

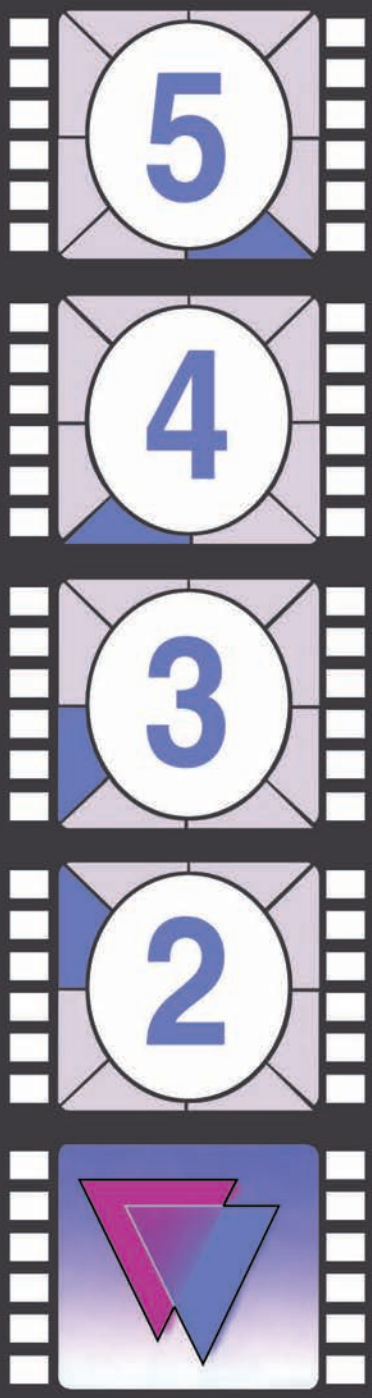


BISEXUAL CHARACTERS IN FILM



From Anaïs to Zee

WAYNE M. BRYANT



**Bisexual Characters
in Film**
From Anaïs to Zee

HAWORTH Gay & Lesbian Studies

John P. De Cecco, PhD

Editor in Chief

New, Recent, and Forthcoming Titles:

Homosexuality and Sexuality: Dialogues of the Sexual Revolution, Volume I
by Lawrence D. Mass

*Homosexuality as Behavior and Identity: Dialogues of the Sexual Revolution,
Volume II* by Lawrence D. Mass

Sexuality and Eroticism Among Males in Moslem Societies edited by Arno Schmitt
and Jehoeda Sofer

Understanding the Male Hustler by Samuel M. Steward

Men Who Beat the Men Who Love Them: Battered Gay Men and Domestic Violence
by David Island and Patrick Letellier

The Golden Boy by James Melson

*The Second Plague of Europe: AIDS Prevention and Sexual Transmission Among Men
in Western Europe* by Michael Pollak

Barrack Buddies and Soldier Lovers: Dialogues with Gay Young Men in the U.S. Military
by Steven Zeeland

Outing: Shattering the Conspiracy of Silence by Warren Johansson and William A. Percy

The Bisexual Option, Second Edition by Fritz Klein

And the Flag Was Still There: Straight People, Gay People, and Sexuality in the U.S. Military
by Lois Shawver

One-Handed Histories: The Eroto-Politics of Gay Male Video Pornography
by John R. Burger

*Sailors and Sexual Identity: Crossing the Line Between "Straight" and "Gay"
in the U.S. Navy* by Steven Zeeland

*The Gay Male's Odyssey in the Corporate World: From Disempowerment
to Empowerment* by Gerald V. Miller

Bisexual Politics: Theories, Queries, and Visions edited by Naomi Tucker

Gay and Gray: The Older Homosexual Man, Second Edition by Raymond M. Berger

Reviving the Tribe: Regenerating Gay Men's Sexuality and Culture in the Ongoing Epidemic
by Eric Rofes

Gay and Lesbian Mental Health: A Sourcebook for Practitioners edited by Christopher
J. Alexander

Against My Better Judgment: An Intimate Memoir of an Eminent Gay Psychologist
by Roger Brown

The Masculine Marine: Homoeroticism in the U.S. Marine Corps by Steven Zeeland

Bisexual Characters in Film: From Anaïs to Zee by Wayne M. Bryant

Autopornography: A Life in the Lust Lane by Scott O'Hara

The Bear Book: Readings in the History and Evolution of a Gay Male Subculture
edited by Les Wright

Bisexual Characters
in Film
From Anaïs to Zee

Wayne M. Bryant

 **Routledge**
Taylor & Francis Group
NEW YORK AND LONDON

First Published by

The Haworth Press, Inc., 10 Alice Street, Binghamton, NY 13904-1580

Transferred to Digital Printing 2009 by Routledge
270 Madison Ave, New York NY 10016
2 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon, OX14 4RN

© 1997 by Wayne Bryant. All rights reserved. No part of this work may be reproduced or utilized in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, microfilm and recording, or by any information storage and retrieval system, without permission in writing from the publisher.

Cover design by Donna M. Brooks.
Cover graphic design by David Reiffel and Mary-Ann Greanier.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Bryant, Wayne M.
Bisexual characters in film : from Anais to Zee / Wayne M. Bryant.
p. cm.
Includes bibliographical references and index.
ISBN 0-7890-0142-X (hardcover : alk. paper)
I. Bisexuality in motion pictures. I. Title.
PN1995.9.B57B78 1997
791.43'6538--dc20

96-25868
CIP

Publisher's Note

The publisher has gone to great lengths to ensure the quality of this reprint but points out that some imperfections in the original may be apparent.

In memory of *Tequila Sunrise Serval* –
dedicated writing and viewing companion.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Wayne Bryant, Co-Founder of Biversity Boston, serves on the Board of Directors for the Bisexual Resource Center in Boston and is Film Editor for the *Bisexual Resource Guide*. He has programmed bisexual films for a number of conferences and festivals and has been writing about bisexuality, films, and politics for more than a decade.

CONTENTS

Preface	ix
Acknowledgments	xiii
Chapter 1. Who is Bisexual?	1
Similarities and Differences of Real and Celluloid Bisexuals	3
Chapter 2. In the Beginning	9
A Survey of Bisexual Representation in Silent Film	10
Early Activism	17
Chapter 3. Breaking the Code	19
The History of the Motion Picture Production Code	21
Independent Filmmakers Challenge the Code	40
Chapter 4. Lost in the Translation	45
“Sanitizing” Bisexual Characters	45
Rewriting Biographies	49
The Case of No Sexuality	53
Chapter 5. Killers and Psychos and Queers! Oh My!	59
Lunatic Killers and the Mentally Ill	59
Other Bisexual Criminals	65
Chapter 6. Bisexual As Victim	67
No Rest for the Wicked!	67
Chapter 7. Wedded Bliss	73
Stereotypes of Bisexual Husbands	73
Why Wives Turn to Other Women	77

Chapter 8. Anything That Moves	83
Promiscuity Among Screen Bisexuals	83
Chapter 9. Do the Hustle	89
Bisexual Male Prostitution	89
Runaways	93
Chapter 10. Bi Camp	99
Chapter 11. The Butt of the Joke	109
Chapter 12. Oil and Water?	113
Lesbians and Bisexuals Together on Film	113
Chapter 13. In Their Own Image	121
Historical Definitions of Bisexuality	121
Bisexual Entertainers: Making a Difference	122
Chapter 14. By the Bi	135
The Bisexual Influence Offscreen	136
Bisexual Writers	142
Chapter 15. Conclusion	153
Bibliography	155
Film Index	161
General Index	171

Preface

Anyone with a passing interest in the subject can probably name a dozen or more movies with gay and lesbian characters. The same is not true for bisexual characters in film. Experts may be hard pressed to cite more than two or three examples, even though many films with homosexuality as a central theme have bisexual protagonists.

The invisibility of bisexual characters in film is compounded by the dearth of writing on the topic. While there are a number of books on homosexuality in the cinema, there has never been anything written—until now—about bisexual characters in film. The relatively small number of bisexual characters is certainly due to a variety of factors, which are discussed in this book. These include a total ban on same-sex relationships in U.S. films for decades, the lack of “out” bisexual film producers and directors, the absence of a cohesive bisexual movement until the early 1980s, and the popular myth that bisexual people do not actually exist.

Just as famous bisexual people in history have been “claimed” by the lesbian and gay community (Sappho, Alexander the Great, Virginia Woolf, Simone de Beauvoir, Langston Hughes, etc.), so have films with bisexual characters been categorized as lesbian or gay films. This is true even in cases where there are no strictly homosexual characters in the film.

Another factor contributing to the invisibility of bisexual characters is the personal prejudices of those who write movie reviews. Many film critics automatically pan films with lesbian, gay, or bisexual characters. In other cases, they conveniently ignore them. When beginning my research, I purchased a copy of *Halliwel's Film Guide*—a venerable name in film criticism—which contains a wealth of information on thousands of films, *as long as they are not about bisexual or homosexual characters*. Notably absent from this book, which claims that “no other guide has the same breadth or scope,” are such classics as *Mädchen in Uniform*, *Women in Love*,

The Rainbow, *Torch Song Trilogy*, *The Fourth Man*, *Entre Nous*, and *The Rocky Horror Picture Show*. For gay, lesbian, and bisexual films that the Halliwell guide did review, there is rarely a kind word. He calls *Personal Best* "tedious," *The Hunger* "absurd," *The Bostonians* "sluggish," *Deathtrap* "badly fumbled," and so on.

Another mainstream source which I consulted on occasion, *The Time Out Film Guide*, though more complete, is also viciously homophobic. A synopsis of the film *Zee and Company* contains the phrase "her pet faggot." The text on *Querelle* calls its director "a drug-crazed German faggot." With this sort of commentary, it is not difficult to see why films with bisexual, lesbian, or gay characters often fare poorly at the box office. Built-in obstacles of this kind make obtaining the necessary financial backing to produce such a film much more difficult.

Also contributing to this invisibility is the fact that many lesbian and gay film festivals tend to ignore films with bisexual characters. This may be because of the myth that bisexual people do not actually exist or because many gay and lesbian people who attend these festivals feel offended if the heterosexual sex they are forced to watch, *ad nauseam*, in the mainstream media shows up in a gay and lesbian film festival. Therefore, recognizably bisexual film characters are generally not mentioned in the festival program. The same seems to be true for most existing books on homosexuality in the cinema. The fact that characters being discussed are attracted to members of the other sex is not mentioned, ostensibly because that is not the subject of the book.

The program for The Seventh Annual Boston International Gay and Lesbian Film and Video Festival (1991), for instance, does not mention any bisexual characters, although roughly one quarter of the films in the festival contained such roles. The synopsis of *Straight to the Heart* describes the bisexual protagonist as coming to "full acceptance of his homosexuality," when in fact there is no indication that he is no longer bisexual. The description for *My Father Is Coming* characterizes a bisexual woman as trying to deceive her father by living with a man in order to protect her lesbian relationship. In the plot, however, she does not yet have a female lover when this scene occurs. The bisexual role in a third

film, *Sunday, Bloody Sunday*, is central to the plot, but the festival guide does not mention it.

This book does not deal with the subject of bisexual characters in pornographic movies, with the exception of a small number of soft-core films that received general theatrical release. There are a number of reasons I have chosen this course of action; for one thing, it is difficult to keep up with all the X-rated films with bisexual characters being produced these days. The enumeration of such films would overwhelm this book and make the project unmanageable. There would be questions of whether to include 8mm films and peep show film loops as well. All that aside, this author has had to sit through an unconscionable number of bad films with marginal plots already. If he hadn't stopped, he would surely have gone blind!

Finally, a few notes about language. In an attempt to make this book accessible to all people interested in the topic, the use of gratuitously academic language has been avoided. English, while rich in words and concepts, is still relatively lacking in terms to describe genders, relationships, and sexual orientations outside the male/female, monogamous, heterosexual convention. In this book, the term "opposite sex" refers to male as opposite of female and vice versa. This is not meant to negate the existence of transsexuals, transvestites, intersexed people, and people with other chromosomal combinations as additional sexes or genders. Since male and female are not *really* opposite, you may consider "opposite sex" to be merely a colloquialism. The word "straight" is used merely as a synonym for heterosexual and does not imply that heterosexuality is any more or less normal or desirable than any other sexual orientation.

Page Intentionally Left Blank

Acknowledgments

This book could not have been written without the help and support of a number of people. Many people assisted in identifying and locating films and reference books for use in this endeavor. Others provided advice, encouragement, guilt, and whatever else was necessary to keep the project moving forward. I would like to express my love and gratitude to Mary-Ann Greanier, David Reiffel, and Michael Schwartz for their unfailing assistance and encouragement. Many others helped me in a variety of ways. I would like to thank Lani Ka'ahumanu, Sharon Gonsalves, Michael Montgomery, Liam Moody, Heidi Vanderheiden, Grau Katt, Coal Train, Drew Lewis, Wouter Kaal, Kevin Hardy, Leslie Bryant, Andy Brenneman, Dr. Fritz Klein, Gilly Rosenthal, Vic De La Rosa of Frameline, Burt Blum of the Santa Monica Trading Company, Din Luboviski of the Larry Edmunds Bookshop, Jackie Hayes, Lisa Sheehy, and Aurora Nunes.

My thanks also to the dedicated organizers of lesbian, gay, and (sometimes) bisexual film festivals in Boston, Cambridge, New York, Washington, DC, Amsterdam, Hartford, San Francisco, and Copenhagen. Without their efforts, it would have been much more difficult to locate many of the more obscure films I have researched. In addition, I would like to thank the staffs of the following libraries for assisting me in locating information: Museum of Modern Art in New York, Margaret Herrick Library of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences, Library of Congress, Boston Public Library, University of California at Berkeley, San Francisco Public Library, and the national film archives in Amsterdam and Copenhagen. I would like to extend a note of special thanks to Mary-Ann Greanier for her extraordinary work in editing, indexing, and political insight, and for teaching me so much along the way.

Page Intentionally Left Blank

Chapter 1

Who Is Bisexual?

Of course, people do go both ways.

–The Scarecrow in the movie,
The Wizard of Oz

Questioning characters in film about whether they are bisexual or not is as productive as asking historical figures the same question; neither is available for comment. Were they available, there is no guarantee they would give a straight answer. Or perhaps the answer would be more “straight” than truthful. All we have to go on is the historical evidence; in this case, the film itself and anything the director, actor, or script writer may have said. Given that, we are often unable to make a determination beyond a reasonable doubt.

Opinions about bisexuality represent wide and varied beliefs. Using the broadest interpretation of the term—people who have had at least some sexual attraction to both males and females—nearly half of all American males (46 percent) would be considered bisexual according to Kinsey Institute statistics published in 1948. People rated as one through five on the Kinsey scale might be considered bisexual, whereas those who rated zero are exclusively heterosexual and six are exclusively homosexual.

Some people will use the narrowest interpretation to insist that there are no bisexual people: “bisexuals” are merely people in the process of coming out as homosexual. In his book, *Homosexuality: Disease or Way of Life?*, Edmund Berger voices this point of view. He states, “Bisexuality—a state that has no existence beyond the word itself—is an out-and-out fraud, involuntarily maintained by

some naive homosexuals, and voluntarily perpetrated by some who are not so naive.”

Scientific evidence disputes Berger’s claim, however, and suggests the opposite may be true. In 1985, Dr. Fritz Klein published research based on his Klein Sexual Orientation Grid. Rather than a single Kinsey digit, subjects using the Grid are asked to place themselves on each of twenty-one seven-digit scales. The scales indicate each subject’s past, present, and ideal rating for sexual attraction, sexual behavior, sexual fantasies, emotional preference, social preference, self identification, and lifestyle. This results in a multidimensional grid of behavior over time. Klein’s research demonstrated that there is “a significant trend in the direction of the bisexual norm with the heterosexuals moving toward a more homosexual orientation over their lifetimes, and homosexuals moving away from a homosexual orientation.”

Even among bisexuals, there is no consensus about who “qualifies” as bisexual. There is general agreement among researchers that the majority of bisexuals do not have an equal attraction to females and males. However, those bisexuals who do feel an equal attraction often feel that they are attracted to men and women in different ways. Heated debates rage over why people have a particular sexual orientation and why it may change over time. A quick reading of a few essays from the landmark anthology, *Bi Any Other Name* will illustrate a diversity of feelings, experiences, and lifestyles among bisexuals.

The general belief among bisexuals is that anyone who has an attraction to males and females can be considered bisexual, whether or not they are currently engaged in relationships with both. Many bisexuals are engaged in monogamous relationships while others are celibate. Therefore, it requires more than just physical evidence of sexual relations during any period of life to determine whether or not an individual is truly bisexual. Research by Dr. Ron Fox shows that many people who have physical attractions or even regular sexual encounters with both females and males still identify themselves as gay, lesbian, or straight. In some cases, this is because the subject has had no particular emotional attractions to partners of one sex. For others, the reason is pressure from their social support network to retain a particular identification.

**SIMILARITIES AND DIFFERENCES
OF REAL AND CELLULOID BISEXUALS**

If one were to view film characters as real rather than fictional, it would be obvious that there exists a larger population of bisexuals than is evidenced in the films. Because a film is just a small slice of a fictional character's life, we are usually given little information about their history. For example, were Ester and Anna lovers in Ingmar Bergman's *The Silence* (1963) before we join the action? Bergman teases us with this possibility, but in the end is silent about the answer. Similarly, there is no telling what will become of any given character after the film's end, unless they die on screen. As it happens, death is the fate of an inordinate number of bisexual, lesbian, and gay film characters. *The Celluloid Closet* by Vito Russo lists an interesting "Necrology" with dozens of gay, lesbian, and bisexual characters who were killed off in Hollywood films.

Some film characters may be attracted to both males and females, but do not let us know during the time frame of the film. Perhaps they are not yet aware themselves. Given the number of characters who discover their bisexuality during the course of a film, is it reasonable to assume that others might discover it in some as-yet-unmade sequel? If Stallone had made as many sequels to *Tango and Cash* as he did to *Rocky*, we might have quite a different picture of the "Italian Stallion." Just as monogamous bisexuals are less obvious in real life, a bisexual film character in a monogamous relationship is overlooked unless overt reference is made to the fact. There have not yet been any narrative film characters wearing the overlapping blue and pink triangles—the symbol of the bisexual movement.

A film must be read in the context of the period and country in which it was made. Modern Hollywood films, such as *Henry and June* (1990), can be quite explicit about bisexuality. However, films made during the days of the Motion Picture Production Code, such as *Gilda* (1946), were strictly regulated. Therefore, references had to be much more subtle. German films, such as *Mädchen in Uniform*, were acceptable in 1931 Germany (though censored in the United States). Such a film could cost the director and actors their lives less than five years later under Nazi rule.

Just as gay, lesbian, and bisexual people are forced underground when their government starts burning books and people, so are their celluloid counterparts. The characters exist during such times, but they are much more difficult to detect. They must be clever and subtle to avoid the police (read: censors), but if you know the “code words” you can still find them.

In the 1990 documentary, *Dry Kisses Only* (directed by Jane Cottis and Kaucyilia Brooke), a number of films are cited in which, despite being produced in the days of the Motion Picture Production Code (The Code), lesbian and/or bisexual characters can be spotted by “reading between the lines.” None of these roles were allowed to be explicitly developed or even strongly suggested, however. Under The Code, homosexuality could be portrayed only as negative stereotypes, warped personalities, or silly comic characters used to underscore the macho qualities of the leading (always white) male. Two women could never kiss each other more passionately than a quick peck, and men had better save their lips for the opposite sex.

There are a number of recurring character types in film that are difficult to categorize as bisexual or not bisexual. The reason they defy classification is that we do not fully understand their motivations or inclinations. Because the film is merely a slice of a character’s life, it generally reveals only a portion of the character’s personality. Even if the character is well-developed in the script, we may not know, with certainty, whether or not he or she is truly bisexual because the character may not be sure either.

One example of such an ambiguous character is the married bisexual. Old stereotypes would have us believe that all such people are actually closeted homosexuals who marry to avoid detection. If not closeted, they must be confused, and will eventually realize that they are indeed homosexual. There are certainly some married people who fall into one or the other of these categories. However, to state that this is true for all married people who are attracted to members of the same sex is simply to deny that bisexuality could possibly exist as a legitimate sexual orientation. This stereotype denies the idea that a person could choose to acknowledge his or her bisexuality over the long term and still have a successful marriage. In fact, married couples with one or both partners being bisexual

exist in significant numbers. Many of these are quite successful long-term relationships.

This attitude toward married bisexuals is deeply ingrained in the movie industry, both in the United States and abroad. One is hard-pressed to find a single instance on film of a bisexual woman who is happily married. The implication, rather, is that women turn to other women for love because their husbands abuse them. Conversely, the stereotypical married bisexual male in film is treated as a closeted homosexual who married simply for the sake of appearance. Such films do not allow the possibility that bisexual men marry because they are attracted to women. We will return to these stereotypes later in the book.

Another negative type of bisexual character is the one who sleeps with people of the same sex in order to gain something from them. In most cases, we do not know whether that character would be attracted to someone of their own sex under normal circumstances. In *The Conformist* (1971), does Anna seduce Julia only to save her husband's life? Probably. Would she—does she—sleep with other women? Perhaps. We cannot know for sure.

In the Japanese film *Afternoon Breezes*, would Natsuko have slept with a man had it not given her a better chance at becoming lovers with her roommate? Based on the evidence, probably not. On the other hand, if we had known her better, maybe we would find that this is not so incongruous for her after all. It was certainly her first time with a man, but that is not unusual for a young working woman in Japan in the late 1970s. What *is* unusual is her open attraction to another woman during that period.

Is Elizabeth Taylor's character in *X, Y, and Zee* (1972) bisexual or did she sleep with Susannah York only to save her marriage? We are left to decide for ourselves. In *Doña Herlinda and Her Son* (1986), would the son ever sleep with women if his mother were not pushing him and threatening to withhold her love? The implication of the film is that he would not, but who knows?

Michael York's Karl, in *Something for Everyone*, seems to be using his bisexuality to make his way to the top and fulfill his dream of living in a real castle. Is he having sex with both men and women only to achieve his goals . . . or would he choose to do so in any

event? If he is not bisexual, to which sex is he attracted? Considering the evidence, it is impossible to tell.

A third type of ambiguous film character is the hustler. Would one consider a man bisexual who sleeps with men professionally, but prefers women in his personal life? Maybe, but probably not. In most of these cases, however, we do not have all the information necessary to make an informed judgment. Examples of otherwise-straight hustlers appear in *Mala Noche* (1985) as young Roberto and *Midnight Cowboy* (1969), with Jon Voight as the homophobic Joe Buck. In Paul Morrissey's *Flesh* and its sequel *Trash* (1970), Joe Dallesandro plays a hustler who seems to enjoy both men and women.

There are numerous instances of characters who turn to members of their own sex due to long incarceration and the opportunity to be sexual with someone who may care about them and their situation. The first such film was probably the German *Geschlecht in Fesseln* (*Sex in Bondage*), made in 1928. In it, the male lover of a gay convict shakes down Dieterle, a married fellow prisoner, over an affair the two had in prison. In *Kiss of the Spider Woman* (1985), Valentin, the revolutionary who has a female lover waiting for his release, eventually turns his attentions to his cellmate Molina, a flamboyant queen. Men are as affectionate as they can manage under difficult circumstances in Jean Genet's French masterpiece, *Un Chant D'Amour* (1947). Tender images of hands reaching through cell windows, flowers being passed, and cigarette smoke shared through a straw fuel the homoerotic feel of this film, set in an otherwise brutal environment.

The boarding school is another form of enforced single-sex living. The most famous of all early lesbian films is *Mädchen in Uniform* (1931). In this film, several of the girls are lovingly involved with each other, and one girl with her teacher. Early in the film, however, the school girls are seen gazing longingly at pictures of men. Jacqueline Audrey's *Olivia* (1951) depicts passion between students in a French girls' school. *Thérèse and Isabelle* (1968) is yet another girls' school film in which at least one of the young lovers has an interest in men, as well. Many European countries have produced one or more of these films. *You Are Not Alone* (1982) is Denmark's contribution. In it, a bisexual boy named Bo teaches the