



## American Television, Drama

by Nathan G. Tipton

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Despite a steady increase in the number of "big screen" queer characters and queerly-themed movies, the overt presence of gays and lesbians on the American small screen has been (and continues to be) far more limited. As Suzanna Danuta Walters has explained, while film has long dealt with gay subjects (albeit in often stereotyped or "tragic" ways), television's explicitly family-centric format appeared to mandate that glbtq persons were simply not a part of families that made up "typical" family audiences.

After all, Walters continues, the intense intimacy and centrality of television in the personal space of family life provides a particular type of viewing experience that is fundamentally distinct from the relative anonymity of movie theaters.

Not surprisingly, this family-centrism is displayed most prominently in programs shown by the five broadcast television networks, ABC, CBS, NBC, The CW, and Fox. These networks have historically been reticent about tackling homosexuality in its multifarious forms, preferring instead to leave these programming decisions to the proliferating number of cable networks.

Still, long before the advent of cable, broadcast networks were tentatively exploring homosexuality by vicariously inserting into dramatic television series stereotypically gay characters.

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### Early Representations

From 1968 to 1974, as Edward Alwood has explained, homosexuals on television were recognizable in programs such as *Kojak*, *M\*A\*S\*H*, *Police Woman*, and *Hawaii Five-O* because of their routine representation as limp-wristed, effeminate drag queens who walked with a swish and talked in high-pitched voices. Further, as Kylo-Patrick R. Hart has noted, a 1973 episode of ABC's prime-time series *Marcus Welby, M.D.* portrayed homosexuality as a serious illness that subjects gay men to unfulfilling lives, even though this view was strongly challenged that same year by the American Psychiatric Association.

In the face of these stereotyped representations, however, the 1970s also saw the rise of TV movies or MOWs (the broadcast industry slang for "movie of the week") that portrayed homosexuals in a more positive light. These made-for-television movies, promoted as special "events," were specifically themed to address controversial subject matters that otherwise would not be seen in regular programming.

The first TV movie to deal with gay subject matter was ABC's 1972 drama, *That Certain Summer*, which explored a teenage boy's reaction to finding out that his father is gay. *That Certain Summer* starred Hal Holbrook as the father and Martin Sheen as his lover, and it garnered much critical acclaim, including a Best Supporting Actor Emmy award for Scott Jacoby, who played the teenage son.

In 1978 lesbian love was the subject of NBC's *A Question of Love*. Gena Rowlands and Jane Alexander starred in the poignant story of a lesbian mother and her lover, whose "dirty secret" is discovered by Rowlands' ex-husband. He initiates legal proceedings against the pair, and an ugly custody battle ensues.

Another type of battle ensued in ABC's 1985 drama *Consenting Adult*, starring Marlo Thomas and Martin Sheen. Thomas and Sheen portrayed parents trying desperately and, in Sheen's case, unsuccessfully, to deal with their son Jeff's (Barry Tubb) nascent homosexuality.

### **The Age of AIDS**

With the emergence of AIDS on the national landscape, the television landscape changed to accommodate its presence.

In 1985, NBC broadcast the landmark TV movie *An Early Frost*, featuring Aidan Quinn as Michael Pierson, an aspiring lawyer and closeted gay man who, unknown to his family, lives with his lover Peter (D. W. Moffett). Michael not only discovers that Peter has been unfaithful to him but, because of this infidelity, Michael has been infected with the AIDS virus.

This discovery threatens to tear apart not only his relationship with Peter but with his family as well. As Rodney Buxton has explained, the fragile veneer of the Pierson family stability bursts apart when Michael learns he has AIDS, exposing all the resentments that various family members had repressed.

Paradoxically, *An Early Frost* was, in spite of drawing respectable viewing audience ratings, a victim of its own success. Many advertisers believed the subject matter was either too controversial or too depressing. Further AIDS-related TV movie projects were also shelved because of the perception that *An Early Frost* had effectively addressed the issue for network television audiences.

In 1986, however, subscriber network Showtime premiered its adaptation of William M. Hoffman's highly regarded Broadway play *As Is*. Although Kylo-Patrick R. Hart has remarked that *As Is* is structurally less complex than its predecessor, *An Early Frost*, nevertheless its graphically honest depictions of AIDS served a profoundly educational purpose. Not only did *As Is* dispel several popular misconceptions about the disease, such as methods of contraction through mere physical contact or by air, it also drew attention to the diversity of AIDS sufferers.

Despite advertiser resistance to its inherently depressing content, by 1987 AIDS had begun surfacing in the plots of several prime time television shows, although, as Emile Netzhhammer and Scott Shamp have pointed out, the fact that regular characters must be around for next week's episode usually prevented central characters from becoming infected with a disease that will probably kill them. In order to circumvent this quandary, network executives featured AIDS on individual episodes of shows including *21 Jump Street*, *The Equalizer*, and *Midnight Caller* but, in doing so, created a causal link between AIDS and gay men.

For example, the 1988 episode of *21 Jump Street*, "A Big Disease With a Little Name," shows Officer Tom Hanson (Johnny Depp) being assigned to guard from peer harassment an AIDS-stricken hemophiliac male teenager. This Ryan White-type AIDS scare scenario alters when Hanson discovers that the teen is not hemophiliac. Instead, the teen tells Hanson he is gay and refers obliquely to the "real reason" why he has AIDS: unsafe sex. This connection was perpetuated in the media precisely because the earliest reported AIDS cases resulted almost exclusively from unsafe sexual practices among gay men.

Although TV movies such as PBS's *Andre's Mother*, HBO's *And the Band Played On*, and ABC's *Our Sons* attempted to cast AIDS sufferers as noble victims cast off by society, the connection between gay men and their sexual practices nevertheless remained firmly in place.

*Andre's Mother*, the Emmy-award winning adaptation of gay playwright Terrence McNally's drama, aired in 1990 as part of the *American Playhouse* series. The show's conflict revolved around the refusal of the eponymous Andre's mother (Sada Thompson) to accept her late son's sexual identity, even as Andre's lover Cal (Richard Thomas) battles continually for this acceptance.

*Andre's Mother* shifted the "AIDS outsider" dynamic away from the deceased Andre, who is reverently remembered by friends and Cal alike. Instead, Andre's mother becomes the outsider, shut out by both his gayness and his disease, before reluctantly moving towards acceptance as the movie ends.

It remains unclear how much these televised depictions of AIDS resulted in an overall increase in societal AIDS awareness and in increased understanding and compassion for those most affected by the epidemic. However, with the shift in AIDS demographics away from gay men, television portrayals of homosexuals began to break new representational ground. <sup>5</sup>

### **Gays Enter the Television Mainstream**

But even before the specter of AIDS rose in media prominence, another landmark event occurred on a prime time series. In 1981 television audiences for the wildly popular ABC show *Dynasty* were introduced to Steven Carrington (Al Corley from 1981 to 1982 and again in 1991) and Jack Coleman from 1982-1989), the first openly bisexual, and later gay, recurring character in a dramatic television series.

Steven weathered traumas typical of a nighttime soap opera: bisexual liaisons resulting in an out-of-wedlock pregnancy, widely circulated rumors about his homosexuality, and gay lovers murdered by his outraged father, oil baron Blake Carrington. Although deeply conflicted at the outset, Steven finally received praise and recognition from Blake who, in 1991's *Dynasty Reunion*, acknowledged to Steven and his partner, "I am so glad to see that you have someone who loves you as much as I do."

Steven Carrington notwithstanding, *Dynasty* long maintained a marked queer appeal. The show effortlessly combined the trappings of glamorous opulence with scheming, backstabbing characters who exuded an appealing amorality.

*Dynasty* episodes were further highlighted with moments of gloriously high camp, particularly in the memorable "catfights" between the two leading ladies, Krystle (Linda Evans), Blake's present wife, and Alexis (Joan Collins), Blake's former wife. Both straight and queer TV audiences quickly came to expect, if not demand, a weekly hair pulling, furniture-throwing, name-calling, and dress-shredding showdown between the two otherwise impeccably dressed and well-mannered (if not always well-behaved) society scions.

Following the demise of *Dynasty*, producer Aaron Spelling (who also created and produced *Dynasty*) debuted *Melrose Place* in 1992. *Melrose Place* began as a spin-off from another popular Spelling production, *Beverly Hills 90210*, a teen-oriented show that featured many different, though incidental, gay characters during its ten-year network run.

Departing from its teen cousin, *Melrose Place* focused on the lives of a group of young professionals who all share the same Los Angeles apartment complex. The series also featured a recurring gay male character, Matt Fielding (Doug Savant), who was alternately praised as a revolutionary step forward for gay men on television or reviled as a representational nobody.

Much of the criticism surrounding Matt's character resulted from the deliberate downplaying of his homosexuality. Kylo-Patrick R. Hart has commented that, particularly in the show's first two seasons, so much of Matt's social life took place off camera that the series failed to effectively explore realities associated with gay male life. Matt was tapped, instead, to provide emotional support to his fellow apartment denizens.

By the third season, the show's writers and producers began exploring Matt's gay lifestyle on a regular basis, although these explorations were couched in the same soap opera-style melodrama seen in *Dynasty*. Matt found himself involved in a variety of dysfunctional relationships including ones with a closeted naval officer who later discloses that he is HIV-positive, a gay policeman turned obsessed stalker, and a physically

abusive therapist.

Matt was also fired from his job on two separate occasions because of his sexual orientation and developed an uncontrollable drug habit before moving to San Francisco in the show's sixth season, thus effectively ending his tenure on *Melrose Place*. Å

### **The Rise of Prime-Time Lesbianism**

At about the same time that Matt's role on *Melrose Place* was waning, a new star and a new show was finding adherents. In September 1995, *Xena: Warrior Princess* debuted on the USA cable network. Fashioned after mythical Amazon warriors, Xena (Lucy Lawless) and her cohort Gabrielle (Renee O'Connor) were an immediate hit with both straight and queer audiences who wanted something different in a television show than the usual prime time network offerings.

Clad in leather and chain mail, sporting an almost fearless insouciance, Xena exuded difference, and became a model for strong women who would not be cowed by (usually male) opponents. Even though Xena was not per se a lesbian, her ambiguous relationship with the softer, more feminine Gabrielle, certainly hinted at a barely sublimated lesbianism that the show's writers played up at every opportunity.

Indeed, the sympathetic lesbianism seen in *Xena: Warrior Princess* illustrates the sharp contrast in portrayals of lesbians and gay men that has existed, and continues to persist, in television drama. *Dynasty's* Steven Carrington and *Melrose Place's* Matt Fielding exhibited the stereotypical promiscuity and dysfunctionality characteristic of media portrayals of gay male relationships, while the relationship between Xena and Gabrielle was marked with loyalty, devotion, and commitment.

These traits, in fact, have media antecedents stretching back to 1989, with the pathbreaking feminist medical drama, ABC's *Heartbeat*. This show, which lasted only for one season, featured Gail Strickland as nurse practitioner, Marilyn McGrath, the first recurring, openly lesbian character in prime time. Speaking to *People* magazine interviewer Susan Toepfer, *Heartbeat* writer Sara Davidson has remarked that audiences should see McGrath as a terrific person first, then find out that she had a private life that, at its core, was no different from anyone else's.

*Heartbeat* introduced a relationship plot for McGrath's character almost immediately, a romantic interest played by Gina Hecht, but the series' short-lived network run effectively ended the recurring lesbian presence on a prime time dramatic show until the advent of *Xena*. However, corresponding with the rise of *Xena* came the 1995 NBC TV movie, *Serving in Silence: The Margarethe Cammermeyer Story*, which directly addressed the U.S. military's "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" policy regarding open declarations of homosexuality.

*Serving in Silence* told the story of Colonel Margarethe Cammermeyer (Glenn Close), a 28-year Army veteran who, after applying to the Army War College, "admitted" in response to a direct question posed by an investigating officer that she was a lesbian. Because of this declaration, the Army began proceedings for her immediate discharge, and Cammermeyer instituted legal proceedings in response. The movie, which was produced by Barbra Streisand, garnered respectable audience ratings but drew fire on the eve of its premiere because of a discreet kiss between Close and her on-screen lover, Judy Davis. Å

### **Kissing to Be Clever**

The furor over the discreet kiss shared by Close and Davis was hardly unexpected, given the backlash from previous televised expressions of homosexual affection. In February 1991, two female attorneys on the NBC series *L. A. Law*, C. J. Lamb (Amanda Donohoe) and Abby Perkins (Michele Greene), engaged in what has become famous as the first lesbian kiss on network television.

Larry Gross has explained that, in the last few episodes of the 1991 season, the recipient of the famous kiss, Abby Perkins, seemed eager to push things even further, only to have the bisexual C.J. hold back and declare that Abby was not really ready. Thus viewers realized they would have to wait until the next season

to find out if network television was ready to permit two women to express sexual desire for each other. But the answer never came. Michele Greene left the show over the summer and C.J., after being given a one-episode lesbian lover, embarked on an affair with a straight man.

Although the kiss between Abby and C.J. was actually a quick peck on the lips viewed from behind one of the women, it was quite enough to re-ignite the furious debate over depictions of same-sex desire on television begun in 1989. On November 7, 1989, ABC aired the "Strangers" episode of the "yuppie" series *thirtysomething*, in which the series' two main gay characters Peter (Peter Frechette) and Russell (David Marshall Grant) are introduced and, in due course, fall into bed together.

Joe Wlodarz has noted that the most sensational and controversial aspect of the episode is the physical enactment of the two men's desire (both insinuated and visually confirmed) as they share a post-coital moment in bed and talk about their experience of losing friends to AIDS.

However, according to Richard Kramer's script, the bedroom scene was to be preceded by a seduction scene in which Russell kisses Peter and to be concluded with an erotic/affectionate embrace in bed between the two. The viewing audience never witnessed these two moments, leading gay author Armistead Maupin to suggest that the gay kiss, and particularly the gay male kiss, can only be imagined to be "repulsive to most viewers because they have been systematically denied sight of it."

A similar censoring befell *Melrose Place's* hapless Matt Fielding during the 1994 season finale. In the final episode, the visiting best friend of main character Billy Campbell (Andrew Shue) falls for Matt, and a scene was shot in which the two characters kiss before retiring to separate beds. However, as Larry Gross notes, conservative critics chimed in with protests and threats of boycotts. In response, the network altered the scene. Instead of kissing, the two men shook hands, exchanged a meaningful glance and moved towards one another, before the camera cut away to Billy looking through the blinds of his apartment with a shocked expression.

However, while gay male expressions of sexual desire seemed to remain firmly in the closet, lesbian kisses were appearing more frequently and with less fanfare. On January 11, 1997, an episode of the ABC show *Relativity* showed a close-up, passionate, ten-second kiss between Rhonda Roth (Lisa Edelstein) and her girlfriend Suzanne (Kristin Dattilo). Surprisingly no network affiliates pulled the episode from their schedule, even though ABC heavily marketed the show's content.

Speaking with *Advocate* columnist Robert Pela, GLAAD (Gay and Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation) spokesperson Alan Klein noted that the lack of negative response to the show was clearly a sign that times and perceptions are changing.

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### **Changing Perceptions and Breakthrough Representations**

Despite changing social and media perceptions, however, there is still a lingering reticence on the part of broadcast network executives to televise overt displays of homosexual affection and desire. Indeed, in recent years cable and subscriber networks have been far more pathbreaking in their depictions of homosexual content than the networks. For instance, the broadcast networks would not have dared attempt what subscriber network Showtime executed in 2000 with the debut of *Queer As Folk*. Billed in 1999 as the first all-gay soap opera, *Queer As Folk* exploded on Britain's Channel 4 before being transplanted, for U.S. viewers, to Pittsburgh.

Produced by life partners Ron Cowen and Daniel Lipman (who also created the series *Sisters* and 1985's *An Early Frost*), *Queer As Folk* offered an unflinching, no-holds-barred slice of queer life, including foam parties, nipple piercing, and recreational drug use. There was also no shortage of erotically charged same-sex lovemaking scenes, usually between amoral Lothario Brian Kinney (Gale Harold) and his much younger boyfriend Justin Taylor (Randy Harrison).

Yet, in the face of this rampant hedonism, the show also provided a balance of sympathetic characters who sought and achieved meaningful--if tenuously held-- relationships. In the show's first season Michael Novotny (Hal Sparks), whose best friend is Brian, became intimately involved with chiropractor Dr. Dave Cameron (Chris Potter) and, although this relationship ended at the conclusion of season one, Michael soon found a much longer-term partner in HIV-positive professor Ben Bruckner (Robert Gant). Best friends Emmett Honeycutt (Peter Paige) and Ted Schmidt (Scott Howell) also did a turn as lovers in season three.

Living among *Queer As Folk's* predominately gay male cadre was a lesbian couple, Lindsay Peterson (Thea Gill) and Melanie Marcus (Michelle Clunie), who served as dual mothers to Gus, the infant offspring of Lindsay and Brian. The two women also had the show's longest-running relationship.

Lindsay and Mel helped pave the way for another Showtime series, the steamy lesbian hit show *The L Word*, which premiered in January 2004. Although *The L Word* was widely praised, it also drew criticism similar to that received by *Queer As Folk*. Constance Reeder, columnist for the lesbian publication *off our backs*, complained that *The L Word* was not groundbreaking TV but was, instead, "*Queer As Folk* with breasts."

However, renowned gender theorist Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick noted that, while the show was certainly not "edgy" in its "relation to reality or political process," it was nevertheless "absurdly luxurious" in its exploration of the "portrayal of generational dynamics in this group of women, even if only between thirtysomethings and twentysomethings."

Coincident with the meteoric rise of *Queer As Folk* and *The L Word*, Viacom and MTV Networks unveiled Logo, a new channel specifically targeting queer audiences, on June 30, 2005. One of its Logo's first offerings was something previously unseen anywhere on television, whether broadcast or cable: *Noah's Arc*, the first predominately black gay TV show.

*Noah's Arc* debuted on October 19, 2005, and followed the lives of a group of African-American gay men in Los Angeles. According to Ben Aslinger, even though critics struggled to describe the show to audiences unfamiliar with its references to African-American queer culture, the show became an unlikely hit that scored big with African-American glbtq audiences and helped put Logo on the map.

*Noah's Arc* was also noteworthy for not shying away from controversial topics especially relevant to African Americans such as the "down low" debate (in which straight-identified black men surreptitiously sleep with other men, thus keeping their queer sexuality "on the down low"), AIDS-related activism and education, and drag performance. Aslinger points out, however, that the show also risked reinforcing stereotypes of the hypersexual black male and the "down low" as seemingly fixed tropes of gay black identity.

Yet in spite of its almost cult-like popularity, *Noah's Arc* was cancelled after two seasons. In response, the black gay blogosphere erupted with comments accusing the Logo network of racism. However, as Michael Johnson Jr. observed, although the show was successful in elevating the visibility of Latino and African-American gay men, it ultimately failed to acknowledge the complex and often contradictory messages embodied in its characters and plot, particularly in terms of ethnicity, same-sex male desire, and masculinity.

*Noah's Arc* creator Patrik-Ian Polk, moreover, also stated to *Advocate* columnist Kellee Terrell, that the show's presence on Logo limited its exposure to wider audiences. Nevertheless, blogger Keith Boykin offered a positive view of *Noah's Arc's* potential and mourned its cancellation, writing that "if nothing else, it created the possibility in the minds of the public and the industry that [a predominantly black gay television show] is something that can happen and be supported."

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**Queering Twenty-first Century Television**

Although it seems unlikely that broadcast networks will ever reach the levels of queer representational acceptance shown on Showtime's queer hit shows, perceptual changes continue to be seen on both cable and broadcast networks.

Coming-out storylines like those of Jack McPhee (Kerr Smith) on the WB's *Dawson's Creek* (in 1999) and Dr. Kerry Weaver (Laura Innes) on NBC's *ER* (in 2000) are no longer considered provocative. Similarly, queer relationship narratives such as Willow (Alyson Hannigan) getting a girlfriend on the WB's *Buffy The Vampire Slayer* (also in 2000) now occur regularly across network and cable platforms. Indeed, in 2001 HBO premiered the bizarre comedy *Six Feet Under* that prominently featured a long-term interracial gay relationship between mortuary co-owner David Fisher (Michael C. Hall) and LAPD officer Keith Charles (Mathew St. Patrick).

In May 2004 producers of another HBO television drama, *The Sopranos*, announced that Joseph Gannascoli, who played Vito Spatafore on the hit show, would come out as a gay mobster. Gannascoli explained that he relished the chance to play a gay character, and said that he wanted to be "effeminate but knockaround."

In December 2003 HBO premiered a six-hour, \$60 million TV presentation of Tony Kushner's pathbreaking AIDS epic *Angels in America*. *Angels*, which featured an all-star cast including Meryl Streep, Emma Thompson, and Al Pacino, received rave critical reviews and garnered an astonishing 11 Emmy awards. Emma Thompson, in an *Advocate* interview about her response to the play, remarked "I opened the play, read the first couple of pages, rang Mike [director Mike Nichols], and said 'I'll do it.' The writing has that effect on you. It's so remarkable."

The continued uptick in queer characters across television platforms has been further documented by GLAAD who, in 2005, launched their annual "Where We Are on TV" report.

GLAAD's reports track trends and compile statistics for series regular characters on broadcast television with regard to sexual orientation, gender identity, and race/ethnicity. According to GLAAD the number of inclusive dramas (those series with leading and/or supporting GLBTQ characters) on the five broadcast networks have grown steadily and have featured a diverse assortment of characters such as police officer John Cooper (Michael Cudlitz) on NBC's *Southland*; attorney Kevin Walker (Matthew Rhys), retired company CFO Saul Holden (Ron Rifkin), and professional chef Scotty Wandell (out actor Luke Macfarlane) on ABC's *Brothers and Sisters*; investigator Kalinda Sharma (Archie Panjabi) on CBS's *The Good Wife*; and physician couple Dr. Arizona Robbins (Jessica Capshaw) and Dr. Callie Torres (Sara Ramirez) on ABC's *Grey's Anatomy*.

In an evident nod to the increasing media attention focused on same-sex marriage initiatives and legislation, Arizona and Callie were married in *Grey's Anatomy's* "White Wedding" episode (air date May 5, 2011), as were *Brothers and Sisters'* Kevin and Scotty in the "Prior Commitments" episode (air date May 11, 2008). The CW's *90210*--a reboot of the popular 1990s Aaron Spelling teen drama *Beverly Hills 90210* that debuted in 2008--also showcased the coming-out of Teddy Montgomery (Trevor Donovan) who in season four (2011) renewed a relationship with former flame and marriage equality advocate Shane (Ryan Rottman).

Although no cable network has yet attempted to replicate the queerscapes of *Queer As Folk* and *The L Word*, the number of regularly appearing out characters on mainstream cable channels continues to be higher than those characters shown on broadcast networks. Scripted programming on cable has continued to highlight an increasingly inclusive and diverse array of characters, whether in a leading or supporting role or with a recurring series presence.

ABC Family's *GREEK*, for instance, features gay African-American college student Calvin Owens (Paul James), while *Pretty Little Liars*--also on ABC Family--showcases Emily Fields (portrayed by Filipino-Irish actress Shay Mitchell). TeenNick's long-running series *Degrassi: The Next Generation* includes transgender teenager Adam Torres (Jordan Todosey) among its ensemble. According to Steve Stohn, *Degrassi's* executive

producer, the decision to incorporate a transgender person reflected a more naturalistic portrayal of adolescents, engaging viewers by "being more realistic."

Indeed, this emphasis on realistic situations and characters was at its most pronounced in the problematic yet intensely nuanced character Omar Little (Michael K. Williams) on HBO's long-running and critically acclaimed series *The Wire*. In an interview with the *AfterElton* website, Williams described his character as being an unashamedly gay street thug who, despite having a violent streak, also lives by a strict code of conduct.

Omar Little had been an integral part of *The Wire's* cast since its debut in 2002 but, as befitted a violent show, Little also met a violent (if somewhat shocking) end after being shot in the head by a young boy in the "Clarifications" episode (air date February 24, 2008). Little had many devoted fans, including U.S. president Barack Obama, who mentioned while campaigning for president in 2008 that Omar was his favorite character in his favorite show. As Obama carefully stated, "That's not an endorsement. He's not my favorite person, but he's a fascinating character."

In terms of the number of glbtq representations on mainstream cable, HBO and Showtime continue to dominate, due in large part to HBO's *True Blood* and its sexually ambiguous legion of vampires and witches.

Prominent among *True Blood's* cohort are flamboyant African-American short order cook Lafayette Reynolds (Nelsan Ellis) and his Hispanic boyfriend Jesus Velasquez (Kevin Alejandro), who are both witches. With regard to Lafayette's character, Alan Ball, the out writer-producer and sometime director of the *True Blood* series, has noted that Lafayette is a stereotype-busting chameleon, "refusing to be a gangster, [and] refusing to be effeminate." Ball, who also created HBO's *Six Feet Under*, added that the gay themes on *True Blood* are simply topical and that the series represents a "fun, irreverent way to show how easy it is to disenfranchise a group."

Another stereotype-buster also entered the American television landscape on January 9, 2011, with the premiere of Showtime's *Shameless*. The show, a remake of the popular British TV series *Shameless*, revolves around the lives of a dysfunctional down-and-out family living in the Chicago suburbs, and includes closeted gay teenager Ian Gallagher (Cameron Monaghan) who, in addition to being ROTC-trained, also smokes pot, is obsessed with porn, and has a torrid affair with his married Muslim boss Kash (Pej Vahdat).

In an interview with *Vanity Fair* columnist Brett Berk, Monaghan described his character as the "anti-stereotype" and the "anti-Kurt Hummel" (a reference to *Glee's* flamboyant out gay teenager Kurt), and noted that Ian never does anything that could be perceived of as stereotypically gay. Monaghan also stated that even though he himself was not gay, he was drawn to the character of Ian because it was a "fantastic part." He observed that "a lot of teens--and a lot of gay teens, especially--will really relate to the role."

Television portrayals of homosexuals have made significant positive strides since the homophobic images seen in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Indeed, as the prevalence of televised gay, lesbian, bisexual, queer, and transgender portrayals increases, television viewers (and the general public at large) become exposed to what GLAAD--in its annual Network Responsibility Index--calls the "rich tapestry of the GLBTQ community." This exposure, in turn, results in a continued favorable trend toward greater acceptance of gay and lesbian persons among the American public.

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### **About the Author**

**Nathan G. Tipton** is a Ph.D. candidate in Textual Studies at the University of Memphis. He has published critical articles on Robert Penn Warren, Martha Stewart, and the Batman comics, and is a long-standing reviewer for *Lambda Book Report*. He is writing his dissertation on queer eccentricity and gay identity in 1950s Southern fiction.