



The Faculty of Arts and Education

MASTER'S THESIS

Study programme: Advanced teacher education for levels 8-13, specializing in English and the humanities

Spring term, 2023

Open

Author: Anna Charlotte Helgevold

.....
(signatur author)

Supervisor: Nahum Nyincho Welang

Title of thesis: The Representation of Male Sexuality in Popular Culture

Keywords:
Sexuality, identity, queer, gender, masculinity

Pages: 65
+ attachment/other: 0

Stavanger, May 11th, 2023

ABSTRACT

The aim of this thesis is to explore the representation of male sexuality in popular culture and how it has changed from early twentieth century to contemporary time. In order to do this, I intend to do a comparative analysis of three novels that all depict the experience of a male protagonist who falls in love with another man. The novels are *Maurice* (1971) by E.M. Forster, *Giovanni's Room* (1956) by James Baldwin, and *Call Me by Your Name* (2007) by André Aciman. Each novel is set and published in different time periods and thus work as a reflection of the time they represent.

Even though literature is my main focus, I also intend, to a small degree, to investigate the representation of male sexuality within the media landscape of Hollywood films. By examining both literature and media, it will allow a more comprehensive view of the representation of male sexuality in popular culture. Additionally, I intend to explore some of their historical changes that is underpinning contemporary attitudes toward male sexuality. The exploration of the representation of male sexuality will provide an opportunity to review how literature and media both reflect and shape social values and mainstream attitudes.

I have chosen to structure each chapter by argument. Thus, the first chapter will give the reader an overview of queer literature and its history, and an introduction of the three novels. The second chapter will investigate how sexual identity is depicted differently in each novel. The third chapter aim to explore how women are depicted in terms of the representation of male sexuality in the works. The fourth chapter will deal with media representation, with focus on the representation of male sexuality in Hollywood films. In this chapter, I intend to begin with an overview of historical changes within Hollywood film production and how these changes have influenced the portrayal of male sexuality in films. I also intend to explore the representation of male sexuality in contemporary films by examining the films *Maurice* (1987), *Brokeback Mountain* (2005) and *Call Me by Your Name* (2017). The final chapter will serve as a summary of my main points and arguments, then as a discussion and reflection of my findings.

Based on the findings of this thesis, there seems to have been a gradual progressiveness in the representation of male sexuality in popular culture over time. However, as this thesis will argue, the transformation is by no means complete.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank my supervisor Nahum Nyincho Welang for his help and encouragement in turning what initially started as a “shy idea” into a sixty pages long thesis. This thesis and my experience writing it would not have been the same had it not been for your constructive and supportive feedback. Thank you.

Secondly, I would like to thank my family and friends. Especially the friends I have made during these last years at the university. A special thank you to Iselin as well, who helped me during the last days of writing. You all mean a great deal to me.

Finally, I would like to thank my fiancé Sondre. Thank you for your tremendous support and for always believing in me. I love you.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION	1
1.1 An overview of queer literature	2
1.2 <i>Maurice</i> by E.M. Forster (1971)	5
1.3 <i>Giovanni's Room</i> by James Baldwin (1956)	6
1.4 <i>Call Me by Your Name</i> by André Aciman (2007)	8
CHAPTER 2: SEXUAL IDENTITY	10
2.1 Sexual identity in the works	10
2.2 Homosexuality depicted as filth	11
2.3 Homosexuality depicted as normal and natural	18
2.4 Sexuality depicted as fluid	24
CHAPTER 3: WOMEN AND MALE SEXUALITY	30
3.1. Women in the works	30
3.2 Women as victims of male sexuality	31
3.3. Women as threats and victims of male sexuality	34
3.4. Women as facilitators of the exploration of male sexuality	39
CHAPTER 4: MEDIA REPRESENTATION OF MALE SEXUALITY	43
4.1 Changes in media representation of male sexuality	43
4.2 Historical changes in the representation of male sexuality in Hollywood	44
4.3 Representation of male sexuality in contemporary films	52
BIBLIOGRAPHY	66

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

As stated in the abstract, this thesis aims to explore the changes in the representation of male sexuality in popular culture from early twentieth century to contemporary time. In doing so, I intend to do a comparative analysis of the novels *Giovanni's Room* (1956) by James Baldwin, *Maurice* (1971) by E.M. Forster and *Call Me by Your Name* (2007) by André Aciman. The reason I chose these novels is because they all depict a protagonist who experience same-sex desire. In addition to this, does each novel depict and represent a different time period. Thus, by comparing these novels it will in turn give insight to changes in the representation of male sexuality over time. I will be examining how these novels differ in their depiction of sexual identity and in their portrayal of women in terms of male sexuality.

The examination of how sexual identity is depicted in each work is important when examining changes in the representation of male sexuality in popular culture because it helps to create a better understanding of how different cultural, social, and political factors have shaped our understanding of male sexuality over time. Changes in the way male sexuality is portrayed in literature and media, can in turn reflect changes in mainstream attitudes towards sexualities such as homosexuality, bisexuality, and other non-heterosexual identities. Thus, by analyzing how each novel depicts sexual identity, their changing portrayal can tell us something about how cultural norms and values have evolved over time. The exploration of how women are portrayed in terms of male sexuality in each novel is also significant because these portrayals can be reflective of contemporary mainstream perceptions and attitudes in regard of gender roles, gender performance, sexual behavior, and power dynamics between men and women. The examination of these portrayals can thus help gain a better understanding of how gender and sexuality intersect in the society represented in each novel.

Even though literature will be the main focus of this thesis, I also plan to deal with media representation to a minor extent. I intend to do this by exploring some of the changes within the representation of male sexuality in the media landscape of Hollywood films. Additionally, I intend to explore the representation of male sexuality in contemporary films, by examining the films *Maurice* (1987), *Brokeback Mountain* (2005) and *Call Me by Your Name* (2017). I chose these queer films because of their fame and popularity, and because two of them are film

adaptations of the novels I aim to examine. Thus, it will be interesting to look at how the novels' representation differs from their film adaptations.

Thus, this thesis aims to explore the changes within the representation of male sexuality in popular culture in order to form a better understanding of how cultural norms and values around gender and sexuality have evolved over time, and how these changes have impacted individuals, and communities.

1.1 An overview of queer literature

As stated, the aim of this thesis is to explore the changes in the representation of male sexuality in popular culture with the main focus of popular literature. In order to better explicate this thesis, an overview of queer literature is necessary.

Queer desires have found their way into literature for thousands of years. The queer literary tradition can be traced back to works by writers and poets from ancient Greece and Rome who have written about love between men. Writers such as Sappho and Theocritus, for example, celebrated homoerotic desire in their literary works. The Greek philosopher Plato did also praise chaste love between men in *Symposium* and *Phaedrus* (385-370 BC). His work has helped shape the same-sex sonnet tradition from the Renaissance, and also serves as key source material for modern lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer (LGBTQ) writers (Breen 3).

There is an eminent tradition of queer writing in English, writings by men and women who are more or less openly queer and/or writing about queerness. The literary canon from the late 1800s and onward is full of authors who are queer or write about homoerotic poetry and the experience of homosexual desire. Even though there is a canon of queer writers in modern literature, the 'straight' canon is itself also everywhere inhabited by queers or open for queer interpretation or what has been referred to as 'queer reading' (Bennett and Royle 262). For instance, when looking at the themes of strangeness and uncanniness in literary texts, they often have to do with the singular space in which they offer thinking (differently) about gender and sex. Even though the tradition of queer literature may seem invisible before the late nineteenth century, it arguably includes many famous authors such as Shakespeare (1564-1616) and Walt Whitman (1819-1892). Many of these writers are central to the canon of literature in English, whether they are read as queer or straight (Bennett and Royle 262).

Another famous and influential English-language writer was Oscar Wilde, who today serves as a gay icon. Wilde is even mentioned in the novel *Maurice*, where he is used as a reference by the main character Maurice to explain his homosexuality; “I’m an unspeakable of the Oscar Wilde sort.” (Forster 138). He is not only important because of his literary works, but also because of his life story. Wilde was arrested, trialed, and imprisoned for “gross indecency”, and thereafter sentenced to two-year jail term of hard labor. Until his arrest in 1895, Wilde had been a well-regarded and highly successful writer. His work has been described as parodic and subversive as well as critical to social and literary norms. Even though some of his works depict the isolation of gay male experience at the turn of the century and beyond, it is rather Wilde’s trial and imprisonment that have given him a status as a gay martyr (Breen 3-4). In many ways, did Wilde’s fate emphasize the vulnerability of gay men, regardless of social standing. Homosexuals lived in constant threat of entailed brutality, arrests, and public embarrassment (Mambrol). Laws in the Great Britain and the United States were oppressive, in which gay writers took note (Breen 5). Thus, writers did not write openly about homosexuality in their works, or they avoided the subject altogether.

The fear of persecution is what held the famous British author E.M. Forster (1879-1970) from publishing several shorts stories and novels about the subject of homosexuality. Homoerotic themes are present in much of his works. However, in his works published during his lifetime, these themes are very subtle. According to Margaret Sönser Breen, “In his most significant novel, *A Passage to India* (1924), the final passage describing the relationship between Fielding and Aziz may be read as a commentary on the impossibility of intimacy not simply between colonizing and colonized subjects, but also those subjects *as men*” (2015). However, Forster’s most direct depiction of homoerotic themes, is the posthumously published novel *Maurice* (1971), along with the short story collection *The Life to Come and Other Stories* (1971). Even though Forster completed the novel in 1914, he knew quite well that the publication of gay fiction during his lifetime would ruin his career (Breen 6-7).

However, during the mid-twentieth century, the literary world began to note and accept more direct references in fiction, in contrast to the coded references to gay and lesbian experience that characterize much of the writing of the first part of the 1900s (Breen 16). Some of the most significant gay American writers from this period are Allen Ginsberg (1926-1997), Frank O’Hara (1926-1966) and James Baldwin (1924-1987). Just as Ginsberg, O’Hara is known

for his poetry, art criticism and poetic collaborations with artists. The African American writer James Baldwin wrote essays, fiction, plays, and poetry. Baldwin included gay and bisexual characters, as well as gay themes, in much of his work, such as the novels *Go Tell It on the Mountain* (1953), *Giovanni's Room* (1956), *Another Country* (1962), *Tell Me How Long the Train's Been Gone* (1968), and *Just above My Head* (1979). However, *Giovanni's Room* stands out as it has been regarded as one of the first novels in the United States that openly dealt with the subject of homosexuality. Even though some earlier critics have criticized the novel for its frank and positive depiction of homosexual love and the absence of any black characters, recent readings have praised it for its “nuanced and sensitive treatment of both race and sexuality” (Breen 12). The novel has later become some sort of a classic in queer literature.

The mainstream attitudes towards queer literature became progressively better as a result of social movements during the 1960s in the United States, such as the civil rights movement. Also, the gay and lesbian movement and a second-wave feminist movement, in both the United States and other parts of the world. Thus, came along changes in censorship laws in regard of publishing, that in turn led to major changes in the queer literature landscape (Breen 16). Literature published from the 1970s and onward is marked by politics of visibility, celebration, and push-back for a range of LGBTQ people. Within the US context, the Stonewall Riots in New York 1969 are used to pinpoint this shift (Breen 15-16). The riots made changes within the queer community; “Although the riots did not gain the momentum of the civil rights and women’s rights movement of the time, this marked the beginning of an age when gays stopped hiding underground and became advocates for their rights” (Mambrol). As a result of these social movements and changes, gay literature made a significant impact in the literary landscape in 1980s and 1990s. Furthermore, universities started to offer courses in gay and lesbian literature and culture, and the number of gay-themed books being published increased considerably (Mambrol).

As this overview suggests, queer literature has long existed. However, it has not always been widely celebrated. The novels *Maurice*, *Giovanni's Room*, and *Call Me by Your Name* each depict and represent a time period with different views and tolerance of homosexuality, which have influenced the authors in their writing of these novels.

1.2 *Maurice* by E.M. Forster (1971)

The novel *Maurice* by the English author E.M. Forster was originally written in 1913-1914, however, the novel did not get published until 1971, a year after Forster's death. Concerns about the public and legal attitudes against homosexuality held E.M. Forster back from publishing the novel. Some of the novel's major themes are homosexuality, self-acceptance, and self-awareness. The theme of homosexuality was very controversial for the time the novel was written; thus, it was believed to have a negative effect on Forster's career (Breen 7).

The novel is about Maurice and is told from his point of view. The story is set in early twentieth century England and follows Maurice from his early years in elementary prep school and through his years into adulthood. As Maurice grows older, he finds himself increasingly attracted to his own sex. During his time at university, he meets and falls in love with another male student named Clive Durham. However, at that time in England, there was a law from 1886 that criminalized sex between men, by contrast to an older law against 'sodomy' which covered certain forms of sex between men and women as well as various other kinds of 'unspeakable' acts with humans and non-humans, sexual and otherwise (Bennett and Royle 266). Because of this, Clive and Maurice are forced to keep their feelings to each other and their relationship secret.

Despite being able to keep it secret, their relationship comes to an end as Clive claims he no longer has any feelings for Maurice or men in general. He claims that he has become interested in the opposite sex and wants to marry a woman named Lady Anne Woods. Maurice, being heartbroken after losing Clive, starts seeing a doctor and tries to get rid of his same sex desire. However, the treatment is unsuccessful, and even though he tries, he is unable to evolve the same romantic feelings and desire for women as for men. When Maurice visits Clive and his wife at their country estate, he meets a gamekeeper called Alec. One night when Maurice has gone to bed, Alec sneaks through his bedroom window, and the two of them spend the night together. The morning after, Maurice becomes afraid that Alec might expose him as a homosexual to the authorities and therefore starts to avoid him. Alec, being wounded by Maurice's coldness and refusal to answer his letters, starts threatening to expose Maurice. However, when they both finally meet again, they realize that they are both in love with each other. Maurice convinces Alec, who was originally supposed to emigrate to Argentina, to stay in England with him. They decide to leave the city and move into the rural countryside, where they

are able to be together romantically. The novel ends with Maurice confronting Clive and telling him about his relationship with Alec. Maurice then leaves to be with Alec, and Clive never sees him again.

The initial response to the novel when it was published was very mixed and rarely positive, according to literary scholar Kate Symondson. To some people, the novel stood out on Forster's otherwise impeccable literary record. Even Forster himself shall have questioned his own novel and other homosexually charged short stories and wondered if they were worth publishing. Forster's literary and posthumous 'coming out' were troubling for some readers and critics of his earlier works. The knowledge of Forster's homosexuality has led critics to revise his earlier works through queer reading. However, with time, as laws and attitudes concerning homosexuality have progressively become more positive, queer studies have flourished. Consequently, Forster's novel has gone from being ignored and/or viewed as deviant from his other work, to being celebrated. Today, however, the novel is considered as an important part of the LGBTQ+ canon. The knowledge of Forster's sexuality has in turn created a new lens and enriched the understanding of his other work as well (Symondson).

The novel was adapted into a film in 1987. In the article "Neither film came out of personal suffering': James Ivory on Maurice and Call Me by Your Name", Darren Scott writes about his interview with the film director of *Maurice*, James Ivory. In the interview, Ivory explains that the public response of the film was mostly positive in the United States. A probable cause for this, according to Ivory, was because the film came out in the middle of the Aids crisis, which is why "nobody really wanted to attack it" (Scott). In England, on the other hand, the experience was different as the critics were much harder. The movie *Maurice* came out shortly after the film success of *A Room With a View* (1985), which is another film adapted from the works of Forster. However, *Maurice* turned out to be less successful. Despite this, the film has been Oscar-nominated, starring famous actors such as James Wilby and Hugh Grant (Scott).

1.3 *Giovanni's Room* by James Baldwin (1956)

Giovanni's Room is the second novel of the author James Baldwin and was published in 1956. The main character of the novel is an American named David, who narrates from a first-person point of view. In the novel, David leaves the United States and moves to Paris. While he is in Paris, he meets an American woman named Hella Lincoln and asks her to marry him. Yet, Hella

needs some time to consider his marriage proposal and wants to travel to Spain in the meantime. While Hella is away in Spain, David meets an Italian bartender named Giovanni, who he starts a physical and romantic relationship with. When Hella finally returns to Paris, she accepts David's marriage proposal. David, being confused by his feelings for Giovanni, attempts to assert and reclaim his heterosexuality by sleeping with another American woman named Sue. Their sexual encounter leaves David feeling disgusted with himself and even more confused about his sexuality. Despite his romantic feelings for Giovanni, he decides to end their relationship and marry Hella. A while after their breakup, David comes to learn through the media that Giovanni is prime suspect in a murder. Giovanni is sentenced to death for this murder. Consequently, David experiences a lot of guilt and grief, and decides to leave Paris and travel to Nice with Hella. David tries to move on by making his relationship with Hella work, however, he finds himself unable to deny his same-sex desire. When they are in Nice, David once again cheats on Hella with another man. When Hella catches David being unfaithful and she realizes his true sexual orientation, she decides to leave him. The novel ends with David thinking about his life and everything that has happened as he is about to leave Paris and return home to the United States.

Giovanni's Room was Baldwin's second novel and followed the novel *Go Tell It on the Mountain* that was published in 1953. The first novel by Baldwin is about the lives of the Grimes family who during the Great Migration moves from the rural South to the urban North under false promises. The novel is a critique of the Christian fundamentalism and is semi-autobiographical as Baldwin is a former child preacher. The novel has become a part of African American culture (Grandt 271). *Giovanni's Room*, on the other hand, is in many ways the complete opposite. For one, the novel does not contain a single African American character. The novel's setting is in Paris and bears no trace of African American culture. The first-person narrator of the novel, David, is a white American male that is gay (Grandt 271). Baldwin initially encountered obstacles in finding a publisher for his novel because of the novel's controversial themes. Some of the novel's major themes are identity, masculinity, self-acceptance, and sexuality. In addition to this, several editors expressed worry for the novel's "lack of authenticity". Baldwin was told that the novel would damage his career as a young African American writer by several people, including his own agent (Grandt 272).

When the novel was published, it was initially ignored or dismissed by some critics as a deviation. Published during the 1950s America, the novel's negative reception was influenced by discourses against communists and homosexuals, as a result of the Cold War (Armengol 671). The novel was argued to be both sexual and racially deviant, "thus Baldwin's position in the politics and culture of the sixties was particularly complex and contradictory" (Armengol 672). Furthermore, the novel has been regarded somewhat problematic due to Baldwin being an African American author and writing about the experience of a white homosexual male. Consequently, readers of texts within African American literary tradition have either tried to find a way to read blackness into the text or dismissed the novel as an abnormality within Baldwin's work (Grandt 272). Then again, to Baldwin's contemporary readers, the fact that the novel dealt openly with homosexuality seemed more significant than its white characters.

However, despite some criticism, the novel's reviews were mostly positive. Since its publication, *Giovanni's Room* has gotten a lot of praise from the public. In 2019, the novel was ranked high on BBC's list of "100 most influential novels" written over the last 300 years. This list includes a wide variety of famous novels such as *Pride and Prejudice* by Jane Austen, *Frankenstein* by Mary Shelley, *A Game of Thrones* by George R.R. Martin, just to mention a few. Today, the novel is considered something of a classic in gay fiction as it was one of the very first American novels that dealt openly with homosexuality (Grandt 272).

1.4 *Call Me by Your Name* by André Aciman (2007)

Lastly, the final novel is *Call Me by Your Name* published in 2007 by André Aciman. The protagonist is American-Italian Jewish and seventeen-year-old Elio who narrates the story in first person point of view. Most of the novel is told in retrospect of the summer of 1980 and set in a small unnamed town in Italy. Oliver, who is a twenty-four-year-old American Jewish scholar, spends the summer in Elio's family's house. During the summer, Elio finds himself increasingly attracted to Oliver. Believing that Oliver is not interested, Elio starts a relationship with a local girl named Marzia. However, Elio is not able to forget or ignore his growing feelings towards Oliver, and thus asks him to meet in his room at midnight, which lead them to have sex. The morning after, Elio feels a lot of guilt and shame from what they have done which causes him to wanting to end their relationship before it goes any further. However, after some time, Elio realizes his attraction for Oliver still persists, and they both continue to explore their physical and

romantic connection. They keep their relationship a secret from everyone else. Despite his growing affection for Oliver, Elio continues his relationship with Marzia as well. However, when the relationship between Elio and Oliver develops even further, Elio's obsession with Oliver makes him stop paying attention to Marzia.

As the summer comes to an end, and Oliver is supposed to return home to the United States, he decides to spend three days in Rome together with Elio first. The two of them spend time exploring Rome and falling even more in love. Consequently, Elio is left heartbroken when Oliver finally leaves. Elio's father, who has had an inkling of their feelings for each other, comforts him and expresses that he approves of their relationship. A few months later, Oliver announces that he intends to marry next summer. After that, both Oliver and Elio fall out of touch and do not speak to each other for many years. Fifteen years later, Elio visits Oliver in the United States. He admits that he still has feelings for Oliver and refuses to meet Oliver's wife and children. Twenty years later, Oliver visits Elio's family home in Italy, and they talk about their time together. Oliver tells Elio that he "remembers everything". The novel ends with Elio wishing to tell Oliver that if he truly remembers everything, he will hold his gaze and call him by his name as he did their first night together.

In contrast to *Maurice* and *Giovanni's Room*, *Call Me by Your Name* got rave reviews when it was published. The novel has later been called a modern classic of gay literature, which is interesting, considering that one could argue the main characters being labeled as bisexuals might seem more accurate. After its publication, the novel rapidly became part of popular literature. The novel has been adapted into a film by director Luca Guadagnino and starring famous actors such as Timothée Chalamet and Armie Hammer. The film was very popular and also became part of popular culture after its release.

CHAPTER 2: SEXUAL IDENTITY

2.1 Sexual identity in the works

In this chapter I intend to discuss how the representation of male sexuality has changed in popular culture by looking at the depiction of sexual identity in each novel. Sexual identity, and how it influences the protagonist's idea of self, is a reoccurring theme in the three novels. In *Giovanni's Room*, the main character David, struggles with his idea of self because of his feelings to other men. In this novel, homosexuality is depicted as filth because of David's uniquely American experience that derives from a Puritanical view of morals. In *Maurice*, homosexuality is depicted as normal and natural. Forster's main point is to stress the normality and the naturalness of same-sex attraction during a time it was viewed as criminal, immoral, and unnatural. In *Call Me by Your Name*, the novel emphasizes the fleeting nature of desire. That is to say that sexuality in the novel can be read as fluid and non-binary in the sense that attractions, desires, and identities can change over time. In contrast, *Giovanni's Room* and *Maurice* depict sexuality as a fixed and natural part of the protagonists' self that they cannot change even when they try to.

Looking at the differences of how sexuality is depicted in each work, one can argue for a progressive shift in the understanding of sexuality from fixed to fluid. In *Call Me by Your Name*, there is an absence of defining sexual labels for the novel's main characters. Even though some readers may argue that the protagonists would most probably define themselves as bisexuals, this is never mentioned explicitly in the novel. The reason why Aciman excludes this information might be in order to call attention to the ambivalence of the characters' sexualities. Perhaps because the category of 'bisexual', just as homosexual and heterosexual, can be confining for a person's sexual identity. These changes in the depiction of sexuality suggest that homosexual and heterosexual categories do no longer adequately represent the spectrum of human sexuality. Thus, instead of placing people into the two categories of homosexuality or heterosexuality, one may argue that sexuality has become more of a spectrum than binary. Hence, without the need of sexual categories and labels.

One way to interpret *Call Me by Your Name* is as a story about a sexually fluid individual. Even though the novel explores the complications of homosexuality, the novel also promotes loving another person without the affirmation of orientation. Put in another way, the

novel goes beyond the homosexual identity. Even though the novel contains homosexual conventions, the narrative can be read as to be illustrating the complexity and the dynamics of sexual fluidity all the while rejecting the need for sexual labels for its protagonist. Even though the protagonists Elio and Oliver are clearly sexually interested in each other, they also indicate attraction for women, which in turn emphasize their sexual fluidity. However, even though the novels depict sexuality different, they are also share many similarities. For instance, that all the protagonists struggle with the taboos and stigmas in regard of their same-sex attraction. Their initial reaction is that they feel shame because of their cultural or religious heritage. Thus, each novel depicts a protagonist who is trying to define and make sense of his own identity in spite of their sexuality.

2.2 Homosexuality depicted as filth

Throughout *Giovanni's Room*, David faces many struggles because of his sexual orientation and identity in the novel. The main reason for this has to do with acceptance. Even though David is able to gain acceptance within the gay milieu in Paris and from his Italian lover Giovanni, he still does not want to be part of that milieu, as we see in this excerpt: "Most of the people I knew in Paris were, as Parisians sometimes put it, of *le milieu* and, while this milieu was certainly anxious enough to claim me, I was intent on proving, to them and to myself, that I was not of their company" (Baldwin 26). This passage suggests a welcoming and accepting milieu with people who would claim him as one of their own. However, David does not want to be associated with the homosexual milieu because it compromises his identity and idea of self. In her article, "Expiration, Homosexual Panic, and Man's Estate", the literary scholar Mae G. Henderson argues that David's idea of self is linked to his cultural heritage. His concern with how he views himself and is viewed by others, prevents him from acknowledging his feelings to men. According to Henderson, David has internalized homophobic attitudes which makes him see homosexuality as illegal and criminal, as well as unnatural (320). In the novel, David tries to hide his attraction to men from the rest of the world in Giovanni's room. Henderson explains that the room being depicted as dirty and filthy works as a representation of David's associations with homosexuality. The room is also described as small, thus can be read as a metaphor for his claustrophobic sense of entrapment (Henderson 319). David tries to preserve his innocence and purity by remaining within conventionally constructed masculinity and seeks comfort in

gendered conventions and norms. Put in another way, David's concern with his own image holds him to social convention. Henderson explains,

As a prototypical American – *Monsieur l'Americain*, as he is called by the French – David represents a constitution of whiteness and maleness that rests upon a conception of human nature that derives from an American Puritanical heritage associated with the repression and sinfulness of the body (321).

David's cultural heritage and identity derives from a Puritanical view of morality and because of this David has a need to preserve an image of purity. According to Henderson, "Baldwin seems to suggest that in the New World (American) experience, nature and culture are in an antithetical relationship, dissociated by puritanical imperatives" (322).

The Puritans were members of a religious reform movement known as Puritanism that arose within the Church of England in the late 16th century. The Puritans felt that the Anglican Church had not distanced themselves adequately from the Roman Catholic Church and sought to 'purify' it of Catholic practices (Mark). Under siege from church and crown certain groups of Puritans migrated to Northern English colonies in the New World in the 1620s and 1630s, laying the foundation for the religious, intellectual, and social order of New England. Aspects of Puritanism have reverberated throughout American life ever since (HISTORY.com Editors). The literary scholar Thomas A. Foster explains in his article "Deficient Husbands: Manhood, Sexual Incapacity, and Male Marital Sexuality in Seventeenth-Century New England", that Puritan New England was a society in which Puritan community leaders urged the society to reproduce itself, and all nonprocreative sexual acts were thus criminalized. Even though sex was seen as "a joy within marriage", its central purpose was believed to be reproduction. From this perspective, sex was understood as an act that were either marital and reproductive or transgressive, rather than a part of a persons integrated sexual identity (Foster 723). Thus, explains why David views his relationship and feelings to Giovanni, another man, as a transgression against nature and culture (Henderson 322).

David's internalized puritanical view of morality makes him unable to reconcile with his body and desire. He is in a constant pursuit of reassuring an identity that is coherent and fixed. The constant conflict within David is between his homosexual desire and heteronormativity which makes him trapped in his own self-image and at war with himself (Henderson 320). Henderson argues that, "David's sexual anxiety expresses itself in an identification with the

dominant heterosexual subjectivity” (320). Throughout the novel, David makes multiple attempts to achieve a heterosexual relationship with a woman. However, he is not able to deny his desire for men for long. When David fails to suppress his feelings, he also fails coming to terms with himself and his culture. David feels a pull from his own self and from the environment around him, thus a conflict between homosexual desire and the heterosexual imperative (Henderson 322). Even though David is in love with Giovanni, he cannot keep from seeing their love as dirty and immoral because of his internalized homophobia (Henderson 320). Henderson explains,

In David’s cultural consciousness, the original unity has never existed because he is unable to defy or deny the cultural imperatives of his uniquely American experience. Unable to accept the contradictions of his identity, David finds that the cost of social acceptance is the inability to achieve personal fulfillment” (322).

In other words, for David, being homosexual becomes contradicting to his idea of what it means to be an American male. In the article “INTO A DARKER PAST: JAMES BALDWIN’S ‘GIOVANNI’S ROOM’ AND THE ANXIETY OF AUTHENTICITY”, literary scholar Jürgen E. Grandt argues that David has a constant need for reaffirming his American identity. We also see evidence of this in the beginning of the novel, when David introduces himself for the first time to the reader,

My reflection is tall, perhaps rather like an arrow, my blond hair gleams. My face is like a face you have seen many times. My ancestors conquered a continent, pushing across death-laden plains, until they came to an ocean which faced away from Europe into a darker past (Baldwin 9).

As we see in this excerpt, David takes a lot of pride in being an American. However, David finds himself stuck on an American ideal that does not define who he really is. Because of this, David has a fear of authenticity and struggles to remain in the state he is convinced he should be in, which is masculine and heterosexual. According to Grandt, David sees himself marrying the American woman Hella as a way to resolve his anxiety of sexuality and authenticity (Grandt 278). Throughout the novel, David strives to return to this socially sanctioned, normative, safe, and stable category of American male identity, which encompasses both sexuality and race (Grandt 279). Grandt argues that David constantly has a need to assert his American identity throughout the novel, “And I resented this: resented being called an American (and resented resenting it) because it seemed to make me nothing more than that, whatever that was; and I

resented being called *not* and American because it seemed to make me nothing” (Grandt 280). This excerpt also shows evidence of David having an ambivalent relationship with his American identity.

Paradoxically, David is trying to seek refuge in the same category he wants to escape. On the one hand, he resents being reduced to a single category, especially one that makes him at war with himself about who he is and who he believes he should be. On the other hand, he hates the idea of not belonging to any category at all. The excerpt also suggests that he understands that he is bound by social conventions by trying to conform to his idea of what it means to be an American male. David craves a sense of belonging and wants the privilege and safety that comes within that category. The categories hold power for David, and with no other framework than the traditional conventional constructions of male and female, he is consequently left with all the guilt, dissatisfaction, and self-loathing as a result of his deviance of conventional values that is constructed upon sexuality in general. David’s fear of losing his American identity and his sense of belonging is what makes him constantly trying to reach an ideal of a masculine, heterosexual American male, that to him is impossible.

David longs to fulfill the societal role of becoming a man, and he feels a need to act a certain way in order to reestablish himself. In the article “ ‘Immaculate manhood’: *The City and the Pillar*, *Giovanni’s Room*, and the Straight-Acting Gay Man”, the literary scholar Harry Thomas argues that David is concerned with the purity of his gender performance and the ways other people perceive it (Thomas 610). David finds himself in a dilemma of being attracted to other men which draws him towards gay culture. Thomas explains that David is afraid his desire to other men will threaten his masculinity (Thomas 607). We also see evidence of this in an excerpt from the novel in which David shares his thoughts and feelings regarding his first sexual encounter with a boy named Joey:

I was suddenly afraid. Perhaps it was because he looked so innocent lying there with such perfect trust; perhaps it was because he was so much smaller than me; my own body suddenly seemed gross and crushing and the desire which was rising in me seemed monstrous. But, above all, I was suddenly afraid. It was borne in me: *But Joey is a boy*, I saw suddenly the power in his thighs, in his arms, and in his loosely curled fists. The power and the promise and the mystery of that body made me suddenly afraid. That body

suddenly seemed the black opening of a cavern in which I would be tortured till madness came, in which I would lose my manhood (Baldwin 14).

As we see in this excerpt, David draws a connection between sex, sexuality, and gender. To David, manhood is associated with heterosexuality, thus his feelings for men make him feel like a failure as a man. Because of this belief, any deviation from heterosexuality will threaten his perception of himself as a man and his masculinity.

In his article, Thomas quotes historian George Chauncey explaining that there used to be an older belief system, dating to at least the 1890s in New York City, in which a man's sexual normality or abnormality were defined by his gender performance and not their sexual partner(s) (Thomas 596). Under this belief system, men were able to remain "normal" as long as they conformed to masculine stereotypes such as codes of clothing and styling as well as they were careful to only take the "active" role when having intercourse with other men. Men who took the "passive" role, on the other hand, were known as "fairies" (Thomas 597). When reading *Giovanni's Room*, we see the term "fairy" being used multiple times throughout the novel. For instance, after David ends their relationship, Giovanni starts having an affair with the owner of the bar he works at, named Jacques. When David sees how Giovanni acts around Jacques, he describes his behavior as "a fairy's mannerism" and as "giddy and girlish" (Baldwin 139). In other words, men who behaved feminine were called fairies, while men who were able to appear masculine, Chauncey explains, "could thus have certain kinds of sexual contacts with fairies and not be seen as abnormal or unmanly" (Thomas 597).

Thomas explains that even though the idea that gay men are able to have any kind of sexual contact with other men, while still retaining a masculine gender performance, might seem more familiar to contemporary readers than the fairies Chauncey describes. Thus, Baldwin's David becomes a representative of a new social type during the mid-century: a masculine gay man, who hates effeminate men (597). Borrowing a term from contemporary gay male discourse, we can say that David is a "straight-acting" gay man: a gay man who appears and acts masculine, and who take pride in differing from the heteronormative straight men only in the matter of their sexual object choice (Thomas 597). Thomas explains that "David wants to sleep with men, but he wants to do so while retaining the privilege that comes along with being a middle-class white man" (Thomas 607). Throughout his relationship with Giovanni, David worries about his masculine identity, and the paradox of being a man and being with a man.

At some point in the novel, David tries to resolve this dilemma by embracing a traditionally feminine role in his relationship with Giovanni. For example, while Giovanni is at work, David stays home and does chores such as cleaning and cooking:

[...] I invented in myself a kind of pleasure in playing the housewife after Giovanni had gone to work. I threw out the paper, the bottles, the fantastic accumulation of trash, I examined the contents of the innumerable boxes and suitcases, and disposed of them. But I am not a housewife – men can never be housewives” (Baldwin 85).

Looking at this excerpt, it suggests that David is trying to make sense of their relationship, and of the paradox of two men being together, by taking on traditional heterosexual dynamics and gender roles. However, even though he finds it pleasurable for a brief time, David realizes that there is no position more unbearable than being feminine. When Hella returns to Paris, David sees a relationship with her as a way of reclaiming heteronormative masculinity and ends his relationship with Giovanni. In doing so, he chooses the privilege of that middle-class masculinity provides and the privilege of normality (Thomas 609). As we see in this excerpt, David wants the safety and stability of a heteronormative relationship:

I wanted to be inside again, with the light and safety, with my manhood unquestioned, watching my woman put my children to bed. I wanted the same bed at night and the same arms and I wanted to rise in the morning, knowing where I was. I wanted a woman to be for me a steady ground, like the earth itself, where I could always be renewed. It had been so once; it had almost been so once. It only demanded a short, hard strength for me to become myself again (Baldwin 100).

This excerpt implies that David is primarily interested in the idea of asserting his own masculinity through a heterosexual relationship, and not in actually loving a woman. David believes being in a relationship with a woman will restore his masculinity and create a safe space for him to be himself. However, one may argue that David claiming to be himself by being in a relationship with a woman, is him being in self-denial because of his feelings to other men.

Even though David wants to retain the privilege of a heterosexual male, the novel suggests that it is impossible for David to properly conform to heteronormativity. It seems like David wants to be the ideal heterosexual male and thus experiences an inner conflict between who he is and who he wants to be. The author Emmanuel S. Nelson argues in his article “James Baldwin’s Vision of Otherness and Community”, that the only way for David to reach a genuine

and liberating sense of self is through self-acceptance and identification with his community and heritage. Nelson explains that,

David in *Giovanni's Room* fails to achieve a valid sense of self or span the chasm of otherness because of two major flaws: first, he fails to forge his human identity through an acceptance of his sexuality and the suffering it entails; second, he lacks the capacity for communication with and commitment to another individual, which, according to Baldwin, is the core element of genuine love" (28).

David's failure to face himself and the existential void within him inevitably leads to moral and spiritual blindness. He is revolted by the Parisian homosexual underworld and tries to restate and confirm his heterosexuality through his relationship with Hella. At some point he also tries to prove his attraction to women by having a brief sexual encounter with Sue, a blonde woman from Philadelphia. David's unwillingness to fully commit himself to Giovanni is largely a result of the young American's reluctance to confront and come to terms with his own sexual self, which dooms his relationships with other people (Nelson 28-29). Nelson explains that "self-discovery in Baldwin's fiction, however, is not always a result of a private anguish and loving commitment to another individual; it is also dependent on identification of the individual self with group experience and tradition. Tradition, or heritage, is what one carries from the cultural past involuntarily and it is indispensable to achieve self-discovery. As people see themselves as a part and a result of an historical process, they become entrusted by that past with a legacy that will affect their future (Nelson 29). Put in another way, Nelson argues that community and culture play a central role in Baldwin's novels, and that the characters' cultural pasts influence their actions and idea of self. Nelson explains this about Baldwin's fiction; "his characters' quests for self and identity reveal their need for communal identification" (29). In order for an individual to be able to accept himself, he has to come to terms with his collective racial past and heritage (Nelson 29). In the case of David, he finds himself unable to come to terms with his own American identity because of his homosexual desire. The paradox is that because David has assimilated mainstream homophobic attitudes and Puritanical views on morality, he keeps denying his own homosexuality and as a consequence he cannot truly reach self-acceptance.

David's inability to reach self-acceptance, makes him a victim of fatalism according to literary scholar Yasmin DeGout in her article "Dividing the Mind: Contradictory Portraits of Homoerotic Love in *Giovanni's Room*". The theme of fatalism in the novel is connected to

David's continued self-denial that causes self-destruction. David is led to the feeling of self-entrapment because he cannot overcome and accept his desire to other men. This also influences David's relationships throughout the novel. The reason for this is because David is lying to himself and other people about who he truly is (DeGout 428). DeGout argues that David's mind is divided, and that he is not able to accept a self that he does not understand or cannot define. To David, being an American male and simultaneously being attracted to other men is something he refuses to recognize or acknowledge. We also see evidence of this in one of the final passages of the novel, "And I do not know what moves in this body, what this body is searching. It is trapped in the mirror as it is trapped in time and it hurries toward revelation" (Baldwin 158). Nor does David understand that it is his inability to accept himself that leads to his feeling of self-entrapment; "I long to crack the mirror and be free" (Baldwin 158). David believes he is corrupted by homosexual desire, and by reaching the ideal of a masculine heterosexual male, he will finally break free of this corruption. However, fatalism as a theme in the novel suggests that David will never overcome his lust and thereby will never be able to love. Instead, David remains trapped in his own body, in which his sex troubles him and his body confuses him (DeGout 428).

2.3 Homosexuality depicted as normal and natural

Similar to David in *Giovanni's Room* who strives to reconcile his identity as an American male and his attraction to other men, the protagonist Maurice in the novel by the same name, also struggles with his sexuality and identity as an Englishman. The setting in *Maurice* depicts England in the early twentieth century, at a time when the country prohibited same-sex acts between men in English law (Wilper 19). In the nineteenth century, and continuing well into the twentieth century, the public opinion on homosexuality was very negative because it represented decadence and licentious behavior that needed to be controlled through strict laws. Both homosexuality and prostitution were seen as a matter of equal concern that signaled society's degrading morals (Wilper 16). Thus, same-sex acts were regarded as sinful, unnatural, and criminal. That in turn meant that these acts were seen a potential for any individual. Because of the negative perception of same-sex attraction amongst the English public, Maurice strives to correlate his identity as both an Englishman and a homosexual. We also see evidence of this in

the novel when Maurice reacts to Clive Durham, a student he meets at Cambridge, confessing his love for him for the first time,

‘Durham, you’re an Englishman. I’m another. Don’t talk nonsense. I’m not offended, because I know you don’t mean it, but it’s the only subject absolutely beyond the limit as you know, it’s the worst crime in the calendar, and you must never mention it again.

Durham! A rotten notion really –’ (Forster 48).

In addition to Clive’s confession being described as ‘the worst crime in the calendar’, it is also described as nonsense because his love for Maurice does not make sense since both of them are Englishmen. This excerpt depicts a duality between homosexuality and Englishness, in which both terms are irreconcilable. Thus, Englishness becomes a restriction of the characters’ full expression of desires. In her article “‘A Passion That Few English Minds Have Admitted’: Homosexuality and Englishness in E.M. Forster’s ‘Maurice.’”, literary scholar Anne Hartree argues that Maurice struggles to formulate his identity as both a homosexual and as an Englishman. In the novel, Forster presents Maurice as an average middle-class man, a perfect example of a central version of Englishness. The reason for this is because of the overall attempt of the novel to make or reclaim a space within ‘Englishness’ for homosexuality (Hartree 129). In order to reconcile the two, there has to be a deconstruction of the notion of an opposition between homosexuality and Englishness. Hartree explains that Forster uses different strategies to contest what he sees as ‘dominant Englishness’ by disrupting and adjusting central images such as the public school, Cambridge, the countryside, the British Museum, and the Royal Family and so on (129). Put in another way, Forster strategically highlights what he sees as central encoding images of dominant Englishness in order to show how Maurice is to be viewed as a proper Englishman, despite his sexual attraction to men.

The novel tries to extend the boundaries within Englishness in order to reach validation for homosexual desire and relationship. The aim is to reclaim Maurice’s English identity, despite his sexuality being against English law. Hartree argues that “The effort to extend the boundaries of Englishness becomes in part the infiltration and reclaiming of its spaces, and the appropriation of its ideologies for validation of homosexual desire and relationship” (129). There is an overall attempt in the novel to renegotiate the relationship between Englishness and homosexuality, whereas to change the exclusion of homosexuality, and prove Englishness can be both socially and sexually inclusive (Hartree 129). Forster’s main aim is to argue that Maurice’s sexuality

does not contradict or contaminate his identity as an English male. In the novel, Maurice goes to a psychiatrist in order to get treated for his same-sex desire. When the treatment fails, he is advised by the doctor to leave England and move to a country where homosexuality is legal. At some point in the novel, Maurice's love interest, the gamekeeper Alec, is supposed to emigrate to Argentina. Yet, both of them decide to stay in England despite the legal restrictions prohibiting their relationship.

However, in order for them to be together in England, they have to withdraw from the city and move into 'the greenwood', which is the rural countryside. According to Hartree, even though Alec and Maurice being forced to live out in the woods may be argued as a form of exile, it can also be seen as a form of escape. The characters' move from enclosure to open space, can be seen as a way to "rewrite Englishness by separating the idea of England from English society" (135). That is to say, even though they have to escape English society, they are still able to reclaim a space within England and deconstruct the idea of Englishness by discarding society's homophobic and restrictive norms. That way the characters will be able to reclaim their own English identity, despite their sexuality being against English law. Thus 'the greenwood' becomes a space for equal comradeship and refuge from social difference. Hartree explains, "most significantly, it is the novel's final strategy of positioning homosexuality at the heart of England, the 'green England' which is also the 'real' England" (135).

While the English society deem homosexuality desire as unnatural, Forster withdraws his characters from the city and into nature where there are no social restrictions and where they can be their true self. This may serve as a clever way for Forster to make the connotation of homosexuality as natural, and society in contrast thereby becomes unnatural because of its disinclination to human nature. Thus, it becomes an opposition between rural and natural England with its acceptance for homosexuality versus English society with its homophobia and restrictive norms as unnatural. As we see in this excerpt, "They must live outside class, without relations or money; they must work and stick to each other till death. But England belonged to them. That, besides companionship, was their reward. Her air and sky were theirs, not the timorous millions' who own stuffy little boxes, but never their own soul" (Forster 212). Reading this excerpt, one can argue that Maurice and Alec in the end were able to reclaim a space for themselves and homosexuality within England and Englishness by removing themselves from English society with its repressive attitudes.

Forster goes beyond claiming a space for homosexuality within Englishness and seems to want to change the discourse of male-male desire and relationships altogether. By the time *Maurice* was written there was an ongoing creation of a new discourse in Britain that included the term “homosexual” that dismissed the nineteenth-century term “sexual inversion”. This new ongoing discourse selected a reversal of gender roles as the defining feature of sexual pathology and consequently established sexual orientation as an identity (Harned 49). The term homosexuality is only mentioned twice in *Maurice*, and both times they are spoken by the psychiatrist Dr. Lasker Jones. Other times in the novel when the narrative requires attention to Maurice’s sexual orientation there are terms from another, older discourse about sexuality. One example of this is when Maurice describes himself as “an unspeakable of the Oscar Wilde sort” (Forster 130) to describe his feelings to other men. The confession to being an “unspeakable” in association with Oscar Wilde is a symbolic way of admitting to homosexuality because he was a public figure known to be homosexual.

Due to homosexuality’s negative reputation at that time in England, Forster’s aim in *Maurice* may be to force a reversal of the discourse describing homosexuality as unnatural and sinful. In the article “Becoming Gay in E.M. Forster’s *Maurice*”, the literary scholar Jon Harned argues that *Maurice* works as a plea for the acceptance of homosexual desire as normal and natural. We also see evidence of this is when the Dr. Jones tells Maurice; “England has always been disinclined to accept human nature” (Maurice 188). The notion of Maurice’s homosexuality being a natural part of him is stressed throughout the novel. Forster does not explicitly advance a theory to explain Maurice’s homosexual desire; “I’ve been like this ever since I can remember without knowing why.” (Forster 138). One cannot invoke the clichés of Maurice being a victim of an overly devoted mother and an absent father, because Maurice is not portrayed as a “mama’s boy”. These clichés are based on the idea that if a boy does not have a masculine father figure in his life, or if his relationship with his mother is “too close”, that this will influence him to become more feminine.

Based on the figure of Oscar Wilde, the homosexual man became associated with effeminacy, dandyism, and aestheticism (Wilper 140). Effeminacy became attached to the figure of the homosexual man in the wake of the trials of Oscar Wilde during the 1890s and by the end of these trials, “the effeminate male had become more exclusively associated with same-sex erotic attraction” (Reay 226). Reay explains that the role of the iconic Wilde in linking male

effeminacy with homosexuality may have been exaggerated, and there were other famous Victorian trials that dealt with transvestism or cross-dressing as well. These trials and cases also strengthened the idea of there being a link between same-sex desire and woman-like or effeminate behavior (Reay 227). At the end of the nineteenth century, authorities believed sexual identity to be strongly connected to gender identity. Because of this, it was theorized that homosexuals experienced same-sex affection because they either considered themselves, or wanted to be, members of the opposite sex. That is to say that homosexual men supposedly wanted to be women, and homosexual women in turn wanted to be men (Benshoff and Griffin 26). Put in another way, it was believed to be a connection and influence between a person's sexual orientation and their gender performance, and people who deviated from their gender were identified and labeled as homosexuals (Benshoff and Griffin 26). Consequently, the ideal of 'manliness' remained purely heterosexual.

However, in *Maurice* there is a highlighting of masculine homosexuality in order to reject the stereotype based on Oscar Wilde (Wilper 139). For instance, the novel emphasizes Maurice's masculinity such as his fondness for sports, his indifference to aesthetics and his likeness to his father in manners as well as in appearance (Harned 51). According to Hartree, during the early twentieth century, the idea of manliness involved the characteristics athleticism, competitiveness, aggression, and ruthlessness (130). These characteristics were however contained within a controlling framework, that derived from the gentlemanly ideal based on chivalry (Hartree 130). When Clive and Maurice meet for the first time, Clive is of the impression that Maurice is heterosexual and identifies him as a "man who only liked women – one could tell that at a glance" (Forster 61). This suggests that Maurice has a lot of attributes in accordance with traditional masculinity at that time. Hartree explains that Forster's central criticism of this ideal is the exclusion of certain attributes because it is seen as feminine, that in turn causes the inability to express emotions and fear of feelings, which he also attributes to Maurice in his novel (130). Put differently, Forster criticizes the traditional masculine ideal because of its refusal and inability to express emotions and feelings, due to it being viewed as feminine. Then again, the effeminate homosexual male is not absent throughout the novel. Another character named Risley is subtly conveyed by Forster to be gay. As we see in this excerpt, as Maurice introduces Risley in the novel, "Risley was dark, tall and affected. He made an exaggerated gesture when introduced, and when he spoke, which was continually, he used strong yet unmanly

superlatives” (Forster 23). Risley being based on the stereotypical feminine homosexual male serves as a contrast to Maurice who is depicted with masculine traits and attributes. While David in *Giovanni’s Room* is highly concerned about his manhood being affected by his sexual orientation, it seems that Forster, as mentioned earlier, is trying to argue against the idea that all homosexual men are feminine. He does this by highlighting Maurice’s masculinity throughout the novel.

In addition to wanting to change the negative discourses and attitudes towards homosexual males, it seems that Forster also wants to stress how sexuality is a natural part of oneself that cannot be changed. By the time Maurice enters Cambridge it seems he has succumbed to the heterosexualism of his upbringing, affected by its relentless homophobia. He is convinced that he suffers from a unique disorder (Harned 54). This shares some similarities with David, who believes that homosexuality is something he needs to overcome. Maurice tries to rid himself of his “disorder” by going to doctors. One of the main differences between the two characters is arguably that David in *Giovanni’s Room* denies his same-sex desire throughout the novel. Maurice, on the other hand, is able to acknowledge and accept his homosexuality as an unchangeable part of himself after his treatment is deemed unsuccessful. Unlike David, Maurice also tries to normalize and naturalize his attraction for men despite living in a homophobic English society with rigid social norms. We see evidence of this when Maurice speaks to his doctor as well, “It comes to this then: there always have been people like me and always will be, and generally they have been persecuted” (Forster 188). Another example is when Maurice’s first love interest, Clive, claims his attraction has changed from men to women, and Maurice replies; “can the leopard change his spots?” (Forster 111). This metaphor creates a connotation between homosexuality and nature, in which Maurice describes same-sex attraction as both natural and as an unchangeable part of oneself. Furthermore, the novel insinuates that Clive’s orientation has not changed, but rather his ability to reject the normative forces and social pressure. This suggests that even though Clive tries to deny his desire to men, it is impossible to change his attraction. Arguably, one can interpret the depiction of sexuality in the novel to be viewed as a natural and fixed part of an individual.

2.4 Sexuality depicted as fluid

While in *Giovanni's Room* and *Maurice*, sexuality is depicted as a fixed and unchangeable part of oneself, one can interpret the depiction of sexuality in *Call Me by Your Name* as fluid and non-binary. In the coming-of-age novel, the main character Elio, explores his sexuality and desire for both men and women. While Elio is developing feelings for his father's house guest, Oliver, he is at the same time initiating a physical relationship with a local girl named Marzia. For most parts of the novel, Elio tries to hide his feelings for Oliver from his parents and his surroundings. When Oliver and Elio realize their mutual interest in each other, they begin a romantic and physical relationship in secret. Elio continues being with both Marzia and Oliver, but over time, he grows stronger romantic feelings for Oliver. Even though his feelings for Oliver gets to a deeper level than with Marzia, his relationship with Marzia is not portrayed as a courtship of convenience or a way for Elio to act in accordance with heteronormativity. Instead, it can be interpreted as a way to show how sexuality is fluid and that desire can take onto many different forms. Thus, can include being attracted to two different people at once, even though they are of opposite sexes.

Throughout the novel, Elio describes a sexual attraction for both Marzia and Oliver. There are many examples from the texts, such as, "All I wanted was for him or Marzia to pass by my balcony door and, through the half-drawn shutters, make out my naked body sprawled on the bed" (Aciman 146). Elio's sexuality is never discussed throughout the novel and his desire appear dynamic. Even though Elio is physically attracted to both Oliver and Marzia, it seems that Aciman intentionally avoids the label 'bisexual' to describe Elio's sexual orientation throughout the novel. The reason for this may be because 'bisexual' also functions as a limiting term for his characters as well as the categories of homosexual and heterosexual. Instead, Aciman depicts a nonbinary sexuality among his characters and seems to aim to transcend the notion of sexual identity.

However, even though the main characters' sexual labels are never explicitly mentioned, the novel nevertheless depicts homosexual implications. Elio keeps his feelings and relationship with Oliver a secret to his parents and others. When Elio first realizes his feelings towards Oliver, he goes beyond great lengths to keep them hidden from everyone else. As we see in this passage,

There was no one to speak to. Whom could I tell? Mafalda? She'd leave the house. My aunt? She'd probably tell everyone. Marzia, Chiara, my friends? They'd desert me in a second. My cousins when they came? Never. My father held the most liberal views---but on this? Who else? Write to one of my teachers? See a doctor? Say I needed a shrink? Tell Oliver? (Aciman 61)

This excerpt suggests that Elio, due to shame and fear of stigma, does not want to tell anyone about his feelings for Oliver. In the end of the novel, however, we learn that Elio's father would never refuse to accept his feelings to Oliver but rather encourage them. As we see in this excerpt when Elio's father speaks with him about his relationship with Oliver; "You're too smart not to know how rare, how special, what you two had was" (223). Despite that his father most likely would encourage his relationship with Oliver, Elio initially experiences a lot of shame, anxiety, and remorse in regard to his desire and feelings for another man. We also see evidence of this after his sexual encounter with Oliver,

It woke me up before I even realized I had dozed off, filling me with a sense of dread and anxiety I couldn't begin to fathom. I felt queasy, as if I had been sick and needed not just many showers to wash everything off but a bath in mouthwash. I needed to be far away – from him, from this room, from what we'd done together. It was as though I were slowly landing from an awful nightmare but wasn't quite touching the ground yet and wasn't sure I wanted to, because what awaited was not going to be much better, though I knew I couldn't go on hanging on to that giant, amorphous blob of a nightmare that felt like the biggest cloud of self-loathing and remorse that had ever wafted into my life (Aciman 135).

It seems that Elio is experiencing a wave of guilt and anxiety after being with someone of the same sex as himself for the first time. These feelings of shame and anxiety may be a result of Elio deviating from heteronormativity, in which case he feels like he is deviating from the norm. Thus, Elio and Oliver are only intimate with each other in private and secluded rooms, which establish isolation from homophobic prejudice.

When Elio is with Marzia, on the other hand, he is open to have intercourse with her at the beach out in the public sphere. As we see in this excerpt,

I kissed her again, but my mind was racing ahead to the berm. Should I propose it? We would have to ride our bikes for five minutes, especially if we took her shortcut and made

our way directly through the olive groves. I knew we'd run into other lovers around there. Otherwise there was the beach. I'd used the spot before. Everyone did. I might propose my room, no one at home would have known or for that matter cared (Aciman 117).

This passage suggests that Elio has no problem being with Marzia in public. The reason for this may be because relationships between people of the opposite sex is considered as normal, and less stigmatized. Hence, by being with Marzia, Elio is behaving in accordance with heteronormativity. This may be part of the reason why he does not feel the need to hide his relationship with Marzia, as he does with Oliver.

In her article "Exploring the Anxiety of Action in *Call Me by Your Name*", the literary scholar Suchandra Bose argues that the love between Elio and Oliver cannot survive outside the setting of the unnamed Italian village that makes their love affair possible (163). The only time Elio and Oliver are 'out in the open' is when they travel to Rome, in which they are able to be intimate and kiss in open spaces (Bose 163). Much like *Call Me by Your Name*, *Giovanni's Room* also establishes the binaries of the public and private. David is hesitant to accept Giovanni outside the 'room'. The private space created within the walls of the room encourages the lovers to behave in accordance with their desire and allows same-sex love to exist without the interference of societal restrictions and prejudice (Bose 163). Bose argues that the created spaces of Giovanni's room and Elio's unnamed village in Italy "become an extension of the "closet" made central through the fear of the dominant heterosexist cultural location, which in turn elucidates upon the performance of heteronormativity; for example, the presence of David and Elio's female partners" (163). However, the novel does not feed into the idea that Marzia serves as a mean to mask Elio's true self and sexual orientation from the public. Even though their relationship may be read as a way of Elio following traditional heteronormative ideas of romance, he does not use Marzia in order to seem heterosexual or in order to conform to heteronormativity. Instead, Elio describes a desire for both Marzia and Oliver, despite them being of opposite sex. As we see in this excerpt, "It never occurred to me to hide from Oliver what I was doing with Marzia. Bakers and butchers don't compete, I thought" (Aciman 151).

Another reason why Elio feels a need to keep his relationship with Oliver hidden, may be a result of his religious identity. Just as David is bound by his American identity and heritage, Maurice by his English identity and a strict homophobic society, Elio seems to experience

similar issues because of his Jewish religion. As we see in this excerpt, Elio's heritage and ancestry play a role in how he views his feelings for Oliver,

Don't try, don't try this, Elio. It was my grandfather's voice. I was his namesake, and he was speaking to me from the very bed he'd crossed a far more menacing divide than the one between my room and Oliver's. Turn back. Who knows what you'll find once you're in that room. Not the tonic of discovery but the pall of despair when disenchantment has all but shamed every ill-stretched nerve in your body. The years are watching you now, every stay you see tonight already knows your torment, your ancestors are gathered here and have nothing to give or say, Non c'andá, don't go there (Aciman 127).

The fact that it is his own mind echoing the words of his grandfather, and not actually his grandfather speaking to him, proves how shame concerning sexual deviance is internalized within Elio. In the beginning of the novel, Elio's family make a point about keeping their Jewish religion private in a country where the majority of people is Catholic. While Elio does not repress his Jewish identity, he makes a point about not showing it either. Oliver's confidence on this matter makes a strong impression on Elio which inspires Elio to wear his necklace of the David star. As we see in this excerpt,

But it was the gold necklace and the Star of David with a golden mezuzah on his neck that told me here was something more compelling than anything I wanted from him, for it bound us and reminded me that, while everything else conspired to make us the two most dissimilar beings, this at least transcended all differences (Aciman 19).

One may argue that the shared Jewish identity of Elio and Oliver are what creates their anxiety in regard to their love for each other. Simultaneously, it is their shared Jewish religion that serves as a way of uniting them; "My star of David, his Star of David, our two necks like one, two cut Jewish men, joined together from time immemorial" (Aciman 87). The novel's treatment and depiction of religion and sexuality, suggest a connection between the two of them. Thus, religious- and sexual identity can be understood as fluid. That is to say that they both are open for interpretation, and how they define a person's idea of self or how they are practiced, is up to every individual. This notion suggests for a reversal of how to define identity. Instead of letting yourself be defined by religion, sexuality, and so on, it is up to each individual to define what these means for yourself. That is to say, that how one understands oneself should not be based on

fitting into fixed categories. Instead of letting these categories define a person, the person should define what each category means for themselves.

The novels treat the representation of male sexuality differently. *Giovanni's Room* depicts homosexuality as filth because of the protagonist's uniquely American experience that bases itself on a Puritanical view on morals, and because of this, he views homosexuality as both immoral, impure, and unnatural. David's homosexuality influences his idea of self very negatively because of this. He struggles to accept himself because of his same-sex desire as it threatens his idea of what it means to be an American male. David, being a masculine American male is tied with being in a heterosexual relationship. Thus, his desire for men threatens his masculinity and makes him feel less of a man. Even though David continuously attempts to resist his desire to other men and instead attempts to reach a heterosexual relationship with women, he is unable to change or deny this part of himself. In *Maurice* male sexuality is depicted as normal and natural. The novel serves as a plea for the acceptance and naturalization of homosexual desire and love during a time and place it was viewed as both criminal, unnatural, and unethical. While Maurice initially struggles to accept his sexual orientation because of his identity as an English man, Forster finds a way to reclaim a space within Englishness for homosexuality. The novel also aims to deconstruct the notion of the feminine homosexual man, based on the Oscar Wilde figure by highlighting the masculinity of its protagonist. Simultaneously, it depicts sexuality as a fixed part of an individual that one can either accept or deny but cannot ever change about oneself.

In contrast, *Call Me by Your Name* does not depict sexuality as fixed, but rather fluid. There is an absence of sexual labels defining the protagonist throughout, and the novel depicts sexuality as non-binary and desire as dynamic. As opposed to the other two novels, the protagonist describes genuine sexual desire for both men and women. However, Aciman intentionally refrains from labeling the protagonist as bisexual. The reason for this may be because bisexual, just as hetero- and homosexual, serve as a limiting and confining term for an individual. For instance, there is some controversy concerning bisexuality, because it is argued by some people that it does not actually exist since a person will 'always' or 'eventually' decide on one of the two sexes in the end (Castleman). Bisexuality can also be argued to be making the homosexual identity seem less controversial. That is to say, while same-sex attraction is deemed unnatural or abnormal by some people, the additional openness for opposite-sex attraction might

in turn lessen the stigma and controversy. Overall, it seems that the notion of sexual identity has become less fixed and defining over time. By comparing the three novels, one can argue for a progressive shift in the depiction and portrayal of sexuality between people in contemporary society and by the time of Forster and Baldwin's novels. This implies a change in the understanding of sexuality, from people either belonging to one category or the other, to understanding sexuality as non-binary, dynamic, and without labels. Overall, the differences in the novels depiction of sexuality suggests a progressive change of representation of male sexuality in literature.

CHAPTER 3: WOMEN AND MALE SEXUALITY

3.1. Women in the works

In this chapter I intend to explore how the female characters are depicted in terms of the representation of male sexuality in the novels. In *Giovanni's Room*, women are depicted as victims of male sexuality. The women fall victim of male sexuality as a consequence of powerful heteronormativity within their society that puts them in the position of being used by men. They are used by the male protagonist to affirm and reclaim his masculinity and heterosexuality.

David, the protagonist, desperately wants to retain the safety and privilege within a conventional heteronormative relationship, and the women in the novel consequently are treated as tools or objects for him to reach this ideal.

In *Maurice*, women are depicted both as victims and as threats of male sexuality because of patriarchal structures within the society. Clive's mother, Mrs. Durham, functions as a threat for her son's sexuality. She can in many ways be interpreted as an extension of English society because of her constant pressure on her son to act and behave a certain way according to its norms, traditions, and values. One example is her constant pressure for her son to marry a woman. Simultaneously, she also falls victim of the same systems and structures she is trying to uphold and enforce on her son. While it seems that Clive is able to withstand this external societal pressure at the beginning of the novel, at some point, he claims to have changed his sexual orientation from being attracted to men, to only desiring women. Clive appears to have converted to heteronormativity when he decides to marry a noblewoman named Lady Anne Woods. However, throughout the novel, there are several indications that his sexual orientation has not really changed, but rather his ability to withstand social sanctions, pressure, norms, and expectations. In addition to this, Clive seems to have internalized society's mainstream attitudes of homophobia and its idealization of the conventional marriage between a man and woman. That in turn makes Lady Anne Woods a victim of male sexuality in the novel, because she is being used by Clive in order to appear in accordance with society's ideal for conventional marriage.

In *Call Me by Your Name*, on the other hand, women are not depicted as threats nor victims, but rather as facilitators of the exploration of male sexuality. Even though the novel focuses mainly on the relationship between its main characters Elio and Oliver, the protagonist is able to explore his desire and sexuality with both men and women.

3.2 Women as victims of male sexuality

In *Giovanni's Room*, the female characters Sue and Hella, fall victim of male sexuality. The reason for this is because David treats them both as tools to test and reaffirm his heterosexuality and 'manhood'. Furthermore, Hella becomes a representation of the ideal heteronormative relationship that David desperately wants to obtain. Consequently, David is convinced that being in a relationship with her will resolve his anxiety of his own sexuality. Henderson explains, "David betrays himself and makes his female consorts unknowing co-conspirators in his desperate desire to find refuge within the boundaries of conventional heterosexuality" (322). Put in another way, David wants the safety and privilege within the conventional heteronormative relationship and use women such as Hella and Sue to reach the potential of a heterosexual relationship.

When David realizes his attraction to Giovanni, he goes searching for a female prostitute, but instead he finds the American woman, Sue. David seduces Sue in order to test his virility and also to feel better about his relationship with Giovanni, as we see in this excerpt "But I was thinking that what I did with Giovanni could not possibly be more immoral than what I was about to do with Sue" (Baldwin 95). Although David acknowledges that using Sue is immoral, he hopes that having sex with her will help him move on from his feelings for Giovanni and reacquaint him with the touch of women. However, David finds that he hates having sex with her, "I thought *Well let her have it for Christ sake, get it over with*, then it was ending and I hated her and me, then it was over, and the dark tiny room rushed back" (Baldwin 96). Consequently, David feels hatred for Sue and himself because she is not able to confirm his attraction to women. David uses Sue for personal gain, as we see in this excerpt, "Somewhere, at the very bottom of myself, I realized that I was doing something awful to her and it became a matter of my honor not to let this fact become too obvious" (Baldwin 96). After their sexual encounter, David does not want to spend any more time with Sue. She, on the other hand, tells him to visit her again if he ever feels lonely again. This excerpt implies that Sue understands that David only used her for sex but is nevertheless willing to go through the same experience again. Overall, the novel indicates that Sue is in desperate need of the attention of men; "Her lips parted and she put her glass down with extraordinary clumsiness and lay against me. It was a gesture of great despair and I knew she was giving herself, not to me, but to that lover who would never come"

(Baldwin 95). Which in turn makes her a victim of men like David, who only use her for her body. We also see evidence of this through David's narration; "I felt a hardness and a constriction in her, a grave distrust, created already by too many men like me, ever to be conquered now" (Baldwin 95). Thus, Sue can in many ways be read as an object of male sexual desire and a victim of sexual exploitation.

David treats both Sue and Hella as tools to assert his heterosexuality and masculinity. When his sexual encounter with Sue is unsuccessful in doing so, he seeks refuge in a conventional heterosexual relationship with Hella. In the novel, Hella has a strong desire for commitment and being in a relationship. She is convinced that in order to be free, she has to be with a man; "I began to realize it in Spain – that I wasn't free, that I couldn't be free until I was attached – no, *committed* – to someone" (Baldwin 120). Hella goes on describing men as a "humiliating necessity" (Baldwin 119). These excerpts imply attitudes with the notion that all women need a man. This may be a consequence of a heteronormative society, that issues people to be in traditional heterosexual relationships. A consequence of heteronormativity within a society is that it causes a duality among its members between people who are able to meet the expectations and norms, versus people who deviate from it. In turn, it might have a negative effect on people who deviate from the norm, which causes them to feel like failures or as a part of 'the other'. 'The other' is often stigmatized by the mainstream society. Both Hella and Sue seem to feel as failures as single women that in turn put them in a position to be used by men, and thus become victims of male sexuality.

However, in contrast to Sue, Hella is able to free herself from being a victim. Once she learns that David has concealed his same-sex desire for her, she instantly leaves him and travels back to the United States;

'If I stay much longer,' she said, later that same morning as she packed her bag, 'I'll forget what it's like to be a woman.'

She was extremely cold, she was very bitterly handsome.

'I'm not sure any woman *can* forget that,' I said.

'There are women who have forgotten that to be a woman doesn't simply mean humiliation, doesn't simply mean bitterness. I haven't forgotten yet,' she added, 'in spite of you. I'm not going to forget it. I'm getting out of this house, away from you, just as far as taxis, trains, and boats will carry me.' (Baldwin 154).

As this excerpt suggests, Hella has a growing female consciousness throughout the novel. She refuses to become a humiliated and bitter woman, because of the treatment by men like David.

Paradoxically, it is the same systems and structures that put pressure on all the characters to follow traditional gender roles and to reach the ideal of conventional heterosexual relationships. In her article, DeGout argues for the theme of fatalism among the novel's characters. In addition to the protagonist, it is also depicted through Hella and Sue, who are both females and heterosexual (DeGout 433). Fatalism in the novel is a result of the characters inability to reach self-acceptance, according to DeGout (433). DeGout explains, "That both homoerotic and heterosexual characters are linked by a common theme – the inability to face oneself and the subsequent inability to love" (433). The characters inability to love others and themselves, is a consequence of self-denial, which is the result of a harmful society (DeGout 435). Every character is faced with conditions of psychological and sociogenic character that they struggle with. In turn, they all face the same destructiveness of these circumstances (DeGout 433-434). In the article "Hegemony and the internalisation of homophobia caused by heteronormativity", the literary scholar Yolanda Dreyer explains that powerful heteronormativity within a society limits its members by punishing gender norms deviation by social means, for example by stereotyping and labelling (6). Deviations are exaggerated as abnormalities, and in turn created into persistent stereotypes. For example, the stereotype of homosexual men being effeminate. According to Dreyer, homophobia is one of the many consequences of heteronormativity, that is "embedded in a society that tends to conceptualize gender in a binary way" (6). Consequently, it has a negative effect on people with same-sex desire. The reason for this is because they have internalized negative feelings on account of cultural attitudes, that in turn keep them from expressing their sexuality (Dreyer 6). It is this kind of pressure that forces David to conceal and deny his homosexuality, and in turn put women like Sue and Hella at risk for becoming victims of male sexuality.

While David feels less as a man because of his same-sex desire and his lacking interest for women, Sue and Hella feel like failures as women because they are single. Heteronormativity suggests a society that values the conventional relationship between male and females, and people who are unable to reach this ideal are considered as deviants from the norm. That is to say, that even though both Sue and Hella are described as heterosexual women in the novel, they

also experience negative consequences of powerful heteronormativity and its effects. Thus, discourses that (re)produce or naturalize heteronormative cultural assumptions are harmful for everyone. The characters all desperately want to belong and fit in by following the norms and expectations in their society, and to avoid being part of the stigmatized other.

3.3. Women as threats and victims of male sexuality

In *Maurice*, women are depicted as both threats and victims of male sexuality. Clive's mother, Mrs. Durham, can be interpreted as a threat for her son's sexuality. The reason for this is because she puts Clive under constant pressure for him to act and behave accordingly. In the beginning of the novel, Clive rebels against his mother, for example by refusing to go to church and by secretly pursuing a romantic relationship with Maurice. Despite his defiance, he still remains under constant pressure to marry, as we see in this excerpt,

'These children will be a nuisance,' he remarked during a canter.

'What children?'

'Mine! The need for an heir for Penge. My mother calls it marriage, but that was all she was thinking of.'

Maurice was silent. It had never occurred to him before that neither he nor his friend would leave life behind them (Forster 83).

Clive's mother wants Clive to marry and father children. The importance of marriage is stressed throughout the novel, not only in regard to Clive, but for Maurice as well. In her article "Family planning and sex in Britain 1900-1960", the literary scholar Kate Fisher explains that the early part of twentieth century England is "sometimes characterized as a 'golden age' of heterosexual heteronormativity". The reason for this is because more people got married, they married at a younger age and their marriages lasted longer (Fisher). During the first part of the twentieth century, marriage was idealized across popular culture. "Advice guides – whether medical, religious or feminist – presented monogamous marriage, based on romantic love, domesticity and successful reproduction, as the key to a fulfilled and healthy life", according to Fisher.

True to the period it represents, the novel depicts a society that idealizes conventional marriage. We also see evidence of this from the first pages of the novel that depict a conversation between Maurice and his prep-school teacher, Mr. Ducie, who explains Maurice about women, sex, and marriage. Mr. Ducie emphasizes the significance of marrying a woman, as we see in this

excerpt; “To love a noble woman, to protect and serve her – this, he told the little boy, was the crown of life” (Forster 10). Maurice, on the other hand, feels removed from the depiction of marriage with a woman as the ultimate goal of life, as he remarks “I think I shall not marry” (Forster 10). The reappearing and constant notion about the importance of marriage throughout the novel implies a society that values the conventional marriage between men and women. We also see evidence of this later on in the novel, when Maurice explains, “With the world as it is, one must marry or decay” (Forster 149). This excerpt suggests a social pressure amongst the characters to follow the norms and expectations for conventional marriages. In turn, any deviance from heteronormativity results in negative sanctions. For example, social sanctions such as social stigma. In the case of *Maurice*, it also includes legal sanctions, due to homosexuality being criminalized.

When Clive describes his feelings for Maurice, he creates a comparison with the relationship of his sister Pippa and her fiancé, as we see in this excerpt,

She would have no mercy if she knew, she wouldn't attempt, wouldn't want to attempt to understand that I feel to you as Pippa to her fiancé, only far more nobly, far more deeply, body and soul, no starved medievalism of course, only a – a particular harmony of body and soul that I think women have even guessed (Forster 78).

Clive explains how his own mother would never be able to understand, and would never want to attempt to understand, his feelings to another male. This suggests overall resistance of understanding and accepting this type of love. One can interpret Mrs. Durham as an extension or representation of the English society's view on homosexuality as deviant behavior. Put differently, Mrs. Durham's constant pressure on her son can be read as a result of the English society's views and values that she has internalized and in turn enforces on her son.

Paradoxically, as Mrs. Durham can be interpreted as a threat to male sexuality in the novel, she can in turn also be read as a victim of the same systems and structures she is imposing on her son. She becomes a victim by having internalized the values, attitudes, and convictions of the mainstream society, which in turn makes her unaware or ignorant to the negative consequences of male supremacy structures. However, she is also an enabler of the systems and structures that is repressing and restricting herself. The patriarchy is sustained by structures and practices that gives men more power and privilege than women. This includes discriminating laws, traditional gender roles that creates expectations and limitations for genders, and cultural

norms that normalize this notion. The novel takes place in an aggressively patriarchal space and even though the novel itself seeks to break free of these restrictions; tradition, history, and privilege all play a role throughout. Mrs. Durham, amongst other characters, being so intertwined within the oppressive structures makes it harder to separate victim from threat.

However, in his article “The passive woman the theory of patriarchy”, the literary scholar Harris Mirkin compares the view on the traditional woman’s role in patriarchy between woman’s sphere historians and the theorists of patriarchy. Mirkin argues that the major differences between the two approaches, is that theorists of patriarchy believed women held no power of their own. Woman’s sphere historians, on the other hand, argue that they held some power and will of their own (Mirkin 54). Mirkin explains, “She might have been institutionally and economically dominated by males, but she did not act as a male agent, and she retained a perspective and power base of her own” (54). The theorists of patriarchy view the traditional woman as a slave that has adopted the perspective of the patriarchs in a sense of “false consciousness”. That is to say, that women are depicted as unknowing victims of the patriarchy (Mirkin 54). Mirkin argues that the theorists of patriarchy are projecting feelings of anger onto the traditional woman because they themselves believe she is being exploited. However, by saying women did not do any valuable or important work is to rob the historical women of their dignity (Mirkin 54). The woman’s sphere historians view woman’s work as important and argue that this work has been disvalued and ignored because the important spheres are considered to be the male political and economic realm. Traditional women are in turn judged as passive and weak from the perspective of these institutions and values. Paradoxically then, the theorists of patriarchy views of women as passive and weak is how the men according to theorists themselves, see and saw women as well (Mirkin 54). The main difference, according to Mirkin, is that men believed women to be passive by nature, while the theorists of patriarchy believe women were psychologically and institutionally enslaved by dominant men (54).

With this in mind, I argue that Mrs. Durham is in fact able to gain some power in a male-dominated society. As we see in this excerpt,

Mrs Durham had of course her motives. She was looking out wives for Clive, and put down the Hall girls on her list. She has a theory one ought to cross breeds a bit, and Ada, though suburban was healthy. No doubt the girl was a fool, but Mrs Durham did not

propose to retire to the dower house in practice, whatever she might do in theory, and believed she could best manage Clive through his wife (Forster 88).

This passage implies that by getting Clive to marry, Mrs. Durham will be able to control him through his marriage. This suggests that women could have something to gain from being instigators and facilitators of the patriarchy. By compelling her son to marry a woman of upper-class, she is able to maintain her social status and prestige. In addition to this, it seems that she gains protection from this arrangement herself, for instance by being able to live on her son's inherited property. As a widow, Mrs Durham does have the option of remarrying or to live with a relative. Perhaps her motive for getting her son to marry is to secure herself a place to live. As we see in this excerpt, "[...] though Clive's mother no longer presided she remained in residence, owing to the dower house drains" (Forster 146). However, even though there are arguably some benefits, these become problematic as they reinforce the structures of male-supremacy. Hence, Mrs. Durham can be read as facilitator and as a victim of the patriarchy. Additionally, by enforcing these structures of the patriarchy on her son, she simultaneously becomes a threat of male sexuality as well.

The pressure on Clive to marry makes Lady Anne Woods in turn fall victim of male sexuality. At some point in the novel, Clive claims to have gone through a transformation that causes him to lose all interest in Maurice and men altogether. Even though he admits to having felt attraction towards his own sex since he was very young, he is suddenly only interested in women. Not only that, but the thought about same-sex desire and his relationship with Maurice suddenly repulses him. This suggests that Clive has internalized society's mainstream homophobia. We also see evidence of this when Clive talks about sex; "Between men it is inexcusable, between man and woman it may be practiced since nature and society approve, but never discussed nor vaunted" (Forster 144). After supposedly losing his same-sex attraction, Clive starts distancing himself from Maurice and marries Lady Anne. However, even though Clive claims that his attraction to men has vanished, it is insinuated throughout the novel that the only thing that has changed is that he finally gives into the pressure of social norms and expectations. Put in another way, the novel suggests that he has only seemingly conformed to heteronormativity, rather than actually lost his same-sex attraction. As we see in this passage,

They united in a world that bore no reference to the daily, and the secrecy drew after it much of their lives. So much could never be mentioned. He never saw her naked, nor she

him. They ignored the reproductive and digestive functions. So there would never be any question of this episode of his immaturity (144).

Even though Clive claims to be 'cured' for his attraction for men, there is little to no evidence throughout the novel that this is true or that he is physically attracted to his wife, Anne. Their marriage may appear normal, but as the excerpt insinuates, "they united in a world that bore no reference to the daily", suggests that their relationship is nothing like the usual marriage in private. It seems that Clive fears persecution, and therefore uses his marriage to Anne as a way to conceal parts of his sexuality and identity.

Thus, Lady Anne becomes a victim of male sexuality in the novel, because she is being used by Clive to conform to heteronormativity and to keep up appearances as such. We also see evidence of this when Maurice confronts Clive during one of the final passages of the novel, "You care for me a little bit, I do think," he admitted, "but I can't hang all my life on a little bit. You don't. You hang yours on Anne. You don't worry whether your relationship with her is platonic or not, you only know it's big enough to hang a life on" (Forster 117). This excerpt suggests that Anne is treated as an object by Clive in order to secure himself as part of the conventional heteronormative relationship and to avoid social stigma. Maurice arguing that Clive is hanging his life on Anne, suggests that she is the reason he is able to live a privileged life. Arguably then, Anne is within the ability to gain power within this marriage if she were ever to learn about Clive's true self. Without Clive's marriage with Anne, he would probably lose most parts of his life. We also see evidence of this in the novel, in a conversation between Clive and Maurice; "'You and I are outlaws. All this' - he pointed to the middle-class comfort of the room - 'would be taken from us if people knew'" (Forster 112). If Clive was to refuse to conform to conventional heteronormativity that in turn would have a negative effect on his social status as a gentleman of upper class. Maurice on the other hand, is willing to give up his position in society and escape it altogether to be with Alec.

It seems that both David in *Giovanni's Room* and Clive in *Maurice* believe that a relationship with a woman will save and cure them from their 'impure' desire towards men. Arguably, one of the main differences between David and Clive, is that Clive is better at controlling and hiding his same-sex desire. In contrast to David, it seems that Clive has reached a higher level of self-denial, as well as internalized homophobia, which makes him able to keep up the charade of a happy marriage with Anne and better deny and hide his same-sex desire. The

women in *Maurice* are depicted as threats and victims of male sexuality. The novel depicts attitudes amongst its characters that are influenced by powerful patriarchal values which idealizes traditional marriage between men and women. That in turn create prejudice and discrimination against any deviance, such as homosexuality. The novel reveals the historical tendency of homophobia which can be seen as a byproduct of patriarchal values. In turn, it shows evidence of systems and structures that both oppress and victimize men and women.

3.4. Women as facilitators of the exploration of male sexuality

In *Call Me by Your Name*, the women are depicted as facilitators of the exploration of male sexuality. As mentioned earlier, the novel depicts sexuality as fluid and non-binary. Thus, women in the novel make it possible for the male protagonist to explore his desire and sexuality with both sexes. Even though Elio has growing romantic feelings for Oliver, he publicly pursues a relationship with his childhood friend Marzia. In contrast to the other two novels, Marzia is not depicted as an object that Elio uses to hide his true feelings for Oliver. Initially, one would perhaps think of Marzia as a victim of male sexuality based on the fact that Elio stops paying attention when his relationship with Oliver develops romantically. However, there are a lot of evidence throughout the novel that suggest otherwise. For example, when Elio and Marzia's relationship changes from a platonic friendship to physical relationship, Marzia seems aware of Elio's romantic feelings for Oliver. As we see in this passage,

“You're not with me because you are angry with Chiara?”

“Why am I angry with Chiara?”

“Because of him.”

I shook my head, feigning a puzzled look meant to show that I couldn't begin to guess where she's fished such a notion from (Aciman 50).

This passage shows that unlike the other novels' victims of male sexuality, Marzia seems somewhat aware of Elio's feelings for Oliver. We also see evidence of this in another excerpt from the novel, “'Why? Because I think you can hurt me and I don't want to be hurt.' Then she thought for a moment. 'Not that you mean to hurt anyone, but because you're always changing your mind, always slipping, so no one knows where to find you. You scare me.'” (Aciman 116). Marzia seems aware of Elio's feelings for Oliver and recognizes the chance of being hurt by this. However, the excerpt also suggests that Marzia is aware that feelings are constantly shifting and

desire fluctuating, and even though she expresses a concern for this, she continues to pursue a physical relationship with Elio.

In contrast to Hella, Sue and Lady Anne, Marzia is not depicted as an object or being treated as a tool by Elio in order to appear heterosexual or more masculine to others. That is to say that Elio's relationship with Marzia is not portrayed as a courtship of convenience, or as a way for the main character to hide his true feelings. Instead, their relationships give insight about how desire can change and take on different forms. While Elio is sexually attracted to his friend, Marzia, he also experiences increasingly romantic feelings for with Oliver. Although his feelings towards Marzia are sincere, his actions are influenced by his growing feelings for Oliver. In the beginning of the novel, Elio pursues Marzia as a way to work through his frustrations in regard to his feelings towards Oliver not being reciprocated. However, Elio does not end their relationship as soon as Oliver reveals his mutual interest. Neither does he flaunt his relationship with Marzia in any way in order to make Oliver jealous, as we see in this excerpt, "On our way to the cove below I was once again pleased to feel I didn't care if he found out about us, just as I didn't care if he never showed up tonight" (Aciman 123). Thus, Marzia does not become a victim of male sexuality, because she is not being used or deceived in any way. She is rather a facilitator of the exploration of male sexuality, making it possible for Elio to explore his desire to both her and Oliver. Even though his feelings to Marzia are genuine, they do not stand a chance against the romantic obsession he grows for Oliver. After a while, Elio dismisses her in favor of Oliver. Yet, the novel does not depict a breakup scene between the two characters. The last time we as readers ever hear about Marzia is through another character, telling Elio that Marzia missed him while he was away in Rome with Oliver. This might suggest that there is no need for closure between the two because she is aware how their relationship stands. In turn, she shows an understanding of desire being dynamic and ever changing.

However, one may also read the character of Marzia as being an example of the stereotype of passive and supportive female figure. As a reader, we do not get much information about Marzia, and the novel mostly focuses on Elio and his relationship with Oliver. Then again, if we were to take away the character of Marzia, the novel's overall notion of sexuality as fluid and non-binary would be dismissed or minimized altogether. Instead, the novel would be about the protagonist's homosexual identity and experience, despite it never being mentioned that the protagonist is homosexual. Arguably, there might be lack of depth in her character, but she does

not seem passive in any way. Instead, she seems to have a lot of insight of Elio's changing desire, and she is not being victimized or used by him as a shield to hide his true feelings to Oliver. If one were to argue for a character that fits the trope of women as passive, Sue in *Giovanni's Room* would be a more suitable example. The reason for this is because Sue becomes fully aware she is being used by David and nevertheless, she seems willing to be used by him again. One could argue that both Sue and Marzia are being knowingly and willingly sexually exploited by the male protagonists. However, I argue against this. While Sue is more or less being used for her body by David, Elio's feelings for Marzia in contrast, are depicted as genuine. In addition to this, does Marzia seem aware of Elio's feelings to Oliver before they initiate a physical relationship. Moreover, the novel does not seem to suggest that Marzia is being intentionally deceived by Elio, in contrast to Sue. Then again, one could argue that Elio does in fact deceive both himself and Marzia by initiating a relationship with her, despite his growing feelings for Oliver. However, in contrast to David who also is in denial of his same-sex attraction, Elio does not use Marzia for sex and then dismiss of her afterwards. David intentionally deceives and uses Sue for sex, and even admits to his treatment of her being immoral. Additionally, both Hella in *Giovanni's Room* and Marzia in *Call Me by Your Name*, distance themselves once they learn of their partner's stronger attraction to another man. Marzia, then, can be interpreted as a facilitator of the exploration of male sexuality rather than a passive figure or a victim.

When we look at the differences of how women are portrayed in terms of male sexuality in each novel, we see a gradual change from women being depicted as victims and/or threats to being facilitators of the exploration of male sexuality. The two oldest novels, *Giovanni's Room*, and *Maurice*, both depict women as victims. *Giovanni's Room* depicts a society with powerful heteronormative attitudes and *Maurice* depicts a society with strong patriarchal values. As a consequence, both female and male characters experience pressure to act in accordance with society's norms and expectations. Consequently, it pressures characters with same-sex attraction to fight against these types of urges and desire because they deviate from the norm. As a result, women are treated as tools in order to conform to society's expectations. The women in the novels fall under social pressure as well, which lead them to put themselves in situations of being used by the male characters. Some of the female characters do this knowingly, such as the character of Sue in *Giovanni's Room*. Sue is willingly putting herself at the mercy of men in

order to raise her self-esteem through the attention of men. While other female characters fall victim of male sexuality without realizing. Consequently, the characters in *Giovanni's Room* all fall victim of fatalism as a result of their inability to accept themselves despite being part of the stigmatized 'other'.

In *Maurice*, however, the women are also depicted as threats. Some of the female characters can be read as an extension of society's norms, expectations, and traditions. That is to say that they become part of the same pressure by forcing society's regime on the male characters. However, by enforcing and upholding these social systems and structures of the patriarchy, women fall victim of these. Society's pressure on its members serves a limiting or repressive effect in people's actions, such as their sexuality and gender expressions. It is the same structures that create inequality between male and females in society, as well as repress and limit them. In *Call Me by Your Name*, on the other hand, the notion of women as victims of male sexuality subsides. Instead, they are depicted as facilitators in the exploration of male sexuality. The novel depicts an absence of labels and binaries for its protagonist within sexuality, and in turn, the character is free to explore his desire with both men and women. In contrast to the other two novels, the women are not being used or threatening in terms of male sexuality. Instead, the novel depicts a sincere and growing desire between people of the same- and opposite sex, that in turn serves the novel's aim to show how sexuality and desire are both dynamic and non-binary.

These changes in the portrayal of women in terms of male sexuality in the novels can be interpreted in many ways. One may argue this as a positive change, due to the fact that women have gone from being depicted as victims and threats to facilitators. This suggests changing attitudes in the portrayal of women in literature. Perhaps as a reaction to earlier portrayals of women in literature, it seems that it has become important to empower female characters in contemporary time.

CHAPTER 4: MEDIA REPRESENTATION OF MALE SEXUALITY

4.1 Changes in media representation of male sexuality

In this chapter, I intend to explore changes in the representation of male sexuality in media. Since media is such a broad topic, I intend to focus on the representation within Hollywood films from the early twentieth century until contemporary time. I will start the chapter by giving an overview of changes within Hollywood film production, and how these changes have influenced the representation of male sexuality in films over the years. Furthermore, I intend to examine the films *Maurice* (1987), *Brokeback Mountain* (2005) and *Call Me by Your Name* (2017) in order to be able to say something about how representation of male sexuality is in contemporary films. I have chosen these films for several reasons. For one, all of these are very famous and popular queer films. In addition to this, two of these are film adaptations of the novels I have discussed in the earlier chapters of this thesis. That way, I can examine how the portrayal of male sexuality is treated differently in novels versus films. However, since *Giovanni's Room* has not been adapted into a film, I chose the well-known queer film *Brokeback Mountain*. I intend to use these films in order to illustrate the changing attitudes and the progression of the representation of male sexuality in contemporary films. In addition to this, I also intend to discuss the films' reception, in order to better understand the frames of references and discourses involved.

The Hollywood film industry has since the early twentieth century produced films for mainstream audiences all over the world. Due to its popularity and influence, Hollywood films are seen as a major part of popular culture. Thus, its portrayal of male sexuality can in turn influence mainstream audiences' attitudes. Even though early Hollywood film production was very progressive in their representations of sexuality, its growing popularity led to public outcries against the industry because of concerns of the immorality of its films. Thus, the industry self-imposed a set of guidelines to regulate the content of its films. As a consequence, homosexuality has for the most part of Hollywood's film history been made invisible on screen. Even though these guidelines were abandoned by the end of the 1960s, they left behind a culture of censorship amongst filmmakers. Thus, even though there have been progressive changes within Hollywood film production and its representation of male sexuality, the industry still has a long way to go before it can reach the level of sexual frankness as in queer literature, queer independent films or television series and -shows.

4.2 Historical changes in the representation of male sexuality in Hollywood

Before examining the selection of films, it is necessary to give an historical overview of changes within the representation of male sexuality in Hollywood films during the twentieth century.

In early Hollywood, there was a lot of progressive representations of same-sex relationships. As the film industry grew in popularity, concerns about the films' immorality began to emerge. At first, the Motion Picture Producers created a set of guidelines known as the "Don'ts and Be Carefuls" in 1927 (Vaughn 44). However, these guidelines were voluntarily and not rigidly enforced. In 1930, these guidelines were replaced with the Motion Picture Production Code, also known as "the Hays Code" (Vaughn 64). The Code got its nickname after Will H. Hays, who was the president of the Motion Picture Producers and Distributors of America from 1922 to 1945. Hays created the Code as a response to the public outcry over the perceived immorality of Hollywood films during the 1920s (Vaughn 43). Between the years of 1934-1968 the guidelines regulated filmmakers in what films could and could not show. The purpose of the Code was to ensure that films did not offend public sensibilities. Even though the Code was created in 1930, the studios generally ignored the guidelines since there was no strong method of enforcing it. Thus, the Code was not put into effect until 1934 (Benshoff and Griffin 33). Filmmaking before the Hays Code was much more liberal and less regulated as there were no formal guidelines or regulations governing what could be shown on screen. The Hays Code influenced movies by enforcing strict censorship rules, which meant that filmmakers had to be more careful about what they showed on screen. It regulated the content of films in a number of ways, including prohibiting depictions of nudity, drug use, and homosexuality. Film studios had to send their scripts to Production Code Administration (PCA), and the scripts had to be approved before film production could begin (Black 167). In addition to this, Hollywood was forced to permanently stop the circulation of its films that were viewed "immoral" by the Administration (Black 167). The PCA exercised a strong, often dominating influence on movie content and production for more than two decades, and scrutinized every Hollywood script for offensive, social, political, and sexual themes (Black 168). That in turn, led to the creation of films that were much more conservative than they might have been without these guidelines. The initial intent was to protect the public from sexual improprieties, as well as a way to maximize the worldwide appeal of Hollywood films, by eliminating controversial subjects from the screen.

However, in the process, film producers and filmgoers were imposed by a rigidly conservative view of politics and morality (Black 168). In the article “‘Something’s Missing Here!’: Homosexuality and Film Reviews during the Production Code Era, 1934-1962”, the literary scholar Chon Noriega explores the gay and lesbian film criticism during Hollywood’s Production Code era. During the Hays Code, in the 1930s and 1940s, at least three films were released based on plays and/or novels that had homosexuality as a central part of the plot: *These Three* (1936), *The Lost Weekend* (1945) and *Crossfire* (1947). These films were widely praised as a “problem” or “social-consciousness” pictures that dealt with malicious gossip, alcoholism, and antisemitism (Noriega 22-23). Even though film reviewers were quick to allude to the necessary social changes depicted in the films, there were little to no mentioning of homosexuality within the films. According to Noriega, there was general silence of the period with a consensus among film reviewers and society at large that homosexuality was an “unsavory theme” (23). This was based on the notion, among film reviewers in mass circulation newspapers and magazines, that exposing readers to passages about homosexuality could in turn influence them. Consequently, publishers and newspaper editors would engage in and exercise some sort of self-censorship that kept homosexuality virtually out of print (Noriega 23).

During the years after World War II, there was a shift in American culture. As war traumas lingered, there was feelings of angst and anxiety during the postwar years. There was a general sense of xenophobia and paranoia among people because of The Korean War, the Cold War, the Red Scare, and the nuclear race. That in turn led a lot of people to be suspected, investigated, fired, imprisoned, or even put to death (Benshoff and Griffin 81-82). The Cold War rhetoric often made a duality between “Americanness” and homosexuality, communism, unionization, and the civil rights movement. That is to say, that everyone could potentially be viewed as “un-American” or “anti-American” due to this paranoia (Benshoff and Griffin 83). Consequently, the need for conformity within the norm of a white, middle-class, heterosexual American became an obsession as well as a survival mechanism, especially among people who deviated from the norm in any way. That in turn had an impact of how queer people lived their lives, as well how sexuality was represented in Hollywood movies from the late 1940s to mid-1960s (Benshoff and Griffin 82). However, while the mainstream media pretended there was a peaceful and prosperous postwar consensus across the nation, there was in reality a simmering

and growing dissatisfaction among racial and ethnic minorities about their lack of civil rights (Benshoff and Griffin 82). Consequently, it would have an effect on Hollywood film production.

The 1950s witnessed a weakening of the Hays Code in the restriction of certain representations such as adultery, prostitution, and miscegenation. By the beginning of the 1960s, the only specific restriction left was that on “sex perversion”. However, during this decade, the filmmakers themselves put pressure on the Production Code Administration. In 1961, two films that would deal with homosexuality went into production, while others were planned (Noriega 30). The president of United Artists threatened to release these films without the “seal of approval” unless the Code was modified. In an attempt to keep their control, the Production Code Administration gave in by allowing homosexuality and other sexual aberrations been shown on screen “with care, discretion and restraint”. However, the change of words, by calling it “homosexuality” instead of “sex perversion” suggested an more open-minded representation of sexuality. As a consequence, the Hollywood Production Code was amended to allow homosexuality to be treated openly on screen. Thus, several films that dealt with homosexuality were released afterwards. One of these films was even released despite its lack of a seal of approval from the Production Code Administration (Noriega 30). Hence, homosexuality could be the subject of a film, and as a result, film reviewers tried to establish the appropriate reception of these types of films (Noriega 31). According to Noriega, there was a change of discourse concerning homosexuality; “Intentional or not, the medical discourse neatly sidestepped the Code’s prohibition on sympathy for homosexuals and other sinners and violators of divine, natural, and human laws” (Noriega 32). That is to say, instead of viewing homosexuals as sinners, they were viewed as people with a medical condition that should be met with the responses of “sympathy” and “tolerance” (Noriega 32). In turn, film reviewers believed that the public knew, or needed to be informed, that homosexuality was not a congenital problem, but rather a psychiatric one (Noriega 32). The assumptions of the homosexual as “immoral” and “indecent” were no longer central, and in their place a more sentimental and sympathetic approach concerning the homosexual “condition” (Noriega 33). According to Noriega, the change included that “homosexuality was considered a ‘condition’, ‘practice’, and ‘social problem’ rather than a ‘tragedy’ and ‘evil’” (33). In other words, the medical discourse and framework opened up a space for sympathy and tolerance within the public’s attitude towards homosexuality, due to its new view as a “disease” that could be cured or isolated (Noriega 33).

As a consequence, when discussing homosexuality; “film reviewers and other began to speak about homosexuals as members of a distinct sexual group, if not community rather than as tragic individuals” (Noriega 33). Thus, helped identifying a homosexual community. According to Noriega, “The film reviews reflected a shift in society from moral and legal definitions of homosexuality to psychiatric definitions” (Noriega 34). In the changing discourse on homosexuality, laws, social reform movements, sexual norms, and economic structures that underlay the Production Code began to change (Noriega 34). This suggests that the mainstream attitudes were progressively becoming more positive in regard of queers.

In many ways, the postwar era can be described as an transitional one. During the 1960s people were rebelling and loudly rejecting against the cultural pressure to conform. In turn, a small version of the homosexual liberation movement was born. Thus, Hollywood gradually began to acknowledge the topic of queer sexuality (Benshoff and Griffin 82). During 1967, the Production Code that ensured Hollywood architectural stability and moral scaffolding to the plotlines and profits, was falling apart (Doherty 10). According to Benshoff, “stars and producers were becoming independent of the old studio moguls. Producers had to deal with a dwindling and fragmenting audience, as women, people of color, and the younger generation became more and more vocal in their opposition to the status quo (and to films that endorsed the status quo)” (82). The growing competition from independent films and television increased, affecting Hollywood’s profit negatively. Independent American filmmakers and foreign film exhibitors began to push the limits of sexually explicit material, which in turn had Hollywood filmmakers to the same in order to compete. Thus, desperate to attract a wider audience, more and more “adult” subject matter found its way into Hollywood films (Benshoff and Griffin 82). By 1967, the notion of adults being able to watch most anything they wanted without the need of censorship was emerging. The year after, the Supreme Court officially abolished any local and state ordinances regulating film content, while at the same time permitting restrictions for children (Doherty 15). This led to a paradigm shift within films, because of a revision of the PCA protocols that let film after film in 1967 explore new boundaries within sex, violence, and language in their films (Doherty 14).

Despite the new freedom, there was not too many changes in the early 1960s. During these years, there was an attempt to maintain older attitudes from the first half of the twentieth century, as these new attitudes were beginning to assert themselves (Benshoff and Griffin 82).

That is to say, that there was a duality between conservative and traditional attitudes versus new and more liberal ones. The mainstream paranoia about homosexuality allegedly being tied to communism, pederasty, and mental illness in turn affected the representation of queerness onscreen (90-91). Films still contained gay jokes and comedic pansies. Queer characters were often portrayed as villains in thrillers, such as the films *From Russia with Love* (1963) and *Goldfinger* (1964). Homosexuals were still believed to be mentally ill, and in Hollywood films they were portrayed as being likely to kill others, as well as themselves (Benshoff and Griffin 90). Arguably, it is not until the end of the 1960s, we can see the start of the modern gay and lesbian rights movement. One example is the Stonewall Riots that occurred on June 27-28, 1969, which are often referred to as the start of modern gay and lesbian rights movements. The event started as a police raid on a Greenwich Village gay bar that turned into a riot. The customers, who were sick and tired of harassment, fought back against several policemen that came to arrest them. The bar's patrons resisted arrest, trapped police officers in the building, and set fire to the building itself. Many historians are in agreement that the Stonewall Riots in turn led to new attitudes toward self-acceptance and struggle for equality among queers (Benshoff and Griffin 119-120). Consequently, the Stonewall Riots received a lot of mainstream publicity, that in turn spread the notion of a new civil rights struggle across the nation, as well as around the world. The Stonewall Riots were just a small part of the sexual revolution that occurred throughout the 1960s. According to Benshoff and Griffin, "American mores about gender and sex were dramatically changing, becoming more permissive throughout the postwar era" (120). The beginning of the civil rights movement in the 1960s, would in turn weaken the Production Code within Hollywood film production, and be completely abolished by the end of the decade.

In the Code's place, a new rating system came about. The name of the Production Code Administration was changed into the Motion Picture Code and Rating Administration. The Motion Picture Association of America started to use a voluntary film rating system in order to rate the suitability of films for certain audiences. Each rating is intended to provide a general idea of the type of content the audience can expect in a film. The new rating system resulted in another wave of Hollywood films addressing the topic of homosexuality, in which many of them went back to old portrayals based on Hollywood's traditional stereotypes about queer people (Benshoff and Griffin 125). Even though the influence of the Hays Code was relatively limited after it was abandoned in 1968, the impact of the code was still felt as it had left behind a culture

of censorship that filmmakers had to contend with (Doherty 15). While some filmmakers chose to push the boundaries of what was acceptable in their films, others continued to play it safe. During the 1970s, there was a new wave of filmmakers who wanted to explore more controversial and taboo subjects in their films. That in turn led to the creation of films that challenged traditional Hollywood narratives as well as it pushed the boundaries of what was acceptable on screen. These films were often sexually explicit, violent, and politically charged. As a consequence of the scrapped Production Code, Hollywood filmmaking during the years of 1960s and in the beginning of 1970s produced work arguably more radical and experimental than had ever been produced before. However, traditional concepts of Hollywood filmmaking were starting to reestablish themselves by the mid 1970s. In turn, the potential to explore new, complex understandings of sexuality was short lived and its potential never reached (Benshoff and Griffin 121). While some films went back to a negative depiction of homosexuals in their films, there were other films in favor of a more positive diverse queer perspective. However, according to Benshoff and Griffin, “they shocked, confused, and ultimately angered many mainstream viewers” (128). Most of these films “were meant to be dark comedic allegories about American social mores and the sexual hypocrisy” (Benshoff and Griffin 128). While Hollywood films about tragic homosexuals and comedic pansies were tolerated by the mainstream critics, they did not tolerate films that “presented outrageous queer inversions of both traditional (hetero)sexual mores” (Benshoff and Griffin 128). Consequently, the critical backlash would have Hollywood filmmaking throughout the 1970s and 1980s to subside in its experimentation and queer content. While simplistic queer stereotypes would thrive, there would be an avoidance of complex queer characters in films throughout the 1970s (Benshoff and Griffin 128). There were very few films during early 1970s that tried to address queer desire without being judgmental and exploitative. Hollywood discovered that they made more money on reworkings of old Hollywood genre films, such as *The Godfather* (1972) and *The Exorcist* (1973). As a consequence, the films invoked earlier forms of moviemaking, that in turn did not concern themselves with contemporary notions and attitudes of race, gender, or sexuality (Benshoff and Griffin 135).

In the hope of improving the onscreen representation of queer people, the Gay Activist Alliance, along with the National Gay Task Force, set for the entertainment industry to produce better image and release a set of educational guidelines (Benshoff and Griffin 139-140). While

Hollywood was withdrawing from the topic and ignoring the gay rights movement altogether, the need for media representation of queer life was critical. As a result, queer people began to produce their own movies, instead of waiting for Hollywood to mend their ways. Other people would continue in the tradition of making queer underground films, as they had for several decades. By the 1970s, underground cinema changed into new and more sexually explicit forms. However, in order to reclaim the gay and lesbian past, there was a desire to produce films that would document the emerging queer communities of the 1970s. “The aim of these films was multiple. They were meant to unearth historic queer communities that had been formerly overlooked and through that process help define and solidify the struggles of contemporary queers”, according to Beshoff and Griffin (140). Even though some people preferred straightforward documentaries to more experimental ones, some people also preferred traditional Hollywood-style films. Consequently, starting in 1970s, there were several attempts to produce independent, yet conventional, films about contemporary homosexual lives. However, these first gay-narrative films that explored issues related to gay liberation, such as gender norms, heterosexism, and sexual freedom, seem to have been forgotten due to its lack of publicity and success, both in American film history as well as in gay culture (Beshoff and Griffin 153). Unlike the Hollywood scene, independent films explored homosexual themes with more depth and complexity. These types of films made by and for queer people helped to define and consolidate queer communities and laid the foundation of increased criticism of Hollywood’s representation of homosexuality (Beshoff and Griffin 155).

A decade of gay liberation created a new understanding of sexuality in America. More and more people were finding ways to “come out of the closet” and live openly with their sexuality. However, even though there were advances made by the gay liberation movement, there was also an increasing resistance. Christian fundamentalism in the United States sparked a backlash to feminism and gay liberation. That in turn led to the election of Ronald Reagan in 1980, who’s administration and supporters tried to draw back liberal changes that was accomplished (Beshoff and Griffin 160-161). As a reaction and part of the growing backlash on gay liberation, Hollywood brought back old stereotypical queer representations, such as “the killer queer” in slasher movies such as *Dressed to Kill* (1980) (Beshoff and Griffin 162). These types of films did not go without any reactions and met a large public outcry that seemed to register with studio executives. Consequently, producers started lining up movies that attempted

to represent lesbians, homosexual men, and even transgendered characters in a more sympathetic, sensitive, and realistic way (Benshoff and Griffin 165). The reception, as well as production and marketing, of Hollywood's queer films in 1982 reveals a lot about the understanding of sexuality in Hollywood and in the United States during that time. For example, the only openly homosexual person in the production of the film *Making Love* (1982), was the screenwriter named Barry Sandler. No leading film stars would consider starring in a gay movie; thus, the film was cast with television actors. In addition to this, the actors who played gay in the film, frequently stressed that they themselves were not gay in public interviews. Furthermore, studio publicists often tried to distance the films from their queer content, for example by claiming that homosexuality is not the subject or main theme of the movie (Benshoff and Griffin 169). Hollywood's new "gay positive" films did not last very long. The reason for this is arguably because of strong mainstream homophobia that went usually unchallenged in both Hollywood as well as the rest of the United States. According to Benshoff and Griffin, "the nation was in the midst of a reactionary backlash against gay liberation" (169). Yet, there was another growing factor that in turn would influence, not just Hollywood filmmakers, but the whole nation, which was the AIDS crisis. Hollywood's response to the AIDS crisis reflected and mirrored much of society's response. There was a fear and hysteria within the industry, as well as rumor-mongering and renewed homophobia. Because of this, during the mid-1980s, Hollywood's homosexual characters were either downplayed or erased altogether (Benshoff and Griffin 170). While Hollywood effectively ignored AIDS, or only dealt with the subject subtly through references in their films. The 1980s queer films show a common problem with gay and lesbian filmmaking in America, and that is that independent films need to attract a wide audience in order to make profits.

During the 1990s and in the beginning of twentieth century, gay and lesbian people became more and more visible. As a result of the AIDS crisis, many queers had come out of the closet, even if they had preferred to stay hidden, and in turn become more vocal about their civil rights (Benshoff and Griffin 222). Despite this, the 1990s also saw a backlash against the advances in equality, as hate crimes increased. Hollywood was faced by renewed queer activism. The reason for this was because the industry remained resolutely heterosexist. Many queer actors and performers were counseled to keep their sexuality a secret. In addition to this, in order to attract the largest audience possible, the industry consequently aimed to attract the straight

masses rather than gay and lesbian fringes (Benshoff and Griffin 223). Even though more and more people in Hollywood were able to live openly gay or lesbian lives, most of the films and televisions shows the industry produced remained “steadfastly heterosexist”, and sometimes even homophobic. In addition to this, the majority of the openly queer people are working behind the camera, instead of in front of it. Most queer actors in Hollywood were compelled to keep their sexuality private because of the fear that mainstream American audiences would not accept openly queer actors in heterosexual roles (Benshoff and Griffin 226). In the wake of the activism, Hollywood tried once again to include queer characters in its films. However, very few movies were approved by queer critics, arguably because its producers had intentionally done everything in their power to make the films as mainstream as possible, thus; “gay intimacy, romance, and community, are marginalized, and the broader political implications of the AIDS crisis are never addressed” (Benshoff and Griffin 227). To be put in another way, the uniqueness of queer experience was absent from the movies as they were universalized in order to appeal to a wider audience.

In some ways, there had not been many changes in mainstream Hollywood movies since the period of the Production Code. Homosexuality was still being written out of the majority of movies. Despite that Hollywood devoted some of its recourses to queer causes, there was a relatively narrow approach as to storytelling, that in turn made it hard to produce and market films about queers. Overtly gay and lesbian main characters were mostly absent in the mainstream cinema, and once they appear they were often desexualized, depoliticized as well as removed from any sociocultural context. Arguably, television have been far more progressive in bringing queer lives and issues to American mainstream audiences. Furthermore, the queer characters tend to be more varied and complex. Then again, one can argue that tv-shows and tv-series often have one or few target audiences, while Hollywood films are meant for the general public.

4.3 Representation of male sexuality in contemporary films

In order to explore the representation of male sexuality in films in contemporary time, I intend to examine the films *Maurice* (1987), *Brokeback Mountain* (2005), and *Call Me by Your Name* (2017). The film *Maurice* was released in cinemas in 1987. When the film was released, it was initially viewed as a disappointment or diversion by some critics. According to Lodge, the film

was not as valued as it should have been during its time (Lodge “Maurice” 2017b). While the Venice film festival jury was highly taken by it, very few other critics followed their leads. In the article “Maurice at 30: The Gay Period Drama the World Wasn't Ready For”, the film is described as “a tender graceful love story, performed with quiet emotional conviction and crafted with Merchant Ivory’s signature visual serenity and meticulous period detail,” however, the article also explains that the dispassionate reception of the film was due to it being “too gay” for its time (Lodge “Maurice” 2017b). That is to say that the film dealt with a rare subject within prestige heritage cinema, during a time when the mainstream was not very rich with queer art (Lodge “Maurice” 2017b). Even though the film is discreet on sex, the characters are allowed on the screen in the nude. In addition to this, the film also offers a happy ending as the homosexual couple are offered an escape, rather than punishment for their sexuality.

In retrospect, it might not come as a surprise that the reception of *Maurice* was respectful, but nevertheless also dispassionate in 1987. The film was shown in cinemas in the United States during the AIDS crisis. This was very daring given that the nation in the middle of the crisis showed fear and disdain for homosexuals and the “gay” disease. Hence, the issues at that time might have influenced the film’s reception and its success. On one hand, it seems that the mainstream public in the United States did not want to criticize it. People may have found it too controversial to criticize a romantic gay film in the middle of a pandemic that seemed to especially target homosexuals. Even though the film was critically and financially successful, it was not very popular. Neither was the film praised by queer critics, as they found fault with the movie because it did not deal with contemporary queer issues. Considering that the film is a period drama, and its narrative is supposed to be set in Edwardian England, it would not make much sense to address social issues from the 1980s. Then again, this criticism may be due to the fact that Hollywood films ignored the AIDS crisis and other queer social issues in their films, thus queer critics may have found it important to praise films that actually addressed these issues. However, after its release, the legacy of the film has been impactful, in regard to the film’s quality and the boldness of depicting a gay love story during the AIDS crisis.

Eighteen years after *Maurice* came out, the film *Brokeback Mountain* was released in 2005. The film was a commercial and critical success. At the 78th Academy Awards, the film was nominated for eight awards and won for three. While *Maurice* has later been praised for depicting homosexual love during difficult times for the community, *Brokeback Mountain* is one

of the seminal films that brought queer cinema to the mainstream in the 21st century. The film is about the romantic relationship between two American cowboys, Ennis Del Mar played by Heath Ledger and Jack Twist played by Jake Gyllenhaal and set in the American West from 1963 to 1983. According to the article “Brokeback Mountain: Masculinity and Manhood” by James R. Keller and Anne Goodwyn Jones, did the film *Brokeback Mountain* become a cultural icon even before its release in 2005 (21). The film’s screenplay is written by Larry McMurtry and Diana Ossana and based on a short story by Annie Proulx. The script made several rounds in Hollywood over the years, because it was argued to be “too good and too risky” for anyone to produce (Keller and Jones 21).

Before the film’s release, several compromises were made between writers and director in order to guarantee mainstream success. These compromises led to changes that would downplay the narrative’s homosexual thematic (Keller and Jones 22). Because of this, some critics have argued that the main characters Ennis and Jack are not homosexual enough and that the gay element of the narrative has been made too subtle in the pursuit of mainstream success (Keller and Jones 22). According to Keller and Jones, the film’s success “signifies the effort to mainstream homosexuality in the American media – not so much from the position of moral or ethical imperative, but from the position of commerce” (22). That is to say, that homosexual elements within the film have been downplayed in order to make more money of the film.

Even though some critics may argue that the film’s success has come at the cost of the representation of the homosexual identity in the film, *Brokeback Mountain* signifies a successful and progressive step due to the integration of homosexuality within popular cinema. The film is both praised and criticized because the male protagonists are depicted traditionally masculine, despite the fact that they fall in love with each other. According to Keller and Jones, “what makes *Brokeback Mountain* unique is the traditional masculinity of the gay protagonists, and one of the principal markers or constructs of this masculinity involves a filmmaker’s adaptation of the Western genre to the gay subject matter” (23). That is to say that the film is unique in its portrayal of traditional masculine homosexual males, as a result of homosexuality being adapted to the Western film genre. The depiction of masculinity within the film, has in turn had some critics praising the film for its “naturalization” of same-sex love.

However, some critics have found this problematic. The reason for this is because such depictions can be seen as some sort of conformist agenda. That is to say that the films may

encourage homosexuals to conform to mainstream gender norms, values, and ideas such as traditional masculinity within males (Keller and Jones 23). The protagonists hetero-normative gender construction is confirmed throughout the film. Ennis can be described as a hardworking, athletic, reserved, and responsible. Additionally, Jack tries to be a man like his own father, which comes across to the film's audience in the form of his obsession with ownership, dominance, and rodeo success (Keller and Jones 24). Both protagonists appear to be traditionally masculine and try to remain within conventional masculinity. That is not to say that they are hiding alternative personalities or identities behind a masculine gender performance (Keller and Jones 25). Then again, one may argue that the film makes visible a subject that has often been limited within an art house audience. However, the price for this visibility of homosexuality, is that the queer narrative has to be negotiated in order to secure a place within mainstream media (Keller and Jones 32). Thus, the relationship between Jack and Ennis is presented in forms to highlight traditional masculinity. For example, when they first have sex, it is presented in a hyper-masculine form, which differ from the depiction of homosexual sex in traditional gay romances (Keller and Jones 26).

There are several ways to interpret the traditional masculinity within the protagonists of the film. On one hand, one can interpret the film as fighting the stereotypical notion that homosexual men cannot appear or be masculine. However, one may argue that the film does little to disprove gay stereotypes, compared to its broadening of assumptions in regard to traditional manhood. That is to say, that the film can be interpreted as a "story of traditional men who love in spite of their masculinist assumptions and heterosexist paradigms, who love without becoming gay" (Keller and James 33). Even though *Brokeback Mountain* does a lot for the visibility of homosexual desire by demonstrating that same-sex love can be touching and even tragic, the constant efforts during the movie to salvage the protagonists' masculinity succeed in breaking down the homosexual/heterosexual binary by validating poly- or bisexuality (Keller and James 33). The narrative goes back-and-forth between "gay/straight, progressive/conservative binaries, and it erases the line as it passes" (Keller and James 33). One may argue that making homosexual characters appear traditionally masculine, also strengthen the notion that queer love is only "valuable" or "appreciated" if it is conformed within traditional heterosexual norms and values. That is to say, that homosexual males are more appreciated if they appear "straight", by being depicted as conventionally masculine. However, another

interpretation would be that the writers of the film are trying to “dismantle the gay/straight binary in the construction of masculinity within the American Western tradition” (Keller and James 34). That is to say, that they aim to break the notion of a duality between masculinity and same sex desire. Thus, the idealized image of the cowboy, which embodies “rugged outdoor masculinity” in turn creates “some radical possibilities within the construction of gender relations” (Keller and James 34). Despite how one would interpret the film, the fact is that it has had an important role due to its work for the gay community as it has paved the way for other queer films in the mainstream of the 21st century and helped carve the queer cinema landscape that exists today.

During 2017, LGBT cinema was thriving. Thirty years after *Maurice*'s release, the film was renewed for the screens in hope of a warmer reception than in 1987. One of the reasons for this is because the film *Moonlight* (2016) won the best picture Oscar at the Academy Awards. The film *Moonlight* is about a homosexual African American boy who grows up in poverty in Miami. The film's win was barrier-bursting due to the fact that it was a low-budget film featuring all-black characters and depicted complex queerness. Even though the film is not very radical in the history of queer cinema, the film can be regarded as a path-braker (Lodge “After” 2017a). The film's Oscar win suggests that queer cinema might be able to escape its arthouse niche, into the mainstream. Arguably, the film does not stand for this progress alone, it is part of the trend in which LGBT cinema is becoming more visible, building on the success of previous queer films that helped pave the way, such as *Brokeback Mountain* (2005) and *Boys Don't Cry* (1999) (Lodge “After” 2017a). While the film *Moonlight* won an Oscar in 2016, and the film *Maurice* was renewed for cinemas in 2017, James Ivory, the director of *Maurice*, during the year of 2017 was a part of yet another LGBT triumph. Ivory was co-writer on Luca Guadagnino's queer film *Call Me by Your Name* (2017). After the film's release it quickly became part of popular culture. As a consequence, the film has gotten an iconic “gay” status and has been praised by many people within the queer community (Cracker).

However, the progressiveness of sexual representation in the *Call Me by Your Name* compared to the other two films is up for debate. According to Billy Gray, there is a cost of queer elements for the success of a queer film. Thus, the film “feels like a retreat from the sexual frankness of earlier trailblazers like *Brokeback Mountain*, *Shortbus*, and *Blue is the Warmest Color*” (Gray). Gray argues that there is a restraint in the movie in its depiction of same-sex

intimacy, and an overall aversion of homosexual intimacy. While the film depicts “the rush of gay love with all the woozy sensual excess”, *Maurice* on the other hand, true to the period it represents, abstains from this (Lodge “Maurice” 2017b). However, the film adaptation of the novel is stripped of many of the source’s graphic sexual content, such as the notorious passage that includes masturbation (Gray). In his article, Cracker argues that the film is “very straight” (Cracker). One of the reasons for this are because all homosexual sexual scenes take place off screen, while the heterosexual sexual scenes are allowed on screen (Cracker). This suggests that there is a difference between the representation of male sexuality within novels and films. While the novel is sexually explicit, its film adaptations in turn have dismissed some of these graphical scenes.

There are arguably many reasons why it is more acceptable for a novel to be more sexually graphic than a film. One reason is that novels are typically consumed in a private setting, while movies often are viewed in public spaces. Thus, a private person reading a sexually explicit novel is less likely to offend others than a film being viewed in public. One might argue that one can in fact watch a film in the privates of one’s own home, however, Hollywood films are made to be shown in theaters before they get available for online streaming. Thus, it makes sense that films that are to be seen by a bigger audience, may be more conservative than novels that are consumed in private. In addition to this, there are more freedom for authors to explore controversial subjects or taboo subjects in novels than there is for filmmakers, who may be subject to censorship and other restrictions. Furthermore, novels often provide more context and depth to the characters, their motivations, and behavior, which can make sexual content seem more meaningful. Additionally, there may also be less stigma attached to reading a novel with sexually explicit content than there is watching a film.

Finally, another reason why filmmakers choose to erase or downplay sexually graphic queer content may be in order to appeal to mainstream audiences. While *Call Me by Your Name* and *Maurice* arguably restrain themselves in the depiction of same-sex intimacy, *Brokeback Mountain* on the other hand, downplays homosexual identities, in which the main characters are portrayed traditionally masculine. When comparing these films, it seems that they have in common criticism for downplaying queer elements and “universalizing” their films in order to make them more palatable to mainstream audiences.

The universalizing of films might have a negative effect on the representation of sexuality within queer films; “At a time when LGBTQ rights and broader acceptance have required a toll of desexed normality, it is worth asking what compromises have been made to these movies to make them palatable to critics and indie connoisseurs, not to mention wider audiences” (Gray). Universalizing queer films can be problematic because it often involves dismissing or downplaying queer content and themes that are part of what make the queer films unique in the first place. Queer people have a wide range of experiences and identities, which is why it is important that films reflect that. Moreover, filmmakers might rely on stereotypes and clichés in order to make the film more appealing. Thus, the films can sustain harmful stereotypes and restrict the representation of queer representations within films. By trying to appeal to a wider audience, the film might lose some of its authenticity and perspectives that are compelling to the queer audiences. In addition to this, it might strengthen the notion that queer experiences are only valuable when they are pleasant and entertaining for the straight mainstream audiences. Thus, the films might reinforce heteronormativity in the way that they strengthen heteronormative ideas by making it seem like normality. That in turn can reinforce the notion that queer experiences only are valid if they conform to heteronormative standards. This might also lead to exploitation of queer experiences within films, as filmmakers try to make queer films that appeal to everyone, only for commercial reasons. For example, if the main priority of a filmmaker is to gain money and fame from queer stories, it can in turn lead to shallow, wrong, or negative representations of queer people on screen. Thus, it becomes important to support and celebrate films that embrace the complexity and diversity of queer experiences, even if they do not appeal to everyone.

Based on the findings in this chapter, it seems that the progressiveness in regard to the representation of male sexuality in Hollywood films from early twentieth century to contemporary time can be described as swinging. The reason for this is because, with every accomplishment there has also been some backlash as well. As the overview in the beginning of the chapter suggests, because homosexuality is considered deviant by mainstream cultural values, both lesbians and gay men have for the most part of film’s history been made invisible on screen (Mangin 50). According to the literary scholar Daniel Mangin, “This was particularly true in America from 1934 to 1961, when the Motion Picture Production Code prohibition against the depiction of ‘sex perversion or any interference of it’ was strictly enforced” (50). Many of the

films of the 1910s and 1920s were more relaxed in their portrayal of sexuality than those films made after the enforcement of the Hays Code began in earnest (Mangin 50). Perhaps the Hays Code is one of the reasons why *Giovanni's Room*, that was published in 1956, has not yet been adapted into a film such as *Maurice* and *Call Me by Your Name*. While it is argued that the pre-era of the Hays Code was very progressive in its representations of sexuality, during the years of the Code homosexuality was largely prohibited from being depicted on screen. Queer characters were most of the time absent from Hollywood films during this period, and any references to homosexuality were often subtle or implied rather than explicit. Thus, characters were subtly hinted to be homosexuals, such as male characters being portrayed as effeminate or flamboyant, in order to signal to the audiences that he was gay. This type of representation was limited and problematic as it both relied on- and reinforced stereotypes. It was not until the 1960s and 1970s that Hollywood films began to produce films that depicted homosexuality more openly and honestly. However, at this time, there was still a lot of discrimination and stigma against queer people in society at large.

The year of 2017 has often been referred to as the “year of queer cinema” because it saw the release of a number of critically acclaimed films that centered queer experiences and characters, such as *Moonlight* and *Call Me by Your Name*. The success of these films has helped demonstrating that there is a desire for more diverse and inclusive stories in Hollywood, thus they have paved the way for more queer films to be made in the future. However, according to some critics, the films’ success may have come at a cost, as they have been criticized for downplaying the uniqueness of queer elements in order to make them more appealing to the mainstream audiences. If we look at the novel *Call Me by Your Name* and its film adaptation, some of the sexually explicit content from the novel is absent from the movie. On one hand, this can be viewed positively. Because by presenting queer characters and stories in a way that makes it more accessible to a wider audience, it can help break down the social and cultural barriers, as well as promote acceptance of queer identities. As a result, queer films can become part of popular culture. Overall, based on the findings of this chapter, even though the progressive transformation in terms of representation of male sexuality in Hollywood films is by no means complete, there seems to have been a gradual relaxation of the taboos concerning homosexuality on screen. In turn, queer films have gradually become a bigger part of mainstream cinema, and thus, paved the way for more queer content within popular culture in the future.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

In this final chapter I intend to summarize my main point and arguments. The second half of this chapter will be a discussion of my findings and of the relevance of this research.

The overview of queer literature in the beginning of this thesis shows that the subject of same-sex desire in literature can be traced back many centuries. However, due to oppressive laws and negative mainstream attitudes towards homosexuality, the subject of same-sex desire has either been made almost invisible, or it has been avoided altogether in literary works. The fear of persecution and social stigma has restricted writers from publishing works about the controversial topic. Yet, as a result of social movements in the middle of the twentieth century, there seems to have been a gradual change in the mainstream attitudes to being more positive and accepting of homosexuality. As a result, changes were made to repressive laws, such as censorship laws within publishing. These changes opened up the literary landscape so that writers finally could write more openly about same-sex desire and sexuality, instead of using coded references like in the past. By the end of the twentieth century, queer literature was celebrated in the literary landscape. As a result, universities started to offer gay and lesbian literature and culture courses and there was an increase of gay-themed novels to be published from the 1970s and onward.

Overall, it seems that there has been a gradual progressive change to more positive attitudes and acceptance for queer literature, from the beginning of the twentieth century to contemporary time. We also see evidence of this, by the different receptions of the novels. *Giovanni's Room* has become a classic in gay literature due to the fact that it was among the first novels that dealt openly with homosexuality. The novel *Maurice* being published posthumously, a year after Forster's death, reveals the fear among authors to write openly about same-sex love and desire. The reception of the novel in 1971 and the film adaptation in 1987, can be described as ambivalent. However, over time, the novel and movie have been more and more appreciated by critics and the public. Yet, the extreme popularity of *Call Me by Your Name*, both novel and film, suggests a change in attitudes amongst the mainstream public, and has revealed a desire for the depiction of homosexual and bisexual desire in literature and film. The novel's reception and popularity indicate that the representation of male sexuality within literature has gone from being mostly absent or almost invisible, to being depicted openly and celebrated in popular literature and culture.

In addition to the gradual change in mainstream attitudes towards homosexuality, the findings of chapter 2 suggest that there has also been a change in the understanding of sexuality and its depiction in the novels. In *Giovanni's Room*, homosexuality is depicted as filth due to the protagonist's unique American experience and heritage that derives from a puritanical view on morals and purity. One way to interpret the novel is as plea from Baldwin against a harmful society that punishes any sort of otherness or deviance from the mainstream norms. In *Maurice*, homosexuality is depicted as normal and natural, and the novel can be read as a plea for the acceptance of homosexuality during a time and place it was criminalized by English law. In addition to this, the novel seems to fight against certain homosexual stereotypes, such as the notion that all homosexual men are effeminate. Both *Giovanni's Room* and *Maurice* have in common that they depict sexuality within their protagonists as a fixed part of them. That is to say, that their same-sex desire is portrayed as a natural part of them that they cannot change, even if they try to. Overall, the two novels have in many ways fought for the representation of homosexuality in literature, and the overall acceptance of it.

The novel *Call Me by Your Name*, on the other hand, does not label its male protagonist as homosexual, despite the fact that he falls in love- and initiates a romantic relationship with another man. Even though the narrative explores the complications of homosexuality, it also illustrates how sexuality can be fluid, dynamic and non-binary. One way to interpret the novel is as a story about the experiences of one sexually fluid individual, who is attracted to both men and women. Despite this, the sexual label 'bisexual' is never used to describe the protagonist. This suggests that the novel depicts sexuality as non-binary and without the need of sexual labels. Hence, the novel goes beyond the categorizing and labelling of sexuality. Instead, desire can be understood as shifting and dynamic, and in contrast to the other two novels, not as a permanent and unchangeable part of an individual. The differences in the novels' depiction of sexual identity suggest several changes within the notion of sexuality. For one, sexuality and desire are portrayed as fluid and dynamic, rather than fixed. Secondly, sexual identities and categories seem to have matter less and to have become non-binary, and as a consequence, Elio in *Call Me by Your Name* is able to explore his attraction to both men and women.

However, Elio's exploration of his desire to men and women is not portrayed as him being deceitful to himself or others. David in *Giovanni's Room*, on the other hand, is in denial of his homosexuality, which causes him to use women such as Sue and Hella in order to reclaim his

masculinity and heterosexuality. Thus, in *Giovanni's Room* the women are depicted as victims of male sexuality. The reason for this is because they are treated as tools or objects for the male protagonist in order to convince himself and others that he is heterosexual. Similar to Baldwin's novel, the women in *Maurice* can also be read as victims of male sexuality, such as in the case of Clive's wife, Lady Anne. However, the women can be read as threats to male sexuality as well. The character of Mrs. Durham can be interpreted as an extension of the English society and, thus, a threat to her son's sexuality due to her constant pressure on him to marry a woman. The novel suggests that she has a lot to gain by being an facilitator of the patriarchy. Then again, one might argue that she can also be interpreted as a victim by having internalized the patriarchal values of the society, and thereby is unable to see the negative effects of the structures she enables and forces on her son. While Baldwin's and Forster's novels depict women as threats and/or victims of male sexuality as a consequence of heteronormative and patriarchal values within society, *Call Me by Your Name*, on the other hand, depicts women rather as facilitators of the exploration of male sexuality. The women do not seem to be used by the protagonist to conceal his same-sex desire. Even though the novel focuses mainly on the relationship between the male characters Elio and Oliver, it also depicts the protagonist's sincere attraction to Marzia. Consequently, the character of Marzia becomes rather important as part of the narrative in the novel's aim to argue desire and sexuality to be fluid, non-binary and dynamic. The changes in the portrayal of women in terms of male sexuality from victims to facilitators suggest that giving female characters more power and agency has become important in contemporary literature. This may also be a reaction to earlier portrayals of female characters in literature.

Literature has come a long way in its representation of male sexuality compared to Hollywood films. We also see this, by looking at the comparison of the novels and their film adaptations in chapter 4. Arguably, there are several reasons why it is more socially acceptable for novels to be more sexually explicit than films. Even though there has been some progressiveness compared to the years of the Hays Code, there are still room for improvement within the representation of male sexuality in Hollywood films. For example, there seems to have been more progress in terms of sexual representation in other medias such as in television and independent films. However, the film industry is to be praised for introducing queer films to mainstream audiences, and thus making some of them part of popular culture. Some critics may argue that the popularity of queer films has come at the cost of the queer representation in the

works. For example, by downplaying queer elements or content in the films, or by trying to universalize the films in order to make them more appealing to the public. Despite this, universalizing queer films may also promote inclusivity and acceptance of different sexual orientation, which in turn can influence society to become more tolerant. Additionally, it can help to inspire understanding and empathy among the mainstream audience who may not have previously been exposed to the experiences of queer people.

Based on the findings of this thesis, one can argue that the representation of male sexuality in popular culture has with time become more and more progressive. In addition to this, it seems that the mainstream attitudes have become more positive and accepting of other sexual representations than of the heteronormative. However, there is still some issues that need to be addressed. Overall, it seems that people in contemporary society are more open to sexual identity being a spectrum rather than binary and they seem more aware that the sexual labels can be restricting for individuals. This changing and progressive understanding of sexuality, that we also see evidence in the comparison of the novels, can be viewed positively. For one, it seems that the notion of people having to belong to either the hetero- or homosexual category is closer to extinction, which is positive for people who feel like they do not fit into neither category. On the other hand, if these changes were to lead to the total extinction of sexual labels, it would not be as positive. However, if we as a society were to remove sexual labels altogether, it may have a negative effect.

The reason for this is because by claiming “sexuality has no labels”, we are ignoring and/or forgetting the effect of heteronormativity and the discrimination and homophobia as results for its deviance. We would also be ignoring or forgetting the privilege that comes with normality. The consequence of heteronormativity is that it leads to stigmatization and discrimination of non-heterosexual people. As we have seen in the novels and films, every protagonist has experienced shame and anxiety because of their attraction to other men. That in turn has had an negative influence on their idea of self. Sexual orientation, just as any other parts of our identity, influence our overall perception of self. People identify themselves and others through categories such as sex, gender, nationality, ethnicity, and so on. These are all viewed as being parts of who we are as individuals, thus, influence how we view ourselves and others, and in turn, are viewed by others. Which is why when people realize that their sexual orientation deviates from the norm and the majority of people, this can have a negative effect on their idea

of self and self-esteem. Furthermore, by claiming there is no labels, no deviance or no 'otherness', is to ignore the issues of homophobia as well as the prejudice and discrimination of people with same-sex desire that they experience.

Before we can claim sexuality as being without any labels, we have to address the structures and issues such as mainstream homophobia that results in shame, prejudice, and inequality. Moreover, if we were to strip sexuality for all labels and categories, this would lead to less representation of the types of sexualities that are in need for more representation in literature and media, such as homosexuality. In order to disrupt heteronormativity, one should be inclusive and incorporate all types of identities and experiences, in contrast to denying their existence. That way we will be able to address both prejudice and its underlying mechanisms. In contemporary time, people have started to refer to themselves as non-binary in order to transcend the limits within the sexual categories. However, by calling oneself non-binary may in turn lead to the creation of a new binary. That is to say, that it paradoxically insists that other people are in their binaries or categories, because oneself is without category. Thus, today, the term "non-binary" has in many ways become a new type of sexual identity, which defies the original purpose of the term. The solution may not be to create even more categories or a wider spectrum, in order to fit in every different personality. Instead, traditional gender norms should be challenged, and make room for people to explore gender expression and presentation. Gender should be recognized as the social construct it really is. That is to say, instead of creating more categories within a suppressive system, one should abolish the system by challenging its norms, expectations, limitations, and opportunities that is linked to genders.

This discussion and the research of this thesis are relevant as it is consistent with is conversations we have today about masculinity, gender norms and sexual orientation. Giving attention to the representation of male sexuality is significant because it is not very common in literary discussions. Generally, the representation of male sexuality is not paid much attention, and it is very little talked about. There may be several reasons for this, such as social taboo in regard to male vulnerability and emotions, cultural expectations of masculinity, and the historical dominance of male perspectives in literature and media. Another reason might be that the topic is viewed as less relevant or important to the broader social and political discourses, thus is overshadowed by other issues, such as race and class. In addition to this, it might be difficult to address due to the sensitive and personal nature of sexual identity and experience. However, the

discussion of the changes within the representation of male sexuality in popular culture is important because it is not discussed as much as other progressive topics. Furthermore, the discussion may also help challenge stereotypes and assumptions about masculinity and male sexuality by providing a platform for underrepresented voices and perspectives. Moreover, it can promote greater awareness and understanding of the diversity of human experience. As a consequence, it can help to promote and develop critical thinking and reflections about the issues of gender, sexuality, and power, which can inspire to social and political change.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Aciman, André. *Call Me by Your Name*. London: Atlantic Books, 2019.
- Armengol, Josep M. "In the Dark Room: Homosexuality and/as Blackness in James Baldwin's *Giovanni's Room*." *Signs*, vol. 37, no. 3, 2012, pp. 671–93. *JSTOR*, <https://doi.org/10.1086/662699>. Accessed 24 Apr. 2023.
- Baldwin, James, and Caryl Phillips. *Giovanni's Room*. Penguin Books, 2001.
- Benshoff, Harry M. and Sean Griffin. *Queer Images: A History of Gay and Lesbian Film in America*, Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2005. ProQuest Ebook Central, <https://ebookcentral-proquest-com.ezproxy.uis.no/lib/uisbib/reader.action?docID=1354853&ppg=1>. Accessed 8 May 2023.
- Black, Gregory D. "Hollywood Censored: The Production Code Administration and the Hollywood Film Industry, 1930-1940." *Film History*, vol. 3, no. 3, 1989, pp. 167–89. *JSTOR*, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3814976>. Accessed 24 Apr. 2023.
- Bose, Suchandra. "Exploring the Anxiety of Action in Call Me by Your Name". ELLIDS, <http://ellids.com/archives/2019/10/3.1-Bose.pdf>. PDF file. Accessed 2 Oct. 2022
- Breen, Margaret Sönsler. "LGBTQ Literature: 1890-1969". SALEMPRESS. 2015. [https://salempress.com/Media/SalemPress/samples/cilgbtq_samplepgs\[1\].pdf](https://salempress.com/Media/SalemPress/samples/cilgbtq_samplepgs[1].pdf). PDF file. Accessed: 2 Dec. 2022.
- Castleman, Micheal. "The Continuing Controversy over Bisexuality." *Psychology Today*, 15 Mar. 2016, www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/all-about-sex/201603/the-continuing-controversy-over-bisexuality. Accessed 8 May 2023.
- Cracker, Miz. "Call Me by Your Name Is Not a Gay Story. so Why Do Gays Keep Falling for It?" *Slate Magazine*, *Slate*, 28 Nov. 2017, <https://slate.com/human-interest/2017/11/call-me-by-your-name-is-not-a-gay-movie.html>. Accessed 8 May 2023.
- DeGout, Yasmin Y. "Dividing the Mind: Contradictory Portraits of Homoerotic Love in *Giovanni's Room*." *African American Review*, vol. 26, no. 3, 1992, pp. 425–35. *JSTOR*, <https://doi.org/10.2307/3041915>. Accessed 18 Jan. 2023.
- Doherty, Thomas. "SEX, VIOLENCE, AND ADULT THEMES: The MPAA and the Birth of the Film Ratings System." *Cinéaste*, vol. 42, no. 4, 2017, pp. 10–15. *JSTOR*, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/26356782>. Accessed 24 Apr. 2023.

- Dreyer, Yolanda. "Hegemony and the internalisation of homophobia caused by heteronormativity". *HTS Teologiese Studies*, 5 May 2005, 63 (1): 1–18. doi:10.4102/hts.v63i1.197. Accessed 8 May 2023.
- Fisher, Kate. "Family Planning and Sex in Britain 1900–1960." British Library, 23 Oct. 2020, <https://www.bl.uk/womens-rights/articles/family-planning-and-sex-in-britain-1900-1960>. Accessed 8 May 2023.
- Foster, Thomas A. "Deficient Husbands: Manhood, Sexual Incapacity, and Male Marital Sexuality in Seventeenth-Century New England." *The William and Mary Quarterly*, vol. 56, no. 4, 1999, pp. 723–44. *JSTOR*, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2674233>. Accessed 3 Mar. 2023.
- Forster, E. M. *Maurice*. Penguin Books, 2005.
- Grandt, Jürgen E. "INTO A DARKER PAST: JAMES BALDWIN'S 'GIOVANNI'S ROOM' AND THE ANXIETY OF AUTHENTICITY." *CLA Journal*, vol. 54, no. 3, 2011, pp. 268–93. *JSTOR*, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/44325797>. Accessed 2 Oct. 2022.
- Gray, Billy. "Call Me by Your Name, like Moonlight before It, Lacks Explicit Sex. Does That Explain Its Critical Success?" *Slate Magazine*, Slate, 21 Nov. 2017, <https://slate.com/human-interest/2017/11/call-me-by-your-names-lack-of-explicit-sex-may-explain-its-critical-success.html>. Accessed 8 May 2023.
- Harned, Jon. "Becoming Gay in E.M. Forster's Maurice." *Papers on Language & Literature*, vol. 29, no. 1, Winter 1993, p. 49-66. EBSCOhost, search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=aph&AN=9511063115&scope=site. Accessed 8 May 2023.
- Hartree, Anne. "'A Passion That Few English Minds Have Admitted': Homosexuality and Englishness in E.M. Forster's 'Maurice.'" *Paragraph*, vol. 19, no. 2, 1996, pp. 127–38. *JSTOR*, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/43263490>. Accessed 29 Jan. 2023.
- Henderson, Mae G. "James Baldwin: Expatriation, Homosexual Panic, and Man's Estate." *Callaloo*, vol. 23, no. 1, 2000, pp. 313–27. *JSTOR*, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3299564>. Accessed 3 Oct. 2022.
- HISTORY.com Editors. "The Puritans." *HISTORY*, 29 Oct. 2009, www.history.com/topics/colonial-america/puritanism. Accessed 20 Apr. 2023.
- Keller, James R., and Anne Goodwyn Jones. "Brokeback Mountain: Masculinity and Manhood." *Studies in Popular Culture*, vol. 30, no. 2, 2008, pp. 21–36. *JSTOR*, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23416123>. Accessed 6 May 2023.
- Lodge, Guy. "After The Moonlight Fades: What's next for LGBT Cinema." *The Guardian*, Guardian News and Media, 7 Mar. 2017a,

- <https://www.theguardian.com/film/2017/mar/07/moonlight-future-lgbt-movies>. Accessed 8 May 2023.
- Lodge, Guy. "Maurice at 30: The Gay Period Drama The World Wasn't Ready For." *The Guardian*, Guardian News and Media, 19 May 2017b, <https://www.theguardian.com/film/2017/may/19/maurice-film-period-drama-merchant-ivory>. Accessed 8 May 2023.
- Mambrol, Narsullah. "Homosexuality in Literature." *Literariness*, 25 May 2021, literariness.org/2021/05/25/homosexuality-in-literature/. Accessed 2 Dec. 2022.
- Mangin, Daniel. "COLLEGE COURSE FILE: THE HISTORY OF LESBIANS AND GAYS ON FILM." *Journal of Film and Video*, vol. 41, no. 3, 1989, pp. 50–66. *JSTOR*, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20687868>. Accessed 1 May 2023.
- Mark, Joshua J. "Puritans". *WORLDHISTORY.ORG*. 2021. <https://www.worldhistory.org/Puritans/>. Accessed: 3 Mar. 2023.
- Mirkin, Harris. "The Passive Female the Theory of Patriarchy." *American Studies*, vol. 25, no. 2, 1984, pp. 39–57. *JSTOR*, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40641862>. Accessed 20 Apr. 2023.
- Nelson, Emmanuel S. "James Baldwin's Vision of Otherness and Community." *MELUS*, vol. 10, no. 2, 1983, pp. 27–31. *JSTOR*, <https://doi.org/10.2307/467307>. Accessed 2 Oct. 2022.
- Noriega, Chon. "'Something's Missing Here!': Homosexuality and Film Reviews during the Production Code Era, 1934-1962." *Cinema Journal*, vol. 30, no. 1, 1990, pp. 20–41. *JSTOR*, <https://doi.org/10.2307/1224848>. Accessed 1 May 2023.
- Reay, Barry. "Writing the Modern Histories of Homosexual England." *The Historical Journal*, vol. 52, no. 1, 2009, pp. 213–33. *JSTOR*, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40264164>. Accessed 5 Mar. 2023.
- Scott, Darren. "'Neither Film Came Out of Personal Suffering': James Ivory on Maurice and Call Me By Your Name." *The Independent*, 28 Jul. 2018, www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/films/features/james-ivory-interview-maurice-call-me-by-your-name-sequel-hugh-grant-a8463176.html. Accessed 28 Jul. 2018.
- Symondson, Kate. "E M Forster's Gay Fiction." *The British Library*, 25 May 2016, www.bl.uk/20th-century-literature/articles/e-m-forsters-gay-fiction. Accessed 20 Apr. 2023.
- Thomas, Harry. "'Immaculate Manhood': The City and the Pillar, Giovanni's Room, and the Straight-Acting Gay Man." *Twentieth Century Literature*, vol. 59, no. 4, 2013, pp. 596–618. *JSTOR*, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/24246956>. Accessed 2 Oct. 2022.

Vaughn, Stephen. "Morality and Entertainment: The Origins of the Motion Picture Production Code." *The Journal of American History*, vol. 77, no. 1, 1990, pp. 39–65. *JSTOR*, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2078638>. Accessed 24 Apr. 2023.

Wilper, James Patrick. "A Tough Act to Follow: Homosexuality in Fiction after Oscar Wilde." *Reconsidering the Emergence of the Gay Novel in English and German*, Purdue University Press, 2016, pp. 137–52. *JSTOR*, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt1wf4dth.11>. Accessed 12 Mar. 2023.

Wilper, James Patrick. "Sin and Crime." *Reconsidering the Emergence of the Gay Novel in English and German*, Purdue University Press, 2016, pp. 15–48. *JSTOR*, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt1wf4dth.6>. Accessed 12 Mar. 2023.