

# FILM

FALL  
ENTERTAINMENT  
PREVIEW

## The new degaying of Hollywood

*Alexander. Troy. Brokeback Mountain. De-Lovely.* Straightening up history's heroes, desexing literature's love stories, Hollywood is making gay movies—without the “gay” **By Michael Giltz**

**I**s Hollywood on lavender alert? After decades of slow and steady improvement in depicting queers on-screen—from indie films like *Maurice* and *Boys Don't Cry* to well-intentioned major studio flicks like *Making Love* and *Philadelphia* and

groundbreakers like *In & Out*—Hollywood seems to be living in terror of showing intimacy between two men. Lesbian intimacy is even less visible, unless it's presented as seedy sport for straight men.

*Catwoman* gives Halle Berry a mincing coworker who is so outlandishly gay (clapping his hands girlishly and cooing over “man sandwich” Benjamin Bratt), you don't know whether to be angry or embarrassed. *Troy* features two of the most famous male lovers in history—Achilles and Patroclus—and pretends they're just really good pals. *De-Lovely* tackles the

*De-Lovely* puts Cole Porter (Kevin Kline) in a man's bed, but there's none of that sex stuff: He's really in love with Linda (Ashley Judd).



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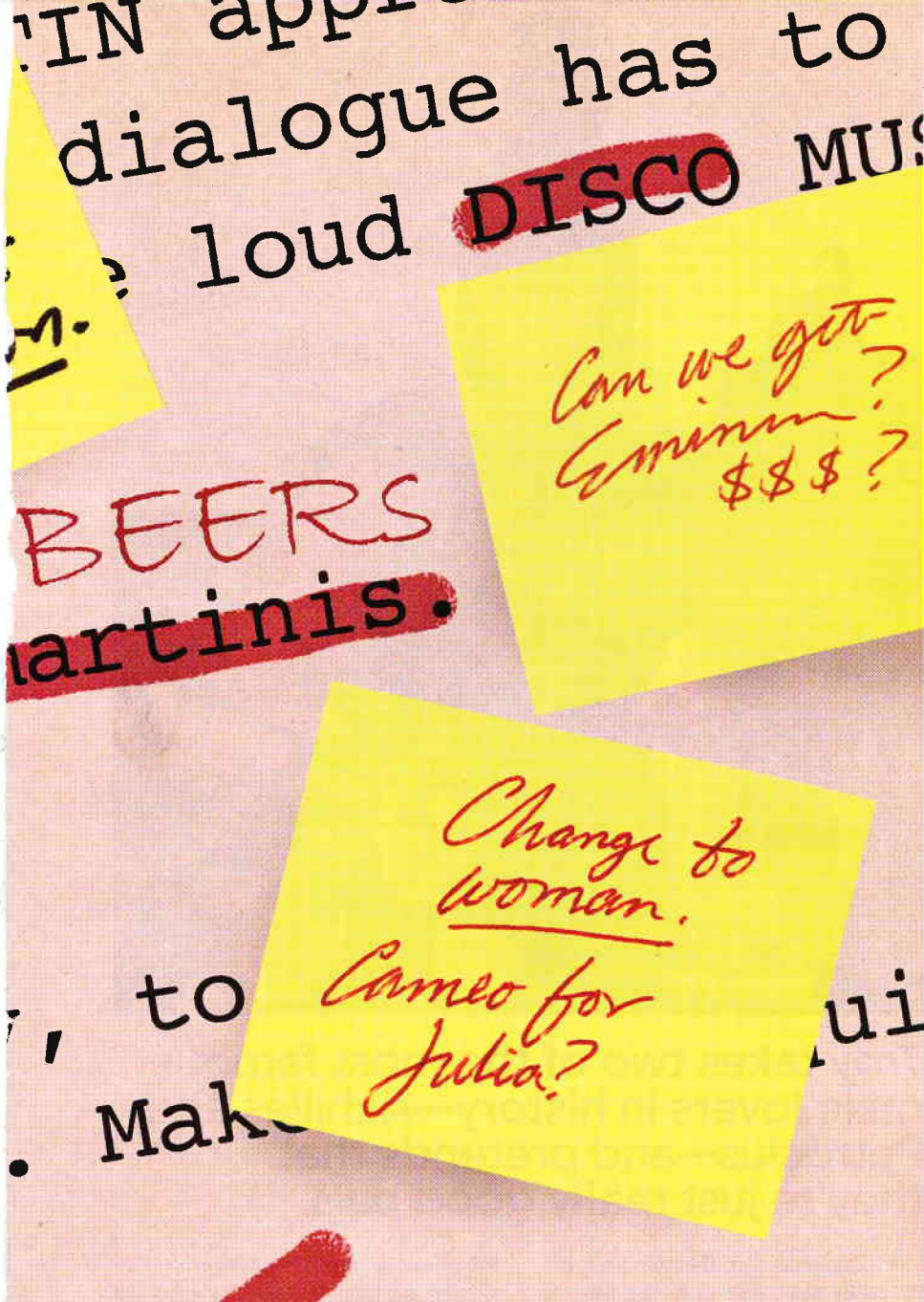
life of Cole Porter by finally letting the composer (a wry Kevin Kline) be seen chastely in bed with men but implies that the real love of his life is his wife, Linda (Ashley Judd).

And upcoming movies seem to threaten just more of the same. It's two steps forward, one step back: Hollywood is tackling more and more gay subject matter, but sometimes in a way that denudes it of meaning or substance.

Acclaimed British writer Andrew Davies finishes a new film script of *Brideshead Revisited*, and the dream cast includes Jude Law as the teddy-toting Sebastian and Paul Bettany as Charles Ryder. Then Davies happily describes his work as “darker” and “more

ILLUSTRATION: AMY MARTIN; DE-LOVELY: SIMON MEIN





heterosexual" than the classic miniseries and Evelyn Waugh's novel.

Jake Gyllenhaal and Heath Ledger set hearts aflutter by agreeing to star in Ang Lee's drama *Brokeback Mountain*, based on the short story by Pulitzer Prize-winner E. Annie Proulx. Currently in production, it's about two modern cowboys who are passionately in love with each other but tragically unable to make it work.

Gyllenhaal further warms the cockles of our heart by telling Canada's *Calgary Sun* it would be no big deal to kiss a guy in a movie and that "every man goes through a period of thinking they're attracted to another guy." Then he spoils it later by saying to another paper that the

gay love scenes might be toned down and that Lee had made the claim that two men herding sheep was far more sexual than two men having sex on-screen.

Up first is *Alexander*, Oliver Stone's epic about Alexander the Great, one of the most famous bisexuals in history and a man who conquered the world with his male lover and military general Hephaestion by his side. Colin Farrell, who plays the title role, spoke charmingly to *Entertainment Weekly* about his well-reviewed drama *A Home at the End of the World*—then launched a clever preemptive strike on complaints about *Alexander* (due November 5 from Warner Bros.).

"I don't have a kiss with Jared [Leto],"

Farrell told *EW*, referring to the actor who plays Hephaestion, "but I have a sex scene with the woman who plays my wife. And there will be blue murder as to, Why do we see him have sex with Rosario Dawson, but we don't see it with [Leto]? Nobody will stop to think; they'll only see what's on the surface."

Alternately, in the new drama *When Will I Be Loved*, directed by James Toback, Neve Campbell has a steamy lesbian scene, and no one blinks twice, except perhaps the always excitable Toback.

What's going on? With gay people kicking ass on reality and game shows; with gay characters so common on sitcoms and dramas on prime-time broadcast and cable TV that you can barely keep track of them all; with Ellen DeGeneres the darling of daytime talk; with Broadway flooded by queer-friendly musicals like *The Boy From Oz*, *Hairspray*, and *Avenue Q*; with authors such as Allan Gurganus, Sarah Waters, and David Levitt treated as major talents rather than ghettoized in the "gay" section; with out pop stars like Rufus Wainwright and Scissor Sisters becoming matter-of-fact; with scenes of men kissing men and women kissing women featured routinely on the local news as people fight for their basic civil rights, why is Hollywood so timid?

It's always been so, says Frank Rich, longtime cultural critic for *The New York Times*. "Mainstream Hollywood movies may be the most conservative medium in this regard, [certainly compared] to television, theater, and independent filmmaking," says Rich. "Mainstream Hollywood movies are much more dependent on the international market than an independent film or cable show. That leads to a general dumbing-down of everything, not just the presentation of gay people."

To show that gays are not alone, Rich cites such examples as *The Diary of Anne Frank* (which barely presented Anne as Jewish), the history of blacks in cinema, and the first film version of *The Children's Hour*, which drained all the lesbian content from the play. Mark Merlis, the out author of several novels, including the recent *Man About Town* and *An Arrow's Flight*, which plays off tales of the Trojan War, can attest that today is, in some ways, an embarrassment of riches. ►



# FILM

## FALL ENTERTAINMENT PREVIEW

'No kisses!' I guess that'll be OK," laughs Shanower. "Obviously, I'm not familiar with the movie, and I don't know the story. But if you're not going to do the gay content, why choose the story that had the gay content in the first place?"

What filmmakers are choosing, of course, is how to tell that story and dramatize the moments that matter to them. "Let's say there is a big kiss in the story and it's taken out of the movie," says Rich. "Until we see it, we can't judge. I don't think that's necessarily wrong. If we learned that a studio executive made them take out the kiss—they wanted it artistically, they wanted to be faithful to that part of the book, but the studio said, 'No, you can't do that because we don't want to lose any viewers'—that would be appalling and reprehensible. But we don't know that we're in that situation. For all we know, Ang Lee has a way of doing it that's more original than showing any kind of explicit physical contact."

Indeed, stories can be told and retold in a thousand ways. The Trojan War, for example: *Troy*, the Brad Pitt summer blockbuster (\$480 million worldwide and counting) is sheer spectacle that turns Achilles and Patroclus into cousins.

Shanower's book treats their love matter-of-factly, as something unremarkable to those around them. And *An Arrow's Flight* by Merlis is a marvelously original take that mixes in anachronistic details like cars and television, all in service of a story that uses the mythic tales of the Trojan War to breathe new life into the very modern story of a go-go boy and the curse of AIDS. (The novel couldn't be gayer, but Merlis got angry letters from readers upset that it didn't include the romance of Achilles and Patroclus. Apparently the sexy goings-on surrounding Pyrrhus, the son of Achilles and a hustler to boot, weren't enough for them. Just goes to show you can't please everyone.)

Ironically, Shanower didn't know



**"I don't have a kiss with Jared, but I do have a sex scene with Rosario, and there will be blue murder as to why," says Colin Farrell.**

about the romance between Achilles and Patroclus when he began researching his project in 1991. And Merlis initially intended to focus his book on the cursed Greek warrior Philoctetes and play it straight in every way—until he realized that the curse on that warrior spoke to him as a metaphor for AIDS.

So two gay authors approached this classic and unexpectedly discovered gay elements they wanted to explore. Shouldn't other artists be able to adapt that same story and find the straight ones? And does it matter?

"I haven't seen *Troy*, but it's still a Hollywood star vehicle," says Rich. "It's not as if it's changing what kids are reading in high school history books. I'm much more worried about that kind of tampering going on. I'd be very upset—and I daresay it's probably happening—that the gay identities of historical figures, such as Alexander, are edited out of history books." ■

*Giltz is a regular contributor to several periodicals, including the New York Post.*



## Alexander the straight

It stuns me that we are still dealing with such major censorship regarding historical gay people ["The New Degaying of Hollywood," September 14]. The Pitts and Cruises refuse to play these characters as they truly were. I suppose when a studio has hundreds of millions riding on content, they do have to make a decision. The really sad thing is that so many people will never believe the

closet in an effort to demonstrate to Americans that gays effectively serve our nation in many ways.

Unfortunately, the true motivator of McGreevey's confession was the scandal of a lawsuit and, perhaps, some of the other missteps of his administration.

I am proud that I was able to come out of the closet with dignity and on my own terms. Other gay elected officials who are in the closet should aim to do the same. Personal

next to New York, there is no metropolitan area that comes close to the amount of theater [in the Twin Cities], and there is almost always something that has GLBT elements—certainly as much as some of the plays he showcased in his article.

Stuart Holland, Minneapolis, Minn.

## Crossing party lines

I can relate to Taro Gold's beautifully written perspective about growing up in a conservative Republican military family [My Perspective, September 14]. Like many gay folks, my family is also a very conservative, Republican, and sometimes narrow-minded group. I forwarded copies of Gold's column to many members of my family, and to my delight and surprise, most of them agreed with everything he had to say—and more important, they announced they will not be voting for Bush this year. If only every rational Republican could read Gold's essay, I believe our country would be set to elect John Kerry, a more fair-minded, wise, and truly compassionate man, as president this November.

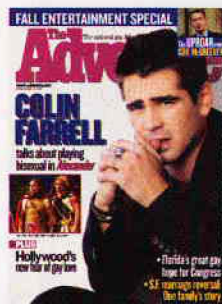
As a gay Republican, I simply cannot support a political party that allows religiously inspired bigotry to be espoused as policy, as it is by the Bush administration. Like Mr. Gold, I pray that all of our gay and lesbian brothers and sisters who made the mistake of voting for Bush in the last election will not make the same mistake this time. We must put our own dignity and the good of our nation ahead of partisanship, and that leaves us only one choice, in my opinion. I for one will be happy to support John Kerry when I'm at the polls this fall.

Dan Culbertson, Los Angeles, Calif.

As Taro Gold says, "Without wisdom, knowledge can be more harmful than ignorance." This is exactly what we have been dealing with during the Bush administration and its reelection campaign. Bush's supporters are paying no heed to the facts. They are incorrigible! Why is the Bush re-election campaign so enveloped in untruths? The day we ►

## "Certainly there would be no Burger King tie-ins if Alexander actually kissed his young friend."

—JON HALBUR, Las Vegas, Nev.



truth if they hear it; they will go by what they saw on the screen. Certainly there would be no Burger King tie-ins if Alexander actually kissed his young friend. And so it goes—America is still one of the most homophobic countries in the world, playing to the fundamentalists and the right-wingers.

Forget art, forget accuracy—just tell a good story and have the hero ride off into the sunset with his girl. Though I really enjoy Colin Farrell's work, based on what I have read and what has been deleted from the story of Alexander, I will have to pass.

Jon Halbur, Las Vegas, Nev.

## Out in Miami-Dade

At first I was excited when I saw the headlines about Gov. James McGreevey's coming-out [At Issue, September 14]. Earlier this year, as a member of the North Miami city council, I was the first elected official in Miami-Dade County to announce while holding public office that I am gay. I thought McGreevey, likewise, was stepping out of the

experience has shown me that the electorate cares little about one's sexual identity. Those truly wishing to advance the cause of gays in America should do so with their heads held high.

Scott Galvin, North Miami, Fla.

## A star is scorned

Attention, Michael Giltz: Fun preview ["Let's All Go to the Lobby," September 14], but where was *Meet the Fockers*? Barbra Streisand is back in a movie after eight years, and you fail to mention it? What are you, a heterosexual?

Frank Darmstadt, West New York, N.J.

## Twin cities theater

I don't know what kind of research Gerard Raymond does before writing about theater, but I guess most of it is from what his friends in New York and on the West Coast tell him ["Get Thee to a Theater," September 14]. Certainly he has missed (big-time) the big theater towns in between, Minneapolis and St. Paul. In fact,