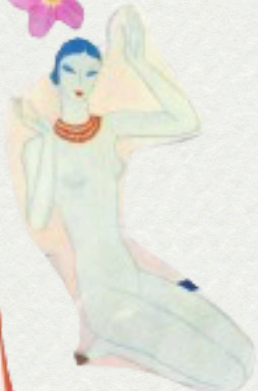




reel

TALK



Hello and welcome to the Reel Talk zine! We're so pleased to present you with an exciting range of articles, reviews, recommendations (and even a themed crossword puzzle!) from our wonderful team.

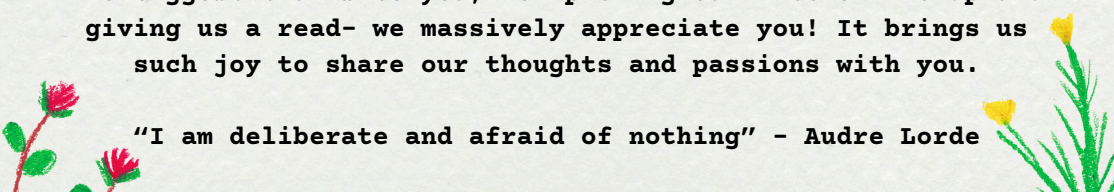
We have worked so hard to bring this Pride collection to you in its physical form. Zines, a shortened form of 'magazines' or 'fanzines', originated in subculture and offered an alternative to mainstream publication. The format was also adopted by underrepresented groups, as an artistic means of information-spreading and community-building. Zines are typically hand-made, from the formatting to the binding, and are primarily distributed in small batches. It is a pleasure to reproduce this process for our Pride edition, which shines the spotlight on queer film and television.

Our writing team focused on a diverse range of screen media, highlighting the filmic/televisual contributions of LGBTQ+ creatives and their wider cultural impact. In a time where queer lives are increasingly under threat, where identities are used as political pawns and the most vulnerable are progressively maltreated, it is vital that we protect and support our LGBTQ+ communities. Yet, amidst these dark days, there is also light. As we rally against hatred and shame, we must remember to also prioritise queer joy and expression. Our articles reflect on long-loved media, reapproaching our viewing practices, and look to the future, embracing the changes yet to come. From this collection emerges a united message: we are here to stay.

We would like to extend a huge thank you to every member of the Reel Talk team who made this possible- whether you wrote, edited, or produced- we couldn't have done it without you. A special thank you to James Taylor, who offered us endless support and guidance throughout the process (and printer access!).

The biggest thanks to you, for picking our little zine up and giving us a read- we massively appreciate you! It brings us such joy to share our thoughts and passions with you.

"I am deliberate and afraid of nothing" - Audre Lorde

The page is decorated with stylized floral illustrations. In the bottom left corner, there are two red flowers with green leaves. In the bottom right corner, there are two yellow flowers with green leaves. The flowers are drawn in a simple, hand-drawn style.



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# CONTENT WARNINGS

Many of the films mentioned in this Zine may feature content that could be distressing. If you're interested in watching any of the films mentioned, please ensure that you research any potential content issues before viewing. We've added content warnings for the main films featured in articles below:

*Showgirls* (1995): Sexually explicit content, sexual assault, violence and gore.

*The L Word*: Sex and nudity. It would be best to check on an episode by episode basis for content warnings.

<https://www.doesthedogdie.com> provides detailed content warnings.

*Fire* (1996): Domestic abuse (brief)

*Joyland* (2022): Transphobia, Suicide.

*Interview With a Vampire*: Violence and gore

*Femme* (2023): Graphic sex, nudity, hate crime, assault

*Watermelon Woman* (1996): Sex and nudity

# A LOVE LETTER TO CINEMATIC TRASH: THE QUEER CAMP LEGACIES OF 'SHOWGIRLS' (1995)

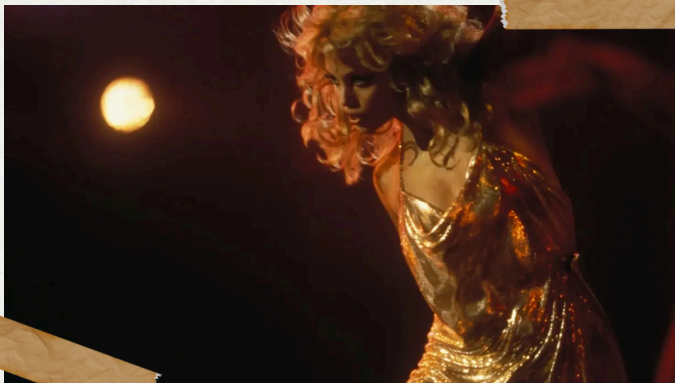
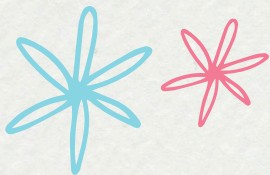
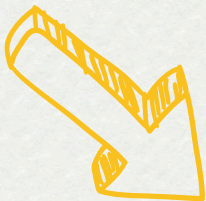
'Not all homosexuals have Camp taste. But homosexuals, by and large, constitute the vanguard - and the most articulate audience - of Camp', so says Susan Sontag in her revolutionary 1964 essay 'Notes on Camp'. Flamboyantly landing onto the academic and cultural playing field, Sontag essay would go on to be revised as a bible in contemporary discussions around the aesthetics of media and what it means to be 'high' or 'low' art. Artificial, unintentional, and most importantly ambitious in its outlandish nuance, Sontag dictates Camp as a sensibility, as a taste cultivated only by those who are in on the bit. As she says, "Camp is esoteric ... a badge of identity even among small urban clique" (Sontag, 1962). The queer evil stepmother of conventionality, Camp cinema has flourished like no other and remains a lifelong staple to many queer communities. From the gutters of John Water's *Trash Trilogy* to the heights of Liza Minelli in *Cabaret* (1972), Camp's retrospectives and legacy can be seen far and wide in film history's worst and best products. As put by columnist Judith Dry, 'Wherever camp goes, queer follows.'






Considered a laughable commercial flop and dubbed by Roger Ebert as a 'sleazefest' in his two-star review of the film, *Showgirls* had all the necessary components to be embraced as a cult camp classic, winning seven Golden Raspberry awards including Worst Picture and Screenplay upon its release. Directed by Paul Verhoeven, the master craftsman behind *Basic Instinct*, and starring Elizabeth Berkley as fiercely ambitious stripper Nomi Malone, **the film is a misunderstood extravaganza of female desire and sexual prowess.**

The cast is also joined by Gina Gershon as Nomi's idol-cum-rival Cristal Connors, as well as Kyle MacLachlan as her boss. Taking place within the grimy showbiz underworld of Las Vegas, Nomi drifts between the trials and tribulations that the Vegas underbelly has to offer, from cat fights and strippers to outright sabotage. Despite being a hypothetical epic erotic voyage, *Showgirls* is far from being *The Odyssey's* cinematic equivalent. Torn to shreds by its controversy with unsexy vulgarities, clunky performances, plot holes and slippery sloppiness, *Showgirls* isn't without its faults.



Yet it is exactly these faults that make it not just good, not just brilliant, but outright incredible. It's an uncompromising roar; a huge spectacle of hot trash. Camp revels in imperfections, in the sloppiness and amateurishness of it all, and there's something artistically freeing to watch something so confident in its own hyper-stylisation, whether that be the tight shiny leggings and heels combo that infiltrates every rehearsal scene, Nomi's platinum blonde curls, or the insane delivery of the line "It must be weird, not having anybody cum on you". You may not remember much from the plot of *Showgirls*, but you will absolutely have its image seared into your memory.

The misconstrued and inherently subversive nature of Camp is exactly what its many admirers revel in. Indeed, it is audacious in its positionality against the mainstream, providing queer audiences with visibility, resilience and a springboard to form community and a sense of mutual recognition. As Andrew Bolton, curator of the Met's Costume Institute tells the New York Times, Camp 'can be actually a very sophisticated and powerful political tool, especially for marginalised cultures.' Showgirls continues to hold a special place both in my heart and my Letterboxd top 4, as nothing gives me more comfort than unapologetically fierce women in complete glam. And I am sure that camp cinema holds a similarly homely place in many Queer folks' hearts.



By Arabella Ladiero

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# 5 SHORT(S) WAYS YOU CAN BE A TRANS ALLY



By Aaron Jagger

With increasing anti-trans sentiment and legislation in the UK and across the world, this year it is all the more important for trans allies to come forward and learn some trans history. We have always been here, or as transgender film producer and director Rhys Ernst (*Transparent*) puts it, we've been around. His five short films on trans pioneers (which are available to watch on YouTube) provide bite-sized history lessons that teach us trans people aren't going anywhere.

## ALBERT CASHIER

<https://youtu.be/5PFdoaxWqh0?feature=shared>

In 1862, Albert Cashier signed up to serve in the Union Army as a man, despite being assigned female at birth. Yet even after his service, Cashier would continue to live as a man until his death. History unearthed Cashier's story and rightfully respected him as a trans man. Cashier was honoured by his loved ones throughout his life, who fiercely defended him time and again, always seeing him as the man he was. This short uses archival footage as well as recreations and dramatisations of Cashier's life and legacy during the American Civil War, appearing more like a tapestry of footage and artwork that could easily see itself made into a historical biopic in years to come.



If you liked... *Dances with Wolves* (1990), *Killers of the Flower Moon* (2023).

## LUCY HICKS ANDERSON

[https://youtu.be/\\_DKxsGP9tRY?feature=shared](https://youtu.be/_DKxsGP9tRY?feature=shared)

During the Prohibition era, Lucy Hicks Anderson thrived. A socialite, chef, and hostess, Anderson also owned a brothel that sold illegal liquor. However, she would soon find herself in the midst of a scandal and a subsequent trial to prove that she was a woman.



Anderson is remembered now as the first transgender person to fight for marriage rights in the US. Anderson's short sees dramatic, artistic renderings of her court hearing accompanied by narration from Valerie Spencer, which honour this Black trans woman's story. Anderson's roaring twenties environment paired with her many domestic endeavours reimagine her as a vibrant but warm

woman, her life a remarkable epic that manages to stay rooted in the longing for home and love.

If you liked... *The Great Gatsby* (2013), *How to Get Away with Murder* (2014-2020).

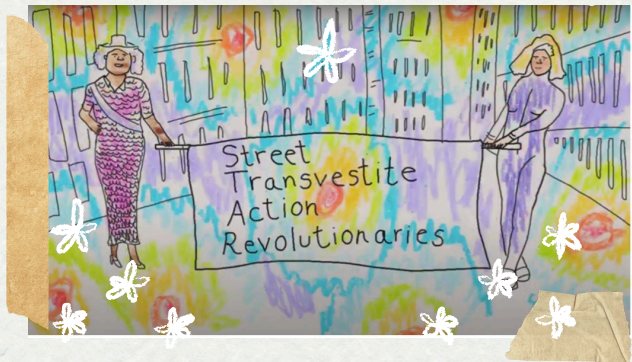
## MARSHA P JOHNSON, SYLVIA RIVERA AND S.T.A.R

<https://youtu.be/MhGf-ba5Syw?feature=shared>

Perhaps more well-known, Marsha P. Johnson was a pioneer for trans rights, and associated with the 1969 Stonewall Riots which paved the way for gay liberation in the West.

Sylvia Rivera was a lesser-known trailblazer who, after Johnson's death in 1992 (that many suspected to have been a murder) became disenfranchised with the whitewashed and trans-exclusionary contemporary gay movement. Together the two had set up S.T.A.R. (Street Transvestite Action Revolutionaries), an organisation that assisted trans, gay, and drag artist youth with housing. With narration from actress and activist Alexandra Billings, the S.T.A.R. short uses hand drawn animation, not unlike the erratic animations seen in *Hedwig and the Angry Inch* (2001).

Pay attention to the revolutionary archival footage of Sylvia Rivera's famous 1973 speech, 'Y'all Better Quiet Down'





in which Rivera is heckled and booed as she describes what she has done for gay liberation. Watch as she screams 'revolution now!' into the jeering crowd.

If you liked... *Paris is Burning* (1990), *Pose* (2018-2021).

## LOU SULLIVAN

<https://youtu.be/Z5Ld2FAoUD8?feature=shared>



Lou Sullivan moved to San Francisco in the 1980s, with dreams of being accepted into the gay male scene there. A trans man, Sullivan defied prejudiced requirements that only allowed people who practiced heterosexuality to medically transition. Sullivan tragically died from AIDS in 1991, jokingly declaring, '[they] told me I could not live as a gay man, it looks like I'm going to die like one.' This short makes use of Sullivan's prolific television appearances, at times using

his own voice as narration. The beautiful yet destructive image of San Francisco during the AIDS crisis is collaged together - with sun-bleached photographs of tanning male torsos and poignant catalogued images like the AIDS memorial quilt.

If you liked... *Milk* (2009), *120 BPM* (2017).

## LESLIE FEINBERG, RIKI ANNE WILCHINS, AND CAMP TRANS

<https://youtu.be/Ca3erlRoGg8?feature=shared>

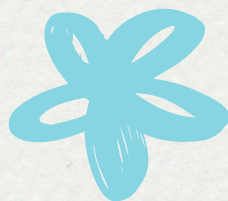
What happens when trans women are barred from a women's music festival? They rally with the support of radical transmasculine lesbian Leslie Feinberg, of course. Known for his book *Stone Butch Blues* (1993), as well as prolific activism and investment in queer liberation, Feinberg heard Riki Anne Wilchins' story of banishment and knew she had to do something. Rallying outside the music festival, queer and trans activists soon formed their own celebration: Camp Trans.

Perhaps even more pressing now than ever, this short shows the importance of trans inclusion and community. Scrutinising trans women punishes cis women too, especially ethnic minorities and queer cis women. Camp Trans follows the events as they unfolded, with the clash between the two groups documented through a zine-like aesthetic which adds a radical sense of urgency.

If you liked... Woodstock (1970), Pride (2014).



Trans people are everywhere; past, present, and future. Allyship does not stop when the films have been dutifully watched, the history consumed. During pride, and throughout the entire year, immerse yourself in the stories and struggles of all queer people, not just those who are cis. Trans liberation does not deserve to be given up on and forgotten, and neither do these icons who sought justice, often at great personal cost. Liberate yourself with the knowledge that trans people have always been around, and fight for us now so we can still be around today and tomorrow.





# THE L WORD: A STAPLE TO LESBIAN CULTURE 20 YEARS ON



By Amy Maloney

Between 2004 and 2009 *The L Word* graced our screens, attempting to bring an end to the drought of lesbian representation, by creating a show with queer women at the centre. The show follows a group of lesbian and bisexual friends in Los Angeles who navigate the intricacies of life: sexuality and 'coming out', relationships, friendships and family dynamics. *The L Word*'s ability to present the taboo of lesbian relationships and culture pathed the very foundations for the future of lesbian representation in TV and Film.

*The L Word* portrays the chaotic and not so straight-forward components of female queerness. The show exudes an emotional tenderness which accompanies these powerful female friendships and relationships, a quintessential characteristic to any show with women at the forefront. With these dynamics in place, *The L Word* presents the importance of friendship and community within queer culture.

Much of the show takes place within 'The Planet', a local coffee shop where the women congregate to socialise and consolidate their friendships. This community hub reflects the proliferation of queer women's spaces in lesbian culture, throughout the US within the mid-and late-twentieth century. Queer women began to rely on the public spaces of coffeehouses and bars to locate a sense of belonging (without the presence of the male gaze) to find friendships, community and even a partner.



'The Planet' is a focal point of community within *The L Word*, exposing the nature of the protagonists' friendships. This is effectively depicted within Season 1, Episodes 1 and 2, in which Bette (Jennifer Beals) and Tina (Laurel Holloman) struggle to find a sperm donor. They consequently turn to their friends at 'The Planet' for their unconditional support, who suggest hosting a party with all the men they know to find an appropriate candidate.



Many viewers of *The L Word* remember the show for its light-heartedness, along with its explicit lesbian sex scenes and graphic portrayal of intimacy - a component of television unheard of in the early 2000s. As the main creator and executive producer (Ilene Chaiken) is a queer woman, these intimate scenes display desire and sexual relationships between women in a tasteful manner. These sequences are created for lesbian audiences; therefore, lesbian sex and female sexuality is portrayed with an emotionally charged sensuality. This same care is given in contemporary shows, specifically *Sex Education* and *The Sex Lives of College Girls*.



Yet, *The L Word* neglects to explore how queer women of colour within predominantly white spaces navigate their identities and sense of belonging, which would have been a valuable insight for non-white viewers of the show.

This would have been particularly interesting to witness, given that when Tasha starts dating Alice, she is ultimately catapulted into white queer culture and a mostly-white friend group.

Despite its revolutionary components, *The L Word* has encountered many controversial moments, which cannot be lightly forgotten. One noticeable feature is its lack of POC representation. Although the sister duo of Bette and Kit Porter are mixed race, no other women of colour feature as recurring characters until season 4, with the introduction of Tasha Williams (Rose Rollins), a military officer. The show incorporates the implications of being queer whilst serving in the military under the 'Don't Ask, Don't Tell' policy, which would consequently lead to Tasha's less-than-honourable discharge, after being outed by a superior officer.





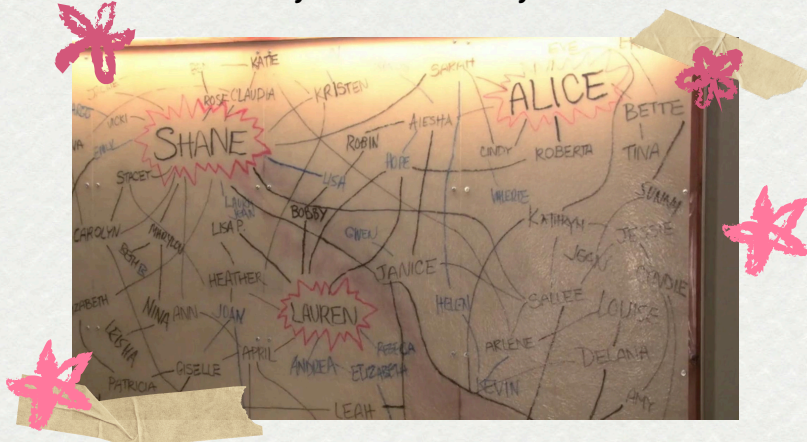
*The L Word* also controversially handles trans identities. When the third season introduced Max Sweeney (Daniel Sea), its first trans masc character, Max's presence as a recurring role was most notable for his poorly managed transition and the overt transphobia directed towards him. *The L Word* barely scratched the surface when exploring Max's testosterone journey, transition and surprise pregnancy. This lack of attention saw the creators attempt to redeem themselves with the character development of Micah (Leo Sheng) during the show's spin-off, *The L Word: Generation Q*.



Along with this, *The L Word* displays problematic attitudes towards bisexuality. Its bisexual characters seemingly shrug off any biphobic remarks made at their expense. One of the show's bisexual characters, Alice (Leisha Hailey) is continually shamed at her inability to 'pick a side', which in later seasons sees her reject bisexuality for the label of lesbian. Additionally, *The L Word* furthers pre-existing unflattering depictions of bisexuality, by heightening the stereotype of bisexual women as cheaters. In season 3, Tina secretly begins an online sexual relationship with Henry (whilst in a relationship with Bette) and is shamed throughout commencing episodes for desiring a man. Despite being bisexual, Tina's 'straightness' ostracises her from the close-knit friend group. Although the depiction of bisexuality is problematic, it relates to the same discussions within contemporary lesbian communities, 20 years on from *The L Word*'s initial release. It is an unfortunate reality that biphobia is still rife within the lesbian community, as bisexuals battle alienation from both heterosexual and homosexual communities. Perhaps *The L Word*'s portrayal of transness and bisexuality was a sign of the times, following the limited knowledge of non-heterosexual and non-cisgendered identities and their limited on-screen representation.



Yet, *The L Word* successfully depicts the tendency for female queerness to be chaotic, as friendships and relationships are often inevitably interwoven. Alice's journalistic career leads to the conception of 'the chart' (a spider-diagram which connects queer women based on their sexual relations). Throughout the show, this chart develops from a dedicated wall in Alice's apartment to its own online platform, displaying the close-knit (and often messy) communities formed by queer women. This is no surprise, given that *The L Word* prides itself in exhibiting lesbian communities through "the way [they] live and love." The show's iconic theme song suggests these women will be "talking, laughing, loving, breathing, fighting, fucking, crying, drinking, riding, winning, losing, cheating, kissing, thinking, dreaming". The chaos which unfolds makes it an addictive watch for lesbian audiences, who are able to see themselves and their own community authentically reflected on screen.



*The L Word* is a timeless piece of lesbian culture which aids lesbians in 'finding their place' within their communities. As the show continues to connect with modern audiences, it received a spin-off, (*The L Word: Generation Q*) in 2019, and is rumoured to have a reboot, (*The L Word: New York*). Modern sapphics recognise its prominence within lesbian culture and continue to pay homage to *The L Word* within their own work. For instance, the original cast from the show introduced Reneé Rapp during her 2024 Coachella set, signifying *The L Word's* role in normalising the lives of queer women and providing an accurate portrayal of lesbianism, which is widely applicable to modern audiences. Whether queer women relate to Bette's lesbian chic, Shane's (Kate Moenning) androgynous womaniser appeal, or the show's thorough depiction of female friendships, relationships and sex - *The L Word* remains quintessential to voicing the experiences of queer women whilst creating the culture and community we see today.

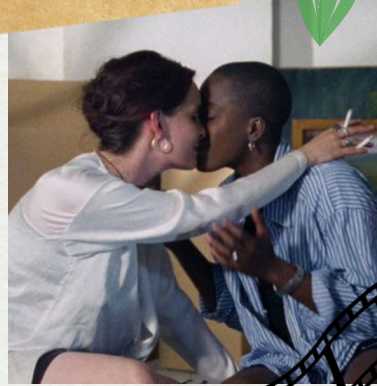


# THE WATERMELON WOMAN (1996): A REVIEW

By Martha Kershaw

Cheryl, a twenty-something aspiring filmmaker, splits her time between the gay bars of Philadelphia and her job at a video store. Here, she has access to a treasure trove of movies, which serve as the backbone for her filmic exploration of the elusive 'Watermelon Woman', an uncredited Black actress from 1930s Hollywood. Cheryl feels an unexplainable connection to the mystery star, who she discovers is called Fae Richards.

Through interviews and archival digging, Cheryl uncovers Fae's queerness and finds solace in their similarities. Cheryl is lesbian and, in between her investigations, falls for a wealthy white woman. The differences between their lived experiences threaten to forge a divide in their relationship, and add to Cheryl's mounting pressure to succeed with her filmmaking. Cheryl encounters various barriers in her research, experiencing firsthand the inaccessibility of racist institutions and the straight-up ignorance of white individuals. Despite these obstacles, Cheryl perseveres and finalises her film, which turns out differently than expected.



As well as identity, the film is about kinship and the gravity of community. Regardless of their ups and downs, Cheryl and her close friend Tamara sustain and support each other, sharing an intimate understanding of the hardships they both face.





Director and star Cheryl Dunye interweaves faux-archival footage and documentary-style visuals, shedding light on early Hollywood's sparse and racist representations of Black women. Dunye lovingly trains the limelight on Black queer women, interconnecting the past and present in a moving tribute.

*The Watermelon Woman* provides an incredibly important perspective - one that has been repeatedly marginalised - and signifies a positive turning point in cinema. It is still, shamefully, one of only a handful of films that centre around the lives of Black queer women.



The film is also highly personal: Dunye coined the term 'Dunyementary', which she explains is the process of inserting her experiences into her filmmaking. This quality is incorporated most prominently in one of the final scenes, with Cheryl speaking directly into the camera. In a 2021 interview with KQED, Dunye references the strength she found in her own marginalisation, commenting that "it allowed me to have my own sense of visibility, it help [sic] me create my own world, make my own cinema". Not only is Dunye's seminal work the first of its kind (Cheryl was the only Black lesbian director of a feature film in 1996), it is also incredibly funny. There are countless, genuine laugh-out-loud moments throughout the film. Tamara's hilarious quips to the camera, Cheryl's disastrous double date, and the wry remarks that permeate the film's punchy dialogue make for an invigorating watch. Dunye's gloriously innovative film runs at a neat 74-minutes, and is an insightful and entertaining viewing experience. *The Watermelon Woman* shapes our perceptions of early Hollywood and carves the path for a new wave of cinema, in which no story is left behind.

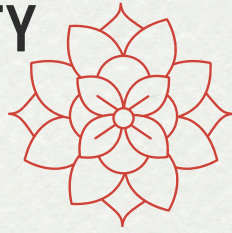
Streaming now on Channel 4.





# QUEER SOUTH ASIAN CINEMA AND THE POLITICS OF VISIBILITY

By Kim Chima



In *Impossible Desires: Queer Diasporas and South Asian Public Cultures*, Gayatri Gopinath establishes a theoretical framework that reconciles the fluidity of queer studies with that of diaspora studies, as well as cultural studies. In doing so, Gopinath constructs a means through which to examine a queer South Asian subjectivity, through an analysis of Queer art, film, and literature. Gopinath's work rectifies the orientalist rhetoric of anthropological studies that render the "queer" South Asian subject as 'impossible.' (Gopinath 2005, 16). Gopinath notes that 'while the diaspora within nationalist discourse is often positioned as the abjected and disavowed Other to the nation, the nation also simultaneously recruits the diaspora into its absolutist logic' (Gopinath 2005, 7). The otherization of the diasporic subject is a means through which to platform the purity of the untainted "homeland" or nation. Gopinath examines this notion in particular concerning the portrayal of South Asian women as bearers of idealised South Asian nationhood, critiquing the tendency of feminist South Asian scholars to negate queer potentiality in their deconstruction of South Asian women and the nation. Gopinath's deployment of queer diasporic frameworks thus, not only challenges the ' "homonormativity"<sup>1</sup> of certain strands of Euro-American queer studies that centre white gay male subjectivity' (Gopinath 2005, 11), but also challenges the 'genealogical' (Gopinath 2005, 10) construction of nationhood. Gopinath's work advocates for a South Asian queer subjectivity that reconciles notions of the nation with the individual, examining the interweaving strands of identity that arise from a history of colonial rule and the continual subjugation of women in an attempt to propagate the patriotic image of a virtuous state, particularly in India and Pakistan.

<sup>1</sup> For further interrogations of homonormativity and orientalism, see *Re-Orienting Desire: The Gay International and the Arab World in Desiring Arabs* by Joseph Massad. (Massad 2007)



Gopinath's use of alternative viewing practices, through the lens of queer diaspora, forms the basis of this essay. *Fire* (Mehta 1996) and *Joyland* (Sadiq 2022) are both films that emphasise "queer" South Asian subjectivity within the heteropatriarchal structuring of their retrospective nations. The films evoke Gopinath's notions of visibility in relation to their 'transnational address' (Gopinath 2005, 21) that is still 'deeply rooted in the politics of the local.' (Gopinath 2005, 21) Both films reconfigure the culturally significant spaces of the home, dress, and music as a means to articulate resistance to the hetero-imperialistic, homonormative notions that deny the characters their very existence as 'impossible subjects' (Gopinath 2005, 20). In addition to this, *Fire* and *Joyland* both assert a queer subjectivity that does not merely reject the nation; queer identity in both films is intrinsically linked to the nation and cultural practices, yet rejects the nation's heteropatriarchal patriotism to articulate their queer subjectivity.



*Fire*, one of the first overtly "queer" Indian films, chronicles the affair between Sita, a new bride (and hence a new member of the family), and her sister-in-law, Radha. The marriages for both women are dissatisfactory; Radha's husband, Jatin, is forced into the marriage by his mother and continues an affair with his girlfriend, Julie.

Sita's husband, Ashouk, remains celibate (and thus Sita childless) due to his infatuation with a religious swami<sup>2</sup>. The relationship between the two women, inconceivable in the eyes of devout Hindu nationalists, disrupts the traditional family structure of the Indian middle classes. The heteronormative, traditional family structure and the nation of India are intrinsically linked, as demonstrated by the film. Much like *Fire*, *Joyland*, a recent Pakistani film, depicts the politics of performance and visibility through the eyes of Haider, an unemployed husband whose inability to assume the role of a "provider" somewhat unsettles the

<sup>2</sup> The term 'swami' refers to a Hindu religious leader/ elder. Within the context of *Fire*, the swami Ashouk reveres seems more dubious. Swami are not the same as priests, and there is no system through which to verify their credibility- many swami in contemporary India exploit people for financial gain.



conventional gender norms for a Pakistani family. Haider secures work as a dancer and has an affair with Biba, a khwajasara<sup>3</sup> dancer.

Whilst Haider attempts to fulfil the role of dutiful husband by securing work, his wife, Mumtaz, is pressured by her father-in-law to give up her job. Both *Joyland* and *Fire* are films that primarily take place in the domestic sphere of the home. Public and private intermingle, and the motifs of performance and visibility that were initially clearly defined by honour and duty are subverted by the disruption of heteropatriarchy in both films. Both films employ aesthetic practices to allude to the nation, which is present in quotidian, domestic settings.



The opening scene of *Fire* establishes its self-reflexive position as an Indian film concerned with notions of subjectivity and desire, as embedded within the “nation”. The film begins with a shot that pans around a mustard field. The shot, taken relatively low down, situates the viewer clearly within the field, amongst the plants thus highlighting their significance. The use of the mustard field is of note; mustard oil is of religious significance, often used in pooja ceremonies in India. Mustard oil is used to light diya during Diwali, poured over doorways to welcome a new bride into a household, and thus has auspicious connotations. The mustard field could also be considered an iconographic site in Bollywood cinema. The field evokes a climactic musical scene in *Dilwale Dulhania Le Jayenge* (Chopra 1995), where the two protagonists declare their love for one another. The scene with the mustard field in *DDLJ* in particular is revered as iconic within the collective Indian psyche; it has been referenced in numerous later Bollywood films (often the surreal music sequences, where characters are no longer bound by narrative space or time) to allude to blossoming romances between

<sup>3</sup> More popularly known as ‘Hijra’ in India. Khwajasara is the Punjabi/Urdu term for feminine gender non-conforming people. The term encompasses trans women and a range of varying feminine gender presentations. The specifically Pakistani term of khwajasara also encompasses aspects of Sufism tied into the identity category and can thus be somewhat distinguished from the Hindi specific term ‘Hijra’. (Kasmani 2023)



characters. In *Fire*, the mustard field signifies a psychic space in which Radha learns to express her yearning for desire. The film's reference to popular Bollywood films further legitimises Radha and Sita's relationship as one of love, not merely lust and carnality.

*Fire* not only references contemporary Bollywood films; a later scene in the film references *Ek Jhalak* (Kalidas 1957), where Radha and Sita dance to the duet 'aja zara mere dil ke' once again associates Radha and Sita's intimacy as one of deep and enduring love, with the film positioning Radha and Sita alongside earlier cinematic couples who exemplify notions of Bollywood romance. *Fire* asserts itself as more than merely erotic, made clear by the film's opening which references the traditional and religious, as well as popular culture.

In *Joyland*, this notion of "queer" visibility is employed through more aesthetic means. In *Pakistan Desires: Queer Futures Elsewhere*, Omar Kasmani reconceptualises Pakistan as a theoretical space. Kasmani uses alternate conceptions of Pakistan as a way to gesture towards 'a history of queerness per se, that makes space for and is made up of, different alternate ways of being queer in the world? Here, queer doesn't begin with a catalytic event but nests in the everyday intricacies of life.' (Kasmani 2023, 4). Kasmani's emphasis on the specificity of Pakistan as an amalgamation of influences and cultures, from its conception as an imagined nation during the Indian independence movement, to its existence as an Islamic country today, is reconciled with queer history and experience. Kasmani suggests, similarly to Gopinath, that the quotidian must be interrogated, advocating for a queer subjectivity that already lies within plain sight. Kasmani also examines the potential of queer desire to be embedded in Sufism, writing, 'However transgressive, queer desire thus embedded in sacred aesthetics cannot be taken as simply antagonistic to religion; rather, it is complexly conserving with it.' (Kasmani 2023, 6). Islamic culture and queer subjectivity need not be polarised (a notion that is typically perpetuated by the West to emphasise the "backwardness" of the East (Massad 2007)), and 'queer desire thus conceived and explored can be both an inclination toward the divine and a continuation of historically given possibilities of living an otherwise life.' (Kasmani 2023, 7). Kasmani's notion of 'sacred aesthetics' (Kasmani 2023, 6) as one that can encompass alternative, queer modes of being, as well as making this specific to a Pakistani queer sensibility, is made evident in *Joyland*.





Biba is shrouded by visual mysticism in the film, made evident in the scenes depicting her performances. Her room (and main place of residence, alongside other chela<sup>4</sup>) is a space that could be said to encompass these 'sacred aesthetics' (Kasmani 2023, 6), making evident the motif of performance and visibility. Biba's room showcases an alternate

temporality that encompasses both Biba's subjectivity as a khwajasara, and her identity as a Pakistani woman. Haider visits Biba's place of residence one evening, shortly before their first performance at the erotic dance theatre. A grudging friendship forms between the two, with Haider seemingly fascinated by Biba.

The scene begins with a closeup of Biba, blowing air into a seashell to make it whistle. The closeup, showing only Biba's long nails and the light that catches onto the gold thread which adorns her kameez<sup>5</sup>, emphasises the tactility of the scene. Small flecks of green light dart around at intervals- a projector in Biba's room.

Though the closeup takes place in a small space, it doesn't seem confining; rather, the closeup disorients the viewer, the scene briefly seeming timeless and spaceless- occurring in an indiscernible space for the viewer. Biba's room is colour-graded in hues of green- the same colour as



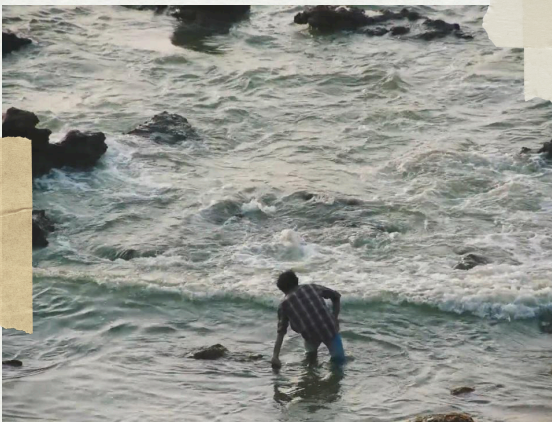
the Pakistani flag and a symbolic colour in Islam. Biba's association with the colour may be considered by some as sacrilegious, and blasphemous. Joyland's continual evocation of the colour as a motif highlights the evident relationship between queer aesthetics and that

<sup>4</sup> Disciples. Khwajasara often live in communities that form under a Guru system (Gayatri 2005). A similar Western equivalent to a Guru would be a "house mother", though this doesn't encompass the religious connotations of the term 'Guru'.

<sup>5</sup> kameez is the top half of a salwar kameez, a traditional South Asian garment worn by women.



of Sufism, as suggested by Kasmani. As the stars project themselves onto Biba's body, so too is the nation mapped onto Biba; her subjectivity is depicted as intrinsically linked to the nationhood that oppresses her. However, rather than rejecting the nation in its entirety, the aesthetics of Biba's room imply an inherent compatibility. As suggested by Massad, the West tends to conceive Eastern and Islamic nations as incompatible with contemporary notions of sexuality, hence the propagation of the 'gay international' (Massad 2007). As illustrated by the disorientating space of Biba's room, however, the two already coexist. Fluid, indigenous genders and sexualities need not reject the nation in its entirety; religious mysticism can, as demonstrated by Joyland, be rendered compatible with a queer temporality.



Both *Fire* and *Joyland* are films that illustrate the potential of queer subjectivity within a nationhood that renders such invisible. Particularly through the audio-visual medium of film, the motif of visibility in both films is integral to their dissection of 'South Asian public cultures' that link queer subjectivity to the home and the quotidian. Everyday cultural practices, as demonstrated by both films, are reconfigured to carve out queer spaces in the films.

Conventional sites of meaning- the oiling of another's hair, an everyday conversation, even mundane items such as a shell, become reappropriated to signify queer space and experience. As a result, both *Fire* and *Joyland* signify a 'de-familiarization of conventional markers of homosexuality [which] takes place, and that alternative strategies through which to signify non-heteronormative desire are subsequently produced.' (Gopinath 2005, 12).



# RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE SEX :

## QUEER RESEARCH NETWORK

<https://dzacariotti.wixsite.com/sex-queer-network>

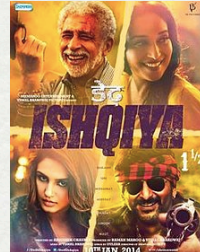
*The Devil Queen* (Antonio Carlos da Fontoura, 1974) is a unique take on queerness in Brazil during the dictatorship, with an intersectional portrayal of queerness, race and class in the country.



*Aligarh* (Hansal Mehta, 2016), a real life story, gently narrated yet extremely impactful, about the inhumane treatment received by professor Ramchandra Siras of Aligarh Muslim University, after he was found being intimate with another man in his house.



*Dedh Ishqiya* (Abhishek Chaubey, 2014) - Loosely adapted from 1942 queer short story written by progressive Ismat Chughtai, a very subtle and powerful story about feminist solidarity, laced with classic South Asian music and dance tradition.



*Terror, Sisters!* (Alexis Langlois, 2019) is a short film following a day of four transgender friends as they imagine their revenge.



*Gentleman Jack* (2019 - 2022) - a series based on the diaries of landowner Anne Lister following her life and relationships in 1830s Yorkshire.



*A Fantastic Woman* (Sebastián Lelio, 2017), a story on grief and transness in contemporary Chile that tangles desire, politics and pleasure.







# The Crossword

Pride Edition





# ACROSS:

- 2) Surname of the author who wrote the 1964 revolutionary essay 'Notes on Camp' which has defined components of *Showgirls* and other camp cinema.
- 3) An item of clothing from *Femme* which has come to define masculinity, queerness and resilience.
- 6) The place which Louis de Pointe du Lac lives in *Interview with the Vampire*.
- 7) The term coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw which refers to how elements of one's identity can overlap and intersect, exposing them to differing forms of discrimination and marginalisation.
- 9) The character (and film name) which sees Therese Belivet catch feelings for an older woman after they encounter one another in a department store
- 10) A child's name which unites the love of Geneviève and Guy in *The Umbrellas of Cherbourg*.
- 11) This term has often been used to describe the nature of the director's personal association with *The Watermelon Woman*.
- 13) Hannah Montana's hometown State which allowed her to express her multitude of personas and re-embrace her masculinity.
- 15) The month of Pride.



# DOWN:

- 1) To express both performance and visibility in *Joyland*, Biba blows air into an object as an indication of her connection to her environment.
- 4) The term given to the concept that heterosexuality is the preferred or 'normal' sexual orientation, and relations are most 'fitting' between members of the opposite sex.
- 5) Transgender film producer and director Rhys Ernst's Amazon Original show, which promoted the ideal that transgender individuals have 'always been around'.
- 8) The friendship and community hub for characters of *The L Word*.
- 12) The recurring run-time throughout episodes of *H2O: Just Add Water*.
- 14) The name of the gay bar which saw riots break out after the police raided it in late-June 1969. These riots would facilitate a turning point in Queer Rights activism.





# THESE VAMPIRE GAYS, THEY 'RE TRYING TO MURDER ME!



By Nate Ryan

With the second series of *Interview with the Vampire* coming to a close, the urge to scream 'Why isn't everyone watching this?' from the rooftops becomes harder and harder to suppress. The general consensus by fans on social media is that this heartbreaking show is the worst thing to ever happen to them, in the best possible way. And yet, the show is managing to fly under the radar of queer and non-queer audiences alike, despite its impressive sets, gorgeous soundtrack, and masterful performances.

The show follows Louis de Pointe du Lac (Jacob Anderson), a Black brothel owner living in Storyville, New Orleans' red-light district. Lestat de Lioncourt (Sam Reid), a century-old vampire, becomes infatuated with Louis when he sees him press a knife to his brother's chest. Lestat compels Louis into becoming his immortal companion, and then later turns Claudia (Bailey Bass, recast as Delainey Hayles in Series Two), a 14-year-old girl, into their vampire-daughter at Louis' insistence. Louis struggles to rescind his mortal life and does not take to his newfound vampire nature easily, with tensions continuing to rise between the vampiric family to an unbearable amount. In 2022, he invites Daniel Molloy (Eric Bogosian) to interview him again after their previous encounter in a gay bar in the 1970s, which ended in Daniel almost being killed by him. Now older and wiser, Daniel helps Louis confront his past.

The show's lack of mainstream popularity has been on my mind since it first aired in October 2022. There are certainly more upsetting reasons as to why certain people would refuse to watch a series that has a black gay protagonist - the blatantly racist and homophobic initial reviewing-bombing taught me that - but I also fear that its own network has let it down, and that with enough of a push it can gain wider attention. The series is an adaptation of the second most influential piece of vampire literature ever





created after *Dracula*, Anne Rice's *Interview with the Vampire*. However, the show also takes a lot of elements from the other thirteen books in the series, which is collectively known as *The Vampire Chronicles*. Although there's a popular idea that this adaptation makes the book's subtext "text," I feel this is an unfair assertion, considering that there is not a single straight character in the whole of *The Vampire Chronicles*. Despite Louis and Lestat's relationship not being explicitly romantic in the first book, Louis and Armand's is, and any later book leaves absolutely zero ambiguity. The show is, however, far more explicitly queer than the 1994 film adaptation starring Tom Cruise and Brad Pitt, which is most people's point of reference. The series itself has no time for homoeroticism, and instead immerses you into the toxic and abusive relationships experienced by these vampires. It moves with maniacal ease from Louis and Lestat's first-time having sex, pictured floating off the ground, Louis' arms stretched out in the freedom of embracing the side of him, to Claudia's perspective of watching her 'Uncle Les', as she calls him, drop her 'Daddy Lou' two kilometres out of the sky because Louis dared to think about leaving him. Its blatant cruelty as well as its refusal to leave anything about their sexuality up for interpretation creates room for a discussion around the structures that allow partner abuse and racism.



Once their queerness becomes explicit, there is no longer a need to make vampirism a metaphor for sexuality and is instead used as a vehicle to stretch out human consciousness. Louis did not need vampirism to be shunned by society as a Black gay man in 1910s America, and, despite Lestat's promises, his vampirism does not save him from racism or homophobia; his business is still unjustly taken from him, he is still belittled by the white businessmen around him, and the police still refer to his and Lestat's relationship as a 'crime against nature'. The true horror does not come from these vampires hunting their human victims, but instead comes in the form of the suffocation present in the nuclear family they find themselves in and the racism that Louis faces on a day-to-day basis.



The representations of violence against humans appear more camp and are referential to the vampire genre. One example of this is from episode four in the first series, when Lestat takes Claudia to feast on "doggers". As one mortal woman flees from the car after Claudia savages her lover, she falls into the arms of Lestat, who proceeds to dramatically dip her forward before biting her, akin to something you would see on a vintage horror poster. Aside from the domestic violence in series one episode five, the most upsetting scenes come from the inequality present in Lestat and Louis' relationship. As a queer person who loves horror, I found this mixture fearfully satisfying.



Going even further into grappling what queerness means to both its main characters and, by extension, us, it is aided by its intertextual references, which subsequently bring historic gay men to the forefront. In the first episode, Louis becomes lost in the grief of seeing his brother, Paul (Steven G. Norfleet), commit suicide in front of him. But even as he mourns, Lestat will not let him go, and begins waiting on his balcony every night, getting inside Louis' head with his vampiric powers.



He does this inappropriate yearning dressed in a robe of grand golden embellishments with quilted gold accents. This striking dressing gown is an almost exact copy of the one worn by a man in an illustration by J. C. Leyendecker in an advert for Arrow Collars. Throughout episodes one and two there are a couple of Leyendecker inspired outfits, confirmed by costume designer Carol Cutshall. This costume inspiration feels particularly important because Leyendecker himself was a gay man, and was with the model of this illustration, Charles A. Beach, for around 50 years. At this point, Louis is coming to terms with his sexuality in a society that forces him to be a 'red-blooded son of the South', and therefore his feelings towards Lestat are kept deep within himself. Having Lestat dressed in the same clothes as Leyendecker's partner, that he could never be public with, shows Louis' repressed desires and relates them to queer history.



Another intertextual element I found particularly interesting is in episode six. Whilst Louis is recovering from the physical abuse inflicted by Lestat, he starts reading *Marriage in a Free Society* by British poet and gay rights activist Edward Carpenter.



Although Carpenter himself was gay, the book is about heterosexual marriage, and paints a strangely similar portrait to Louis and Lestat's relationship. In this scene, the cuts are quick as the camera switches focus over the pages, mirroring Louis' impaired sight as he reads the closest reference he has to a book on marriage between two men. They are compared to heterosexual couples throughout the first series, and continuing on into the second when Louis becomes enamoured with coven leader and theatre director Armand (Assad Zaman). In episode four of series two, he comes to Louis' balcony with flowers a la Romeo, questioning if Louis is 'The sun?' or, more accurately for a vampire, 'The moon?' Not only does this speak to the lack of great homosexual lovers known throughout history, but also repeatedly positions Louis into a female role.

In some cases, this is damaging and makes him a housewife to a patriarchal white man. However, in others it is freeing, with Jacob Anderson himself saying he took inspiration from Eartha Kitt and Grace Jones, allowing Louis a sense of androgyny that does not feel detrimental to him.

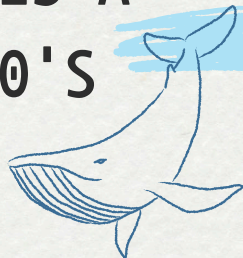


Overall, with queer writers and directors, the show explores many avenues of what that means for the characters, which speaks to larger issues in society, and immersing itself in gay culture. The second series expands on its queer themes and shows many forms of desire. When Louis reaches Parisian soil, his desires become fully formed as he frequents cruising spots, eventually meeting the aforementioned Armand, who he then enters into a BDSM-like relationship with. There are so many moments throughout both seasons where I was shocked beyond belief that something like this exists and is being shown on cable television in America (and on BBC Two in the UK). As someone who has never been interested in 'good' representation, Interview came as a revelation that these stories have a place in modern television, and that queer stories can be eye-opening in ways that are not just shocking homophobia where one, or both, of the queer characters end up dead. Because the vampire Louis will not die, and neither will the importance of stories like this being told.



# READING BETWEEN THE WAVES: A QUEER EXPLORATION OF H2O'S RIKKI

By Martha Kershaw



It's a hot summer's day, mid-June, and I've just finished my final mock exam of Year 10. I wave off my friends and rush home, settling in front of the television with a plethora of snacks. My last year of high school looms threateningly from the tail-end of summer, but I've got bigger things on my mind: *H2O: Just Add Water*. The 2006-10 Australian teen-drama spans across the high school years of Cleo, Emma, and Rikki, who are transformed into mermaids after stumbling across a magic pool. If the girls have contact with a single drop of water, they have a mere ten seconds to dry off before their tails appear.

Each one of the three is able to manipulate water and swim at an accelerated pace, but the trio decide to keep their abilities concealed from their families and peers. With already enough on their plates- boys, bullies, and body image- the three girls struggle to balance their secret powers with their social life. *H2O* promises drama and comedy in its depiction of rivalries, friendship, and romance - alongside boatloads of cheesiness.

Each episode has a punchy 24 minute run-time, with standout titles including "Get Off My Tail" and "Something Fishy" (subtly done).

Years later, particularly comic lines from the show are still quoted in heightened Aussie mockery ("Or nor, the condensation!"). I fell in love with the show from the get go - I'd always found mermaids fascinating - but someone in particular caught my eye.

The most outspoken of the three, Rikki, is initially an outsider to Emma and Cleo's lives. Both scathingly witty and charmingly carefree, Rikki provides an antidote to the awkward Cleo and geeky Emma.





Rikki is a self-proclaimed tomboy, preferring to distance herself from overt forms of femininity. She wears baggy cargo pants, rolls her eyes at sleepovers, and leaves her curly hair untamed. She was in my - young and stereotyping eyes - bisexual. From her sense of style, to her laid back attitude, Rikki's character drew me in faster than the Mako Island tides. I wasn't the only one to make flash judgments about Rikki's sexuality.



When my best friend and I were reminiscing about H2O the other night, we pored over fan made edits that chronicled the imaginary romance between Emma and Rikki. Viewers would insert clips of lingering looks, moments of jealousy, and slow down the briefest of touches to construct a narrative of forbidden love. But it's not just Rikki's friendships that connote an element of queerness, it's also her aversion to conformity. This was (and still is) so refreshing, seeing a teenage girl who doesn't appease her male counterparts, dresses as she pleases, and disobeys the conditions of a 'good girl'. Rikki propelled me towards self-acceptance, normalising my unconventional interests and outspokenness.

In "Fish Out of Water" (S1 E22), Rikki is unapologetically outspoken. The episode follows Rikki as she prepares for a business lunch with her boyfriend Zane. It will be the first time Rikki meets Zane's family, so she is feeling particularly nervous. Additionally, Rikki is sensitive about her working-class upbringing: she lives in a trailer park with her single father, and is reluctant to share this with her friends. Zane comes from an extremely privileged position; his family are known to be snobby. After summoning up the courage to attend the meeting, Rikki dresses in a more 'refined' look, pairing a red summer dress with kitten heels and lipstick. Once the meeting is underway, Rikki becomes visibly uncomfortable, shifting in her chair and picking at her food. When Zane's father proposes a property development on Mako Island (where the girls gained their powers), Rikki can no longer maintain her guise of composure.





Her and Zane's father engage in a verbal rally, in which he insults her class position and reprimands her outspokenness. Rikki storms off from the meeting and swims to Mako Island, where she reminisces on the early days of her friendship with Cleo and Emma. In a moment of vulnerability, Rikki relies on these memories for strength. Returning to the meeting, this time in her classic cargos and sneakers, she refuses to be silenced. With Emma signalling her support, Rikki convinces the investors to withdraw from the business proposal, before telling Zane that she is not willing to forgo her moral beliefs in order to pacify others. Her fortitude is solidified through her friendship. On reflection, the real message of the series is not about fitting in, or finding a boyfriend, but about the importance of community. The three girls form a friendship that, despite its ups and downs, demonstrates an unwavering loyalty. Rikki's departure from conventionality is not punished but celebrated.

This is not to say that unconventional women are innately queer, but rather that Rikki's collective traits denote her marginalisation. Her appearance and experiences deviate from the mainstream notion of femininity, and particularly stood out to me, someone who also felt like a bit of an outsider. And beyond the visibility, it's also pretty fun to reinvent fictional characters as queer. By retrospectively reading into behaviours and clothing, you can

validate your childhood fantasies and project your reality onto imaginary narratives. In reimagining Rikki as queer, I was speaking to a long-buried part of my own identity. In a fictional world where teenage girls have superpowers, why couldn't Rikki also reflect my experiences? If the cool mermaid was into girls, it was okay that I was too. **Bisexuality has always been misconstrued as a phase - a comment I was all too familiar with.** But, unlike the transience of a mermaid tail, my preferences weren't temporary.



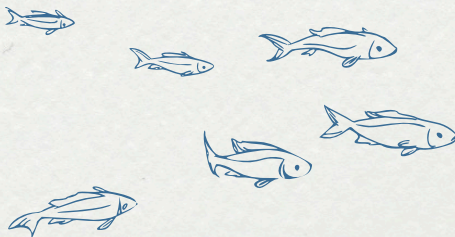


Mapping alternative realities onto fictional characters is an experience all too common for queer folk. Oftentimes, there is no choice but to invent a world where people like us exist and thrive. When I was in high school, the extent of on screen representation for LGBTQ+ teens lay with the token gay best friend. I didn't see myself in any of the media I consumed, so I took the responsibility into my own hands.

I can't help but wonder if the writers of *H2O* would have delved into this side of Rikki, if only queer characters were seen and celebrated in early 2000s mainstream media. Contemporary teen dramas such as *Heartstopper* and *Sex Education* have all had a hand in increasing the visibility of young LGBTQ+ folk, but there's still a long way to go. Only recently have we seen the limited representation begin to include accurate POC-, trans-, and women-centred queer stories. Change is coming. The future of queer TV and film is incredibly promising.



In *H2O*, Rikki's individuality, whether an indicator of her sexuality or not, is embraced wholly by Emma and Cleo. Female platonic love takes centre-stage, and otherness is welcomed rather than shunned. This was the validation fifteen-year-old me desperately needed. I was no longer going to shrink myself down. Queer or not, Rikki is "no ordinary girl", as the title track reminds us. But those differences are the source of her power, not her downfall. The cultural tides are turning: you can either battle the current, or relinquish yourself to the waves. We all know what the mermaids would choose.





# FEMME (2023): A REVIEW

By Amy Maloney



*Femme* was released in cinemas at the end of 2023 and was finally added to Netflix during February of this year. It is the feature debut of Sam H. Freeman and Ng Choon Ping, who both wrote and directed their 2021 short film into a 1 hour 39 runtime. The psychodrama cleverly intertwines criticisms of toxic and hyper-masculinity alongside queerness to present an exceptional but tense depiction of queer revenge.



Following the perspective of Black drag performer, Jules (Nathan Stewart-Jarrett) who is flamboyantly charismatic until a late-night altercation in an off-license turns into a brutally violent homophobic assault. The incident causes Jules to spiral into a 3 month long, reclusive disassociation from his identity and culture. After being reacquainted with his attacker, the intimidating and hyper-masculine Preston (George MacKay), one evening at a gay sauna, the pair embark on an unexpected and turbulent relationship, which involves secrecy, sex and revenge.

*Femme* perfectly encapsulates the element of performance which often accompanies the lives of queer individuals and their attempts at authentic visibility within their community. For instance, Jules portrays a variation of masculinity and femininity throughout *Femme*. This ranges from a more effeminate persona, to appeal to those within the drag scene, to a heightened masculine persona, in order to 'fit in' with Preston's friends. Jules' character exhibits the frequent reality for many gender non-conforming individuals, who often are forced to intentionally hide or alter elements of themselves to feel safe, especially within heteronormative spaces. This is especially seen through Jules' character. His non-conforming mannerisms see him as a target of homophobic abuse until he puts on a façade of masculinity to hide his identity, through which he is able to pass as a straight male.



Similarly, Preston exhibits an overbearing hyper-masculinity in an attempt to completely dispel any inkling of homosexuality from his physical identity.

The portrayal of Jules and Preston in this manner compellingly illustrates how depictions of male queerness are often intertwined with toxic masculinity. *Femme* utilises the prominent stereotype that 'true' masculinity struggles to co-exist alongside queerness. This means queer men are often forced to either uphold toxic male stereotypes which deny their identity or reject masculinity to express their sexuality. Jules breaks this stereotype by infusing fluidity in the ways in which gender and sexuality are physically expressed. Throughout the film there is a continual motif of a yellow hoodie, which Preston wore during his assault on Jules. This hoodie is a consistent signifier of masculinity, as is Jules' straight-passing clothing, as they become symbols of Jules' pride as he reclaims his identity. *Femme* utilises this hoodie to manipulate the notions of secrecy and visibility within Jules and Preston's relationship, and therefore identify the common experiences of LGBTQIA+ individuals who have to constantly contemplate their expressions of gender and sexuality, in their communities and beyond.



*Femme* is a powerful and worthwhile watch due to its gripping and tense depiction of masculinity, performance and queerness. It provides an important insight into the struggles and reality of many queer individuals who must battle society's restrictive expectations as well as find a sense of community and belonging.





# OF SAILORS AND UMBRELLA SHOPS

By Nate Ryan



Jacques Demy's *The Umbrellas of Cherbourg* (1964) is a sad tale. The film follows two young lovers, Geneviève (Catherine Deneuve) and Guy (Nino Castelnuovo), who, despite their difference in social standing and the disapproval of Geneviève's mother (Anne Vernon), are deeply in love and planning to marry. They have even picked out a baby name: Françoise. But these plans are stopped when Guy is drafted into the Algerian war and disappears for two years. During this time, Geneviève discovers that she is pregnant with Guy's child and is urged by her mother to marry Roland (Marc Michel), a man of better social standing that will cover the shame of having a child outside of marriage. When Guy returns and finds out that Geneviève has married another man, he turns to drink and sex workers, drowning in his lost love. Madeleine (Ellen Farnet), who cared for his aunt, rescues him from his sorrow and they end up getting married, with Guy and Geneviève meeting one last time outside a petrol station, the only connection left between them being their children, named François and Françoise respectively.



In this final scene, the music crescendos and we crane away from the empty, icy petrol station from which they have departed, with Demy's aim to 'make people cry' fully completed. But as it came to an end, I was surprised by just how successful

he was, as the tears came out at an uncontrollable rate and lasted for an embarrassingly long time. Even as I was crying, I was confused as to why, as I was normally never that affected by melodramatic romance films, at least not to this level. Once my body had dried up and there were no more tears to shed, a sudden thought entered my mind and so I quickly began to research the queer legacies of the film.





To my very limited surprise, I was met with conflicting reports that Demy himself was either gay or bisexual, as he was married to fellow director Agnès Varda. Sexuality discourse aside, though, I now understood why *Umbrellas* had hurt me so.

As it turns out, I was not alone, as many gay men in France adored the film, with Demy's queerness being recognised at the time despite him being closeted. Even with the absence of explicit homosexuality on screen, the condemnation of Geneviève and Guy's relationship because of their difference in social class can easily be paralleled with the experiences gay people faced at the time. When a pregnant Geneviève chooses Roland out of social obligation, this can be paralleled with gay men going back in the closet and choosing to marry a woman as a socially acceptable option. The social shunning and pressure to make the "right" and more "comfortable" decision in marrying Roland relates to a heteronormative lifestyle, and so the loss of her less respectable love, Guy, is made all the more tragic.

But this interpretation is not the only way Demy's queerness shines through, as the film is first and foremost a musical.

Although it is not as grand and camp as his other musicals, *The Young Girls of Rochefort* and *Donkey Skin*, it is still a



large factor of why it appeals to the gay community so much. It did surprise my mother and me as we realised a little over a minute in that every line was sung, because I had never seen a musical quite like it, and with each line confirming that, yes, it is the whole way through, I became more and more excited. The spectacle of the musical has historically been enjoyed and made by gay men, and *Umbrellas* is no exception. With its melodramatic delivery, achingly bright and beautiful colour scheme, and dreamlike movements of its characters, it is hard not to get swept up by it. The sailors in the back also did not go unnoticed, adding more to the overall gay aesthetic. With the story of class at the forefront, and the subtextual story of sexuality interwoven with its queer form, my tear ducts did not stand a chance.



# HANNAH MONTANA: HOW QUEERNESS GAVE ME THE BEST OF BOTH WORLDS



By Robbie Lawns

As my first Pride month being a loud and proud Queer, I have been reflecting back on my long, arduous journey in discovering my Queerness, sexuality and gender identity (a journey that has only really just begun) and so went back to my earliest childhood memories. Now as all Queers are wont to do, I started Queer coding my own childhood to find the glimpses of my Queer self that were hidden in that young boy. And then it hit me - *Hannah Montana*.

The first time I saw the sparkly dresses, the glitter, the pink heels, alongside the catchiest Disney Channel theme song in history, I was hooked. After that, every day after school I would turn the TV on and catch up with Miley Cyrus. Following the various escapades she finds herself in trying to live the best of both worlds as an ordinary girl/mega pop star. I remember dancing and singing along in front of the screen to all of her songs, crying as she once again stood up Lilly because of another "emergency Hannah situation", falling in love with the bond she shared with her dad, Billy Ray, in the show's most sentimental moments that blurred the lines between reality and fiction.

For me, the show had it all, and what captivated me the most was the fact that Hannah Montana was living out all of my boyhood dreams. Yet unbeknownst to me, those dreams were not to become a famous singer, but to find a way to express both my masculinity and femininity.

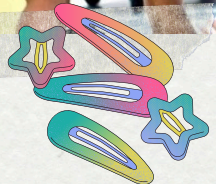
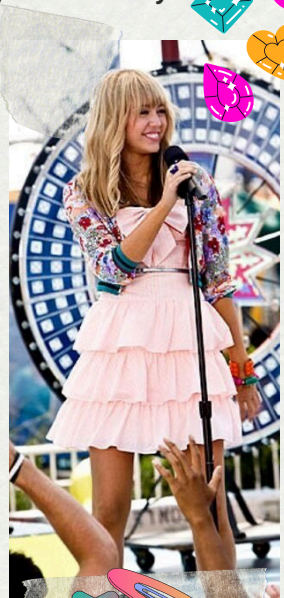




At the height of my love for *Hannah Montana*, I was well into my dress up phase as a kid. Even back then it didn't matter what I dressed up in: one day I could be Spiderman or a Jedi, and the next I could be a Disney princess or a fairy. To me, the performativity of my gender had always blurred between masculinity/femininity, and I did not care what anyone thought about it. *Hannah Montana* taught me that. During the day, Miley Cyrus acts as a tomboyish country girl; while at night, she becomes Hannah Montana performing as a pop star diva. The scenes where Miley argues and fights with her brother Jackson or hangs with Rico highlights the masculine side of her persona, with the pair always trying to one up each other in crazy competitions all for male pride.

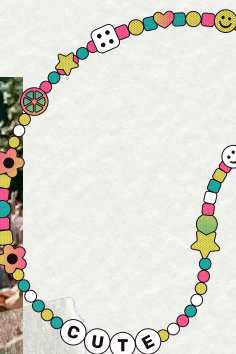
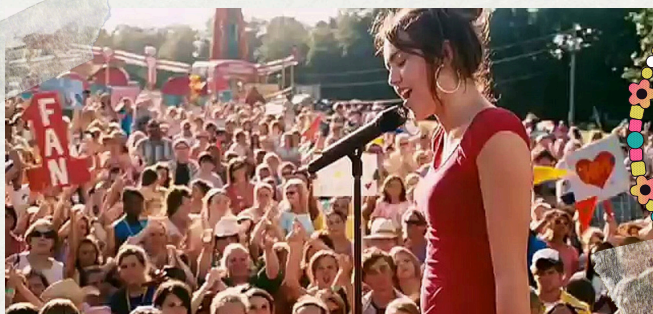
Meanwhile, the recurring scenes of Miley in her dress up room, at the vanity table with her iconic pink makeup kit as she transforms into Hannah expresses her femininity. Equally, her friendship with Lilly brings out this side of her by being able to fight and gossip over boys, and when Lilly is told Miley's secret, she consistently helps Miley in becoming Hannah. The twofold star persona of Miley Cyrus/Hannah Montana therefore represents more than just the divide between country girl/pop star but the binary of her duelling masculinity/femininity.

*Hannah Montana: The Movie* (2009) expresses these ideas even more, as the plot of the film centres around the increasing disparity between Miley's personas. This divide increases to the point that Hannah's exaggerated femininity and increasing diva attitude begin to get in the way of her life. Therefore, she is forced back to her hometown in Tennessee to become in touch again with Miley Cyrus the country girl and re-embrace her masculine side. Throughout the film, Miley must relearn how to live on the farm again, away from the spotlight of Hannah. At first, she struggles and fails miserably, but by the film's climax the rediscovery of her identity is represented in the form of the colourful chicken coop that she builds by herself. What the film ultimately highlights, however, is that it is possible for Miley Cyrus and Hannah Montana to co-exist within the same corporeal body.





Miley shows us that, when she finally reveals her secret to the world, the balance between her masculinity/femininity can be found. In a beautiful moment, as the concert goes quiet and Miley anticipates jeering, a small voice is heard in the middle of the concert crowd. The little girl who discovered Miley's secret earlier in the film utters "we'll keep your secret". The first time I watched the film as a boy, charged with excitement, I was that girl too. I wanted to keep her secret too, because it was our secret. Then there is the catharsis when the whole crowd cheers for Hannah, and Miley realises that her dream is possible, the dream that plays on repeat at the start of every episode, that she can live the best of both worlds.



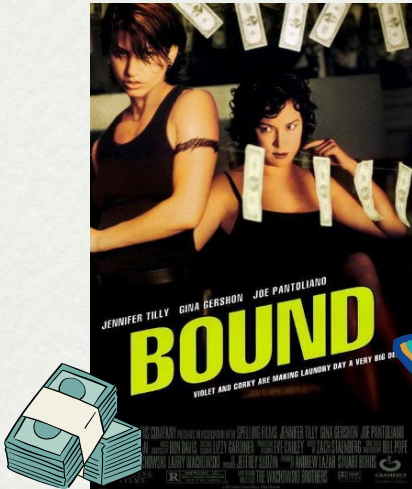
As a queer non-binary person, *Hannah Montana* showed me that by embracing my queerness, my fluctuating masculinity/femininity, that I too could live the best of both worlds. During the day, I'm a regular old country boy from the highlands; while at night, I'm a glammed-up diva hitting the dancefloor. I was never in awe of just Miley Cyrus or just Hannah Montana: the two were inseparable. There was no Miley without Hannah and no Hannah without Miley, and that's what I loved about her. Likewise, the conflicting sides of my identity are inseparable. I love both my masculinity as well as my femininity, and there is no me without the other. The idea of spaces is also incredibly key to Hannah. As Miley, she is able to fit in at school and access the spaces of an ordinary girl, meanwhile as Hannah, she gets access to places Miley could only dream of. My gender identity allows me to achieve the same goal: my masculinity/femininity allows me to alter my corporeal being and transgress these liminal spaces, both physically and mentally. **Like Miley, I too have an inner pop star diva, she just doesn't have a name yet.**





# SOME LGBTQ+ FILMS AND TV SHOWS YOU MAY HAVE MISSED ON STREAMING SERVICES

By Amy Maloney



**Bound (1997) - Prime Video**

Violet and Corky become involved in a passionate love affair, despite Violet's relationship with gangster, Caesar. For the pair to be together, they compose a scheme to steal mob money and blame Caesar in a bid to free Violet.

**Bottoms (2023) - Prime Video**

A comedy centred around the experiences of PJ and Josie, an unpopular high-school duo. The pair start an all-female fight club to woo the most popular girls in their school, in hopes of losing their virginity before graduation.



**Disclosure (2020) - Netflix**  
A documentary which delves into Hollywood's varying depictions of transness, through the experiences and perspective of leading trans creatives and activists.





## *Moonlight* (2016) - BBC iPlayer

A coming-of age drama presenting the life of Chiron in three-parts: childhood, adolescence and early adult life. Born to a drug-addicted single mother, Chiron navigates the complexities of his sexuality and its interconnections between his racial and class identity, alongside his first real role model, Juan, the Afro-Cuban drug dealer. The cinematography of *Moonlight* utilises a distinct but beautifully conducted colour palette of blue and red (which gradually blurs throughout the film) to construct an intimate relationship between Chiron and his environment. This successfully highlights moments of loneliness and ostracisation felt by Chiron, along with the process of maturation and self-discovery (which lay at the forefront of *Moonlight*) which aid Chiron's navigation of identity.

*Moonlight*'s triad of ages provides us with an emotionally-charged overview of masculinity and sexuality in contemporary America.



COMING SOON:

*The Queen of My Dreams* (2023)

*I Saw the TV Glow* (2024)

*Love Lies Bleeding* (2024)

*Under the Bridge*  
(2024) - Disney Plus

Centred around the murder of 14-year-old Reena Virk in Canada during 1997, this murder-mystery series follows the complex dynamic between queer policer, Cam, and queer writer, Rebecca, as they investigate the brutal murder together. Oscar-nominee Lily Gladstone and Golden Globe-nominee Riley Keough star as the leads in this unmissable true crime.





# CHARITIES

We're over the moon that our zine is free of charge, but there are charities that need our support. If you could spare a quid or two, consider donating to one below. We appreciate you!

## **African Rainbow Family**

Supports LGBTQ+ asylum seekers of African heritage and the Global Majority.

[www.africanrainbowfamily.org/](http://www.africanrainbowfamily.org/)

## **Just Like Us**

Equips LGBTQ+ youth with the skills needed to deliver workshops and talks to school groups.

[www.justlikeus.org/](http://www.justlikeus.org/)

## **Mermaids**

Supports trans, non-binary and gender-diverse children, young people and their families.

[www.mermaidsuk.org.uk/](http://www.mermaidsuk.org.uk/)

## **AKT**

Specialises in support for LGBTQ+ youth at risk of or experiencing homelessness.

[www.akt.org.uk/](http://www.akt.org.uk/)

## **Alqaws**

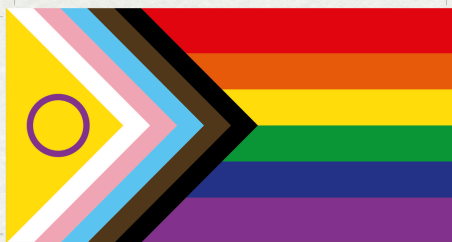
A Palestinian organisation and helpline, founded in grassroots activism, and focused on empowerment and support.

[www.alqaws.org/about-us](http://www.alqaws.org/about-us)

## **Astrea Lesbian Foundation For Justice**

Astrea distribute their donations to activists who need them the most by taking an intersectional approach, and looking at long-term impact.

<https://astraeafoundation.org/>



# RESOURCES

See below for a list of helpful resources, including helplines, books, and useful websites.

## **AllSorts Youth Project**

Offers support groups for LGBTQ+ youth and their families

[www.allsortsyouth.org.uk/](http://www.allsortsyouth.org.uk/)

## **Queer: A Graphic History**

by Meg-John Barker and Julia Scheele

A graphic novel that serves as a helpful introduction to queer identities, theory, and histories.

## **Gender Construction Kit**

Information for LGBTQ+ individuals regarding how to legally, medically and visibly express their gender identity.

<https://genderkit.org.uk>

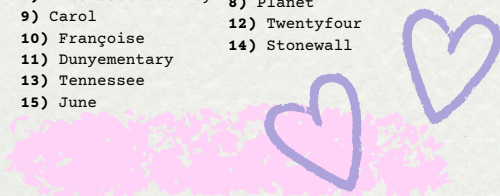
## **Crossword Answers:**

### **ACROSS:**

- 2) Sontag
- 3) Hoodie
- 6) Storyville
- 7) Intersectionality
- 9) Carol
- 10) Françoise
- 11) Duryemantary
- 13) Tennessee
- 15) June

### **DOWN::**

- 1) Seashell
- 4) Heteronormativity
- 5) Transparent
- 8) Planet
- 12) Twentyfour
- 14) Stonewall





# LIST SOME OF YOUR FAVOURITE QUEER FILMS AND SHOWS HERE!

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Thank

You

