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Screen Queer: Analysis of image through the lens of *mise-en-scène* and Queer Theory

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Screen Queer: Analysis of image through the lens of mise-en-scène and Queer Theory.

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I dedicate this work to all of those who are brave enough to do what makes them happy despite the world's bitter judgment.

Dedicatória

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[Porto, 26.03.24]

[Diana Moutinho]

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Resumo

[máximo 300 palavras]

Este trabalho examina três filmes diferentes nos quais estão representadas três igualmente diferentes experiências queer. A análise é feita tendo em consideração o trabalho visual, isto é, uma análise de mise-en-scène que inclui: ângulos da câmera, cor, vestuário e todo o enredo (ações por parte das personagens, palavras, expressões faciais)

Através dos trabalhos de Judith Butler, Foucault e estabelecendo uma ligação entre a imagem e as Teorias Queer, este estudo demonstra como os filmes escolhidos são exemplos de uma representação positiva da experiência queer, o que difere do que normalmente é perceptível quando consideramos o anterior e também atual portefólio cinematográfico associado a queerness.

Palavras-chave: [Filmes, Queer, Mise-en-scène, Butler, Foucault]

Abstract

[máximo 300 palavras]

This paper examines three different films which portray three also different queer experiences. The analysis is made taking in account the visual work, meaning, an analysis of *mise-en-scène* including: camera angles, colour, costume and the overall plot (character's actions, words, facial expressions)

By the means of the works of Judith Butler, Foucault and by establishing a link between the visual and Queer Theories, this study shows how the selected cinematographic works are examples of a positive representation of the queer experience which differs from what is commonly perceived when taking in account the previous as well as the current cinematic portfolio related to queerness.

Key-words: [Films, Queer, Mise-en-scène, Butler, Foucault]

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Introduction

I would like to start with my personal take on the reasoning behind my choice of theme. Cinema has always been a topic of interest for me from the first time I stepped foot inside a cinema room all the way through my last time stepping outside of one after watching *Oppenheimer* (Christopher Nolan, 2023). There is so much of our world that gets captured and translated to the big screen that it would be foolish to deny that there is no better art form for reading and reimagining reality and ourselves than Cinema.

After spending years roaming through pages of narrative, theatre, and poetry I felt it would be a great challenge to venture into the interpretation of image. The knowledge I gained during the first module of my “Cultural Studies” class and the experiences I had while writing the class’s final paper motivated a curiosity I felt needed to be fulfilled. As for the choice of queer cinema, the intent was to step outside the box and look for a subcategory within cinematography that I felt needed more exploring and understanding not only from the public but mostly from myself. I confess that in recent years my knowledge of what it is queer and queer theory has expanded not only due to some of my lectures during the Master’s but also because of my own exploration and engagement with it- an example is my discovery a few years ago of the tv show “Ru Paul’s Drag Race” on Netflix.

When it comes to the choice of films, my intention was to have as much variety as possible, therefore I wanted to analyse 3 films that captured a transgender, gay and lesbian experience. After doing some research for the possible candidates it became clear that when it came to male and male relationships, the film narrative seemed to revolve around the same conjuncture- an unhappy ending. For example, *Brokeback Mountain* (2005), the protagonists are unable to experience their relationship openly resorting to a hidden love affair; *Call Me by Your Name* (2017), young Elio and Oliver’s relationship does not evolve past a summer love romance as Oliver goes back home to marry a woman; among others. In the search for a gay film (male couple) that did the opposite and presented us the possibility for a happy turn of events, meaning a

“more” positive representation, I found *God’s Own Country* (2017), a romance between John and a migrant worker Gheorghe set in the beautiful landscape of the British countryside that results in happy and prosperous ending for the couple. Also, the fact that this is an independent film made with a lower budget also contributed to my choice since I already knew that my two other choices were considerably much “bigger” films and as mentioned before I wanted to diversify as much as possible.

As for a lesbian representation, *Carol* (2015) was the obvious choice. I had first seen the film a year or two after it had been released, while sitting on my sofa at home and I remember admiring the way it was shot and the beautiful images it produced.

However, at that time I don’t believe I had fully understood what it intended to portray. Now, years later and with a wider perspective, I found more layers to uncover. As I mentioned, the way the film is shot, the scenery of nineteen fifties New York and the inspiring and courageous actions from both Therese and Carol that through the exploration of their love evolve and blossom as individuals, make it the perfect subject of analysis.

Moreover, *The Danish Girl* (2015) I must admit was also a quick selection for it speaks of a true-life story of a transgender woman. Plus, I have always admired the work of Eddie Redmayne and seeing him playing the role of Lili was from my point of view intriguing to analyse. However, I’m well aware of the controversy surrounding the casting for this film. Such matter is mentioned in one of the documentaries I watched and that is part of this thesis filmography, entitled “Disclosure: Trans lives on Screen” (2020), where actress and transgender woman Jen Richards explains:

“ When someone like Eddie Redmayne who admittedly might give a really great performance as a trans woman...what’s remarkable about his performance is the transness, is the way that he’s been able to manifest those feminine parts of himself into a convincing trans performance, but it reduces that person, in this case, who was a real person, to a performance of transness, to a performance of femininity, rather than as a whole person, of whom transness is one aspect of.” (Disclosure: Trans lives on Screen, 1:02:52)

Also, in an article from The Guardian, transgender actress Yasmin Finney when speaking of Trans representation in media mentions the case of Eddie Redmayne in “The Danish Girl”, stating that:

“He gave such a great performance. I don’t have a problem with that. What I have a problem with is when people search up the cast for The Danish Girl and they see Eddie Redmayne isn’t trans and it was all a lie. Sadly, it creates this image for trans people that we aren’t actually what we say we are.” (Rachel Aroesti, The Guardian interview: “I’m in awe” transgender actor Yasmin Finney on joining Doctor Who, 24 May of 2022)

Another important aspect to mention is the dates of release of my chosen films: 2015 and 2017. During this period, important events for queer history and queer rights took place, specially in the United States of America. Same sex couples were given the right to wed by the Supreme Court, public opinion and popular culture became more open and acceptive of same sex relationships and transgender identities, a big number of openly gay state officials were elected, and anti- discrimination laws were being created in the hopes of being passed. These efforts amongst others sparked up the long existing talk about queer people and their rights which clearly influenced culture in general and therefore the media such as film- explaining the prominence of queer cinema around that time.

Additionally, around the same period (2017), the Me Too Movement, responsible for bringing awareness to the issue of sexual harassment and sexual abuse for women in the workplace, regained its importance as a response to public news outlets accusing American producer Harvey Weinstein of sexual abuse. What started off with a tweet by American actress Alyssa Milano, spread to a large-scale social media movement aiming to raise awareness, empower and give a voice to the survivors and even propelled changes within the work environment and cultural mentality. One of those propelling changes was the ban of non-disclosure agreements that for years had allowed for unprofessional acts to be hidden and the overall efforts in order to stop the narrative and implement correct behaviour.

The aim of my thesis is to analyse the three previously referred films: “The Danish Girl”, “Carol”, and “God’s Own Country” mostly by means of mise-en-scene and queer theory. Firstly, I will begin with the theoretical part by approaching mise-en-scène history and its practical appliance to film techniques. And it is through the lens of mise-en-scène supporting my arguments in the works of Bordwell and Gibbs. that I will analyse different scenes from the films. To further elaborate my study of the visual works, I will put in use the theories of sexuality and dream symbols provided by Sigmund Freud in his works. Then, I will explore queer theory and also feminist theory giving a background perspective of their evolution and more importantly focusing on the works of Judith Butler and Foucault which I will then apply when interpreting the three films in regard to their socio-cultural environments and overall plot and characters’ choices / actions. Later, I will provide a comparison between the three films discussing what are the points in common and how they are unexpectedly connected.

1. Mise-en-Scène: Theory

The term *mise-en-scène*, when applied to film theory, can be described as a concept “central to a developed understanding of film” (Gibbs, 15). This concept is used to describe the visual elements present on the screen and how they are arranged and interconnected. These elements can include lighting, camera angle, costume, décor, actors, framing, movement, among others. The way in which said elements are organized on the screen reflects not only the interaction between the actors themselves but also with the cinematic elements that surround them, such as their relationship with the camera and by default the audience’s point of view- it is a visual method of communication. As described by Gibbs: “Mise-en-scène therefore encompasses both what the audience can see, and the way in which we are invited to see it.” (15)

When speaking of *Mise-en-Scène*, an important notion to have in consideration is the one of coherence. In film, a body of work can be depicted as coherent all throughout, from beginning to end, which mostly is related to the presence of visual motifs “an element which acquires significance through repetition.” (Gibbs, 59) or as having specific moments of coherence between individual elements of *Mise-en-scène* and thus creating a powerful effect. In regards to Horizontal Coherence, one example of this can be found in the film “The Danish Girl” by Tom Hooper. The presence of the landscape painting from beginning to the end of the film, either in painting form or in its natural form, serves as a powerful symbol of the character’s evolution from Einar to Lili and its constant presence all throughout the film grants it with meaning. We as an audience are consciously or unconsciously given all the necessary tools to make associations between those cinematic elements which become inscribed with meaning and therefore leads us to a better and more complex understanding of the visual work. Moreover, the strategies used in *Mise-en-Scène* can either generate a sense of involvement or detachment in their audience, as explained by Gibbs: “can be extremely moving and, simultaneously, encourage us to look beyond the characters to understand the larger forces that shape their behaviour.” (Gibbs, 97) All this is possible due to the close connection between *mise-en-scène* and “point of view”, more

specifically, the audience's point of view. An audience's point of view can be determined by different aspects: first, the spatial perception, referring to how we are physically placed by the camera to observe the action; second, the cognitive perception, concerning the amount of narrative information we are fed as well as the characters; third, evaluative perception, touching on the opinions and judgments we created about the characters and their actions as the plot develops.(Gibbs,108)

Furthermore, the act of "staging an action" involves the conscious work of positioning the elements of a set. Firstly, the setting itself, whether it might be natural or constructed, can significantly influence our perception of the action (Bordwell et al. 174). For example, the way colour is utilized in a set can almost instantly advise in regards to the characters emotional stage or even further support a narrative development (Bordwell et al. 175). In Tom Hooper's *The Danish Girl* colour is a powerful element used in *mise-en-scène* to support the character's evolution (The Danish Girl will be discussed from this perspective on page 33). The importance of colour can also be connected with costume, which just like the set has the ability to "furnish the film's ongoing narrative system" (Bordwell et al. 176). The evolution of the character Lili, meaning from Einar to Lili, is supported by the evolution of colour: Einar's life, his house, wife, clothes and work space are filled with the colours grey, blue, green. On the opposite, as Lili blossoms more and more the tones surrounding her are those of yellow/orange.

Secondly, the lighting and how it is manipulated strongly define which objects come into our focus and which ones are to remain in the background. Objects are shaped by lighting through the dynamic that is created between what is highlighted and what is left in the shadow , therefore we are given visual information that helps us to determine the space, the level of importance of an object/character and its shape and texture (Bordwell et al. 178). Thirdly, the screen space and how it is arranged has a massive impact in our interpretation of the two-dimensional image. As viewers we are susceptible to any changes that might occur on screen thus any difference in movement, balance, colour and even size are easily noticeable which allows for the filmmaker to guide us as they well intends across the space of the frame. This

technique is very much present in Todd Haynes' film *Carol*, where unbalanced shots provide an understanding of the characters' positions of power towards others but also their overall emotional experience. For example, most times when Carol and Therese are eating/sitting at a table together, there is a clear unbalance of the screen since Carol is given the majority of the screen space and positioned at a higher level than Therese, indicating her maturity and power over the young girl.

When referring to *Mise-en-Scène* in film, it can also be discussed that this cinematic element is one of the possible strategies used to define the filmmaker as the artist responsible for the visual work rather than the screenwriter since "mise-en-scène encompasses the areas of decision making for which the director is responsible" (Gibbs, 79). When it comes to its association to Hollywood Cinema, it can be said that this association is due to the fact that *mise-en-scène* allowed for popular cinema to become more respected and it is precisely by analysing Hollywood films through the lens of *mise-en-scène* that its attributes become more noticeable and desirable (Gibbs, 88). *Mise-en-scène* is ultimately a crucial tool for film criticism which aimed to "understand the relationship between a film's meanings and the evidence of the screen" therefore it allowed for "a more profound sense of how films work." (Gibbs, 89).

2. Queer Theory

The term “Queer Theory” was first employed in the work of Teresa de Lauretis entitled “Queer Theory: Lesbian and Gay Sexualities” , where she defends that Queer Theory has the ability to join Feminist, Lesbian and Gay theories into one, in such a way that will forever change our perceptions of sexuality. It is as Lauretis explains: “ to rethink the sexual in new ways, elsewhere and otherwise.” (26)

Even though queer theory originated in the academic sphere, it is important to note that its emergence is intimately related to the rise of several cultural movements such as its ancestor Feminism, the Gay Rights Movement, Post-Structuralist Theory, AIDS activism amongst others. All these movements brought to light the possibility of a non-normative way of thinking able to surpass a traditional way of viewing politics of sexual identity. Queer Theory advocates that there is no such thing as the “norm” or being “normal”, but constantly shifting normalities one could possibly identify with thus refuting all binary thought that leads to sentiments of inequality. Furthermore, another characteristic that defines this way of thinking is its potential for being ever evolving, a perk that brings much appeal to this theoretic wave of thought. Therefore if “ queer lives up to its radical potential- and does not solidify as merely another acceptable (though oppositional) category- its ongoing evolutions cannot be anticipated: its future is- after all- the future.” (Jagose, 6)

Taking into consideration what was mentioned before, it is important to acknowledge the role of Feminism in paving the way for Queer Theory. A key moment to bear in mind is the emergence of intersectionality during Third Wave of Feminism, when Kimberlé W. Crenshaw (1989), an American jurist, created this concept and defined it as a structure capable of problematizing how different levels of discrimination can overlap each other and interconnect in such a way that it is almost impossible to determine if one mode of discrimination has priority over the other or for that matter to acknowledge one without the other. Therefore, one cannot

concentrate on only one single category of human identity- there is much more beyond race and gender to be discovered.

Furthermore, a concept that is equally important to discuss is the one of heteronormativity. Heteronormativity is defined as the presupposition that heterosexuality is the norm thus all other expressions of sexuality are defined as unnatural and wrong. Hand in hand with this prerogative comes the belief in a binary system where only two sexes, men and women can possibly coexist. This notion has powerful implications for it fabricates institutions like the institution of marriage and promotes a set idea of how sexuality should be governed- which are then ingrained in our everyday lives and in the institutions that rule our society. As explained by van der Toorn: “Heteronormative assumptions are ubiquitous in the daily experiences of both children and adults, leading them to routinely face—and frequently reinforce—such expectations. Accordingly, heteronormativity is the lens through which the world is viewed and, importantly, through which it is evaluated and judged”(160). Indeed, heteronormative is the mind set behind the judgement and exclusion towards other forms of gender and sexual expression outside the man/woman dynamic, which is why Queer Theory, aiming to disrupt any polarizing and dominant binaries that threat the possibility of inclusion and openness, has actively gone against it.

When thinking of Queer Theory, a key figure to take into consideration is Judith Butler. Judith Butler’s work, namely, *Gender Trouble* contributed massively to deconstructing previous set notions of universality of a woman and introduced a crucial concept of gender performativity. To begin with, the premise that a woman is a universal identity (defended by Feminists such as Simone Beauvoir) is criticized by Butler, for woman are all different, they experience and come from different backgrounds and contexts, making it unrealistic to unify female as one single entity, such difference is therefore extended to the physical body as well: “My suggestion is that the presumed universality and unity of the subject of feminism is effectively undermined by the constraints of the representational discourse in which it functions.” (Butler, 6)

Moreover, concepts such as sex and gender many times become inadvertently linked resulting in a transformation of what is biological into a social construction, as explained by Butler: “ If the immutable character of sex is contested, perhaps this construct called “sex” is as culturally constructed as gender;” (9). There seems to be some sort of fixation with our biological sexed bodies which enhances the idea that there is more to it than a simple biological function- this concern is highlighted by Butler as being something which gains social value.

When it comes to gender performativity, if , as previously mentioned, gender and sex both become social constructs then the idea that there is a “stable essence” within each one of us, namely women, is nothing more than: “an illusion discursively maintained for the purposes of the regulation of sexuality within the obligatory frame of reproductive heterosexuality”(186). Thus, by contesting this way of thinking and defending that gender is a constant shifting mechanism, Butler argues that there is no unique single identarian element to the self, gender is nothing more than an action, a series of behaviours we choose to accomplish on a daily basis. The social norms that define these behaviours of gender as natural give it its quality of being performative for it is a reality that is constructed but willingly accepted by us- we play along. On the other hand, it has the potential for also being harmful for those who deviate from the social gender norms , who are viewed as rebels who are misbehaving. Children are specially affected by these imposed social constructions and from an early aged are told what they are and how they should act “perform” taking in account their gender. As explained by Butler:

To the extent the gender norms (ideal dimorphism, heterosexual complementarity of bodies, ideals and rule of proper and improper masculinity and femininity, many of which are underwritten by racial codes of purity and taboos against miscegenation) establish what will and will not be intelligibly human, what will and will not be considered to be “real,” they establish the ontological field in which bodies may be given legitimate expression.(xxiv,xxv)

Gender is also seen as performative due to the fact that an “audience” is present. We are exerting daily reminders of our gender by the way we express

ourselves through our clothes, words, physical movements among others. And all of this is done in the presence of other individuals. Thus, gender norms beyond having the power to create harmful situations, can as well generate a series of stereotypes that can contribute to acts of discrimination and exclusion. To demonstrate the coercive capability of gender norms, Butler gives the example of Gay people: “Gay people, for instance, may be discriminated against in positions of employment because they fail to “appear” in accordance with accepted gendered norms. And the sexual harassment of gay people may well take place not in the service of shoring up gender hierarchy, but in promoting gender normativity”(xiii).

Overall, Butler’s discourse regarding sex, gender and gender performativity forces us to analyse more critically certain circumstances of patriarchal society that even though are described as normal, fail to include all different types of human identarian features.

Another important figure to mention in Queer Theory is Michel Foucault, whose thoughts on sexuality as a social construct and the relation between sex, sexuality and power have impacted and also influenced and continues to influence ideas within the discourse of Queer Theory. As stated by Tamsin Spargo: “Foucault can be seen as a catalyst, as a point of departure, an example and antecedent but also as a continuing irritant, a bit of grit that is still provoking the production of new ideas” (10).

Foucault’s views on sexuality and power began as an opposition to what is called the “Repressive Hypothesis”, a social theory that defends that during the seventeenth century, the bourgeoisie was responsible for repressing sexual desires in the name of economic development, thus sexual actions were only be performed in the name of procreation. According to Foucault, even though efforts were made towards repressing sexuality, there is evidence that shows that sexual discourse in fact increased during this restrictive period. Bearing this in mind, Foucault began to analyse the dynamics between knowledge and power- how much of our knowledge is being influenced by others and how this control gives them (e.g. institutions) power over us and consequently our bodies. He took this wave of thought even further by acknowledging its presence in all relationships. Taking in account how our knowledge

can be determined by outside sources, namely our knowledge of sexuality, Foucault defends similarly to Butler that “sexuality is not a natural feature or fact of human life but a constructed category of experience which has historical, social and cultural, rather than biological, origins.” (Spargo, 12). Therefore, what may seem to us as a natural “born” characteristic of the self is indeed the result of a predetermined social and institutional discourse.

Foucault also mentions Psychoanalysis as a way for us to obtain knowledge about our sexuality, a knowledge that comes from a cultural rather than a natural source therefore gives continuity to the notion that power relations are established between the individual and society (Spargo, 14). Furthermore, the conception of what it is a “healthy sexuality” also took place during the ruling of the bourgeoisie, allowing for it to be proliferated within society so much so that it started to be understood as a crucial characteristic of one’s identity. Indeed, sexual preference is associated with individual behaviour, meaning taking in account one’s sexuality we are expected to behave in a certain way- this association is a result of the social constructs that shape personal thought. All in all, Michel Foucault’s conceptions of sexuality as a social construct by means of relations of power contributed massively to rethink the way in which sexuality is perceived and how much of it is actually controlled by the social and not the individual, as explained by Spargo: “ This does not mean that Foucault ruled out any biological dimension, but rather that he prioritised the crucial role of institutions and discourses in the formation of sexuality.” (13)

On the subject of Psychoanalysis, it is crucial to bring Freud into the conversation. Sigmund Freud and his studies on Psychoanalysis were fundamental for the understanding of the self and its behavioural acts namely when it comes to our sexuality and how it is being expressed. Furthermore, his studies on Dreams and their interpretation allowed for the reading of numerous symbols present in human action and its subconscious meaning which often expressed hidden sexual truths and desires. For the purpose of the topics being discussed, Freud’s work “Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality” is worth taking a look at. When touching on the subject of the three possible meanings for the masculine and the feminine, he wrote:

“The third, or sociological, meaning receives its connotation from the observation of actually existing masculine and feminine individuals. Such observation shows that in human beings’ pure masculinity or femininity is not to be found either in a psychological or a biological sense. Every individual on the contrary displays a mixture of the character-traits belonging to his own and to the opposite sex; and he shows a combination of activity and passivity whether or not these last character-traits tally with his biological ones.”(219)

In the previous lines, Freud goes beyond confirming the sociological construction behind the notions of male and female, he acknowledges that the human being is indeed incapable of being bound to one single finite category of gender/ behaviour as observed when taking in consideration our psychic and physical composition- there is no such thing as “gender purity”. If indeed an individual is undeniably diverse in all its form then all manners of constriction against such diversity can in fact be considered as the anti-natural act and not the other way around. Therefore, Lili’s evolution to become entirely herself is no other than a natural act following her own inner balance between male and female. Following the same line of thought, Carol’s and Therese’s relationship is a direct consequence of each other’s inner traits meaning they are no more “masculine” or less “feminine” for having a lesbian relationship, they just are who the “mixture of the character-traits” leads them to be, entirely and naturally themselves. The same notion can also be applied to John and Gheorghe. Having this in mind as well as many other Freudian critical notions, Freud continues to be a current and important figure for human psychology. Many of his ideologies are still used and studied all over the world as he was one of the first to dare to submerge into the unknown infinite that is the human mind and cared to dismantle it. Although, humanity continues to evolve and adopt new waves of thought and belief at our core we are still the same bounded by our interactions and shaped by our experiences.

Continuing on the idea of how Freud influenced and continues to influence ways of thinking, Laura Mulvey influenced by the Freudian concept of “scopophilia”¹,

¹ the obtaining of sexual pleasure by looking at nude bodies, erotic photographs, etc. (Collins Dictionary)

wrote her 1973 essays entitled “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema” where she describes the way in which the audience views a film, more concretely, how the audience is led to perceive classical Hollywood Cinema. As an audience we are invited to take a seat from a masculine point of view and interpret the image based on toxic masculine concepts where the female is depicted as the object of desire engaged in passive actions while the male is seen as the main character, the active hero we can all identify with and even can aspire to be, which in a way still reflects how our everyday life is perceived. As Mulvey describes:

“In a world ordered by sexual imbalance, pleasure in looking has been split between active/male and passive/female. The determining male gaze projects its fantasy onto the female figure, which is styled accordingly. In their traditional exhibitionist role women are simultaneously looked at and displayed, with their appearance coded for strong visual and erotic impact so that they can be said to connote to-be-looked-at-ness.” (p.808,809)

Moreover, Mulvey explains that the act of looking within film can be divided into three different forms. The first one relates to how a certain action is recorded by the camera; the second one refers to the way in which the audience views what was filmed; and thirdly, how the characters look at each other on the film: “There are three different looks associated with cinema: that of the camera as it records the pro-filmic event, that of the audience as it watches the final product, and that of the characters at each other within the screen illusion.” (p815,816)

Mulvey’s ideas on the impact of the male gaze when it comes to the visual art of Cinema not only bring awareness into how we are ultimately influenced by how a film is presented to us visually and ideologically, but how much of its construction is driven by the public’s own perceptions therefore a mirror image of our society still predominantly masculine values. However, it is important to acknowledge that there have been some improvements made when it comes to this type of ideologies hence also the topic of this essay. But for the most part, patriarchal ideas are still showing its influence on the arts, such as Cinema.

3. *Mise-en-scène*- The onscreen image

The first film to be analysed is *The Danish Girl* (Tom Hooper, 2015), a cinematic adaptation of the novel of the same name which was based on the true story of one of the first transgender woman to undergo gender confirmation surgery, Lili Elbe. The opening scene is of a nature landscape where we are first greeted by a field with yellow flowers, following by the seaside and the sight of mountains surrounded by clouds. All these elements converge into a painting hanging on a green wall at an art exhibition. This painting illustrates part of the previous scenery where 5 leafless trees stand aligned by the waterfront and a mountain is seen behind them with half of the sky clouded and grey and the other half faintly illuminated by the sun light.



Figure 1. Nature Landscape seen in the first scenes of the film.

The room itself is filled with only landscape paintings and the tones around the room whether be the lighting, clothing, or decorations all revolve around the colours blue, grey and green. These paintings have as their author Einar, who is a landscape artist. The painting in question of the nature landscape will come into focus at several times throughout the film and it is this repetition that will add meaning to it.



Figure 2. Painting by Einar of nature landscape seen in the beginning of the film.

Firstly, at one point in the film, Einar (Eddie Redmayne) reassures Gerda (Alicia Vikander) that he won't disappear into the bog (an adjective Gerda uses to describe the landscape he continues to paint), he affirms that the bog is in him. With this comment, Einar attributes to this landscape a deep personal meaning as if it was a part of himself. Moreover, after a meeting between Lili and Henrik (Ben Whishaw) ,the one who kissed her at the artist ball, Lili (Eddie Redmayne) returns home where a different version of the painting can be seen. This version is defined by its yellow, warmer tones- a contrast to the grey/blue tones presented initially and that matched so well with Gerda's and Einar's home. The painting as an extension of the self is evolving at the same time as the character. Not to mention that Gerda expresses how much she misses having Einar paint next to her- something he eventually stops doing as the narrative develops- a change that came as Lili was blossoming more and more. Einar responds that he doesn't remember the landscape anymore. If we look at the painting as a part of Einar himself and if he can no longer remember it, possibly that part of himself and what it represented is disappearing/shifting as Lili is emerging. Overall, the landscape painting can be considered a motif in this film since it is "an element which acquires significance through repetition"(Gibbs), representative of the character's evolution from Einar to Lili. Furthermore, according to Freud, landscapes can be depicted as a symbol for the female (Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams* , Third

Edition, by Sigmund Freud; Translated by A. A. Brill.), in this case, a symbol for Lili, who has been a constant dream of Einar's that only now was beginning to be fulfilled.

Another important aspect is the costume or clothing which goes hand in hand with the cinematic element of colour. During one of the first scenes of the film, Einar goes to the theatre and enters the backstage, passing through the white and gold dancer's costumes caressing them gently as if they were precious to him.



Figure 3. Einar caressing the dancers' costumes- contrast of rough/dark male clothes versus soft and bright female attire.

He then stands hidden watching a friend and dancer Oola as she stretches and is doing fittings. The way we are presented with this voyeuristic action is very particular for the shot shows Einar admiring her but through a round enclosing shape as if we were seeing him through the lens of a camera- this choice in shot forces us to focus on Einar's character and what may be the real intentions behind the forbidden nature of his action- why did he feel the need to hide instead of showing himself. Later on, we discover that he was observing Oola not to fulfil a sexual desire (commonly the cause for voyeuristic actions²) but to admire the body type he wished to have.

² Voyeurism or as Freud calls it the "peeping mania" is the act of observing others often without them knowing, when they are either naked, taking their clothes off or even during a sexual act. The voyeur becomes sexually aroused with this action. This behaviour instead of leading to the normal sexual act tends to suppress it, the "normal" sexual aim is not achieved.



Figure 4. Einar watching Oola hidden behind the dancers' tutus.

Oola notices Einar's presence after a few moments and is quick to reassure the lady next to her that Einar only has eyes for one woman only Gerda. To which Einar replies: "My Guilt Secret is out" - despite this humble confession and his presence being revealed, Einar's body language says otherwise, since he still remains hidden behind the ballet tutus he so preciously caressed before, which creates a contrast with the dark, rough man clothes he is wearing. In a following scene, Einar returns home and finds Gerda applying lipstick in the mirror- Einar stands back admiring her movements. Once again his instinct is to hide as if he was doing something prohibited. At this point and throughout the movie, both Gerda and Einar's clothes as well as their home is involved in dark blue greyish tones something that will change as the plot develops and the scenarios change. The couple is invited to an artist ball. However, Einar is not so thrilled to go since he feels like he is giving a performance. Therefore, Gerda suggests for him to go as someone else- Lili. To attend the ball, Lili wears a dress made with beads, silk, and a blue ribbon. Although most of the clothing is still dark toned- similar to the dark suits Einar wore-, there is a clear shift between the shape and type of materials Einar wore and that Lili is now carrying. This change is crucial as the clothing serves the purpose of exhaling an inner belief and desire- Lili's personal identity is visually represented by the clothes she wears: As Bordwell notes "Since the

filmmaker usually wants to emphasize the human figures, setting may provide a more or less neutral background, while costume helps pick out the characters.” (Bordwell et al.)



Figure 5. Lili at her first ball- wearing female clothes in public for the 1st time.

The paintings of Lili created by Gerda are a success and an art dealer in Paris becomes interested in her work which leads the couple to Paris. We initially have a shot of the beautiful Paris skyline covered in yellow/orange tones above a set of symmetrically aligned white buildings. From this shot we are taken to the next event in the film, the exhibition of Gerda's paintings of Lili. During the gallery show, the character is forced to dress as Einar and dismiss Lili, which causes sentiments of discomfort and unhappiness. After the show Gerda tries to sexually satisfy her husband but fails as Einar stops her for he was not enjoying it. Following this interaction, we have again a shot of the Paris skyline only this time the sky is covered in darker tones of grey and blue- an indication of the character's state of mind.



Figure 6 and 7. Paris skyline dominated by yellow orange tones and then blue/grey tones.

After the previously described events, Einar visits a brothel not to satisfy a sexual desire but to observe the naked women's bodies. He sits by a window and on the other side a woman is sitting naked surrounded by the several lanterns to illuminate and enhance her body. As the prostitute starts to move and caress herself, Einar cannot help but to imitate her movements while at the same time admiring the gentleness and softness of her skin. The room the girl is in is adorned with yellow flowers painted on the walls and the fact that Einar is physically separated from this woman by a window generates a sentiment of entrapment and isolation (a theme also present in *Carol*) as well as of what he admires, the female body, being something

unattainable for him. Moreover, such unattainability is further reinforced by the presence of the several mirrors on the floor all around the prostitute-the female body is constantly being reflected and enhanced in a masochistic way reminding that that reflection is not his own.



Figure 8. Prostitute surrounded by yellow flowers, lights, and mirrors.

The colour yellow, resurfaces again with the character of Hans, the childhood friend of Einar and the first man he had ever kissed. His office is decorated with yellow walls and framing, his hair is also blond, and he tends to always wear something with yellow detail such as the yellow suit vest he wears when nurturing Einar after he is assaulted by some men at the park, the walls, and decorations in his office and even the stairs that lead to his apartment.



Figure 9. Hans cleaning Einar's wounds in his office after he is assaulted.

Gerda invites Hans back to their Paris home which by itself is a tremendous shift from their home in Denmark since it is decorated with warmer tones where the colour yellow is also a strong presence. Lili appears to greet Hans in a yellow silk ensemble, she is delighted by Hans's presence and tries to talk to him remembering his precious moments with her cousin Einar.



Figure 10. Lili introducing herself to Hans for the first time.

Lili starts to be a more constant presence- and since Einar was not painting anymore Lili had to continue to pose for Gerda in order for them to have money. However, there is a crucial moment in the film when an integration between Einar and Lili emerges. Lili decides to go outside walking through the park wearing a male style suit but made of more soft, delicate fabrics and lighter colours such as yellow, beige, and purple. It can be considered a transitional moment because from this point onward Einar is practically buried to make way for Lili, who becomes the centre of the action.



Figure 11. Einar dressed in a mix of feminine/masculine clothes and wearing eye makeup.

On the whole, the presence of this opposition in colour schemes with the grey, blue/green tones versus the warm yellow/orange tones, helps to visually create a division between what was Einar and his life with Gerda and their monochromatic home and what is Lili a fresh and happier self with all her wishes and dreams she eagerly needed to fulfil. As explained by Bellantoni: “We associate yellow with powerful life energy—exuberance itself. In whatever situation you find it, or wherever it is, bright yellow can be the scene-stealer, always clamouring for attention” (42)

After Lili's death, Gerda goes back with Hans to his and Lili's childhood homes and there she sees in person for the first time the nature landscape Einar would keep painting over and over again. Gerda and Hans go up a hill to admire the view and because it is so windy Gerda loses the scarf she was carrying and that belonged to Lili. Hans tries to grab it, but Gerda asks for Hans to "let her fly" – to let Lili fly and be finally free. This final scene can be interpreted as a cathartic moment for Lili whose presence is set free by the means of the scarf- which moved over the painted landscape that for so many years was part of Einar, who hid his true identity by living artificially as a male and that now has been reinvented by the presence of Lili, who followed her true nature as a woman.



Figure 12. Hans and Gerda visiting the landscape that inspired Einar's paintings and scarf that belonged to Lili flies away.³

The second film to be analysed is "Carol", also a cinematic adaptation of a book that follows a forbidden love affair between an older woman going through a divorce and a young woman aspiring to be a photographer. The opening scene of the film presents us with an image of metal bars displayed in a swirly pattern that could be interpreted as a maze. This imagery might be setting the tone for what will be

³ This ending scene can be depicted as a common thread in film since it can be seen in other works such as: *Forrest Gump* (1994) where we have the closing scene of a feather flying away.

characters experienced of feeling confined and lost within societal norms and expectations of who or what they want to be. Then, we are taken to follow a man as he enters a hotel bar and requests for a drink. The cars and clothing presented to us allow us to assume that the film is set in 1950's America and we get a glance into the busy environment of the city life.

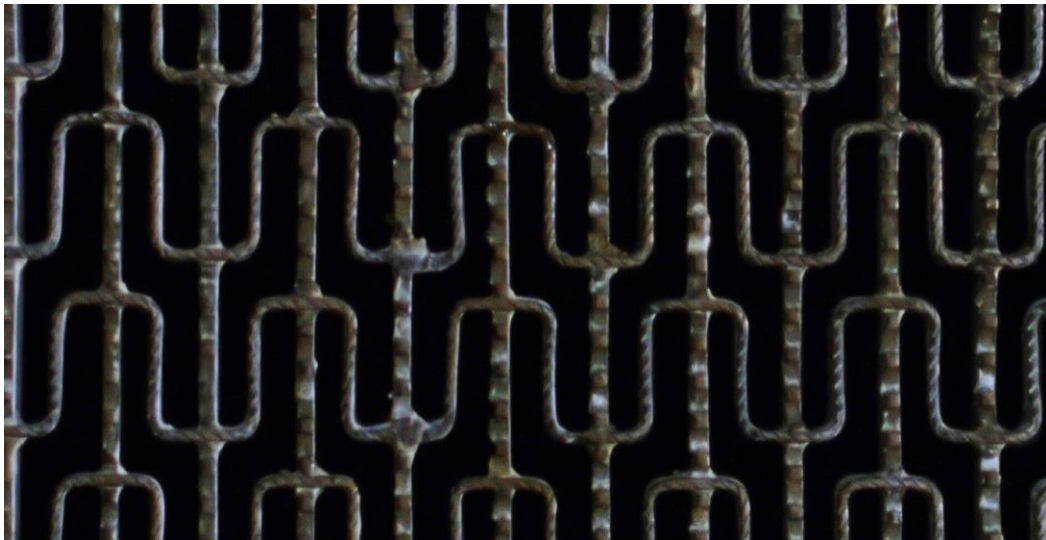


Figure 13. Metal bars with a swirly pattern- opening shot.

Also, the way the shot is positioned, and the cameras move, force us to follow everything that he is doing with detail. Eventually someone else in the room catches his eye and we follow his gaze until we lay upon Therese's back, one of the protagonists. Opposite her sits Carol, the other protagonist, and between them sits a jar with white flowers and a small white lamp lit. The proximity of the two bodies enhanced by the over the shoulder shots, originates an atmosphere of intimacy between the two women.

After the hotel bar scene, we have a tight close-up shot of Therese in the back of a car. She appears to be feeling completely isolated despite the fact that other people are in the car chatting beside her. The close up of her face blurred by the condensation of the car window creates an image of solitude and confinement. Also, as she looks out the window we are presented with the sight of a happy heterosexual couple laughing and chatting and the woman in question reminds us of Carol with her

short, blond, curled hair. Immediately, Therese recalls a memory of when she first saw Carol at the department store, admiring a play train set. Therefore, an association with Carol is made, meaning that Therese's interest in Carol might be more than platonic. This flashback is accompanied by the sound of the train set Carol admired, a sound also heard at the opening scene of the film where the metal bars displayed in a maze-like pattern. This technique for flashback differs from how it is traditionally introduced in many other films for we are given an image of Therese through a foggy window creating a dream like state for the character instead of the abrupt image fading and replay of events.



Figure 14. Therese in the backseat of the car where she has a flashback.

Next, we see Therese at her work in the department store where she is called to go up to her floor where they sell children's toys. Therese admires a train set that will later catch Carol's attention. The recurrent use of the train set is done with intention- the toy becomes a metaphor of the heteronormative society that traps the characters into its set norms, limiting their actions. As the train goes around and around always following the same path so does the society of 1950's America. It is interesting as well how the train is displayed in a winter setting and indeed the story beginning during the winter season close to Christmas. As Carol enters Therese's floor her presence does not go unnoticed by the young woman. They exchange looks while Carol admires the train set and she eventually greets Therese at the counter asking for

help to find a doll for her daughter. The image we have of Therese with her red Christmas hat, surrounded by play dolls and a sign that reads “ MOMMY’S BABY” serves to accentuate not only the age difference between the two women but also the later association made between Therese and Carol’s daughter Rindy, not only by means of their resemblance in haircuts but also the way in which both are treated by Carol with endearing terms and gentle touches to their hair. Not to mention, the ultimate comparison between Therese’s childhood photo and Rindy’s photo shown by Carol at the department store.



Figure 15. Therese at the department store when she first saw Carol. The sign besides her reads “MOMMY’S BABY”.



Figure 16. Carol showing Therese a picture of her daughter Rindy.

Furthermore, as Therese clocks off work and takes off her Christmas hat, the shot presented of her face surrounded by a dark square space (her locker), as if she was stuck inside a box, once more causes a feeling of entrapment and indeed she is stuck in an anonymous routine at her work.

Other important shots to mention are the ones with a lack of balance which serve as an instrument of opposition. An example of this, when Carol first asks Therese to meet for lunch, we have a view of Carol almost as if it was from above as she occupies most of the top of the screen and is better illuminated while Therese is positioned at the bottom right of the screen with only the back of her head visible. This disposition creates a dynamic of superiority and inferiority where Carol seems to be the one in control and Therese appears to be the vulnerable element. As explained by Bordwell: "Balanced composition is the norm, but unbalanced shots can also create strong effects" (Bordwell et al. 143). In addition, during their road trip, there is a point when they are sitting at a diner eating and said shot is also unbalanced with the two characters either being positioned to the left when we are seeing Therese's back or being situated on the right when we see Carol's back. Nonetheless, these shots also demonstrate a sense of superiority by Carol for she is either positioned taller/bigger or occupying more screen space.



Figure 17. Carol and Therese when they first meet for lunch. Therese at the bottom right corner of the screen and Carol in focus.

However, when it comes to Carol's friend Abby, the layout changes. In a scene where the two, Abby and Carol, meet for lunch, they are both placed at the centre of the screen occupying the same amount of space and lighting, therefore the composition of the shot is balanced following standard working practices.



Figure 18. Abby on the left of the screen and Carol to the right- at the same level and both on the centre.

By the end of the film, the previous unbalance associated with Carol and Therese's dynamic is not present, and we encounter the two women back at the hotel bar presented in the beginning, only this time they are positioned as equals at the centre, the same size and sharing one screen space. This change occurs due to the evolution of the character Therese who has found her identity and now carries herself as a grown woman who knows what she wants. This difference in behaviour is highlighted by Carol who comments on how Therese has blossomed.

Another awkwardly arranged disposition that carries important meaning can be found in two distinct moments. First, after Carol visits her lawyer and is informed that her husband Harge will be fighting for full custody of Rindy. She reunites with Abby to share the news and informs her that she will be taking a trip West. Carol is upset with the news she received from her lawyer and goes to her friend to share her sadness. Her state of mind and emotions are enhanced by the way we are faced with a shot of Abby's front to the left sitting at the table and to the right Carol's body is hiding away

behind the dark booth which creates a sense of heaviness and tension on the right of the screen. (Bordwell et al. 143) The same tension appears with the shot of Therese hidden behind the wall of the diner she is sitting at with Abby after Carol leaves her- a moment also of great sadness felt by Therese.



Figure 19. Abby to the left in full display and Therese is hidden behind the wall, with only part of her coat visible.

Additionally, there are moments in the narrative where the characters positioning and division by different rooms/spaces causes a feeling of separation and detachment. As an example, Therese goes to visit Carol at her house and as one of them (Carol) sits in the living room by the Christmas tree with the train set, the other (Therese) is in the opposite room playing the piano. Also, when Harge storms into the house interrupting the two Carol takes him to the kitchen and we are presented with a shot of the distressed husband on the bottom right corner on the floor while Carol is standing up occupying a more central position, she demonstrates to have more control than him. As this is happening, Therese is in the piano room observing the two. Then, Harge moves from the floor to the entrance between the kitchen area as Carol stands behind him still in the Kitchen leaving Therese in front of him by the piano. The division by rooms between the characters of Carol and Therese are a representation of the

patriarchal norms defended by society that push aside any possibility of a homosexual relationship thus creating a barrier between the lovers- a moral barrier.



Figure 20. Therese playing Piano and Carol watching her from the other room.



Figure 21. Carol in the kitchen and Harge at the kitchen's doorway both looking at Therese who is in the living room.

Moreover, this feeling of detachment is as well noticeable during the scenes where, despite being surrounded by a crowd of people, the characters are positioned far apart and secluded by the physical barrier of a window, thus adding a sense of loneliness

amongst the crowd which is a very common thread specially when speaking of life in a big city.



Figure 22. Carol speaking to a woman she knows at a party, but they are visually separated by a window.



Figure 23. Therese at a party speaking to a woman- they are visually separated from the rest by windows and a building wall.

In spite of the sentiment of imprisonment and separation, the two women are capable of going beyond the boundaries imposed by those around them and find their way back to each other by the end of the film, which leads us to conclude that the ending is a happy one.

The last film to be analysed is “God’s Own Country”, a love story between John, a Yorkshire farmer and Gheorghe, a Romanian migrant worker. The opening scene is a long shot of the farmhouse and the fields of green surrounding it during the early morning. As the image becomes brighter and brighter a light is turned on inside the house. The distance from which we are observing the house creates an awareness of the space where the action will be taking place as well as a sense of detachment and loneliness since no other population is seen nearby. Despite being beautiful, the countryside is associated with a sense of loneliness, something Gheorghe comments about later in the narrative.



Figure 24. Farmhouse at the beginning of the film at sunrise.

By the end of the film, we will return to a shot of the house but this time instead of a long shot, we have a close shot giving emphasis to the farmhouse door painted white. It is through that door, in bright daylight, that John walks through alongside Gheorghe, creating a sense of intimacy and closeness that contrasts with the initial scene.



Figure 25. Gheorghe on the left and John on the right entering the farmhouse at the end of the film.

Furthermore, the film presents us with extreme long shots or long shots of the rural landscape particularly when John and Gheorghe are forced to stay alone in the fields with the animals to fix a stone fence in the property. Even though being surrounded by the immense landscape might result in a feeling of insignificance (they are only small dots in comparison), the two young men find in this space a sort of refuge from the cold, harsh and judgmental looks of the rural town. John learns to be gentler due to Gheorghe's influence and they are allowed the time and freedom to get involved with one another and have their relationship blossom. On the other hand, as a viewer we are given the opportunity to pay more attention to their interactions: "the long-shot framing encourages us to search for details or discover abstract patterns." (Bordwell et al. 192)



Figure 26. Scottish rural landscape.

Moreover, another important element in the film is the caravan Gheorghe stays in while he is working on the farm. The old and dusty vehicle will serve as a haven for the lovers where they can be themselves and vividly expressed their feelings for one another. As their relationship evolves, John will try to display affection towards Gheorghe while inside the farmhouse where his father and grandmother also live. However, Gheorghe is not so comfortable with doing this so close to where John's family is, so they go back to the caravan. The caravan is a symbol for their hidden relationship, of the secret they share and the only point in the film that we witness the caravan no longer serving its purpose and leaving the property is precisely at the end of the film when John recovers Gheorghe's love back and openly confesses his wish to be with him before all- hence the last scene when they walk together into the house. Taking this into account, the caravan can be considered a motif for it is a recurring object that is giving meaning due to the purpose it serves: hiding their relationship

from the outside world. Also, in a more literal sense the caravan symbolizes Gheorghe's itinerant nature as a gypsy, moving from place to place.



Figure 27. Gheorghe and John watching the caravan being taken away from the property.

Lastly, the film is characterized by a very specific type of colouring. Tones such as grey, blue, and green are the norm across the entire movie length. These tones typically associated with nature and its landscapes, represent the conservative morals of the countryside environment John is inserted in and which are associated with lack of action or change: "Year after year, our color investigations show that in a blue environment, people become passive and introspective. It's a color to think to, but not to act"(Bellantoni 82). In addition, when we are faced with a different colour it does not go unnoticed. For example, when John tries to win back Gheorghe's love and goes to find him, he opts for a bright red jacket different from the neutral, blend clothes we were used to see him wearing. His intention of getting back together with Gheorghe and this time doing it openly contrasts with the rural expectations initially set out for him, so in using this bright piece of clothing he is expressing his want to go against the

local conservative societal norms in the name of his happiness. Another point to be made is related to how the characters are presented to us on screen, meaning that in a lot of circumstances we get shots of them showing their backs (example figures 25 and 27), which in film is commonly perceived as referring to a non-trustworthy character. However, in the case of *God's Own Country* it can be a reflection of how typically queer people are looked upon as unreliable/unbalanced people and therefore it brings awareness into how things in reality are not always as we perceived them for we see a positive evolution in the characters and their lives regardless on their homosexual relationship.

All in all, there is a common point shared by the three films namely the fact that they all begin and end at the same place, which is a commonly used Hollywood narrative practice. This practice in cinematic terms is defined as "Bookends"⁴. In "the Danish Girl", the first thing we see is the nature landscape Einar kept painting over and over again and in the last scene of the film Gerda and Hans go back to that same place where Lili's scarf is set free. When it comes to "Carol", the initial scene of them two at the hotel bar is brought back at the end of the film but carrying more detail of their interaction. Although, it was not the very last image we see it has an important meaning. In regard to "God's Own Country", the farmhouse we see at first is shown again but in a completely different light. For all these examples, the important common factor to discuss is that the act of returning to where it all

⁴ In popular cinema, the bookend technique is most often used to refer to a parallel between the opening and closing sequences or shots in a film. The first scene is re-visioned, with only minor changes, in the film's final scene leaving the audience with a feeling of completion; what was started is now finished.

started serves the purpose of highlighting the characters evolution whether it be on the self or on their relationships with others. They go back to the beginning, but they are not the same people they once were, they have flourished into a happier self.

4. Queer Theory - The on-screen analysis

Simone de Beauvoir famously stated that: “*One is not born a woman, but rather becomes one.*”- the premise of this statement encapsulates a powerful notion that what we view as *feminine*, or *masculine* is none other than a predefined sociocultural construction expressed, for example, through language, behaviour, and fashion and which goes beyond the biological anatomy of the human body.

When it comes to the film *The Danish Girl* (Tom Hooper, 2015), the idea of becoming gender, “becoming woman” is very much present. Lili, a transexual woman, is born in the context of a heteronormative patriarchal society with its set notions of femininity, therefore by not fitting into the norm this character is challenging those same notions. Moreover, the film also highlights the existing contrast between the two different experiences of being female, exemplified by the characters of Gerda and Lili, crucial for the understanding that female should not be constrictive but rather an open concept, as Butler comments: “ If there is something right in Beauvoir’s claim that one is not born, but rather *becomes* a woman, it follows that *woman* itself is a term in process, a becoming, ...an ongoing discursive practice, it is open to intervention and resignification.”(Butler, 45)

There are several moments throughout the film that can be considered important in the *becoming* of Lili. The first one occurs when Gerda asks Einar to pose in the role of Oola, whose portrait she was painting. Einar puts on tights and shoes that belonged to Oola and holds her dress in front of his torso while assuming her pose. During this process we as viewers are given the opportunity to follow Einar’s gaze as

he gently explores the thin fabric of the stockings with a pleasurable expression. Despite being hesitant at first to take on the role of Oola, it becomes clear that filling in Oola's shoes brought him satisfaction. Moreover, the use of the clothing plus the adopted gentle pose are elements that contribute for the performance of Einar as a woman- he is *performing gender*. As explained by Butler: " Gender reality is performative which means, quite simply, that it is real only to the extent that it is performed"(Butler, 527)



Figure 28. Einar posing as Oola for Gerda to paint.

The next moment to mention is when Einar, persuaded by his wife Gerda, dresses up as Lili to attend a ball. This scene, depicted by Dowerah and Nath as the "turning point in the life of the protagonist"(188), holds great significance. More than just aiding her husband with makeup and the outfit, Gerda goes to the extent of teaching him typically female mannerisms, such as how to walk in heels, stand and flirt like a woman. Their efforts are successful as Lili gets the full attention of the male

attendees, so much so that she gets separated from the crowd by a man called Henrik who kisses her. The success of their efforts once more reinforces that Gender can be constructed through the use of conventional, in this case, *female* practices, and how it can easily be reshaped, thus is not fixed. Butlers explains how gender “is not a fact, the various acts of gender create the idea of gender, and without those acts, there would be no gender at all. Gender is, thus, a construction that regularly conceals its genesis.” (Butler, 522)



Figure 29. Lili and Gerda- Lili first time going to a ball in wearing female clothes.

The following scenes bring more focus to the sexed body. After the ball, Einar is ecstatic with the sequence of events of the night and truly believes the man who kissed him, Henrik, could see that for a moment he was truly Lili. Einar then goes to the theatre, backstage into the dressing rooms and undresses himself in front of a full-length mirror. He goes on to caress his skin delicately as he admires his body by gently moving it to a more feminine shape, also tucking his penis away. He finally holds a

dress up to his front and smiles into the mirror for the version he moulded himself into was that of a beautiful woman.



Figure 30. Einar tucking his male genitals between his legs and admiring his body as he positions himself in a more feminine pose.⁵

Further along, when Einar and Gerda go to Paris to exhibit her paintings of Lili, Einar after having to frustratingly play the role of the husband during the exhibition, goes to a prostitute house for a peep show. During his visit he observes a woman through a small window, who sits in a chair in a closed room poorly lit. She is moving her naked body seductively in order to arouse the men who come to watch her. However, Einar more than just observing starts to mimic her provocative gestures losing himself into a trance of female ecstasy. He wants to master the art of female seduction, capable of getting the attention of the male gaze.

⁵ This mirror scene where Einar tucks in his genitals can also be seen in *The Silence of the Lambs* (1991) when Buffalo Bill (Ted Levine) dances to the sound of *(I Can't Get No) Satisfaction* by The Rolling Stones.

Despite the fact that we are given several moments of gender performance that utterly call our attention to the reality of constructed gender, most of those actions of putting on the appropriate attire, wearing the seductive makeup and mastering the female gestures are all behaviours that yearn for the approval of the male, or in this case, of the male gaze. Meaning, the perception of what it is to be feminine, at least when it comes to Lili, is based on the norms generated by the heteronormative patriarchal society of the 1930's Copenhagen. As explained by Dowerah and Nath: "... while the attempt is to show the space of transman and transwoman by...overbearing discourse of normative sexuality, the film at one point appears to fail at challenging the most visible patriarchal notions of gender difference." (Dowerah and Nath, 189). Indeed, Lili acts as very shy and fragile when attending the ball and in all her interactions with Henrik she portrays an image of the delicate donzel in distress.



Figure 31. Einar imitating the prostitute- contrast between his own reflection and what we see beyond the window.

On the other hand, if we take a look at the character of Gerda, her version of female is one of defiance. She actively shares her opinions and needs and during several interactions with the opposite sex, Gerda doesn't shy away from showing resilience and power. For example, every time Einar and Gerda engage in sexual activities, Gerda is always the one in control opposing therefore to the patriarchal conception of the male as the figure of power. During one of these encounters, Gerda starts to undress Einar to discover her silk pearl nightgown underneath, which Einar had eulogized before. As this discovery is made, Gerda assumes the position of dominance and starts caressing Einar's body underneath the nightgown while Einar trembles in ecstasy. In a so called, "normative scenario" it would've been Einar (male) caressing Gerda and her trembling, not the other way around.



Figure 32. Einar and Gerda in bed- Einar is wearing Gerda's silk nightgown.

Another scene representative of the antinormative behaviour of Gerda is located in the beginning of the film, where she shares an interaction with one of her clients of whom she is painting a portrait. While she is painting, the man before her is

sweating and his demeanour shows a lack of confidence. Gerda paying attention to him, comments on how man tend to feel more uncomfortable by the female gaze than women by the male gaze. And goes even further to conclude that if men were to yield and surrender to the female gaze they might experience pleasure from it. She then goes to command her dog to sit, however the man follows that same order growing stiff, which clearly shows that during this interaction she was the one in control.

Overall, both the characters of Lili and Gerda, are representative of an antinormative behaviour, who in their own ways are a constant challenge to the patriarchal status quo. Lili ultimately defies all established norms by undergoing gender confirmation surgery and Gerda, a rebel all throughout, despite an initial reluctance, supports her husband through the entire process.

In regard to the film “Carol” (Todd Haynes, 2015), dynamics such as relations of power, the hefty presence of the patriarchal norms and the journey to female emancipation are all important themes throughout the film. Carol (Cate Blanchett), a lesbian woman, is forced to be in a heterosexual relationship, stuck by the male figure of the husband Harge (Kyle Chandler) who consistently tries to exercise his power and control over his wife, such attempts extending to their child, when he fights for full custody. Harge is the representation of the male patriarchal society, which prioritizes the male as the figure in command and the female as their obedient disciple expected to behave accordingly and to live solely for her husbands and family. As described by Smith:” Harge wants to box Carol into his idea of heteronormative domesticity.” (11). On the other hand, Carol is the representation of the resistance against patriarchy, no matter the consequences she fights for her sexual and individual freedom- “she claims

a life for herself" (Smith, 12). Therese (Rooney Mara), Carol's lover, is another symbol of female emancipation but more so in the individual sense since she emancipates herself as she evolves from a shy young girl to a confident woman.

There are several moments throughout the film that elaborate on the dynamics mentioned above. Firstly, when it comes to the heavy presence of the patriarchal norms, the first scene to mention is when Harge drives Carol home after a party. Before entering the house Carol is invited by Harge to spend Christmas with him and their daughter Rindy at his family's home but Carol refuses. Harge comments how: "It shouldn't be like this", to which Carol replies: "I know". Harge's insistence in having Carol with him and his daughter for Christmas is more than a simple gesture of proximity, he is desperate to try and keep up with the façade of a happy heterosexual family, hence their attendance at a party as a couple when indeed they live separately. Moreover, by having Carol by his side during the festive season would also be a way to keep an eye on her, to exercise his control. Also, his comment: "It shouldn't be like this"- can be interpreted as related to their situation of being apart despite being married or it can be extended as a reference to her sexuality that does not fit the norm, therefore *it shouldn't be*.

Secondly, after Harge barges into Carol's house to find her conversing with Therese, he drunkenly argues with her first inside and then outside after Carol says goodbye to her daughter who is leaving for Christmas. During their argument outside, Carol affirms that they are over. Harge once again makes a judgemental comment: "I put nothing past woman like you", to which Carol retaliates: "You married a woman like me.". Harge then drunkenly stumbles almost falling over before reaching the car.

Their interaction once more serves to highlight the patriarchal position of the husband who does not accept his wife sexuality and even more judges her for it, defining what she was doing as wrong and damnable.



Figure 33 . Harge despite trying to exert control over Carol falls to the ground in a drunken state.

Next, following the film's narrative, Carol visits her lawyer and is informed that Harge wants full custody of their daughter. Also, a morality clause is mentioned as a reason being used by Harge to try and get custody- he is threatening to get Rindy by the means of scrutinizing Carol's conduct- meaning her sexuality. Here we are faced with yet another one of Harge's attempts at control but this time using their daughter as leverage in his patriarchal game. Moreover, in order to try and keep custody of her daughter, Carol initially agrees to see a psychotherapist to be treated for her illness (which also occurs in the film "The Danish Girl"- where Einar initially is taken to the doctor to be treated for his "perversion"). Following this idea, we have a scene where Carol is sharing a meal with Harge and his parents at the family home, like the good wife they expect her to be. Harge's parents comment on Carol's treatment, underlying

that she should be getting better since the doctor is expensive and a Yale man, thus she must follow what he (they) say- this underlining threat is accentuated when Rindy arrives home and Carol hugs her carrying the child inside but is denied the possibility to spend time with her daughter whenever she wants and without supervision- the husband is demonstrating that he still holds all the power by the means of the child.



Figure 34 and 35. Carol having lunch with Harge and his parents- looks uncomfortable as they discuss her psychological treatment.

Regarding the theme of female emancipation, there are two types of emancipation found on the film. The character of Carol symbolizes the female emancipation against the patriarchal norm. Despite initially being trapped by a heterosexual marriage and agreeing to see a physiotherapist not to lose custody of her daughter, Carol will ultimately choose her own happiness and freedom. Her first signs of emancipation are shown by the way in which Carol refuses to spend time with her husband and despite his constant attempts to keep her by his side and maintain appearances, as described by Smith: "Though the couple is separated, Harge repeatedly tries to put Carol back in the domestic box of "my wife." (6)- she denies him and fights for the divorce, as seen in two of the previously described interactions (page 7 and 8). Moreover, by pursuing a relationship with Therese and going on a trip with her she completely disregards her husband wishes and acts according to her own needs. As stated by Abby (Sarah Paulson), Carol's friend and former lover, Harge never allowed Carol outside her domestic space as his wife- "my wife"- thus her trip with Therese is ultimately the breach of the controlled environment inside which she was kept for years.

Her definite choice is most visible during a meeting between her, Harge, and their lawyers. Carol decides to speak up ignoring her lawyer's advice and confesses her relationship with Therese, stating that she wanted it and does not regret it and that Harge should take full custody of Rindy. However she demands regular visits to see their daughter. She gives him an ultimatum and further comments that: " There was a time when I would've done almost anything I would've locked myself away to keep Rindy with me. What use am I to her, to us, if I am living again my own grain?"- here

she courageously expresses and emancipates herself. As explained by Bradbury-Rance:

“ The nuclear family is precisely what *Carol* resurrects and pushes against, forcing its protagonist to choose. The decision Carol finally makes not only to seek romantic love but also to risk motherhood is radical even in the twenty-first century.”(134).



Figure 36. Carol meets Harge and their lawyers to discuss custody of Rindy.⁶

The character of Therese is initially introduced as a shy young woman, unsure of herself and of what she wants. The majority of her interactions with Carol place her in a level of inferiority not only because Carol showcases more confidence and dominance but also because Therese is cleverly compared to Rindy, Carol’s daughter. Even the way in which Carol speaks with Therese with endearing terms and their similar haircuts contribute for this mother-daughter dynamic between the two. Thus, Therese is depicted as an innocent and fragile young girl. This narrative is refuted

⁶ In figure 36 we can see the look of disapproval given by the only other woman in shot, disapproval towards Carol and her “misconduct”.

when, after they have been separated, Carol contacts Therese asking for them to meet for dinner. The Therese that meets Carol is not the same as before, her posture, attire has changed, she now carries herself as a grown secure woman. Carol offers her a cigarette, Therese denies. She invites Therese to come live with her, once again Therese refuses. Her assertiveness contrasts with her previous incapability of saying no, as described by Bradbury-Rance: “Therese’s entryway to that which we desire- Carol- is halted by a refusal to yield from always saying ‘Yes to everything’, she switches to ‘No, I don’t think so.’ ” (137)



Figure 37. Therese and Carol at the end of the film- balance.

Overall, the characters of Carol and Therese and even Abby are a symbol of rebellion against the heteronormative patriarchal society of the 1950's America (similarly to Lily and Gerda in "The Danish Girl") by embracing their sexuality and putting their happiness first despite the societal pressure to follow the norm, even if such choice leads to consequences such as losing custody of one's child. It is the

refusal to obey the status quo that categorized these characters and their story as a positive evolution towards an inclusive society.

Lastly, the film “God’s Own Country” (Francis Lee, 2017) stands out in regard to the previous two due to its simplicity. Not only is the scenery of the quiet countryside opposing to the rushed city life but also it tells a story of romance between two young men who despite their cultural differences will eventually be able to openly love one another. John (Josh O’Connor), representative of the emotionless Englishman, lives in his family farm which is getting closer day by day to bankruptcy- his father, as the male authority in the household - despite the physical limitations, is persistent in having things done his way which not only causes John to hide his true identity but also keeps the farm from evolving with more modern techniques. As stated by Severiche: “In God’s Own Country, activities that modify the landscape and farm animals concern the men of the house, the father and son...The death of a calf or the unrepaired walls are just two incidents that show Johnny’s struggle to run the farm simply by following his father’s orders.” (17)

This attitude of shying away from being your true self is very evident in the relationship between John and Gheorghe (Alec Secareanu), where John refuses to express his true feelings towards Gheorghe, in other words, John is incapable of diverging from the patriarchal idea of what a man should be and act, more than his homosexuality which he chooses to keep hidden, his incapability of showing emotion is a direct consequence of the masculine model he was taught to follow by his father: “By making the father–son relationship another narrative storyline wherein demonstrations of affection are unusual, the film points out that Johnny has inherited

his emotional inarticulacy”(Severiche,17). The “manly” behaviour is the reason for most of John’s family problems as between him, his father, and his grandmother there is little to no conversation, even when mentioning the mother who walked out on them it is all made very harshly not allowing for any openness or expression of feelings. Also, John’s manly actions leads him to cheat on Gheorghe as a way of enhancing his bruised ego.



Figure 38. John cheats on Gheorghe at the pub’s bathroom.

In opposition to John behaviour there is Gheorghe’s, who all throughout the film demonstrates constant kindness and empathy, by expressing his feelings towards John and treating others as well as the animals with respect and care.



Figure 39. Gheorghe is seen feeding a baby sheep- nurturing nature of a mother versus John working on the wall- manual labour a typically male action.

It is due to Gheorghe that John will learn to express his feelings and re-establish a healthy, open relationship with his family. Such openness of spirit will also influence the farm life as John expresses to his father his wish to take care of the farm and make it better but under his own terms. As described by Severiche: “One can note God’s Own Country’s progressive stance by making of the homosexual, foreign other a decisive element that triggers the ‘host’ nation’s possibilities to overcome its own conflicts.”(22)



Figure 40. John and his father openly speaking about their feelings and discussing the future.

Overall, the toxic masculinity present in the rural society of the Scottish countryside was the prompter of many of the conflicts in the protagonist life and only when he puts these notions aside and starts to live by his true identity will he be able to be truly happy and contribute for the happiness of others around him. Once again, it is by going against the expected patriarchal norms that the characters reach their happy ending.

5. Conclusion

After one and half year of working on this thesis, I believe to have found the answer to the question that started this whole journey for me: “Is there any positive representation of queerness in film?” My general conclusion after studying the three selected films is: yes.

As evidenced by the previous chapters, the films I chose were selected because, amongst the general tendency of negative queer representation, they are capable of demonstrating a queer experience that evolves into what’s commonly described as a “happy ending”- all three couples evolve both personally and collectively to happier version of themselves independently of their different journeys. Also, is it important to note that the way in which their experiences are brought into the screen contribute immensely to this depiction of a happy turn of events. By the use of color, light and symbolic elements the correct atmosphere was created to better enhance and accompany each of the character’s positive development. Lili was able to explore her femininity and take the step of physically trying to become a woman by the means of surgery. Despite her death, in her final moments she was able to feel whole again and obtain the full support and understanding of the ones she loved most. Therese and Carol, although on different stages of their lives, evolved into more confident and assertive individuals denying to be bounded by the patriarchal constraints of their time. John and Georghe, both originating from humble beginnings, found amongst nature the perfect balance between their private life and family life which granted them all the necessary tools to create a healthy and happy future for themselves.

I started my work by watching and rewatching the films and taking notes of anything that caught my attention and that could be useful without following any specific method. Only after reading and studying the bibliography found and recommended to me I was able to watch them again with a more focused eye for details such as symbols, camera work/angles and character on character interactions that could contribute for the development of my analysis. For example, by focusing my analysis of the visual through mise-en-scène I was able to detect and explain visually how there is

a positive evolution in the character of Therese (her position in shot in comparasing to other characthers evolved from a lower level to an equal level). Furthermore, taking in account the ideas of Butler it became possible to futher elaborate on the feminine elements present in the character of Lily, deconstruct them and compare them to the ones present within Gerda, both are representative of femininity despite going against the norm. Moreover, with the readings of Severiche it was possible to understand how Georghe presence as an outsider contributed to John's path of instrospection that helped to heal the domestic and the private. Overall, the theoretical lenses I was using when watching the films allowed me to better focus my attention to then further develop my conclusions and evidence why in my opnion the three films are a positive take on queerness.

A step further in this study would be to take this framework and apply it to the analysis of TV shows. It is my common perception as a viewer that tv shows/ series have been able evolve better and faster in the path of positivism in queer representation than films. Bearing this in mind, a good subject to work on would be to analyse three tv shows or more under the same parameters of the three films here analysed and elaborate on their similarities and differences in order to conclude which ultimately does offer a more nuanced take: Tv or Film?.

Overall, the conclusions taken from this study suggest that in fact there is positive representation of queerness in film accomplished not only by the chosen films' narrative but also by the visual work itself. These films were a product of its time social changes and urge to find in the visual art of Cinema the portrayal of queerness that lacked thus far and which individuals could ultimately relate to. Furthermore, these films amongs others have hopefully paved the way for a more inclusive and diverse cinematographic field where concepts such as the one of representation is taken into consideration.

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