



European Film

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European films have been greatly influential in shaping the history of queer cinema. In the first 30 years or so of cinema (roughly from the 1920s through the 1950s), European films, like their American counterparts, rarely included honest, non-judgmental portrayals of gay and lesbian characters or dealt seriously with the theme of homosexuality.

However, as attitudes and ideas evolved in Europe throughout the 1960s and 1970s the lives and culture of homosexual men and women became more visible, and film became more explicit about sexual behavior. Consequently, glbtq filmmakers across many European countries were able to bring their personal sensibilities to the screen, creating socially, as well as artistically, significant queer-themed films.

Although working across an array of styles and exploring a variety of subjects, several common themes can be found within many glbtq European films, such as conflicts between classes and generations, the plight of the marginalized, and the yearning for love and freedom in a repressive society.

Early Gay and Lesbian European Films

The first known gay-themed film is Swedish director Mauritz Stiller's *Vingarne* (*The Wings*, 1916). Based on Herman Bang's novel *Mikael*, the film concerns a sculptor and his attraction to his young and handsome apprentice (who is primarily attracted to women). The younger man takes advantage of his patron at every opportunity, and their romance ends unhappily, with the older man dying of a broken heart.

The same material was used by German filmmaker Carl Theodor Dreyer in 1924, under the title *Mikaël*. As with the earlier Swedish film, the relationship between the two men is handled discreetly and conveyed mainly through glances and tone.

Another early gay-themed film is Richard Oswald's *Anders als die Andern* (*Different from the Others*, 1919), written by Oswald and Magnus Hirschfeld, the renowned German sexologist and founder of the Institute for Sexual Science in Berlin. Conrad Veidt stars as a musician blackmailed after making advances on a stranger at a men-only dance. The story was prefaced by a direct-to-camera monologue by Hirschfeld and ended with an explicit plea for the abolishment of Paragraph 175, the German law that punished homosexuality. The film was banned by the German government after a short commercial run.

In 1931, Leontine Sagan directed *Mädchen in Uniform* (*Girls in Uniform*), one of the earliest films with a strong lesbian undertone. Based on a play by the German writer Christa Winsloe, it tells the story of Manuela, an unhappy schoolgirl sent to a strict boarding school, who develops a romantic attraction to one of her teachers. When Manuela openly declares her love the headmistress denounces such feelings as "sinful" and decides the student must be expelled. Faced with separation from her beloved, Manuela is driven to the point of suicide. Two endings were created for the film; in one, Manuela dies, but in the other she is saved by her classmates. The latter version was deemed objectionable by American censors; therefore, the more tragic ending, where the schoolgirl is irrevocably punished for her feelings, was the

only version available in the United States for decades.

Cocteau and Genet

Other significant examples of early European gay cinema include the films of Jean Cocteau and Jean Genet's *Un chant d'amour*.

Jean Cocteau was one of the most versatile French artists of the twentieth century; in addition to being a director, he was a poet, novelist, painter, playwright, set designer, and actor. He was also openly homosexual; many of his films feature his lover of many years Jean Marais.

Cocteau's first film, *Le sang d'un poète* (*The Blood of a Poet*, 1930), explores the process of creating art through a series of dreamlike tableaux. Cocteau has stated that the film was an attempt to tell "where poems come from." He denied that the film contained any symbolism and instead called the movie "a realistic documentary of unreal happenings."

Cocteau wrote dialogue and adapted several stories for the screen over the next several years, but let fifteen years pass before writing and directing his second film, *La belle et la bête* (*Beauty and the Beast*, 1946). Using haunting images, and romantically elegant sets and costumes, Cocteau tells the story (based on the eighteenth-century fable by Madame Leprince de Beaumont) of a lonely and misunderstood Beast, played by Jean Marais, who falls in love with a beautiful young woman. *La belle et la bête* is, by general consensus, one of the most enchanting films ever made.

Cocteau and Marais subsequently collaborated on several more films, including *L'aigle à deux têtes* (*The Eagle Has Two Heads*, 1947), and *Les parents terribles* (*The Storm Within*, 1948). Perhaps the most significant of their collaborations is *Orphée* (*Orpheus*, 1949). Cocteau set his retelling of the Greek myth of Orpheus in post-war Paris, and cast Marais as a poet who follows the spirit of his dead wife to the Underworld. Instead of rescuing his wife, however, he abandons her in his search for the treasures Death may hold. Self-consciously homoerotic, *Orphée* features striking and original imagery; the film became famous for its use of two leather-clad motorcyclists as the errand boys of Death.

Following the completion of *Orphée*, Cocteau made no films of his own for ten years; he blamed his withdrawal on the commercialism of the cinema and the dependence of filmmakers on financial backers. He did, however, contribute dialogue, narration, and occasionally full screenplays to the films of others. Cocteau directed his last film in 1960, *Le testament d'Orphée* (*The Testament of Orpheus*), another retelling of the Orpheus legend, this time reinterpreted as the story of an eighteenth-century poet who time travels in search of inspiration. Cocteau cast himself as the poet; the film also includes uncredited appearances by Pablo Picasso, Jean Marais, and Charles Aznavour, among others.

Another French artist who has had a significant influence on both queer and experimental cinema is Jean Genet. Although more widely known as a novelist and playwright, Genet also created *Un chant d'amour* (*A Song of Love*, 1950), one of the earliest and most remarkable attempts to portray homosexual passion on screen.

Less than half an hour in length and silent, the film tells the story of three prisoners in solitary confinement and the prison's warden. Realistic scenes of the prisoners attempting to communicate their desires for one another (for example, two prisoners share a cigarette by blowing smoke back and forth through a hole in the wall) give way to fantasy images of same-sex lovemaking.

Since its first release, *Un chant d'amour* has been subject to censorship and banned in several countries on the grounds of obscenity. The film is explicit in its portrayal of gay male desire, showing several scenes of masturbation and containing possibly the earliest images of erect penises seen in a legitimate, non-pornographic film.

Victim

Another landmark in the evolution of European gay and lesbian cinema occurred with the release of the British film *Victim* (1961). The film, directed by Basil Dearden, broke serious ground by addressing the adverse public perception of homosexuality in Britain. At the time, Britain had laws against homosexual activity, which left many gay men vulnerable to blackmail or exposure. *Victim* concerns a self-confessed, but non-practicing, homosexual, portrayed by Dirk Bogarde, who risks his marriage and career to track down a ring of blackmailers preying on wealthy gay men. The film is reputedly the first in Britain to use the term "homosexual"; it was initially banned in the United States simply because the word was uttered in the movie.

Although perhaps timid in its treatment of homosexuality by today's standards, *Victim* is, nonetheless, a very courageous film. Made in the aftermath of 1957's Wolfenden Report, which recommended that homosexual behavior between consenting adults no longer be criminalized in England, the filmmakers consciously set out to change British law and the public's perceptions of homosexuality. Six years after the film's release, the Sexual Offenses Act of 1967 finally decriminalized most homosexual behavior between consenting adults over the age of 21 in England and Wales.

As political and social changes gradually took place in Europe throughout the 1960s and 1970s, the portrayal of homosexual men and women on screen became more acceptable, and brought several gay and lesbian directors and their queer-themed films to the forefront. Such directors include, among others, Italy's Luchino Visconti and Pier Paolo Pasolini, Germany's Rainer Werner Fassbinder and Rosa von Praunheim, Britain's Derek Jarman, and Spain's Pedro Almodóvar.

Visconti and Pasolini

Luchino Visconti is usually credited as one of the founders of Italian Neorealism (along with Roberto Rossellini and Vittorio De Sica), with films notable for their use of nonprofessional actors and naturalistic settings. However, as his work progressed, Visconti's films became more stylized, and ultimately, more deeply personal. Openly bisexual, Visconti's films have few explicitly gay characters, although there is often an undercurrent of homoeroticism.

Perhaps Visconti's most important contribution to gay cinema is *Morte a Venezia* (*A Death in Venice*, 1971), an adaptation of Thomas Mann's classic homoerotic novella. The film tells the story of Aschenbach, a vain but aging composer, who travels to Venice to rest after a period of artistic and personal stress. A man obsessed with an ideal of beauty and perfection, Aschenbach becomes entranced with a beautiful young boy, Tadzio. Although only intending to stay at the Venetian resort for a short time, the composer invents reasons for prolonging his holiday, despite the threat of a deadly outbreak of cholera. Aschenbach lingers in the city and courts his own demise in his quest to understand the meaning of perfection.

Other notable films by Visconti include his first feature, *Ossessione* (1942), an unauthorized version of the James M. Cain novel *The Postman Always Rings Twice*. Visconti subtly portrays the friendship between the young drifter Gino and a street magician as a one-way gay romance. For example, in one scene, the two men are together in bed and the street magician strikes a match to survey Gino's handsome face as he sleeps.

Rocco e i suoi fratelli (*Rocco and His Brothers*, 1960) looks at Southern Italian peasants who relocate to Milan in search of economic stability. The film includes a subplot involving a boxing promoter who pays young men for sex.

Il gattopardo (*The Leopard*, 1963), one of Visconti's most acclaimed films, chronicles the decline of the Sicilian aristocracy during the Risorgimento, the nineteenth-century movement that led to the unification

of Italy, a subject close to Visconti's own family history.

Visconti explored the rise of Nazism in *La caduta degli dei* (*The Damned*, 1969), a portrait of the disintegration of a German industrialist family during the Third Reich. Homoeroticism is rampant in the film. Helmut Berger, as the German industrialist's grandson and successor, makes his first appearance in the film in full Marlene Dietrich drag; an explicit gay orgy precedes a scene depicting the Night of the Long Knives, June 30, 1934, when Hitler purged the party of his homosexual associate Ernst Röhm and some 300 other members of the "Brown Shirts." The stylized decadence depicted by Visconti was of such graphic intensity that the film was originally released in the United States with an X rating.

Ludwig (1972) is Visconti's film biography of the nineteenth century homosexual "mad" King Ludwig II of Bavaria. The film includes a portrayal of the aging king's obsession with a handsome young actor and features an all-male orgy reminiscent of the one in *The Damned*. The 1974 film *Gruppo di famiglia in un interno* (*Conversation Piece*), is a culmination of the themes that run through most of Visconti's films: the disintegration of family, the decay of traditional values, and the obsessive pursuit of beauty.

Poet, painter, playwright, essayist, and novelist, Pier Paolo Pasolini is best known outside of Italy as a filmmaker. Indeed, Pasolini is considered one of the most significant directors to emerge in the second wave of Italian cinema in the 1960s. Although politically radical and openly gay, Pasolini infrequently addressed homosexuality in his films.

Pasolini's first film, *Accattone* (1961), adapted from his own novel *Una vita violenta* (*A Violent Life*), is a realistic depiction of the life of an *accattone*, or pimp, in Rome's petty-criminal underworld. The film's sympathetic attitudes toward its amoral characters caused an immediate uproar; Italian authorities originally sought to ban the film outright, but eventually allowed a release restricted to adults only.

His next film, *Mamma Roma* (1962), with Anna Magnani in the lead role, explores similar territory, and centers on a woman who is fatefully drawn back to her former life as a prostitute. This film, too, attracted official censure for "offending against the common sense of decency," but was finally released after lengthy legal proceedings.

Pasolini once again courted public outrage and legal battles with his third film, *La ricotta*. Pasolini was invited to contribute an episode to the 1963 compendium film titled *RoGoPaG* (named after the four contributing directors: Rossellini, Godard, Pasolini, and Gregoretti). In Pasolini's short film, a petty criminal finds work as an extra on a film about the life of Christ. When he is cast as one of the thieves crucified with Christ, he, ironically, suffers from a fatal case of indigestion and actually dies while on the cross. Italian authorities considered the film an "outrage against the established religion"; Pasolini was consequently tried for blasphemy and received a three-month suspended sentence. A significantly edited version of Pasolini's film was eventually allowed to be released.

It might have been suspected that his next feature film *Il Vangelo secondo Matteo* (*The Gospel According to St. Matthew*, 1964), told in an almost documentary-like style, would again create outrage and receive censure. This time, however, the film was praised by Catholic organizations as one of the few honest portrayals of Christ on screen, and attacked instead by left-wing critics who accused it of pietism and hagiography. Despite all the controversy, or perhaps in part because of it, the film brought Pasolini his first international recognition.

Pasolini followed that film with *Uccellacci e uccellini* (*Hawks and Sparrows*, 1966), about the adventures of a father and son (the son was played by Ninetto Davoli, Pasolini's one-time lover). Pasolini next shifted his focus to the mythic past with *Edipo re* (*Oedipus Rex*, 1967).

Pasolini returned to a contemporary setting with *Teorema* (1968), one of his most controversial works. The story concerns a handsome, enigmatic stranger who insinuates himself into the home of a bourgeois

Milanese family and proceeds to physically and emotionally seduce them all, including the father and the young son. Catholic authorities were outraged by the film and had it withdrawn and the director charged with obscenity. The charges were finally dismissed two years later and the film formally released in 1970.

In the early 1970s Pasolini concentrated on lush, erotic adaptations of classical texts, which at the time he characterized as his most "non-political" films. *Il Decameron* (*The Decameron*, 1971), *I racconti di Canterbury* (*The Canterbury Tales*, 1972), and *Il fiore delle mille e una notte* (*Arabian Nights*, 1974), provided Pasolini with his greatest commercial successes and broadest audiences. Later, Pasolini suggested these were instead his most "political" films; the politics being sexual in the eroticized male and female bodies celebrated on screen.

Pasolini's final film is the intensely controversial *Salò o le 120 giornate di Sodoma* (*Salo, or The 120 Days of Sodom*, 1976), an uncompromising and explicit fusion of Mussolini's Fascist Italy with the philosophies of the Marquis de Sade. Scenes of rape, sodomy, coprophagia, sexual humiliation, and torture are repeatedly depicted. The film was released (and withdrawn on charges of obscenity) two weeks after Pasolini's death at the hands of a male prostitute. *Salò* was subsequently banned in Italy, and nearly everywhere else, for several years.

Fassbinder and the New German Cinema

One of the most remarkable phenomena of cinema was the brief but prolific career of German filmmaker Rainer Werner Fassbinder, who died at the age of 36. Few other directors in cinema history have matched his productivity. From 1966 to 1982, Fassbinder completed 44 films for theatrical or television release. His prodigious output was matched by a wild, self-destructive nature that earned him a reputation as the *enfant terrible*, and central figure, of the New German Cinema. Openly gay (he declared his homosexuality to his father at age 15), Fassbinder nonetheless married twice; one of his wives acted in his films and the other served as his editor.

Fassbinder's films typically detail the hopeless yearning for love and freedom and the many ways in which society, and the individual, impedes it. Many of his films deal candidly with sexuality; homosexual themes often appear, either as central or incidental to the films' plots.

Fassbinder achieved his first international success with *Die Bitteren Tränen der Petra von Kant* (*The Bitter Tears of Petra von Kant*, 1972), a highly stylized film that is both a tribute to and a deconstruction of Hollywood's "women's pictures" of the 1940s and 1950s. The story (adapted from Fassbinder's own play) concerns a lesbian love affair and its aftermath between a successful fashion designer and a young, working-class model.

Working again in the genre of the Hollywood melodrama, *Faustrecht der Freiheit* (*Fox and His Friends*, 1975), focuses on a gay circus worker (played by Fassbinder himself) who wins a large fortune in a state lottery and is befriended and systematically exploited by a clique of younger, bourgeois gay men. Criticized by some gay and lesbian critics as being homophobic, Fassbinder insisted that his central focus was less on sexual behavior and more on the power relations among people sexually involved with one another, and on the intersections of age, beauty, and social class.

Fassbinder explored his own self-destructive tendencies in *Satansbraten* (*Satan's Brew*, 1976), about an artist named Kranz who is no longer able to create. The film features several sexually explicit scenes played for surreal comedy. In one scene, Kranz receives a public restroom proposition from a male hustler who masturbates frankly for the camera throughout their conversation; in another, Kranz is beaten up by a pimp and discovers he enjoys the pain.

In einem Jahr mit 13 Monden (*In a Year of 13 Moons*, 1978), explores issues of sexual identity and the familiar Fassbinder theme of the "outsider among outsiders" in the story of Elvira, a male-to-female

transsexual who, in the last few days before her suicide, decides to visit some of the important people and places in her life. In a virtuosic sequence, Elvira wanders through the slaughterhouse where she worked as Erwin, recounting her history amidst the carnage. Filmed in the aftermath of the suicide of Fassbinder's estranged lover, the work is an unrelenting, emotionally candid, and profoundly personal study of the human quest for love, approval, and acceptance.

Fassbinder's best-known homoerotic work is his final film *Querelle* (1982), adapted from the Jean Genet novel *Querelle de Brest*. The film, a fetishized, flamboyant examination of the various forms of love and sexuality, concerns a young sailor (played by the American actor Brad Davis) discovering his homosexuality. In the first of several erotically charged scenes, *Querelle* purposely loses a bet and allows himself to be sodomized by the husband of the local brothel owner. To tell his story, Fassbinder utilized such archetypal gay imagery as leather-clad men and debauched sailors in white uniforms, and a self-consciously stylized landscape of phallic architecture.

Fassbinder died in 1982 of an overdose of sleeping pills and cocaine.

Another prolific filmmaker of the New German Cinema with a highly individualized style is Rosa von Praunheim (born Holger Mischwitzky). He chose the name Rosa as an allusion to the pink triangle ("rosa Winkel") that homosexuals were forced to wear in the Nazi concentration camps.

Beginning his career in the late 1960s, von Praunheim developed a confrontational approach to filmmaking, offering little comfort to spectators and explicitly disavowing inspirational or optimistic treatments of gay life. He has been quoted as saying, "I don't want audiences at my movies to have a good time, I want them to be upset."

In 1971, von Praunheim gained notoriety, and created controversy, throughout Germany with his film *Nicht der Homosexuelle ist pervers, sondern die Situation, in der er lebt* (*It is Not the Homosexual Who Is Perverse, but the Society in Which He Lives*, 1971). The appearance of this film has been cited as crucial to the founding of the new German gay rights movement. His film *Armee der Liebenden oder Revolte der Perversen* (*Army of Lovers or Revolution of the Perverts*, 1979) documents the American gay and lesbian rights movement from the 1950s to 1976.

With the black comedy, *Ein Virus kennt keine Moral* (*A Virus Knows No Morals*, 1985), von Praunheim made one of the earliest feature films about AIDS. He subsequently directed a trilogy of films about AIDS and AIDS activism: *Positiv* (*Positive*), *Schweigen = Tod* (*Silence = Death*), and *Feuer unterm Arsch* (*Fire Under Your Ass*), all made in 1990.

In 1992, he directed the life story of the East German transvestite Charlotte von Mahlsdorf, *Ich bin meine eigene Frau* (*I Am My Own Woman*), employing both documentary footage and recreations utilizing actors. *Vor Transsexuellen wird gewarnt* (*Transsexual Menace*, 1996), originally made for German television, documents the transgender community.

The gay sexologist Magnus Hirschfeld is the focus of *Der Einstein des Sex* (*The Einstein of Sex*, 1999). *Can I Be Your Bratwurst, Please?* (1999), a 30-minute comedy, stars the gay pornography icon Jeff Stryker.

Frank Ripplloh is another gay German filmmaker whose work has courted controversy. Ripplloh achieved international art-house success with his first feature film *Taxi zum Klo* (*Taxi to the Loo*, 1981), an explicit account of the director's own sexual escapades and fantasies. He returned to the same milieu several years later with *Taxi nach Kairo* (*Taxi to Cairo*, 1987), in which the main character's mother threatens to disinherit him if he does not settle down and marry. Ripplloh died in 2002 at the age of 52.

Director Wolfgang Peterson first gained recognition for his film *Die Konsequenz* (*The Consequence*, 1977), an understated and unsentimental coming-out story that he co-wrote as well as directed. Peterson went on

to earn international acclaim for *Das Boot* (*The Boat*, 1981), a wartime drama about a German U-Boat crew. He subsequently relocated to California, where he has since directed a number of mainstream Hollywood films.

German filmmaker Ulrike Ottinger has become a significant figure in lesbian cinema with her extravagant avant-garde fantasies. The attractions and desires of her female characters are never overtly presented, but are instead subtly encoded in the stylized *mise en scène* of her films.

Her first film, *Laokoon and Söhne* (*Laocoon and Sons*, 1975), stars Tabea Blumenschein, an underground film actress and Ottinger's lover at the time. Ottinger and Blumenschein collaborated again on *Madame X--eine absolute Herrscherin* (*Madame X: An Absolute Ruler*, 1978), a satiric and erotic fantasy, which has since reached cult status, about a group of women who join a female pirate on her sea voyages.

Ottinger has also directed several documentaries, primarily on marginalized cultures, such as *China. Die Künste--Der Alltag* (*China. The Arts--The Everyday*, 1985), about everyday life in the Sichuan and Yunnan provinces of China; *Taiga* (1992), concerning nomadic tribes in northern Mongolia; and *Exil Shanghai* (*Exile Shanghai*, 1997), the story of six exiled Jews in Shanghai who later settled in the United States.

Monika Treut has explored controversial social issues and celebrated transgressive sexuality in such films as *Verführung: Die grausame Frau* (*Seduction: The Cruel Woman*, 1985), about the psychological aspects of sadomasochism, and *Die Jungfrauenmaschine* (*Virgin Machine*, 1988), in which a female German journalist investigates the lesbian subcultures of San Francisco.

The compilation documentary *Female Misbehavior* (1992) is perhaps Treut's best-known work. "Bondage" (1983) examines the lesbian S&M and bondage scene; "Annie" (1989) showcases lesbian performance artist Annie Sprinkle; "Dr. Paglia" (1992) focuses on critic Camille Paglia; and "Max" (1992) documents the female-to-male transsexual journey of Max Velerio.

Derek Jarman and British Film

The British filmmaker Derek Jarman was a uniquely idiosyncratic artist known for his opulent imagery, social criticism, and bold explorations of homosexuality. He routinely revisited history from a gay perspective, and his work was influenced by such gay European filmmakers as Cocteau, Fassbinder, and Pasolini, and the American underground director Kenneth Anger.

Sebastiane (1976), Jarman's debut feature film (co-directed by Paul Humphress), is an overtly homoerotic interpretation of the life and martyrdom of Saint Sebastian, with dialogue spoken entirely in Latin. The film opens with an extended scene set in a Roman orgy where naked men covered in body paint dance while wearing comically exaggerated penises. The film's explicit content and ground-breaking full-frontal male nudity earned it an X rating when it was first released; the film went on to become a critical and commercial success.

Jarman followed that film with *Jubilee* (1977), a political fantasy in which Queen Elizabeth I time travels to find England a wasteland of violence and anarchy, and *The Tempest* (1979), a visually lush reworking of Shakespeare's play. Jarman returned to Shakespeare for his next feature, *The Angelic Conversation* (1985), a unique, non-narrative exploration of the underlying theme of homosexual desire in fourteen of Shakespeare's Sonnets.

Caravaggio (1986), which examines the art and sexuality of the late-Renaissance Italian painter, is perhaps Jarman's most popular work. Told in an intentionally anachronistic manner--motorcycles and jazz music are juxtaposed with richly rendered, painstaking recreations of Caravaggio's most famous works--the film emphasizes the artist's homosexual affairs with his models and the various scandals in which he was involved.

In 1991, Jarman created a film version of Christopher Marlowe's play *Edward II*. Although the film is relatively faithful to Marlowe's Elizabethan text, Jarman's direction turned the source material into a parable of homosexual martyrdom in the face of institutionalized homophobia, with direct references to the repressive nature of Thatcher-era British politics. Jarman augmented the film with graphic visualizations of homosexual love and sadomasochistic violence.

Other significant films by Jarman include *The Last of England* (1988), *War Requiem* (1989), *The Garden* (1990), *Wittgenstein* (1993), and his final work *Blue* (1993), in which a soundtrack of voices, sound effects, and music are densely interwoven against a plain, unchanging cobalt blue screen to convey Jarman's experiences with AIDS.

Jarman died of an AIDS-related illness in 1994.

British filmmaker Terence Davies began his career with the short films *Children* (1976), *Madonna and Child* (1980), and *Death and Transfiguration* (1983). These intensely personal films chronicle the main character from childhood to death and examine how he copes with his working-class family, religious upbringing, and his own homosexuality. The three films were released together in 1984 under the title *The Terence Davies Trilogy*.

Davies' first feature film, the autobiographical *Distant Voices, Still Lives* (1988), paralleled the director's own harsh life in Liverpool during the 1940s and 1950s. The film won international acclaim for its structural innovations and lyrical imagery. Davies followed that film with *The Long Day Closes* (1992), a somewhat more uplifting look at a working-class Catholic childhood, again set in Liverpool.

Davies continued his career with non-autobiographical films, including *The Neon Bible* (1995), inspired by the novel by John Kennedy Toole, and *The House of Mirth* (2000), based on the novel by Edith Wharton.

Other notable glbtq-themed British films include the ground-breaking *A Taste of Honey* (1961), directed by Tony Richardson, about a young unwed pregnant woman who befriends and sets up house with a gay art student. The film, based on the play by Shelagh Delaney, rendered one of the first sympathetic portrayals of a homosexual character in the history of cinema.

John Schlesinger's *Sunday Bloody Sunday* (1971), is the story of a young, bisexual sculptor who divides his affections between a divorced woman and a well-to-do male doctor. *Maurice* (1987), created by the distinguished gay partnership of James Ivory (director) and Ismail Merchant (producer), and based on the posthumously published novel by E.M. Forster, concerns an upper-class man coming to terms with his homosexuality in Edwardian England.

Stephen Frears' early feature films *My Beautiful Laundrette* (1985), the story of a cross-race, cross-class, and same-sex relationship in London, and *Prick Up Your Ears* (1987), a study of gay British playwright Joe Orton, who was murdered at the height of his fame by his mentor and lover Kenneth Halliwell, are also noteworthy additions to the history of gay cinema.

Sally Potter's film *Orlando* (1992), based on the fanciful novel by Virginia Woolf, features a metaphoric transsexual character who is born a nobleman in the Elizabethan age and changes sex midway through his/her life. "Same person, no difference at all. Just a different sex," Orlando remarks, after falling asleep as a man and waking as a woman. Orlando is played throughout the film by actress Tilda Swinton; Queen Elizabeth I is portrayed by the openly gay writer and performance artist Quentin Crisp.

Further key British works include *Beautiful Thing* (1996), directed by Hettie MacDonald, a love story between two teenage boys in a London housing project, and Brian Gilbert's *Wilde* (1997), about the poet and playwright Oscar Wilde, with the openly gay actor Stephen Fry in the title role.

Pedro Almodóvar and Eloy de la Iglesia

Pedro Almodóvar is the most internationally-acclaimed filmmaker to emerge from post-Franco Spain. He began his career making short films in the early 1970s. His earliest efforts became cult hits, but his third feature film, *Entre tinieblas* (*Dark Habits*, 1983), an offbeat comedy about a nightclub singer who seeks refuge in a convent of delinquent nuns (who indulge in such secular pleasures as hard-core drugs and soft-core porn), gained the director a wider audience.

Almodóvar's popularity increased with *¿Qué he hecho yo para merecer esto?!!* (*What Have I Done to Deserve This?*, 1984) and *Matador* (1986), and established the filmmaker's distinct style of combining elements of camp, comedy, melodrama, and sexual intrigue that often exceed the boundaries of socially acceptable norms.

Mujeres al borde de un ataque de nervios (*Women on the Verge of a Nervous Breakdown*, 1988), an elaborate farce deconstructing the clichés of female hysteria, became Almodóvar's first worldwide success. Throughout the 1990s, with such films as *¡Átame!* (*Tie Me Up! Tie Me Down!*, 1990), *Tacones lejanos* (*High Heels*, 1991), and *Kika* (1993), Almodóvar continued to craft brightly-colored confections with tragicomic plots often focusing on death, violence, rape, and betrayal.

With the release of *Todo sobre mi madre* (*All About My Mother*, 1999), Almodóvar brought a greater refinement and emotional subtlety to his work. The film centers on a woman who, after the tragic death of her teenage son, journeys through Barcelona's underworld in search of the son's father, now a transsexual. Almodóvar followed with *Hable con ella* (*Talk to Her*, 2002), a complex tale of love, obsession, and loss.

Almodóvar's most significant gay-themed film, as well as his self-confessed most personal work, is *La ley del deseo* (*Law of Desire*, 1987). This intricately plotted film--part fantasy, part murder mystery, and part erotic comedy--centers around Pablo, a gay writer/director deeply in love with a young man, Juan, who will not respond to his affections. Under Almodóvar's direction, the film becomes both an appreciation of, and a satire on, the conventions of romantic love.

One of the earliest Spanish directors working within queer cinema is the Basque-born Eloy de la Iglesia. Outspokenly gay, de la Iglesia has stated that his films are about "the world of which the majority of filmmakers do not care to speak, the marginal world." His films often feature gay, or otherwise marginalized, characters. De la Iglesia has explained that he is a director who "always wants to make the films that are not supposed to be made," on subjects that "everyone else has agreed not to talk about." Despite censorship constraints and hostile reactions from Catholic leaders to many of his films, de la Iglesia has enjoyed commercial success as a director, especially in Spain.

De la Iglesia began his film career in 1966 with *Fantasia . . . 3*, a collection of three short films based on children's stories by Hans Christian Andersen, L. Frank Baum, and the Grimm brothers. His first commercial achievement in his native country was *El techo de cristal* (*The Glass Ceiling*, 1971); two years later saw de la Iglesia's first international success with the release of *La semana del asesino* (*Week of the Killer/Cannibal Man*, 1974), a violent account of a young man who goes on a killing spree. The film also includes a gay character who is presented in an open, non-stereotypical, manner.

The death of Francisco Franco in 1975 brought more latitude and a new openness for artists in Spain. As a result, de la Iglesia created *Los placeres ocultos* (*Hidden Pleasures*, 1977), the first gay film to be produced in Spain. The film concerns a closeted homosexual banker attracted to a poor, heterosexual young man. The banker brings the young man into his life, and although the attraction is one way, the youth is accepting of the situation and even brings his girlfriend into the arrangement.

In 1979, de la Iglesia returned to a similar subject with *El Diputado* (*The Deputy / Confessions of a*

Congressman), the story of a married gay congressman who risks his political career when he falls in love with a young man and attempts to integrate the man into his family life. The homosexual affair in this film, however, ends tragically.

De la Iglesia continued his career with such films as *El sacerdote* (*The Priest*, 1979), which was banned by the Catholic Church and heavily censored upon its initial release; *Colegas* (*Pals*, 1980); and *El pico* (*The Shoot*, 1983). After an absence of 15 years, de la Iglesia returned with *Los novios búlgaros* (*Bulgarian Lovers*, 2003), a comedy of sexual obsession, about a middle-aged gay lawyer who falls in love with a handsome, young foreigner.

Other Notable European Films

Other notable filmmakers in the history of European glbtq cinema include Belgian-born Chantal Akerman, whose works, typically filmed in a direct but distanced manner, address such themes as alienation, voyeurism, and marginalization. *Je, tu, il, elle* (1974) concerns a young woman's quest for sexual knowledge; in the final section of the film the young woman, played by Akerman herself, shows up at another woman's house where they proceed to make love. *Jeanne Dielman, 23 Quai du Commerce, 1080 Bruxelles* (1976), perhaps Akerman's best-known film, focuses on a young, middle-class widow whose life begins to unravel as she rigorously tries to maintain her role as housewife and mother, while discreetly serving as a prostitute.

Italian director Ettore Scola's *Una giornata particolare* (*A Special Day*, 1977), starring Sophia Loren and Marcello Mastroianni, concerns a woman who befriends her homosexual neighbor on the eve of Hitler's 1938 visit to Fascist Italy.

The Danish films *Du er ikke alene* (*You Are Not Alone*, 1978), co-directed by Ernst Johansen and Lasse Nielsen, and *Venner for altid* (*Friends Forever*, 1987), directed by Stefan Henszelman, both deal with the confusions of gay male teenagers coming to terms with their homosexuality.

Noteworthy French films include Jean Delannoy's *Les amitiés particulières* (*This Special Friendship*, 1964), which focuses on the youthful friendships, with homoerotic overtones, among a group of boys in a strict French Roman Catholic boarding school in the 1930s. The popular farce *La cage aux folles* (1978), directed by Edouard Molinaro, is about a gay couple whose lives are turned upside down when the son of one of the men announces he is getting married.

Coup de foudre (*Entre Nous*, 1983), directed by Diane Kurys, concerns two women who meet in the aftermath of World War II and gradually form a deep bond that excludes their husbands and children. André Téchiné's *J'embrasse pas* (*I Don't Kiss*, 1991), focuses on a young man who leaves his home in the country to pursue an acting career in Paris but is eventually forced to prostitute himself to men, while *Les roseaux sauvages* (*Wild Reeds*, 1994), is a gracefully sensual coming-of-age story set in the early 1960s.

Les nuits fauves (*Savage Nights*, 1992), directed by Cyril Collard, concerns a promiscuous bisexual male (played by Collard himself) coping with the knowledge that he is HIV-positive; Collard died the following year of an AIDS-related illness. *Ma vie en rose* (1997), directed by Alain Berliner, is the tale of an eight year-old boy who wants to live his life as a girl.

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