

the opposite sex that we have for thinking that it ought to be restricted to one partner.

My own view is that many homosexuals really do want monogamy, of a sort.—the serial monogamy now standard among even conservative congregations, where remarriage after divorce is not thought in any way a problem—even when a man leaves his wife and children for a much younger, shapelier woman. All they want is a series with more entries or episodes packed into a much shorter amount of time. They have the same idea of sex and commitment as do many conservatives, only they have changed the time-span and the limit.

On top of which, the homosexuals are only asking the Episcopal Church to do with Scripture and Tradition and the rest of the Anglican Communion what it did in 1976 in approving the ordination of women—which 85 percent of the conservatives approve wholeheartedly. They (the moral innovators) are genuinely surprised that the conservatives continue to condemn one and cheer the other. They are, after all, the theological products of the Church the conservatives helped to create, sustain, and nurture.

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THE MEDIA

Pink Elephants on Parade

by Marian Kester Coombs

More than ever before, homosexual characters and situations are being featured on television. Needless to say, the lay of TV Land is overwhelmingly favorable: cheery, cuddly, cute, and camp.

The first of such programming originated in the formerly Great Britain, either imported directly (*East Enders*, *Absolutely Fabulous*) or adapted to the American small screen (*All in the Family*). This, the French would note, is only to be expected.

Interestingly, a six-week series called *Metrosexuality* ran in the United Kingdom back in 2001, a good two years before Howard Dean stumbled across the term during his campaign for the Demo-

cratic presidential nomination.

Between 1961 and 1970, there existed exactly one American homosexual television character. Between 1971 and 1980, 58 materialized. Between 1981 and 1990, there were 89. Between 1991 and 2000, 306. Since 2000, the rate of unnatural increase has only accelerated.

Does this mean that there are 300 times more “gays” in our society than there were 40 years ago?

The answer to this question depends on one’s theory of homosexuality. In my view, becoming homosexual is primarily a function of flawed embryogenesis: Stress on the mother interrupts the vital action of testosterone upon the male fetus, leaving his brain insufficiently male. This theory explains why there are so many fewer “gay” women than men, why so many lesbians are discretionary or situational (*à la* Anne Heche), and why the homosexual orientation (inversion) is so deeply, intractably rooted in a person’s very being.

By the light of this theory, there are now probably no more—and very likely fewer—homosexuals *per capita* than heretofore, if only because so many of the neurotic women who would have unsexed their male infants in the womb now have abortions instead of children.

Homosexuals, like the poor, have always been with us, a fact of life neither to be celebrated nor hidden, but, in the past, they “passed,” like Cole Porter or like Tennessee Williams, who spun heroines out of his own psyche and its cravings.

The present abundance of homosexual material in the media results, in large part, from the quest to titillate, of course. The problem is that homosexuality, unlike other *outré* sexual situations, is a turn-off to the vast majority of viewers. So, while it may function briefly as a lure, forbidden fruit, to generate buzz for a show, in the long and even the short run, it does not deliver an audience like such truly prurient fare as *The O.C.* and *The Sopranos*.

An even greater part of the reason for the increased visibility of homosexuals in the media is politics, propaganda, and p.r.

In November 1987, the homosexual magazine *Guide* published an article by Marshall Kirk and Erastes Pill called “The Overhauling of Straight America.” A sort of *Protocol of the Elders of Queer* or *Mein Camp(f)*, this document preaches the creation of a cult of “gay” victimization and then

the desensitization of the American public concerning gays and gay rights. To desensitize the public is to help it view homosexuality with indifference instead of with keen emotion. Ideally, we would have straights register differences in sexual preference the way they register different tastes for ice cream or sports games: she likes strawberry and I like vanilla; he follows baseball and I follow football. No big deal. . . .

In no time, a skillful and clever media campaign could have the gay community looking like the veritable fairy godmother to Western Civilization.

A charm offensive very much like that proposed by Kirk and Pill has, in fact, been conducted *via* TV (and movies to a lesser extent). Virtually the only negative portrayal of homosexual behavior has been on *Oz*, an HBO prison drama that depicts homosexual predators behind bars. The majority are straight out of the civil-rights movement’s victimological playbook.

One of the first sympathetic portrayals was in 1994, on *General Hospital*, where an actor playing a homosexual activist melodramatically perished of AIDS, both on screen and off. Such soaps as *All My Children* have provided bathetic story lines for homosexual characters since the 1980’s.

The long-running British soap opera *East Enders* (1985-present) is famed for introducing characters drawn from the margins of London life, such as Pakis and West Indians outspoken in their lack of gratitude for the blessings of the British social order. So the show’s pioneering use of multiple homosexual characters, male and female, is all in the game.

Armistead Maupin’s insipid *Tales of the City*, originally a San Francisco newspaper series, inspired a British-financed dramatization in 1993 that did not spread to the United States until later. In the course of three endless sets of tales, it provided employment for quite a few happy campers, including Lance Loud (the homosexual son of the family that pioneered reality TV) and Sir Ian McKellen.

The Clinton years were a bonanza for “gay” characterizations. *Northern Exposure* not only situated itself in an Alaskan town founded by two lesbians but, in 1994, staged one of TV’s first “gay weddings.”

Beverly Hills 90210 had several ho-

mosexual characters, as does *Melrose Place* (1992-99), *Friends*, *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (which boasts lesbian witches), *ER* (series regular Dr. Maggie Doyle came out in 1997), the salacious teen soap *Dawson's Creek*, *The West Wing*, *Ally McBeal*, MTV's *The Real World*, and *Six Feet Under*.

On the otherwise macho *Nash Bridges*, Nash's sister is a lesbian. Several reality shows, such as *Survivor* and *Big Brother*, have featured homosexual participants.

Queer As Folk is a British television program that first aired in 1999 with a cast of urban homosexual friends that include a lesbian couple and their "son." After testing the waters across the pond, the series begat an American version, transposed from Manchester, U.K., to Pittsburgh, PA, which has been shown regularly on cable since 2000. *In the Life*, an extremely graphic talk and variety show for homosexual audiences, began airing as early as 1992 on PBS, where it may still be found.

Most programming has been aimed at homosexual men, but it is interesting to note that the first show with an "out" homosexual star on American TV was *Ellen*, broadcast from 1994 to 1998. Ellen DeGeneres formally came out at the end of the 1996-97 season; her series was cancelled because of low ratings less than a year later.

The fate of Rosie O'Donnell's talk show (highly rated until its star began to make a nuisance of her homosexuality), coupled with the fate of *Ellen*, suggests that, while audiences may feel less threatened by lesbianism than by male homosexuality, they also find it less attractive, less "must-see." Survey after survey has shown that, of all groups, lesbians have the lowest sex drive and the fewest "partners." But why let facts get in the way of the agenda? Showtime is producing a series called *The L Word*, full of beautiful lesbians (played, for the most part, by straight actresses) who "sleep around" nonstop. The (lesbian, of course) reviewer for the *New York Times* notes this "fantasy" level of sexuality and manfully adds that she's "not complaining"—but she is, no doubt, wondering where these dames have been all her life.

The first show to feature a homosexual lead after the *Ellen* debacle was *Will & Grace* on NBC. Airing from 1998 to the present, it features Eric McCormack as Gay Everyman Will Truman (nice name), Debra Messing as Grace, Debbie Reynolds as Grace's Jewish mother,

and Sean P. Hayes as the series' resident (and contrasting) flaming femme, Jack.

An episode that aired on December 11, 2003, suffices to convey the flavor of *Will & Grace*. "The only thing getting me through the holidays," whines Will, is good tickets to the Barry Manilow concert. To get to meet "the Manilow," Will flirts with the stage manager, whose *quid pro quo* is that Will come with him on a "date" to Philadelphia, the City of Brotherly Love.

Apart from flogging two conceits that demonstrate sitcoms' origin in a simpler, more human time—first, that, in a large city, you will run into everyone you know in the space of one block and 15 minutes; second, that strangers will chat you up amusingly rather than pretending, successfully, that you do not exist—the episode manages in only one half-hour to vamp on Debbie Reynolds, make light of "gay" sexual blackmail, and mock "the holidays" ("The holidays are all about misery . . . and obligation . . .").

"She's the yin to my yang—I just can't actually put my yang in her," quipped *Will & Grace* star Eric McCormack when interviewed on Bravo *apropos* of his co-star Debra Messing, to much appreciative laughter. Bravo is the premier "gay" television network. Its movie choices reflect this, as does its original programming (*Queer Eye for the Straight Guy*) and the first homosexual reality-dating series (*Boy Meets Boy*).

In terms of creating a warm and fuzzy image of homosexuals for mass consumption, *Queer Eye* is sheer brilliance. Carson, Todd, and the rest of the Fab Five appear harmless, adorable and oh-so-helpful—like Mammy in all those Hollywood fables. You would never dream what they would like to do to the unsuspecting straight whom they are salvaging for his wife or girlfriend; only a few random, mocking hints in the aftermath of the makeover remain to suggest the great divide between "breeders" and those "in the life."

If proof were needed that homosexual themes are critical—not popular—favorites, the AIDS-apotheosizing miniseries of Tony Kushner's play *Angels in America* has not even been released theatrically but made it onto 2003's top-ten lists of several influential film critics and, of course, dominated the Golden Globe Awards.

Two recent publicity coups have given heart to homosexual media activists: the openly homosexual Richard Hatch's win in 2000 of the Malaysian round of

the reality show *Survivor*, and the prominent role of openly homosexual Sir Ian McKellen as the wizard Gandalf in the wildly successful *Lord of the Rings* film trilogy.

Sir Ian has been so emboldened by his celebrity that he actually appears at rallies crying, "Come out! Come out and join us!" to all and sundry. Yet his performance as Gandalf clearly shows he is aware that, if there were anything the least bit lascivious about the wizard's affection for hobbits, audiences would recoil in horror.

It is one thing to flirt with young actors on a movie set; it is quite another to imply that underlying Sam's devotion to Frodo, for example, is sexual desire. At the end of *The Return of the King*, as Frodo embraces Sam for the last time before he departs for the West, deeply kissing his brow, the scene's power depends on the purity and spirituality of their comradeship. So does male bonding in the real world of power.

In the end, that is just what homosexuals cannot fathom: They really do not understand that normal men do not have, as Andrew Sullivan has expressed it, "the deepest emotional need" for sodomy. Thus, having the hero suddenly kiss his buddy on the lips is not exciting but repulsive. No matter how many times you show it, it just does not make any converts; in fact, the less you show it, the better.

What is fueling the homosexual makeover of American culture?

Societies with an excess of men are reputed to be undemocratic, rigidly hierarchical, and ruled essentially by homosexual cliques. What of societies with an excess of women? There are, in the United States, 28 million single women over age 30, compared with only 17 million single men. How do 11 million excess women affect the social order?

Simply put, men can be as pathetic as they want and still find eager female takers, at every stage of life. Part of being "pathetic" is toying with homosexuality, metrosexuality, whatever you want to call it. The truth may not be that men are more passionately interested in other men than they used to be but that men are less passionately interested in women than they used to be—a matter of supply and demand.

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Character Is Fate

As Heraclitus concluded so has Andre Dubus III: Character is fate. By way of illustration, in 1999, Dubus gave us his hypnotic novel *House of Sand and Fog*, the story of three very different characters weaving together their individual fates to disastrous effect. Reading this narrative is like being transfixed by a hissing cobra. You know the deadly strike is coming, but you dare not avert your eyes, even for an instant.

I am in debt to first-time feature director Vadim Perelman for translating this novel to the screen. Had he not, I might never have read it. Its cover bears a seal identifying it as an Oprah's Book Club selection, a testimonial that usually works on me as a *cordon sanitaire*. My one regret is that I read the novel just before seeing the film. Doing so threw Perelman's exceptional movie into partial eclipse, for, as good as it is, it cannot compete with the spell cast by the text. Perelman has not found a fully satisfactory cinematic equivalent to Dubus' use of alternating points of view. The book brings us inside its characters' minds by having two of the principals relate in their own voices what they are experiencing as they push each other ever closer to the edge of a moral precipice. Their opposing perspectives intensify the narrative's conflict immeasurably.

Both novel and film aspire to the condition of classic tragedy, but with this difference: Dubus gathered his materials not from the precincts of the highest and mightiest but from the experiences of fairly ordinary people caught up in the middle of American life today. Two pieces of information clicked together for him. One was a news report about a 70-year-old woman who lost her house to county officials for allegedly not paying her taxes. The other came from an acquaintance, a former officer in the Iranian military who had fled to America after the 1979 revolution and had to settle for a financially straightened existence. His imagination thus sparked, Dubus transformed the 70-year-old into the 36-year-old Kathy Lazaro (Jennifer Connelly), a recovering alcohol and cocaine addict whose reckless inattention to her responsibilities results in the loss of the beach-

side bungalow her father left her. When her husband leaves her, she becomes so despondent that she ignores county notices regarding overdue taxes that she has been assessed in error. One morning, the sheriff shows up and evicts her. In short order, her home is sold at auction to an Iranian émigré down on his luck in his adoptive country. Middle-aged Col. Masoud Amir Behrani (Ben Kingsley), late of the shah's air force, has been living well beyond his means in San Francisco on the dwindling funds he managed to take with him when he hastily fled his country. Unable to find work in the aerospace industry, he is reduced to holding two minimum-wage jobs. By day, he serves in the state highway's litter patrol; by night, he is a convenience-store clerk. Knowing nothing of Kathy or her woes, he buys her house as an investment property, hoping to recoup his family's fortunes. At first, his purchase seems like the American dream. Expecting to double his money, he is amazed to discover that the bungalow can command nearly four times the \$45,000 that he paid for it. There is just one problem: Kathy. She hires a lawyer to inform the colonel that the house was auctioned in error and should be returned to her, its rightful owner. The colonel is incensed at first, concluding that he has been made a victim of bureaucratic incompetence, prejudicial injustice, or both. Then he hits upon a simple solution. Through Kathy's lawyer, he notifies the county that he is willing to surrender the house for its market value — \$170,000. When the county balks at his proposal, he puts out a for-sale sign, and prospective buyers begin flocking to him.

As in Sophocles' *Antigone*, the conflict is not between right and wrong. Far more incendiary, it is between right and *right*. Kathy's claim on her property is indisputable. But the colonel also has justice on his side. In purchasing the bungalow, he has put his money at risk and absorbed the costs of moving his wife and son into the new residence in order to escape the punishing \$3,000-per-month rent he had been paying at the upscale, largely Iranian-occupied apartment house in which his wife had insisted they live. Furthermore, he has started renovations. Not sur-



House of Sand and Fog

Produced and distributed
by DreamWorks

Directed by Vadim Perelman
Screenplay by Vadim Perelman and
Shawn Lawrence Otto from
the novel by Andre Dubus III

prisingly, he feels entitled to a fair profit. A rational solution is at hand, if only he and Kathy could step back and take the time necessary to assess their respective positions. Neither has much time to spare, however. Without savings, Kathy has nowhere to stay but motels, which she cannot afford. For his part, the colonel has quit his jobs and staked what remains of his resources on realizing a profit from selling the house so that he can buy a business. Having suffered brutal dispossession himself, courtesy of Ayatollah Khomeini, he cannot afford to sympathize with Kathy's predicament. When she shows up on his doorstep imploring him to do the right thing, he assures her that it is none of his business and that she should instead take the matter up with the county tax-assessor's office. He assumes that, one way or another, she will gain satisfaction and, more than likely, profit substantially by suing the government. His position seems reasonable, if a touch cold. Given Kathy's willfulness, however, it turns out to be a grave miscalculation. Although her legal-aid lawyer instructs her to stay away from the house and to let official proceedings go forward, Kathy is incapable of such patience. She returns repeatedly — first peacefully, then disruptively. Loudly and publicly, she accuses the colonel of stealing her home, short-circuiting his chances of making a quick sale. To up the ante, Kathy has enlisted the extralegal assistance of Deputy Sheriff Lester Burdon (Ron Eldard), who could