



## Screenwriters

by Craig Kaczorowski

Encyclopedia Copyright © 2015, glbtq, Inc.  
Entry Copyright © 2004, glbtq, Inc.  
Reprinted from <http://www.glbtq.com>

A screenwriter is the person (or group of persons) who writes the script upon which a film is based. A script can be an original creation or an adaptation of previously published material.

However, it is important to note that most films involve a complex weave of talents, properties, and personalities. Moreover, film is usually considered a director's rather than a writer's medium; consequently, it is often the director's rather than the writer's vision that shapes a film.

Therefore, the extent of a screenwriter's contribution to any given film can sometimes be difficult to ascertain. Nevertheless, gay and lesbian screenwriters have played significant roles in both mainstream and independent film.

### The Hollywood-Studio Era

During the Hollywood-studio era, roughly from the 1920s through the 1960s, homosexuality was rarely portrayed on the screen. When it did appear, it was typically depicted as something to laugh at or to scorn. As a result, gay and lesbian screenwriters learned to express their personal sensibilities discreetly between the lines of a film.

Perhaps the most significant and prominent lesbian filmmaker to function in the studio era was Dorothy Arzner. Although working within the constraints on form and content imposed by the studio system, Arzner nevertheless brought a distinctive, personal point of view to her films about strong-willed, independent women, within the context of such controversial subjects as extramarital sex, prostitution, and cross-class relationships.

Arzner began her film career as a stenographer in the script department of Famous Players-Lasky Corporation (later to become Paramount Studios) in 1919. She later advanced to writing scenarios for an assortment of silent features including the westerns *The No-Gun Man* (1924) and *The Breed of the Border* (1924); the drama *The Red Kimona* (1925), from a story on prostitution by Adela Rogers St. Johns; *When Husbands Flirt* (1925), a comedy; and the pirate adventure *Old Ironsides* (1926). In 1927, Arzner stopped writing scripts and turned her talents to directing; she completed nearly 20 films, spanning both the silent and sound eras, before retiring in 1943.

Notable gay male screenwriters of the studio era include Stewart Stern, Gavin Lambert, and Arthur Laurents.

A former stage actor, Stewart Stern turned to scriptwriting in the late 1940s, beginning with such television anthology shows as *Philco Television Playhouse* and *Playhouse 90*. He earned his first screenplay credit with the drama *Teresa* (1951), about a young war veteran struggling to adjust to civilian life. Stern went on to write scripts for such varied films as *The Rack* (1956), *The Outsider* (1962), *Rachel, Rachel* (1968), *Summer*



A portrait of screenwriter Gavin Lambert by Stathis Orphanos.  
Courtesy Stathis Orphanos. Copyright © Stathis Orphanos. All Rights Reserved.

*Wishes, Winter Dreams* (1973), and the television movie *Sybil* (1976), an award-winning story of a young woman with multiple personalities.

Stern's principal contribution to gay cinema is his screenplay for the classic alienated-teen drama *Rebel Without a Cause* (1955). The film features a gay-implied character, Plato, who is befriended by fellow high school students Jim and Judy. Although Plato's sexuality is never made explicit in the film, the character's yearnings were clear enough in the script for the Motion Picture Association of America (MPAA)--the governing board that determined what was and was not acceptable in films at the time--to send a memo to the filmmakers stating, "It is of course vital that there be no inference of a questionable or homosexual relationship between Plato and Jim."

Nonetheless, Plato's affectionate glances at Jim, and small details in the film, such as a photograph of the actor Alan Ladd taped to the inside of Plato's school locker, help to imply the character's feelings.

British-born writer Gavin Lambert began his screenwriting career with *Another Sky* (1954), which he also directed; the film concerns the sexual awakening of a prim English woman in North Africa. Subsequent Lambert scripts include *Bitter Victory* (1958), *Sons and Lovers* (1960), based on the novel by D. H. Lawrence, and *The Roman Spring of Mrs. Stone* (1961), an adaptation of the Tennessee Williams novella, about an aging actress who becomes involved with a young Italian gigolo. Some critics have detected a homosexual subtext in the latter film, based primarily on a scene where the actress overhears herself being referred to as a "chicken hawk"--gay slang for an adult homosexual who is attracted to much younger men.

In 1965, Lambert adapted his novel *Inside Daisy Clover* for the screen. Set in the Hollywood studio system of the 1930s, the film tells the cautionary tale of a teenage movie star and her unhappy marriage to a closeted homosexual leading man. Lambert also wrote the scripts for made-for-television movies on transsexual tennis pro Renee Richards (*Second Serve*, 1986), and the gay, though closeted, performer Liberace (*Liberace: Behind the Music*, 1988).

Playwright, novelist, screenwriter, librettist, and stage director Arthur Laurents honed his writing skills on scripts for a variety of New York radio series in the late 1930s and early 1940s. In 1945, he wrote his first play, *Home of the Brave*, a war-time drama about a Jewish soldier confronting prejudice in the army. (When the play was adapted for the screen in 1949, with a screenplay by Carl Foreman, the Jewish character was changed to an African-American.)

Laurents later went to work in Hollywood and wrote the scripts for such films as *The Snake Pit* (1948), *Caught* (1949), *Anastasia* (1956), and *Bonjour Tristesse* (1958), based on the best-selling novel by Françoise Sagan. Laurents again enjoyed popular success in the 1970s with the screenplays for *The Way We Were* (1973), a romance set mainly during Hollywood's anti-Communist blacklisting period, and *The Turning Point* (1977), an insider's view of the world of ballet.

In terms of gay cultural history, perhaps the most significant Laurents script is *Rope* (1948), an Alfred Hitchcock-directed film about two affluent young gay men who strangle an acquaintance merely as an intellectual challenge to commit the perfect murder. As a further display of arrogance and audacity, the two men hide the body in their apartment and proceed to host a small party, entertaining their guests around the concealed corpse.

The script was based on a play by Patrick Hamilton, which in turn was inspired by the notorious Leopold and Loeb murder case of 1924. Nathan Leopold, Jr. and Richard Loeb were wealthy Chicago teenagers embroiled in a secret affair. The teens intellectualized their sexuality into a philosophical superiority and began to commit a series of crimes, escalating in seriousness to the eventual murder of 14-year-old Bobby Franks. Their defense attorneys successfully used the young men's homosexuality as a sign of their insanity; Leopold and Loeb escaped a death sentence and were instead sent to prison.

Laurents's screenplay, written in the late 1940s, was hampered by an inability to speak frankly about the conceptions of homosexuality that informed both the behavior of the two young men and the public's reaction to their crime. (The same is true for the 1959 film *Compulsion*, with a script by Richard Murphy, which explored similar territory.)

However, by the 1990s with the release of *Swoon* (1992), the particulars of the Leopold and Loeb case finally could be explored unambiguously on film. *Swoon*, written by Hilton Als and Tom Kalin, outlines the facts of the murder case while also offering meditations on the philosophical, social, and aesthetic perceptions of homosexuality.

### **Capote, Vidal, and Williams**

Truman Capote, Gore Vidal, and Tennessee Williams, three of the most prolific and honored gay male writers of the twentieth century, each made brief forays into screenwriting.

The novelist and short story writer Truman Capote gained notoriety at the age of 24 with the publication of his first novel *Other Voices, Other Rooms* (1948). Capote's reputation was enhanced by the novella *Breakfast at Tiffany's* (1958); he did not, however, write the script for the popular 1961 film version. The "nonfiction novel" *In Cold Blood* (1966), based on a six-year study of the brutal murder of a rural Kansas family by two young drifters, is considered by many critics to be Capote's best work.

Capote's ventures in screenwriting began with contributions to the film *Stazione Termini (Indiscretion of an American Wife)* (1953), directed by the renowned Italian neorealist Vittorio De Sica. Although a series of writers, including Alberto Moravia and Paul Gallico, also worked on the script, Capote received sole credit for the final screenplay. The story concerns the dissolution of a love affair between a married American woman and an Italian-American professor who spend their last hours together in Rome's Terminal Station.

Capote next worked on the script for the comic thriller *Beat the Devil* (1953), about a ragtag gang of criminals killing time in a small Italian seaport. The filmmakers have admitted to making up most of the script on the spot; director John Huston reportedly tore up the original screenplay on the first day of filming and flew Capote to Italy to work with him on writing new scenes each day.

Although a critical and commercial failure upon its first release, *Beat the Devil* has since become a cult classic and is often referred to as the first "camp" movie. The film is especially renowned for Capote's offbeat, eccentric dialogue.

Capote's final screenplay was the psychological horror film *The Innocents* (1961), based on the 1898 Henry James novella *The Turn of the Screw*. The subtle and cerebral screenplay, which Capote co-wrote with William Archibald, is remarkably true to the mood and atmosphere of the James novella about a young governess who is either being haunted by malevolent spirits or slowly losing her grasp on reality.

Gore Vidal, the American novelist, playwright, and essayist, made his writing debut at the age of 19 with the novel *Williwaw* (1946), based on his wartime experiences as an officer in the Army Transportation Corps. Key novels by Vidal in the history of gay culture include *The City and the Pillar* (1948), one of the first explicitly gay novels to be published in the United States, and *Myra Breckinridge* (1968), a sexually frank satire on gender identity with a male-to-female transsexual as its main character.

Vidal crafted dozens of one-hour original plays and adaptations for television anthology shows in the early 1950s. His most celebrated original teleplay is *Visit to a Small Planet*, which was first aired in 1955 and expanded and produced on Broadway two years later.

Vidal next worked as a contract-writer for MGM and earned his first screenwriting credit for *The Catered Affair* (1956), based on a play by Paddy Chayefsky. Other Vidal screenplays from this period include *I*

*Accuse!* (1958), a study of the Dreyfus Case where a Jewish captain in the French army was falsely accused of treason, and *The Best Man* (1964), an adaptation of Vidal's own play, whose plot involves a presidential candidate's gay indiscretion. Vidal also worked, uncredited, on the script for *Ben-Hur* (1959), into which he infused a homosexual subtext.

Vidal's most noted contribution to gay cinema, however, is the script of *Suddenly, Last Summer* (1959). The film, based on a one-act play by Tennessee Williams (who also contributed to the screenplay), is a somewhat absurd and overheated melodrama of homosexuality, mental illness, and cannibalism. Although the MPAA initially objected to the film's content, the film's producer defended it by stating, "The story admittedly deals with a homosexual, but one who pays for his sin with his life." Perhaps due in part to its controversial subject matter, the film was a surprise commercial success.

Tennessee Williams, one of the world's foremost playwrights, created such renowned works as *The Glass Menagerie* (1945), *A Streetcar Named Desire* (1947), *The Rose Tattoo* (1951), *Camino Real* (1953), *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* (1955), and *The Night of the Iguana* (1961), among others.

While nearly all of Williams's major plays have been brought to the screen, most were made with little or no input from Williams himself.

In the late 1940s, Williams contributed several one-hour plays for the television shows *Kraft Television Theatre* and *Actor's Studio*. He received his first screenwriting credit, which he shared with Peter Berneis, for the film version of his play *The Glass Menagerie* (1950). The screenplay is generally faithful to the original material, although slightly compromised by a more upbeat and hopeful ending.

Although *A Streetcar Named Desire* was a tremendous critical and commercial success on Broadway, Hollywood was initially reluctant to film Williams's play. Industry censors were concerned about the play's bold sexual subjects, especially Blanche's rape by her brother-in-law Stanley, her promiscuity, and her recollection of her husband's suicide after she finds him with another man. Among other edicts, the MPAA insisted that changes be made to the script that would "affirmatively establish that the husband's problem was something other than homosexuality."

Williams reluctantly labored to produce an acceptable screenplay, although stating in a letter to the MPAA, "We will use every legitimate means that any of us has at his or her disposal to protect things in the film which we think cannot be sacrificed."

In the finished film, released in 1951, Blanche's speech about her husband's suicide was condensed significantly and the husband's homosexuality altered to an enigmatic "weakness of character," with implications of impotence. References to Blanche's promiscuity and attraction to young men were also removed.

In 1993, approximately five minutes of censored material, including references to Blanche's promiscuity and edited scenes from the rape sequence, were restored in a "director's version" re-release. Nevertheless, even with these restorations, there is little homosexual content in the film version of *A Streetcar Named Desire*.

Williams wrote only one script expressly for the screen, *Baby Doll* (1956), a heterosexual gothic tale of two male rivals and the seventeen-year-old girl for whom they compete. Religious leaders in the United States fervently opposed its release, due in large part to the film's portrayal of an unconsummated marriage; many movie theaters were forced to cancel their showings. *Time* magazine wrote that the film was "just possibly the dirtiest American-made motion picture that has ever been legally exhibited." Despite such condemnation, *Baby Doll* did moderately well at the box office, no doubt bolstered by the film's themes of sexual repression, seduction, and infantile eroticism.

In 1967, Williams wrote a screenplay based on his 1945 short story, "One Arm," about a boxer who, after losing an arm in an automobile accident, turns to prostitution, only to murder a client and be sentenced to death. Undoubtedly because it was too daring for its time, the screenplay was never filmed. However, it, along with the original story, forms the basis for a recent play by Moisés Kaufman.

### ***The Boys in the Band and Beyond***

In 1970, a watershed moment in the history of gay cinema occurred with the release of *The Boys in the Band*. Written by Mart Crowley, and based on his 1968 groundbreaking off-Broadway play, *The Boys in the Band* was the first mainstream Hollywood movie to focus exclusively on homosexual characters and issues. The story concerns a group of gay men, representing a cross-section of emblematic gay "types" (a queen, a clone, a hustler, etc.), who meet to celebrate a friend's birthday in a Manhattan apartment.

Upon its release, *The Boys in the Band* was celebrated as bold and compassionate, a breakthrough work on a taboo subject. By today's standards, however, the attitudes of the characters, especially their self-loathing, seem somewhat archaic and even objectionable.

Written on the eve of Gay Liberation--the Stonewall riots occurred nearly one year after the play opened and preceded the film's release by nine months--*The Boys in the Band* is reflective of its times. "I knew a lot of people like those people," Crowley has said of his characters. "The self-deprecating humor was born out of a low self-esteem, from a sense of what the times told you about yourself." As one of the most famous lines from the work clarifies, "Show me a happy homosexual and I'll show you a gay corpse."

A less clichéd, and certainly more celebratory, view of same-sex desire is presented in the film *A Very Natural Thing* (1974), written by Christopher Larkin (who also directed) and Joseph Coencas. The screenplay focuses on a young seminarian, David, who leaves the church after acknowledging his sexuality and embarks on his first homosexual relationship. Reported to be the first American mainstream film made by an openly gay director (William Friedkin, who directed *The Boys in the Band*, is heterosexual), *A Very Natural Thing* is an insider's view of gay life, detailing the everyday events of David and his boyfriend.

Nearly ten years passed before Hollywood embarked on another mainstream film focusing on same-sex desire. Unlike *The Boys in the Band*, with its self-hating, archetypal characters, *Making Love* (1982) presents a non-stereotypical view of gay men attempting to deal honestly with their sexuality. Barry Sandler's screenplay utilizes elements of classic melodrama to tell a modern love story of a married couple forced to confront the husband's homosexuality when he becomes emotionally attached to an openly gay writer. Sandler has explained that the script was the direct result of his decision to write from his personal identity and experience.

Anglo-Pakistani novelist and screenwriter Hanif Kureishi first came to prominence with his Academy Award-nominated screenplay for *My Beautiful Laundrette* (1985), which presents a cross-class, cross-racial homosexual relationship. Directed by Stephen Frears, and featuring excellent performances by Saeed Jaffrey and Daniel Day Lewis as the lovers, the film presents the homosexual relationship matter-of-factly even as it exposes the rapacity and inequities of Thatcherite Britain.

Other screenplays by Kureishi include *Sammy and Rosie Get Laid* (1988), *London Kills Me* (1991), *My Son the Fanatic* (1997), *The Escort* (1999), and *The Mother* (2003). Gay men, lesbians, and bisexuals frequently appear in Kureishi's screenplays and novels, though they often reject the categories of sexual identity politics, just as they frequently blur categories of nationality and ethnicity.

A defining moment in the history of lesbian cinema occurred with the sympathetic portrayal of lesbian characters in Natalie Cooper's screenplay of *Desert Hearts* (1985), adapted from the 1964 novel *Desert of the Heart* by Jane Rule. The story concerns a married woman who has gone to Reno, Nevada for a divorce and has taken up residence at a ranch to wait out the process. While at the ranch, she meets an open and

self-assured lesbian, and the two women subsequently begin a relationship.

The film ends on a positive note, and offers the possibility that two women can end up in a happy, stable relationship--as opposed to the doomed lesbian couples portrayed in such earlier films as *The Children's Hour* (1962) and *The Killing of Sister George* (1968).

Another critically-lauded film with non-stereotypical lesbian characters is *Go Fish* (1994), written by Guinevere Turner with the film's director Rose Troche. The film tells the story, in a casual, meandering style, of an extended group of friends in Chicago. Shot in black and white with a miniscule budget and a cast of nonprofessional actors (including the film's co-writer Turner), the film's frankness and feeling of everyday authenticity are perhaps its greatest virtues. *Go Fish* marked a breakthrough for young, urban lesbians unused to seeing something approximating their lives on the big screen.

Turner also wrote the screenplay for *American Psycho* (2000), based on the novel by Bret Easton Ellis, in addition to several scripts for the television series *The L Word* (2004), about a group of lesbian friends in Los Angeles. Troche went on to direct *Bedrooms and Hallways* (1998), which focuses on a gay male relationship, and wrote and directed *The Safety of Objects* (2001), based on the novel by A. M. Homes.

The romantic-comedy *Kissing Jessica Stein* (2001), another critically and commercially successful lesbian-themed film, concerns a straight young woman, frustrated with the heterosexual dating scene, who hesitantly embarks on a relationship with another woman. Heather Juergensen and Jennifer Westfeldt's script was adapted from their 1997 play *Lipschtick*, which was based on their own dating experiences and anecdotes culled from interviews. Several gay and lesbian groups objected to the film's sexual politics (the issue is addressed briefly in the film, when a gay male friend accuses one of the women of "trying lesbianism on as if it were the latest fashion"); many critics, however, championed the film for its very lack of political correctness.

### **Philadelphia and Other AIDS-related Films**

Although not the movie industry's first foray into AIDS-related material, *Philadelphia* (1993), written by Ron Nyswaner, is significant for being Hollywood's first big-budget attempt to examine the subject. Nyswaner's script tells the story of Andrew Beckett, an attorney with AIDS, who is fired from his firm because of his illness; Beckett hires a homophobic lawyer who is the only willing advocate for a wrongful dismissal suit.

Primarily a courtroom drama, the script was somewhat sanitized, both politically and dramatically, for a mainstream audience. "Reaching a large audience, not just gays, was a prime consideration," Nyswaner explained when the film was released. "Our consuming goal was to make a movie that would play to the largest possible audience." Hence, Beckett's personal struggle with AIDS and his relationships with his lover and family are kept at a rather superficial level.

Nyswaner also wrote the script for the television movie *A Soldier's Girl* (2003), based on the true story of U. S. Army Pfc. Barry Winchell who was beaten to death in 1999 after his fellow soldiers learned of his involvement with a transgendered nightclub performer.

A number of independent films have also explored the issue of AIDS, including Arthur J. Bressan, Jr.'s *Buddies* (1985), the first American film to dramatize the AIDS crisis; *Parting Glances* (1986), written and directed by Bill Sherwood, about a group of New York friends and their responses to AIDS; *Longtime Companion* (1990), with a script by the noted playwright Craig Lucas, which also bore witness to the toll of AIDS on a circle of friends in the 1980s; *Together Alone* (1991), written and directed by P. J. Castellaneta; Gregg Araki's *The Living End* (1992); John Greyson's AIDS musical *Zero Patience* (1993); Randal Kleiser's *It's My Party* (1996), about the planned suicide of a man suffering from AIDS; and *Love! Valour! Compassion!* (1997), written by Terrence McNally and based on his Broadway success of the same name.

## The Emergence of the Writer/Director

There is a long history of film directors who are also writers. The European auteurs such as Pasolini and Visconti often wrote--or at least collaborated on--their own scripts. This tradition has been continued by such contemporary glbtq directors as Pedro Almodóvar, Chantal Akerman, Monika Treut, and Rosa von Praunheim, among many others.

Since the late 1980s, with the emergence of gay and lesbian independent films and the "New Queer Cinema" movement, a proliferation of glbtq-themed movies has been released. This has been due in part to the economic viability of independent films, the growth of an audience responsive to queer-themed works, and the presence of openly gay and lesbian writer/directors who have brought their personal visions to the screen.

John Waters is one of the first openly gay writer/directors, and in many ways a trailblazer for "alternative" films. Unreservedly embracing camp, kitsch, and graphic bad taste, his films have addressed such subjects as crime, religion, racism, and sexual subversion, and are notable for their audacious, willfully demented dialogue. Divine (born Harris Glenn Milstead), a 300-pound cross-dresser, was the undisputed star of early Waters' movies until his death in 1988.

Waters began experimenting with 8 and 16mm shorts in the 1960s; early feature-length films such as *Mondo Trasho* (1969) and *Multiple Maniacs* (1970) were rarely seen outside of Waters' hometown of Baltimore, Maryland. With *Pink Flamingos* (1972), a boldly transgressive film about two families fighting for the title of "Filthiest People Alive," Waters finally achieved critical acclaim and notoriety. In the film's final scene, which firmly established the reputations of both Waters and Divine as cultural icons of outrageousness, one family matriarch (played by Divine) proves herself the "Queen of Filth" by ingesting fresh dog excrement.

While his more recent films, such as *Hairspray* (1988), *Serial Mom* (1994), and *A Dirty Shame* (2004), have had increasingly bigger budgets and greater technical proficiency, Waters' personal brand of absurdity has also been toned down to reach a broader, more mainstream, audience.

Gus Van Sant, the highly prolific and influential filmmaker, has worked both within and outside the Hollywood system. While he has directed films from other writers' scripts, including *Good Will Hunting* (1997) and a remake of the Alfred Hitchcock classic *Psycho* (1998), Van Sant's critical reputation derives mainly from those films he has both written and directed.

Van Sant's first feature-length film, *Mala Noche* (1985), based on an autobiographical novella by Walt Curtis, concerns the passionate, but unrequited, love of an openly gay liquor store clerk for a teenage illegal alien from Mexico. The visually innovative, black-and-white film won nearly unanimous praise for the frank, non-judgmental, depiction of its marginalized characters.

*Drugstore Cowboy* (1989), co-written with Daniel Yost and based on a novel by James Fogle, focuses on two young couples who rob pharmacies to support their drug addiction. Notably absent from the script is any moralizing about drug use.

*My Own Private Idaho* (1991), an ambitious film inspired by Shakespeare's *Henry IV*, focuses on the friendship between two teenage male hustlers. As with his two previous films, Van Sant artfully explores such concepts as unrequited love, alienation, and the concept of family.

Other films both written and directed by Van Sant include *Even Cowgirls Get the Blues* (1993), one of his rare artistic failures, based on the Tom Robbins cult novel; *Gerry* (2002), a minimalist experiment about two friends who get lost while on a hike in the California desert, with a script attributed to Van Sant in collaboration with the film's two stars Casey Affleck and Matt Damon; and *Elephant* (2003), inspired by the mass shootings at Columbine High School in 1999, which utilizes a loose, spontaneous narrative structure

and visual style. Although Van Sant is credited with the script, the dialogue, similar to *Gerry*, seems mainly to have been improvised by the film's young actors.

Todd Haynes's complex and controversial experiments with genre, narrative, and character identification have earned him outstanding critical acclaim and positioned him as one of the leading figures of the New Queer Cinema. Haynes debuted in 1985 with the short film *Assassins: A Film Concerning Rimbaud*, a stylized study of the violent love affair between the French poets Arthur Rimbaud and Paul Verlaine. *Superstar: The Karen Carpenter Story* (1987), which Haynes co-wrote with Cynthia Schneider, is a 43-minute film examining the career of 1970s pop singer Karen Carpenter as enacted not by actors but by a cast of Ken and Barbie-type dolls.

The writings of Jean Genet were the inspiration for Haynes's first feature-length film, *Poison* (1991). The film weaves together three seemingly unconnected stories (the first, about a boy's murder of his abusive father; the second, concerns a scientist who turns into a monster after ingesting the human sex drive in liquid form; and the final story, an unrequited love affair between two men in prison), each told in its own distinctive style and juxtaposed so that they comment on one another.

Haynes has described *Poison* as "an attempt to link homosexuality to other forms that society is threatened by--deviance that threatens the status quo of our sense of what normalcy is." Although attacked by right-wing extremists as pornography, *Poison* is considered by most critics a defining work of the New Queer Cinema.

While *Safe* (1995), about a woman seemingly allergic to her very environment, is devoid of any overt gay content, some writers have interpreted the mysterious affliction in the film as a metaphor for the AIDS virus. Told in a visually austere style, the film is also notable for its dialogue, which Haynes consciously wrote to expose the way people speak to each other without actually communicating.

In *Velvet Goldmine* (1998), Haynes explores the glam-rock scene of the early 1970s--a world of flamboyant theatrics and androgynous imagery. The film posits Oscar Wilde as the original "pop idol," and the self-consciously transgressive glam-rock stars as Wilde's direct descendants; much of the film's dialogue directly refers to Wilde's writings.

Without resorting to either parody or camp, *Far from Heaven* (2002) pays tribute to, as well as deconstructs, Douglas Sirk's domestic melodramas of the 1950s, such as *Magnificent Obsession* (1954) and *All That Heaven Allows* (1955). Significantly, Haynes's film tackles such social issues as homosexuality and racism that Sirk's were never allowed to explore.

Another key figure in the New Queer Cinema movement, Gregg Araki, garnered praise for *The Living End* (1992), the story of two young HIV-positive gay men on a crime spree. Other films written and directed by Araki include the ménage à trois drama *Three Bewildered People in the Night* (1987); *The Long Weekend (O'Despair)* (1989), about a group of college graduates brooding over their future; the "teen apocalypse trilogy," which includes *Totally F\*\*\*ed Up* (1993), *The Doom Generation* (1995), and *Nowhere* (1997), all of which focus on bored, alienated Los Angeles teenagers; the screwball comedy *Splendor* (1999); and *Mysterious Skin* (2004), a drama based on the novel by Scott Heim.

Lesbian writer and director Jane Anderson began her career scripting such mainstream films as *It Could Happen to You* (1994) and *How to Make an American Quilt* (1995). She went on to write and direct more groundbreaking films for television, including the first segment of *If These Walls Could Talk 2* (2000), which focuses on a woman coping with the death of her female partner of 50 years; *When Billie Beat Bobby* (2001), about the historic 1973 tennis match between Bobby Riggs and the young feminist Billie Jean King; and *Normal* (2003), the story of a married man who shocks his family and small-town community by revealing that he wants a sex-change operation.



Lisa Cholodenko gained critical attention with her debut film *High Art* (1998) and followed up with the equally ambitious *Laurel Canyon* (2002); both films concern reserved young women swept into the unconventional lifestyle of a charismatic older female artist.

Bill Condon is known principally as the writer/director of the biographical films *Gods and Monsters* (1998), an adaptation of Christopher Bram's novel *Father of Frankenstein*, focusing on the final days in the life of the gay, British-born film director James Whale; and *Kinsey* (2004), a study of the pioneer of human sexuality research Alfred Kinsey. Condon also wrote the screenplay for, but did not direct, the adaptation of the Kander-Ebb musical *Chicago* (2002).

Del Shores, producer and writer for the cable television hit *Queer as Folk*, who has also written for such other television shows as *Touched by an Angel*, *Ned and Stacey*, *Dharma and Greg*, and *Martial Law*, is the writer, director, and producer of the gay cult comedy *Sordid Lives* (2000).

Australian-born Stephan Elliott gained prominence with the exuberant "drag queen" farce *The Adventures of Priscilla, Queen of the Desert* (1994). Elliott also wrote and directed the comedies of misadventure *Frauds* (1993) and *Welcome to Woop Woop* (1997), as well as the thriller *Eye of the Beholder* (1999), and, most recently, *Venetian Wedding* (2004), co-written with Sheriden Jobbins, about a woman left at the altar when her fiancé runs off to Paris with his best man.

Andrew Fleming's semi-autobiographical film, *Threesome* (1994), which he both wrote and directed, concerns the romantic entanglements of three college roommates, one of whom is gay. Fleming also co-wrote the screenplay (with Steven E. de Souza) for his feature-film directorial debut, *Bad Dreams* (1988), about a young girl who survives a cult group's mass suicide. He also directed and co-wrote *The Craft* (with Peter Filardi, 1996), a stylish thriller about teenage witches, and *Dick* (with Sheryl Longin, 1999), a political satire about two high school girls who inadvertently become President Richard Nixon's secret advisors during the Watergate scandal.

The openly gay writer/director Scott McGehee co-directed and co-wrote (with his straight partner David Siegel) the atmospheric melodrama *The Deep End* (2001), about a mother's desperate attempt to cover up the murder of her young gay son's disreputable older lover. McGehee and Siegel based their script on the Max Ophüls cult noir *The Reckless Moment* (1949) and its original source, Elisabeth Sanxay Holding's 1947 novel *The Blank Wall*. McGehee and Siegel also co-directed and co-wrote the crime thriller *Suture* (1993).

*The Hours and Times* (1991), Christopher Münch's first feature, is a fictionalized account of what may have happened when the Beatles' John Lennon and the group's gay manager Brian Epstein went on holiday together to Barcelona in 1963. Münch also wrote and directed *Color of a Brisk and Leaping Day* (1996), a visually impressive account of a young Chinese-American's attempt to revitalize a railroad built by his ancestors; *The Sleepy Time Gal* (2001), an elegiac film about a middle-aged woman coming to terms with cancer; and *Harry and Max* (2004), focusing on the relationship between two pop-star brothers.

The screenwriter Don Roos made his writer/director debut with the celebrated comedy *The Opposite of Sex* (1988), about a manipulative 16-year old girl who wreaks havoc on her extended family after seducing her step-brother's boyfriend. Roos also wrote and directed the romantic-comedy *Bounce* (2000), and the multi-layered *Happy Endings* (2004).

Roos began his career writing scripts for such television series as *Hart to Hart* (1979 to 1984), *Paper Dolls* (1984), and *Casebusters* (1986). He eventually left television and wrote the screenplays for *Love Field* (1992), which focused on a housewife traveling to John F. Kennedy's funeral; *Single White Female* (1992), a psychological thriller based on the novel by John Lutz; *Boys on the Side* (1995), a female "road-movie" whose characters include a lesbian singer and a young woman with AIDS; and *Diabolique* (1996), a remake of Henri-Georges Clouzot's classic 1955 mystery thriller.

Other key glbtq-themed films by noted writer/directors include *The Incredibly True Adventure of Two Girls in Love* (1995) by Maria Maggenti, the story of two young women of different social and economic backgrounds who fall in love; Richard Kwietniowski's *Love and Death on Long Island* (1997), adapted from the novel by Gilbert Adair, about an elderly British writer's infatuation with a young American film actor; *Billy's Hollywood Screen Kiss* (1998), by Tommy O'Haver, about a young gay photographer who becomes infatuated with an aspiring musician of uncertain sexuality; *Boys Don't Cry* (1999), directed and co-written (with Andy Bienen) by Kimberly Peirce, about the life and brutal death of a cross-dressing young woman; Greg Berlanti's *The Broken Hearts Club: A Romantic Comedy* (2000), focusing on a group of friends in Los Angeles; *Hedwig and the Angry Inch* (2001), John Cameron Mitchell's adaptation of his off-Broadway success about a German-born male-to-female transsexual punk rock musician; *Party Monster* (2003), by Fenton Bailey and Randy Barbato, a true-crime account of the murder of a drug dealer by a club party organizer that the filmmakers based on their 1998 documentary of the same name; and *Monster* (2003) by Patty Jenkins, a study of Aileen Wuornos, one of the first U.S. female serial killers.

### Other Significant Screenwriters

Other significant screenwriters include Larry Kramer, Derek Jarman, Harvey Fierstein, Craig Lucas, Paul Rudnick, Kevin Williamson, and Alan Ball.

Writer and AIDS-activist Larry Kramer crafted the screenplay for *Women in Love* (1969), based on the D. H. Lawrence novel. Although the film has an ostensibly heterosexual plot, a palpable homoeroticism is evident throughout the film, especially in the famous wrestling scene, which contains full-frontal male nudity.

British filmmaker and activist Derek Jarman, whose work reveals a fascination with gay history and gay representation, wrote many of his most acclaimed films, including *Sebastiane* (1975), *Caravaggio* (1986), *Queer Edward II* (1991), and *Wittgenstein* (1993). A painter and set designer as well as director and writer, Jarman's works are always visually interesting and politically provocative.

Harvey Fierstein, the playwright and actor, wrote the screen adaptation of his award-winning Broadway play *Torch Song Trilogy* (1988), which concerns a New York drag queen's search for love and respectability.

Fierstein also wrote the scripts for the made-for-television movie *Tidy Endings* (1988), about a man coming to terms with the death of his lover from AIDS; *The Sissy Duckling* (1999), an animated television cartoon about an effeminate duckling taunted by his schoolmates; and the segment "Amos and Andy," about a father's eventual acceptance of his son's marriage to another man, in the anthology film *Common Ground* (2000), which also contains segments written by the lesbian playwright Paula Vogel ("A Friend of Dorothy's") and the noted gay writer Terrence McNally ("M. Roberts").

Playwright Craig Lucas, who wrote the screenplay for *Longtime Companions* (1990), also wrote the screen adaptations of his plays *Prelude to a Kiss* (1992), a fantasy romance about a young woman who inexplicably exchanges personalities with an elderly man she kisses at her wedding reception, and *Reckless* (1995), a darkly comic tale about a woman on the run from her husband who has contracted to have her killed.

Lucas also wrote the script for *The Secret Lives of Dentists* (2002), an adaptation of Jane Smiley's novella *The Age of Grief*, about a dentist's mounting suspicions of his wife's infidelities, and has completed his first film as writer/director, the screen version of his play *The Dying Gaul* (2004), an examination of the relationship between a gay male writer, a bisexual film producer, and the producer's wife.

Playwright, humorist, and screenwriter Paul Rudnick's film scripts include such comedies as *Sister Act* (1992), under the pseudonym Joseph Howard; *The Addams Family* (uncredited, 1991) and *Addams Family Values* (1993), both based on the cartoons of Charles Addams; *Jeffrey* (1995), adapted from his own off-Broadway play; *In & Out* (1997), about a high school teacher inadvertently outed by one of his former students; *Isn't She Great* (2000), on the life and career of novelist Jacqueline Susann; *Marci X* (2003), set in

the world of hip-hop and rap music; and *The Stepford Wives* (2004), a broad satire on suburban conformity based on the novel by Ira Levin.

Out-director Kevin Williamson has written the scripts for the popular teen horror movies *Scream* (1996) and *Scream 2* (1997), *I Know What You Did Last Summer* (1997), *The Faculty* (1998), and both wrote and directed the comedy-thriller *Teaching Mrs. Tingle* (1999). Williamson is also the creator of the popular television series of teenage angst *Dawson's Creek* (1998 to 2003).

Alan Ball got his start writing television situation comedies, but went on to garner praise and several prestigious awards for his screenplay of *American Beauty* (1999), a darkly comic study of suburban despair. He is also the creator of the critically acclaimed television series *Six Feet Under* (2001), which prominently features several gay and lesbian characters.

## **Bibliography**

Barrios, Richard. *Screened Out: Playing Gay in Hollywood from Edison to Stonewall*. New York: Routledge, 2003.

Clarke, Gerald. *Capote*. New York: Ballantine, 1988.

Ehrenstein, David. *Open Secret: Gay Hollywood, 1928-1998*. New York: William Morrow and Company, 1998.

Gever, Martha, John Greyson, and Pratibha Parmar, eds. *Queer Looks: Perspectives on Lesbian and Gay Film and Video*. New York: Routledge, 1993.

Mann, William J. *Behind the Screen: How Gays and Lesbians Shaped Hollywood, 1910-1969*. New York: Viking, 2001.

Nyswaner, Ron. "Leaving Philadelphia." *The Advocate* (May 27, 2003): 36.

Russo, Vito. *The Celluloid Closet: Homosexuality in the Movies*. New York: Harper & Row, 1981.

Sandler, Barry. "Making Love." *The Advocate* (November 12, 2002): 88.

Stephens, Chuck. "Gentlemen Prefer Haynes." *Film Comment* 31.4 (July/August 1995): 76-81.

Vidal, Gore. *Palimpsest: A Memoir*. New York: Random House, 1995.

Waters, John. *Shock Value*. New York: Thunder's Mouth, 1981.

Wyatt, Justin. "Cinematic/Sexual Transgression: An Interview with Todd Haynes." *Film Quarterly* 46.3 (Spring 1993): 2-9.

## **About the Author**

**Craig Kaczorowski** writes extensively on media, culture, and the arts. He holds an M.A. in English Language and Literature, with a focus on contemporary critical theory, from the University of Chicago. He comments on national media trends for two newspaper industry magazines.