the role of psychiatry in World War II, including the massive screening for homosexuals among draftees that began shortly before Pearl Harbor.<sup>83</sup> By 1962, *Time* could berate the scriptwriters for *Victim* because even though their “psychiatric information is clearly coeval with the statute they dispute, [they] accept this sick-silly self-delusion [of congenital homosexuality] as medical fact.”<sup>84</sup> The problem was no longer a moral one, but a question of competing medical models, congenital versus behavioral.

The congenital explanation for homosexuality had been gradually, though not completely, discredited by psychoanalysis after World War I.<sup>85</sup> While the congenital explanation continued to be instrumental in the development of a homosexual identity, its appropriation was an attempt to neutralize the legal, moral, as well as *medical* discourses on homosexuality. Film reviewers, however, did not acknowledge this distinction between sexual identity and medical pathology, even when the films themselves suggested that it existed. Instead, dialogue such as “I can’t help the way I am” in *Victim*, and “They’re people who want it, who believe it, who have chosen it for themselves” in *The Children’s Hour*, was labeled as arguments for “congenital homosexuality.” Reviewers thus effectively co-opted what could be seen as the depiction of a homosexual identity in film. Rather than allow the possibility that some characters view their homosexuality as “natural,” not so much hereditary as unproblematic, the reviewers limited the discussion of homosexuality to medical discourse.<sup>86</sup>

Even though reviewers and society now labeled homosexuality a medical problem, it was still seen in moral terms. The assumption was that homosexuals were “indecent” and “immoral,” and that “the subject is disagreeable.”<sup>87</sup> These moral judgments, however, were no longer central and were often offset by more sympathetic statements about the homosexual “condition.” In fact, the same review that found homosexuality a disagreeable subject, described the homosexual hero in *Victim* as “a man of vast compassion and *moral* integrity.”<sup>88</sup> In the film reviews, homosexuals were more often described as “abnormal” than “immoral,” and homosexuality was considered a “condition,” “practice,” and “social problem” rather than a “tragedy” and “evil.” The medical framework opened up a space for sympathy and tolerance, since homosexuality was a “disease” that could be cured or at least isolated.

In discussing the existence of the “problem,” film reviewers and others began to speak about homosexuals as members of a distinct sexual group, if not community, rather than as tragic individuals. The *New York Times* speaks of “the well-known presence and plight of the tacit male homosexual in modern society.” *Variety* describes how *Victim* “vividly reveals that all types occupy this half-world of darkness”; “the authors do not condone homosexuality but merely recognize its presence and make a plea for greater tolerance for those caught up in it.” And for the first time, a review includes homosexuals among the “disenfranchised,” adding that the “abnormal characters . . . manage to tug at the heart without breaking it.” *Time* even came close to accepting the homosexual as long as traditional male-female roles were inverted, but not subverted: “The homosexual [in *Taste of Honey* displays] valor, humor, ethos, pathos, and a touching reminder that men who become women sometimes become good women.” Of course, being “good women” meant giving “mother love” to a pregnant girl, and not erotic love to another man. But even here there was a tacit acceptance of a homosexual identity (without sexuality). Although film reviews began to refer to homosexuals as members of a clinical or even social group, identifying a homosexual community—even when it was shown on the screen—was another

matter. Only *Commonweal* describes (with both awe and reassurance) the gay bar scene in *Advise and Consent*: It is “an extraordinary scene never shown in a movie before but made as repulsive as possible.”<sup>89</sup>

Film reviewers nonetheless perceived themselves to be writing against the prejudices of their readers. The usual complaint was that audiences would not approve of the “real homosexuals” depicted. The abnormal characters in *Taste of Honey* were seen as “real people, people of whom audiences will probably not approve but who are alive and not puppets.”<sup>90</sup> One indication of how much the film review ethos had changed from condemnation to tolerance can be seen in Crowther’s review of *Taste of Honey*, which he praises for its “firm flow of tolerance and compassion.” In addition to his praise, Crowther ridicules the usual conventions and stereotypes that the film avoids, concluding with much sarcasm that “the vagrant homosexual . . . could do with some sharp and dirty digs . . . [since] . . . no one is more easily rendered odious than an obvious homosexual.”<sup>91</sup> In *The Celluloid Closet*, Russo misses the point and excerpts that remark alone, presenting it as Crowther’s own judgment.<sup>92</sup> Russo thus denies the substantial shift in reviewers’ assumptions that made possible a sarcastic utterance of anti-homosexual sentiments.

In general, reviewers thought that these films should be seen by “thoughtful,” “intelligent,” and “serious” filmgoers. Given such an audience, *Variety* felt that a “penetrating enough” examination of the “problem” might change even the views of those with “definite opinions on the moral and legal aspects of the controversy.”<sup>93</sup> Crowther, in an editorial against the censorship of *Victim*, also criticized the “definite opinions” of moral and legal condemnation since homosexuals were “helpless . . . sufferers from a disease.”<sup>94</sup>

These statements constitute an effort to define or refine a heterosexual audience, since—to modify Freud’s dictum on women—homosexuals were the problem to be understood and tolerated. Compared with the earlier reviews, suicide is no longer seen as a “realistic” or desired consequence of homosexuality, except in *Films in Review*. In addition, the wartime homosexual relationship in *Advise and Consent* does not provide a “realistic” rationale for either blackmail or suicide. Instead, it is a youthful indiscretion that a “stable family man” could face.<sup>95</sup> The film reviews reflected a shift in society from moral and legal definitions of homosexuality to psychiatric definitions. While the emphasis was still on homosexuality as a problem, the medical framework opened up the possibility for alternative readings and a certain degree of professed tolerance among heterosexual viewers.

The film reviews were written from and for a heterosexual perspective, and only rarely addressed or inferred the homosexual readership that must have existed. Richard Dyer explains the role the mass media and film in particular played for homosexuals: “Because, as gays, we grew up isolated not only from our heterosexual peers but also from each other, we turned to the mass media for information and ideas about ourselves. Until recently, films have been just

about the only widely accessible source of such ideas, and we have had, unfortunately, to rely on them a good deal.”<sup>96</sup>

Dyer’s statement must be qualified in two ways. First, as D’Emilio argues, despite their anti-homosexual bias, statements in the mass media nonetheless “communicated to gay readers that their situation was widely shared.”<sup>97</sup> In other words, the fact that homosexuality was named or spoken about is more significant than and cannot be reduced to *how* it was named. Second, the *how* of naming changed much more than either Dyer or Russo acknowledge, so that films and film reviews sometimes presented homosexuality outside the legal, moral, and even medical discourses. Most film reviews stated matter-of-factly, for example, that “*A Taste of Honey* draws no moral, comes to no conclusion” about the homosexual character, implying that nothing is “wrong” with homosexuality.<sup>98</sup> The film itself presented an alternative to classic narrative structure with its high degree of (moral) closure: “it isn’t a story at all; it’s a mood piece, a slice of life, done with imaginative realism that neither condemns nor condones.”<sup>99</sup>

During the Production Code era, reviewers let filmgoers know that—in Big Daddy’s words—“Something’s missing here!” In the changing discourse on homosexuality, the nature of that something and whether or not it was actually missing would come increasingly into question as the laws, social reform movements, sexual norms, and economic structures that underlay the Production Code began to change. In the end, censorship could neither “silence” nor “protect.” Instead, censorship incited and multiplied discourse within the field of “nonfilmic events”: literary sources, film reviews, editorials, and advertisements. Since these “events” preceded actual film viewing, the censored subject could be reintroduced back into the theater in the body of the reader/viewer, creating the possibility for authorized “subtexting.” Perhaps only Hollywood’s Big Daddy didn’t know what was happening.

The “nonfilmic events” reveal that the film text is not so much a product with a determinate meaning, as it is a social process that occupies a contested discursive space. In examining “the things said” about a film upon its release, we can discern the “frames of reference” and discourses involved in its reception. And, rather than subtexting past films to suit present needs, we can also reconstruct the historical subtexts of “interpretive communities.”<sup>100</sup> Here—within ethnic, political, sexual, religious, and/or class identified interpretive communities—we can uncover resistance and negotiation, not to mention different ways of reading altogether that do not reify a “preferred” text.<sup>101</sup>

### List of Films Considered

*These Three* (1936)

*The Lost Weekend* (1945)

*Crossfire* (1947)

*Pit of Loneliness* (French, 1951; released in U.S., 1954)

*Tea and Sympathy* (1956)

*The Strange One* (1957)  
*Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* (1958)  
*Suddenly, Last Summer* (1959)  
*The Children's Hour* (1962)  
*Walk on the Wild Side* (1962)  
*Victim* (British, 1961; released in the U.S., 1962)  
*A Taste of Honey* (British, 1961; released in the U.S., 1962)  
*Advise and Consent* (1962)

## Notes

I would like to thank Estelle Freedman, Virginia Wright Wexman, Mary Pratt, and Gabrielle Forman for their comments and support on earlier drafts of this article.

1. In the final scene of both versions of the play, it is Maggie who initiates sex, blackmailing Brick into impregnating her. In the film, Maggie acquires a more traditional role as Brick's (passive) redeemer, and even appears in the father-son confrontation scene beside Brick.
2. "Cat on a Hot Tin Roof," *New York Times*, 19 September 1958, 24. See note 48.
3. Quoted in Mary Beth Harolovich, "Advertising Heterosexuality," *Screen* 23, no. 2 (July-August 1982): 58.
4. Father Daniel Lord and Martin Quigley, "Reasons Supporting the Production Code," reprinted in Gerald Gardner, *The Censorship Papers: Movie Censorship Letters from the Hays Office, 1934 to 1968* (New York: Dodd, Mead & Company, 1987), 215-18. Gardner's book is the first to make use of the correspondence between censors and studios. The book is short on analysis and long on highly edited letters strung together with historical anecdotes taken from film reviews. In at least one instance, Gardner plagiarizes a review from *Time* (9 February 1962, 83) in providing the context for *The Children's Hour* (192).
5. "These Three," *Variety*, 25 March 1936, 15.
6. As Robert C. Allen and Douglas Gomery conclude, "little has been written about the creation of meaning through nonfilmic events" such as film reviews and advertisements. (*Film History: Theory and Practice* [New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1985], 257.) In fact, Allen and Gomery cite just one study: Mary Beth Harolovich's "Advertising Heterosexuality." I have not been able to find any other articles published on the subject since 1982. Frank Pearce examines the nature of the news coverage of homosexuals in the British press, in "How to be immoral and ill, pathetic and dangerous, all at the same time: mass media and the homosexual," in *The Manufacture of News*, ed. Stanley Cohen and Jock Young (London: Constable & Co. Ltd., 1973): 284-301. His findings about the changes over time in how the press responded to homosexuals are similar to what I have discovered about American film reviewers.
7. Edith Becker et al., "Lesbians and Film," in *Jump Cut: Hollywood Politics and Counter-Cinema*, ed. Peter Steven (New York: Praeger Special Studies, 1985), 301. Also published in *Jump Cut* 24/25 (March 1981—Special Section: Lesbians and Film): 17-21. These strategies do not differentiate between the sensibilities and cinematic codes or iconography that existed during the Production Code era and those that are specific to the present. Often the problem stems from limited and censored historical evidence—for example, the correspondence between censors and the studios was closed to examination until 1986—although a discursive analysis would expand the horizon beyond the film itself and provide the basis for a historical subtext. For examples of the various strategies applied to Production Code era films,

- see (on sensibility) the discussion on "gossip" in Becker et al., "Lesbians and Film," and Jack Babuscio, "Camp and the gay sensibility," in *Gays and Film*, ed. Richard Dyer (New York: Zoetrope, 1984): 40-57; (on Freudian psychoanalysis) Robin Wood, "An Introduction to the American Horror Film," in *Movies and Methods*, Vol. 2, ed. Bill Nichols (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985): 195-220; also Robert Lang, "Looking for the 'Great Whatzit': *Kiss Me Deadly* and *Film Noir*," *Cinema Journal* 27, no. 3 (Spring 1988): 32-44; and (on iconography) Richard Dyer, "Homosexuality and Film Noir," *Jump Cut* 16 (November 1977—Special Section: Gay Men & Film): 18-21.
8. Allen and Gomery, *Film History*, 90.
  9. Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality: Volume I: An Introduction* (New York: Vintage Books, 1980), 6, 11.
  10. *Ibid.*, 27.
  11. By "informed," I mean film reviewers who either read the book, were otherwise aware of the book or were informed of the nature of the book by the studio press release.
  12. Unfortunately, I was unable to locate gay or lesbian publications that provided film reviews or editorials. And although it would contribute much to the understanding of pre-1960s gay and lesbian film reception, an analysis of diaries, interviews, letters, and novels is beyond the scope of this article.
  13. Vitto Russo, *The Celluloid Closet: Homosexuality in the Movies* (New York: Harper & Row, 1981). For a good examination of the historical problems of "gay sensibility," especially as it relates to Russo's *The Celluloid Closet*, see Andy Medhurst, "Notes on Recent Gay Film Criticism," in *Gays and Film*, 58-64.
  14. John D'Emilio, *Sexual Politics, Sexual Communities: The Making of a Homosexual Minority in the United States, 1940-1970* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1983), 19, 130-31.
  15. Edward de Grazia and Roger K. Newman, *Banned Films: Movies, Censors and the First Amendment* (New York: R. R. Bowker Company, 1982), 5.
  16. "The Motion Picture Production Code," reprinted in Gerald Gardner, *The Censorship Papers*, 207-12.
  17. "These Three," *Time*, 30 March 1936, 33-34; "Crossfire," *Time*, 4 August 1947, 76.
  18. "The Lost Weekend," *New York Times*, 3 December 1945, 17; "Crossfire," *Time*.
  19. "The Lost Weekend," *Variety*, 15 August 1945, 14; "Crossfire," *Variety*, 25 June 1947, 8.
  20. "Crossfire," *New York Times*, 23 July 1947, 19; "The Lost Weekend," *Time*, 3 December 1945, 98; "The Lost Weekend," *New York Times*.
  21. D'Emilio, *Sexual Politics*, 19. See also, D'Emilio and Freedman, *Intimate Matters*, 288-95; and Allan Berube, "Marching to a Different Drummer: Lesbian and Gay GIs in World War II," in *Power of Desire: The Politics of Sexuality*, ed. Ann Snitow, Christine Stansell, and Sharon Thompson (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1983), 88-99.
  22. D'Emilio, *Sexual Politics*, 34-37, 41; and Pearce, "Mass Media and the Homosexual," 289-90.
  23. "These Three," *Variety*; "These Three," *Commonweal*, 3 April 1936, 636; "These Three," *Variety*.
  24. "These Three," *New York Times*, 19 March 1936, 22; "These Three," *Time*.
  25. "Pit of Loneliness," *Variety*, 16 May 1951, 18.
  26. B. Ruby Rich, "*Maedchen in Uniform*: From Repressive Tolerance to Erotic Liberation," *Jump Cut* 24/25 (March 1981—Special Section: Lesbians and Film): 47. Rich provides an excellent historical analysis of the film that should serve as the standard for similar investigations into Production Code era films. I have not included

- Maedchen in Uniform* since it precedes the enforcement of the Production Code in 1934.
27. "These Three," *New York Times*.
  28. D'Emilio, *Sexual Politics*, 96. See also Caroll Smith-Rosenberg, "The Female World of Love and Ritual: Relations Between Women in Nineteenth-Century America," *Disorderly Conduct: Visions of Gender in Victorian America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), 53-76. Smith-Rosenberg also discusses the problems Freudian psychoanalysis poses for historical method and interpretation.
  29. D'Emilio, *Sexual Politics*, 98. An unresolved question concerns the extent of lesbianism in the 1920s and 1930s. D'Emilio argues that the small number of lesbian bars indicates that there were fewer lesbians than gay men, whereas Lisa Duggan argues that the proliferation of pro-heterosexual and anti-homosexual literature by doctors and social reformers in the 1920s is evidence that lesbianism was widespread. Katherine B. Davis, in her study of the sex lives of women in the late 1920s, found that at least 25 percent of the 2,200 women she interviewed had "some homosexual experience." While the data seems to support Duggan's claim, it is important to note that the women Davis studied were college graduates, and therefore had a better opportunity than most women to meet the economic prerequisite for a same-sex erotic life—supporting oneself outside marriage. As Duggan notes, the evidence for the 1920s and 1930s is "severely limited." See Lisa Duggan, "The Social Enforcement of Heterosexuality and Lesbian Resistance in the 1920s." In *Class, Race, and Sex: The Dynamics of Control*, ed. Amy Swerlow and Hanna Lessinger (Boston: G. K. Hall and Co., 1983), 75-92.
  30. D'Emilio and Freedman, *Intimate Matters*, 171-201.
  31. D'Emilio, *Sexual Politics*, 131-32.
  32. The above remarks are based on discussions with Erin Carlston and on her unpublished essay, "'A Finer Differentiation': Homosexuality and the American Medical Community, 1926-1940," which examines the ideological conflicts within the medical discourse on lesbianism, as well as its openness to appropriation. For Atkinson's comments, see his introduction to Edouard Bourdet's *The Captive*, trans. Arthur Hornblow, Jr. (New York: Brentano's, 1926), vii-x. For an analysis of the medical discourse on lesbianism between 1880 and 1930, see also George Chauncey, Jr., "From Sexual Inversion to Homosexuality: The Changing Medical Conceptualization of Female 'Deviance,'" in *Power and Passion: Sexuality in History*, ed. Kathy Peiss and Christina Simmons (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1989), 87-117.
  33. de Grazia and Newman, *Banned Films*, 77-84.
  34. Some of the films that challenged the Production Code in the early 1950s include Otto Preminger's *The Moon is Blue* (1953), the first film to use the taboo word *virgin*, and *The Man with the Golden Arm* (1955), a film about heroin addiction; and Elia Kazan's *Baby Doll* (1956), a film about adultery. An early challenge to the Production Code is Howard Hughes's sex western *The Outlaw* (1943), a film about Jane Russell's bosom.
  35. Kinsey's scientific conclusions, in the context of the McCarthy era, took on the tenor of a warning: "Persons with homosexual histories are to be found in every age group, in every social level, in every conceivable occupation, in cities and on farms, and in the most remote areas of the country." Alfred Kinsey et al., *Sexual Behavior in the Human Male* (Philadelphia: W. B. Saunders, 1948), 627.
  36. D'Emilio and Freedman describe the ratcheting effect that took place between anti-homosexual movements and gay liberation in *Intimate Matters*, 288-95, 318-25.
  37. Russo, *The Celluloid Closet*, 102.
  38. "Pit of Loneliness," *New York Times*.

39. "Pit of Loneliness," *Variety*. Foreign films also presented "sophisticated" viewers with a safely distant sexual "other." Film reviewers even *expected* homoerotic themes from French films. In its review of *Diabolique* (1955), the *New York Times* laments that the film provides neither the "typical French account of abnormality and sadism in a badly run boys private school . . . [nor] . . . genteel mistating and frustration." *New York Times*, 22 November 1955, 41. Ironically, the film was based on a French novel about a murderous love triangle between a husband and wife and their mutual female lover.
40. "Pit of Loneliness," *New York Times*.
41. "Pit of Loneliness," *Time*.
42. "Pit of Loneliness," *New York Times*; "Pit of Loneliness," *Time*.
43. "Pit of Loneliness," *Time*; "Pit of Loneliness," *New York Times*.
44. Pearce, "Mass Media and the Homosexual," 291.
45. "Tea and Sympathy," *Time*, 8 October 1956, 104, 106, 108; "Tea and Sympathy," *New York Times*, 28 September 1956, 24.
46. "Tea and Sympathy," *New York Times*.
47. "The Strange One," *Variety*, 3 April 1957, 6; "The Strange One," *Commonweal*, 26 April 1957, 97-98; "The Strange One," *Time*, 22 April 1957, 108, 111-12; "The Strange One," *Variety*.
48. "Cat on a Hot Tin Roof," *Time*, 15 September 1958, 92; "Cat on a Hot Tin Roof," *New Yorker*, 27 September 1958, 163-64; "Cat on a Hot Tin Roof," *Variety*, 13 August 1958, 6; "Cat on a Hot Tin Roof," *Films in Review* 7 (October 1958): 454-55.
49. "Cat on a Hot Tin Roof," *New York Times*.
50. "Tea and Sympathy," *New York Times*; "Suddenly, Last Summer," *Time*, 11 January 1960, 64, 66; "Suddenly, Last Summer," *Commonweal*, 1 January 1960, 396; "Suddenly, Last Summer," *New Yorker*, 9 January 1960, 74-75.
51. "Pit of Loneliness," *Time*; "Pit of Loneliness," *Variety*.
52. Richard S. Randall, *Censorship of the Movies: The Social and Political Control of a Mass Medium* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1968), 12.
53. *Ibid.* See also, Ira H. Carmen, *Movies, Censorship, and the Law* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1966), 127.
54. "Suddenly, Last Summer," *Films in Review* 11 (January 1960): 39-41.
55. "Tea and Sympathy," *Films in Review*.
56. *Ibid.*; also "Suddenly, Last Summer," *Films in Review*.
57. "The Strange One," *Variety*.
58. "Suddenly, Last Summer," *Time*; "Suddenly, Last Summer," *Films in Review*. In a recent critical work, English professor Paul Fussell reveals the same tendency to generalize homosexual desires or fantasies: "The ultimate male homosexual social dream is to sit at an elegant dinner table, complete with flowers and doilies and finger bowls, surrounded by rich, successful, superbly suited and gowned, witty, and cleverly immoral people. The ultimate lesbian social dream is to pack it in at some matey lunch counter with the heftier proles, wearing work clothes and doing a lot of shouting and kidding." *Class* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1983), 202.
59. Randall, *Censorship of the Movies*, 205-6.
60. Gardner, *Censorship Papers*, 193. *Advise and Consent* was later released by Columbia Pictures.
61. Quoted in Russo, *Celluloid Closet*, 121-22.
62. D'Emilio and Freedman, *Intimate Matters*, 300.
63. "Victim," *Commonweal*, 23 February 1962, 569-70.
64. "Victim," *Time*, 23 February 1962, 102; "Victim," *Films in Review* 13 (February 1962): 107-8; "The Children's Hour," *Films in Review* 13 (April 1962): 236-37; "A Taste of Honey," *Films in Review* 13 (June-July 1962): 366.

65. For an excellent discussion of homosexual typing in films, see Richard Dyer, "Stereotyping," in *Gays and Film*, ed. Richard Dyer (New York: Zoetrope, 1984), 27-39. Dyer, however, fails to historicize the homosexual "iconographic features" or cinematic codes he identifies in Production Code films in his essay "Homosexuality and Film Noir." If—as he argues—homosexual characters were introduced into certain films noir, then it must follow that the agent(s) would have used covert cinematic codes understood *at that time* within one or more viewing communities: Hollywood, urban, educated, homosexual. Dyer, however, does not distinguish between these covert codes and the manifest ones that developed *after* the Production Code restrictions.
66. "Victim," *Time*.
67. *Ibid.*
68. "The Children's Hour," *Films in Review*, emphasis added.
69. "Victim," *Variety*, 6 September 1961, 6.
70. All quotations are from "The Children's Hour," *New York Times*, 15 March 1962, 28. See also, "The Children's Hour," *Variety*, 12 December 1961, 6; "The Children's Hour," *New Yorker*, 17 March 1962, 123-24.
71. "Walk on the Wild Side," *Variety*, 31 January 1962, 6.
72. While there may have been no literary source, several reviewers cite the "awesome" press release as indicating that there was something "adult" about the film.
73. "Walk on the Wild Side," *New Yorker*, 24 February 1962, 111.
74. "Victim," *Variety*.
75. "Advise and Consent," *Films in Review* 13 (August-September 1962): 430-32.
76. The "realistic" homosexual, like the "tragic" one of the 1950s, exists to evoke a cathartic response from the viewer rather than to be an accurate or "typical" portrayal. For a discussion of the problems inherent in "realist" portrayals of homosexuals, see Richard Dyer, "Rejecting Straight Ideals: Gays in Film," in *Jump Cut: Hollywood Politics and Counter-Cinema*, ed. Peter Steven (New York: Praeger, 1985), 286-95.
77. "The Children's Hour," *Commonweal*, 2 March 1962, 598.
78. "Victim," *Time*; "Victim," *Variety*. See also, Crowther's editorial, cited in note 6.
79. "Victim," *New York Times*, 6 February 1962, 27; "Victim," *Commonweal*. *Victim* is a dramatization of the 1957 Wolfenden report, which recommended that homosexuality be legalized in Britain.
80. "Victim," *Commonweal*.
81. D'Emilio, *Sexual Politics*, 144-46.
82. "Tea and Sympathy," *Commonweal*, 12 October 1956, 45.
83. Berube, "Marching to a Different Drummer," 92.
84. "Victim," *Time*.
85. D'Emilio, *Sexual Politics*, 16.
86. One can find a similar process—though used for quite different ends—at work in some psychoanalytic film criticism. According to gay film critic Robin Wood, "homophobia . . . can be explained *only* in psychoanalytic terms": humans are bisexual, society represses the homosexual side, and the repressed returns as a threat. In *History of Sexuality*, Foucault notes that the medical discourse on homosexuality "made possible the formation of a 'reverse discourse' [wherein] homosexuality began to speak in its own behalf, to demand that its legitimacy or 'naturalness' be acknowledged, often in the same vocabulary, using the same categories by which it was medically disqualified." While Foucault refers to the pre-Freudian congenital explanations for homosexuality, his concept of the "reverse" discourse seems applicable to Wood's criticism. It should be pointed out, though, that Wood's insistence on a psychoanalytic explanation ("proved" once and for all by Freud) replicates

the ahistorical nature of the medical discourse he appropriates. It is perhaps ironic then that Robert Lang's "Looking for the 'Great Whatzit,'" which relies upon Wood's paradigm, should be criticized by a behavioral scientist, and not a historian. Robin Wood, "Cat and Dog: Lewis Teague's Stephen King Movies," *CineAction!* 2 (Fall 1985): 41; Foucault, *History of Sexuality*, 101; "Dialogue: Laurence Miller and Robert Lang on *Kiss Me Deadly*," *Cinema Journal* 28, no. 3 (Spring 1989): 69-74.

87. "Walk on the Wild Side," *Commonweal*, 2 March 1962, 599; "Victim," *Commonweal*; "Victim," *New York Times*.
88. "Victim," *New York Times*, emphasis added.
89. "Victim," *New York Times*; "Victim," *Variety*; "A Taste of Honey," *New York Times*, 1 May 1962, 33; "A Taste of Honey," *Time*, 18 May 1962, 93; "Advise and Consent," *Commonweal*, 8 June 1962, 280-81.
90. "A Taste of Honey," *Variety*, 20 September 1961, 6.
91. "A Taste of Honey," *New York Times*, 20 May 1962.
92. Russo, *Celluloid Closet*, 127.
93. "Victim," *Variety*.
94. Bosley Crowther, "Choice of Words: Let the Film-Makers Pick Their Own," *New York Times*, 11 February 1962, sec. 2, 1. Russo does not cite Crowther's editorial.
95. "Advise and Consent," *Variety*, 23 May 1962, 6.
96. Richard Dyer, ed., "Introduction," *Gays and Film* (New York: Zoetrope, 1984), 1.
97. D'Emilio, *Sexual Politics*, 147.
98. "A Taste of Honey," *Commonweal*, 11 May 1962, 178-79.
99. *Ibid.*; also, "A Taste of Honey," *New York Times*, 1 May 1962, 33.
100. Stanley E. Fish, *Is There a Text in This Class? The Authority of Interpretive Communities* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1980), 322.
101. I refer to Stuart Hall's concept of the text as a set of formal properties that construct a "preferred" reading. In Hall's paradigm, reception is the product of a causal relationship—acceptance, opposition, or negotiation—with the "preferred" reading. See Stuart Hall, "Culture, the Media and the 'Ideological Effect,'" in *Mass Communication and Society*, ed. James Curran, Michael Gurevitch, and Janet Woollacott (London: Edward Arnold, 1977), 344-46.