



***BURY YOUR GAYS: COMPARATIVE STUDY OF QUEER
REPRESENTATION AND TROPE PORTRAYAL IN *RENT* (2005) AND
DALLAS BUYERS CLUB (2013)***

A Thesis

**In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Bachelor Degree Majoring in
American Cultural Studies in English Department, Faculty of Humanities,
Diponegoro University**

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PRONOUNCEMENT

The writer honestly states that this thesis entitled "*Bury Your Gays: Comparative Study of Queer Representation and Trope Portrayal in Rent (2005) and Dallas Buyers Club (2013)*" is written by himself without taking any works from other researchers in diploma degree, S-1, S-2, and S-3 degree of any university. The writer also ascertains that they do not take any material from other works except the mentioned references.

Surabaya, September 13, 2021

Immanuel Eka B W

MOTTO AND DEDICATION

"History is not something you look back at and say it was inevitable. It happens because people make decisions that are sometimes very impulsive and of the moment, but those moments are cumulative realities."

Marsha P. Johnson

"But, if constructing the future and settling everything for all times are not our affair, it is all the more clear what we have to accomplish at present: I am referring to ruthless criticism of all that exists, ruthless both in the sense of not being afraid of the results it arrives at and in the sense of being just as little afraid of conflict with the powers that be"

Karl Marx – *Letter from the Deutsch-Französische Jahrbücher* (1843)

This thesis is dedicated to every working class queer person whom I have and have not met. You are the strongest and most resilient people ever; thank you for being the light amidst the darkness of this cisheteropatriarchal world

I wish you abundant love, strength, and happiness

APPROVAL

***BURY YOUR GAYS: COMPARATIVE STUDY OF QUEER
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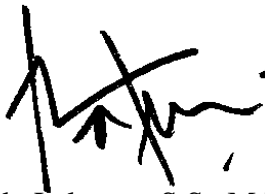
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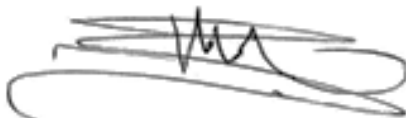
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The writer is highly aware of the fact that this thesis is far from perfect. Therefore, any recommendation and constructive criticism would be appreciated to improve this study on queer representation and portrayal on film. Finally, the writer hopes that this thesis would help people understand more about the film industry that still puts queer characters in jeopardy due to the remnants of past draconian guidelines.

Surabaya, 13 September 2021

Immanuel Eka B W

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ABSTRACT

The rise of queer characters' portrayal in cinema, despite bringing representation for queer people to be depicted on the silver screen, still revolves around a lousy narrative where queer characters would most likely face death at the end of the story. The term '*Bury Your Gays*' (BYG) is a trope to characterize these phenomena in the film industry. In this thesis, the writer will discuss the film *Rent*, directed by Chris Columbus, and *Dallas Buyers Club*, directed by Jean-Marc Vallée, and analyze the characteristic of the trope that takes place in both films during the AIDS crisis in America and how queer characters are being represented in them. The method that is used in this thesis is close reading; the result of the thesis is that the writer finds that both films are a manifestation of the BYG trope by using the death of the queer characters as catharsis and exploitation, despite having different characterization, both queer characters in the films are died because of AIDS. To conclude, the representation of queer characters in both films is still portrayed with grim endings to boost the heterosexual main characters' story progressions and put their queer identity merely in a negative light.

Keywords: Bury Your Gays, Cinematic Representation, Queer Cinema, Rent, Dallas Buyers Club

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

Queer characters have always been a massive part of literary works, whether through their portrayal in books, dramas, or films. The term ‘queer’ refers to an umbrella term to identify non-traditional gender identity and sexual orientation. The word used to be a pejorative word for homosexual individuals, making them subjected to abuse and violence of homophobia. Recently, this word is also used for a research model for gay or lesbian studies in the academia (Jagose, 1996:1). The increasing number of queer characters portrayal in films in the 21st century gained many praises because finally queer characters can be shown on the silver screen, it creates a sense of representation for actual queer people on how their lives are portrayed and watched by many people (Kohnen, 2015:114).

The portrayal of queer characters is not always good. In the past, Hollywood had a special treatment for film productions by creating sets of guidelines of self-censorship productions called *The Hays Code* (Black, 1996:25). Under this guideline, homosexuality was listed as one of the prohibitions when producing a film. This condition was widely supported, thus making the practice of queer-coding and queer-baiting very popular in that era for the filmmaker to include homoerotic aspects into their film. When the portrayal of the queer character was finally allowed, the filmmaker

would still portray them as the antagonist, the villains, or portray their identity as something perverse to avoid backlash from the production studio and the audience. This leads to the modern cinema era, where a certain stereotype is being imposed towards the portrayal of queer characters in films; this stereotype is called *Bury Your Gays*. The stereotype is a *trope* depicting how queer characters often face death within the storyline in one way or another. According to *The Art Direction Handbook for Film*, trope is a universal image which has been identified and permeated with layers of ideas, contextual meanings which create new metaphor or visual (Rizzo, 2014:12). *Bury your gays* trope is often found in literary works since the 19th century, although lately, it has been used to identify queer characters in both films and TV shows written with a grim ending (Hulan, 2017:17).

Discussion around *bury your gays* as a stand-alone film trope, as well as the theoretical framework developed by Haley Hulan in 2017 through her publication, titled; *Bury Your Gays: History, Usage, Context*, are still limited. Hence, this thesis will use the formulated theory as a foundational basis to compare trope portrayal of two queer-themed films. This thesis aims to analyze the trope by comparing two films as case studies. These films are chosen due to the similarity of plots with prominent queer characters' death at the end of the film. The first film discussed is *Rent*, written by Jonathan Larson originally as a play, before being adapted into a film in 2005 which was directed by Chris Columbus. The second film is *Dallas Buyers Club*, written by Craig Borten and Melisa Wallack, released in 2013 and directed by Jean-Marc Vallée. The setting for both films takes place during the 1980s era of the HIV/AIDS crisis in

the United States and involves queer characters who end up dying at the end of the film due to AIDS.

This thesis will also compare the way queer characters are represented in each film to see whether or not there is a progression, difference, or similarities in the way queer characters are written in both films through intrinsic analysis. Moreover, the writer will analyze the relations between the existing heteronormative system with homophobia and the assumption about whether or not these dynamics play a role in creating the *bury your gays* framework. Finally, the writer will try to examine how the AIDS situation is portrayed in both films' plotlines as an essential part of the death of the queer characters.

1.2. Research Questions

1. How are the prominent queer characters represented in both films as the case study?
2. How can queer characters in the study be analyzed within Hulan's *Bury Your Gays* framework through homophobia and heteronormativity lens?

1.3. Objectives of the Study

1. To explain similarities and differences of queer portrayal in regards to *bury your gays* theory in the case study
2. To analyze how queer characters face grim endings concerning homophobia and heteronormativity in the *bury your gays* framework.

1.4 Previous Studies

Several academic papers discuss the *Bury Your Gays* trope and its impact on the audience and general representation. For this thesis, the first paper that discusses the trope in general and the writer refers to is the principle idea and classification of the *Bury Your Gays* trope from Haley Hulan's 2017 paper titled *Bury Your Gays: History, Usage, and Context*.

The paper discusses how historically, the trope has been used in many forms of literature for over 125 years, originally used as a medium for queer authors to write queer stories without having to deal with negative stigma from the audience, since back then the existence of queer people was heavily condemned. In the contemporary era, as western societies can tolerate the queer community, the use of the trope and the reason why queer characters have always faced death, in the end, are varied, depending on who is writing the story. For Hulan, most of the authors use this narrative only to provide further context by the death of the queer character, which is invoking harmful narratives towards the queer audience (Hulan, 2017).

The second paper, *Bury Your Gays and Social Media Fan Response: Television, LGBTQ Representation and Communitarian Ethics* by Erin B. Waggoner, was published in 2017. The paper discusses the social media response towards the death of queer characters that often are the only representation that exists in television. The way the fans of the television show can create a massive social movement rooted in their anger, due to the way queer characters representation always end in death and demand for better endings for queer characters prove that there is a significant flaw that exists

within producers or scriptwriters when they write the storyline for queer characters. They are responsible for creating better representation for the queer audience if they want to profit from it (Waggoner, 2017).

The third paper is titled *A Genealogy of Querbaiting: Legal Codes, Production Codes, 'Bury Your Gays,' and 'the 100 mess'* written by Elizabeth Bridges. This paper mainly explains how the portrayal of queer in cinema is influenced by the renowned Hays Code as the legal code in Hollywood to stop what was considered immoral and degenerate in films and television productions, including homosexuality. Thus, the only acceptable way for producers to incorporate them into the silver screen was through negative portrayal or plot involving the death of queer characters. Moreover, the paper discusses how the current condition of film still portrays homosexuality negatively, despite the situation that has progressed (Bridges, 2018).

1.5 Scope of the Study

This thesis analyzes the *bury your gays* theory developed by Haley Hulan, which will be applied to analyze two queer-themed films, *Rent* and *Dallas Buyers Club*. Furthermore, the thesis will discuss the representation of queer characters in both films, and how homophobia and heteronormativity play a role in creating *bury your gays* trope in both films.

1.6 Organization of the Thesis

This thesis contains four chapters, each of which will then be further divided into sub-chapters. The four chapters are as follows:

1. Chapter I: INTRODUCTION. This chapter explains the background of the study, the research questions, the objectives, the methods used, and the organization of the thesis.
2. Chapter II: THEORY AND METHOD. This chapter consists of theories and research methods that the writer sees as relevant to the thesis topic, which will then be used to analyze the case studies.
3. Chapter III: RESULT AND DISCUSSION. This chapter discusses the findings of the research and the intrinsic and extrinsic aspects of both films to answer the research questions.
4. Chapter IV: CONCLUSION. This chapter is the conclusion of the analysis in the previous chapter.

BIBLIOGRAPHY.

APPENDIX.

CHAPTER II

THEORY AND METHOD

2.1 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This chapter elaborates on the writer's theoretical framework to analyze the study case to answer the research questions. The theoretical framework includes a general explanation of several critical intrinsic elements of the study case and the extrinsic elements of the study case. The intrinsic elements include the queer characters, setting of time and place, and plot, while the extrinsic elements cover *bury your gays* theoretical classification, heteronormativity, homophobia, and representation.

2.1.1 Historical Background of the AIDS crisis in the United States

The first public media that reported a form of cancer among gay men and caused an uproar was the New York Times article titled "*Rare Cancer Seen in 41 Homosexuals*" by Lawrence K. Altman in 1981 (hiv.gov). The term HIV/AIDS was not yet invented around that time, and people called the disease, which was and still is manifested in Kaposi's Sarcoma as one of the prominent symptoms, as gay cancer because the first group of people who got diagnosed was gay men (NPR – Wright, 2006). Kaposi's Sarcoma is a rare cancer which form masses of lesions in skin, mucous membranes, lymph nodes and other organs (National Cancer Institute). In the first New York Times article about cancer in homosexuals, Altman describes that the lesions formed on the

skin appears in violet-colored spots anywhere in the body, which can turn brown (Altman, New York Times, 1981). Because of the term "gay cancer," many homosexual men and the rest of the GBT community received terrible stigma for being the carriers of the virus (Butler, 2004:94). The term gay cancer will go on to be a public lexicon, as a way to stigmatize the LGBTQ community, before the Center for Disease Control (CDC) introduced the term *Gay-Related Immunodeficiency* (GRID), which was also popularized by New York Times through its 1982's article titled "*New Homosexual Disorder Worries Health Official.*" In September that year, CDC introduced a new term, *Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome* (AIDS), which we have come to know as the proper term to call the disease (hiv.gov).

Although there has been a lot of changes and studies that dispel the association of HIV/AIDS with homosexual people, the prejudice and discrimination against LGBTQ+ people as well as the association of the disease with their sexual identity remains rampant, the structural bias and association caused an implication that gay men not only an AIDS carrier but also other various sexually-transmitted diseases (Wollitski & Fenton, 2011:5). Due to the rising attention towards the LGBTQ+ community in that era, it is argued that the HIV/AIDS epidemic was the source of visibility surge towards the LGBTQ+ community, and not the Stonewall Riots, which was a series of spontaneous uprising and strikes by the LGBTQ community in New York in 1969, as a response for police raids in gay bars and oppressive laws that mandate the police to do so (D'emilio, 1984:231) like most people believed, as the monumental event that

showed the existence of how massive the LGBTQ+ community is in the public eye for the first time (Crimp, 2002:10).

Data from Gallup in 1985 shows that stigma that homosexual men are infected with AIDS is agreed upon by 80% of Americans. Meanwhile, another survey showed that 28% of Americans would avoid homosexuals, and that number increased to 44% in 1986. In another survey about AIDS during 1987-1988, Americans still believe that AIDS is a punishment from God for immoral sexual behavior. Some also agreed that people with AIDS should carry identification to show their status and that employers should be allowed to fire their employees who had AIDS (Mccarthy, 2019 – Gallup Vault).

The development of AIDS medication did not come that easy. The lack of state interest in finding the cure due to the stigma that it was only a disease spread among homosexuals and the sentiment against them made the development for treatments take so long. Eventually, in 1987 a medicine called *Azidothymidine* (AZT) was introduced through a placebo trial, where doctors disseminated random medicine for the trial participants, in which some received the AZT, and some received placebo; this was intended to test its efficacy towards AIDS patients (Park -Time, 2017). In 1997, a new treatment called Highly Active Antiretroviral Therapy (HAART) was introduced as the new medication standard, which helped decrease the death rates. In 2002, the FDA approved a rapid test kit to more accurately detect HIV in a person so they could receive treatment immediately (Nall, 2021 - Healthline)

2.1.2 Intrinsic Elements

The writer finds it essential to analyze the intrinsic elements of the novel because there are traits and personalities of the main characters and the settings that are essential for analyzing the study case.

2.1.2.1 Theme

A theme is the general essence or concept of literature, which is implied for the readers and sometimes proclaimed in the literary works to trigger the reader's imagination about the content of the literary works (Abrams, 2009:230).

A comprehensive understanding of the theme will help readers acknowledge an essential part of the literary work that is important to analyze each aspect of the work further. In this thesis, the writer will analyze the theme, compare it in both case studies, and analyze how it manifests itself through the characters.

2.1.2.2 Character and Characterization

According to M.H. Abrams, characters are the portrayal of individuals that live in narrative or dramatic works. The audience and the readers of said literary works thus can give a certain humane quality such as morals, intellectuals, and emotions. Characters explain the flow of the story based on their narrative through their dialogues, gestures, actions, and conflicts (2009:48).

Characterization, or characterizing, according to Abrams, is a process to distinguish characters in a narrative (2009: 48-49). For Abrams, there are two methods

for the author to characterize, showing and telling. The process of showing consists of letting the audience interpret the characters' motives and behavior merely from the written dialogues and narratives. In the telling, the author intervenes and describes the characters in detail for the readers to acknowledge (Abrams, 2009: 49). In this thesis, the writer will try to characterize the characters in the film by interpretation based on the dialogues and narration from other characters about the mainly observed queer character.

2.1.2.3 Setting

According to M.H Abrams, a setting can refer to either locale, historical time, and social conditions in which action occurs in literature (2009: 362).

The social situation in the story usually talks about the condition of the environment, society's state of affairs, customs, lifestyles, and social class of the characters (Kennedy, 1987:143). Differences in social settings might also create different outcomes despite having similar plotlines.

2.1.2.4 Cinematic Elements

The cinematic technique is an integral part of filmmakers to produce their works. These techniques include angle, camera movement, shot framing, and sound and editing for a film. When analyzing films, there needs to be an understanding of cinematic techniques; some cinematic techniques that will be included are as follow:

2.1.2.4.1 Shots Framing

Shot framing consists of close-up shot, medium shot, and long-shot. Frame shots are essential to create particular effects in the film and create different impressions in each scene, which is a medium for the director to convey their vision (Golden, 2001: 3).

2.1.2.4.1.1 Long Shot

A long shot (see appendix 2.1 for reference) would make a character or object appear from a distance, allowing the audience to choose where to look because there is much to look at. This includes the surrounding environments of the character; the audience could also sense the time and location present in the shot. However, due to the distance and lack of detail, it will be challenging to see the characters' emotions (Golden, 2001:3.).

2.1.2.4.1.2 Close-up Shot

A close-up shot (see appendix 2.2 for reference) will take most of the frame and show much more details. These details include facial expressions, emotions, and any other highlight of the characters that the director intended for the audience to notice (Golden, 2001: 5)

2.1.2.4.1.3 Medium Shot

A medium shot (see appendix 2.3 for reference) is captured from the waist-up of a character or the medium distance of the character. A medium shot can show more details in expressions and environments compared to a long shot. The medium shot does

not give many expressions for a cinematic effect, unlike the long and close shots, which is why it is often called a 'neutral shot' (Golden, 2001: 5).

2.1.2.4.2 Angle

2.1.2.4.2.1 Low Angle

A low-angle (see appendix 2.4 for reference) camera is positioned below the subject or looking up. This angle makes characters or subjects look more extensive, powerful, and in control. Usually, characters shot with a low angle are often used for powerful characters (Golden, 2001: 9).

2.1.2.4.2.2 High Angle

A high-angle (see appendix 2.5 for reference) camera is positioned above an object or looking down from it. This angle gives an effect of making characters look smaller, which symbolizes weakness. Characters shot with a high-angle shot in a film are usually weak characters or not in control (Golden, 2001:9).

2.1.2.4.2.3 Eye-level Angle

An eye-level angle is the most common angle to shoot because people see each other in real life. Eye-level angle (see appendix 2.6 for reference), is a shot in which the audience sees an object straight in the eyes, and the angle is parallel to the character or object. Despite not having many effects when used for the first time, it may suggest the emergence of power when used as a transition from a low-angle to eye-level (Golden, 2001:9).

2.1.3 Extrinsic Elements

The writer will try to analyze the extrinsic elements of the novel as it is crucial in helping the readers fully understand the conflicts and issues in the novel, why they happened, and how they challenged the main characters in the novel.

2.1.3.1 *Bury Your Gays*

Despite being traditionally known merely as a *trope* or stereotype imposed upon queer characters who are being killed off in literary works to protect the authors from facing social backlash for writing about queer characters (Hulan: 2017). According to Haley Hulan, there is no clear definition of *bury your gays* but the recurring theme and plot in literature or cinema which portray death, villainization or enforcement of negative portrayal and lousy ending for queer characters (Hulan: 2017)

Moreover, Hulan explains that there are different depictions and use of *bury your gays* since it is involved mainly with fiction and literary works. Depending on the creator or author of the fictions, the portrayal of the heterosexual author might differ with how queer author portrays and use *bury your gays* for their literary work. The portrayal of the trope is getting more recognizable in contemporary films and TV series. In her paper, *Bury Your Gays: History, Context, Usage*, Haley Hulan explains four types of the way the trope is being written based on their storyline: as a refuge, as catharsis, as exploitation, and as spectacle (Hulan, 2017).

Bury your gays as refuge explains how historically queer authors had difficulty incorporating queer characters or plots without facing repercussions, as Oscar Wilde did with *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. These were the times when homosexuality was still perceived as perversion, mental illness, and social aberration. However, having queer characters written by queer authors in literary works becomes a refuge or escapism for actual queer readers who feel their lives are represented in them (Hulan, 2017:19-20)

Bury your gays as exploitation consists of villainization of homosexuality or the idea of queerness, hence the need to kill the agent and the idea altogether. In this category, Hulan gives an example of the play *The Children's Hour*, which portrays two female teachers falsely accused of being lovers, which ends with one teacher confessing her feelings to the other and killing herself after being rejected. The idea of exploitation is punishing queer-adjacent or queer-coded characters for showing the danger of homosexuality in the first place and casting it in a negative light (Hulan, 2017:21).

Bury your gays as spectacle mainly occurred in TV series, which involves an explicit depiction of queer characters, usually newly partnered, which storylines only revolve around the blooming relationship itself with no other additional background arcs. These relationship plots are usually short-lived because one of the partners will be killed just for shock value. Hulan gives several examples, such as Clarke and Lea in

The 100, Anna and Natalie in *Siberia*, and Leona and Geraldine in *Executive Suit* (Hulan, 2017:23).

Bury your gays as catharsis is defined literally as catharsis, as the cleansing or purification of emotion after experiencing an extreme emotional state. Hulan explains that *bury your gays* as catharsis often involves a plot where the death and the villainization of the queer character become the reason for the other characters to get better and transform themselves as a process of grief and redemption for the queer characters (Hulan, 2017:22-23).

2.1.3.2. Homophobia & Heteronormativity

George Weinberg, a psychotherapist, first coined homophobia, in the mid-1960s, through his book *Society and the Healthy Homosexual*. Weinberg observed the intense and discomfort attitude of his coworkers whenever gay men and women were around. Thus, he invented a word to describe this situation he was experiencing, which is now a common term to describe hatred towards the queer community (1972:5).

There are many forms of homophobia, ranging from physical to mental abuse towards gay people. In this thesis, the writer will define covert and overt homophobia concerning the *bury your gays* trope. Covert homophobia is defined as microaggression that looks subtle and often formed as unconscious actions interpreted as hostility and dehumanizing the members of queer people in various ways (Nadal, Whitman, Davis, Erazo, & Davidoff, 2016:63). Overt homophobia is explained as psychologically

destructive discrimination manifested in violence and harm towards queer people (Hunter, 2007:4).

The term heteronormativity gains recognition in academia in Michael Warner's *Fear of a Queer Planet*. According to Warner, heteronormativity is the perception of the world through the lens of heterosexuality. For Warner, queer people need to assert themselves in society because heteronormativity acts as "the indivisible basis of all community, and as the means of reproduction without which society would not exist" (1993:45).

In accordance with heteronormativity, Tamagne explains that traditionally, the image of sexuality was always heterosexual and monogamous. The perception of "normal" sexuality was propagated by the bourgeoisie to the middle class and working class, resulting in a limited view on sexuality and its spectrum. Any sexuality that does not conforming to the heterosexual norm is considered abnormal, including prostitution, masturbation, and homosexuality (2006: 3).

2.1.3.3 Representation

According to Stuart Hall, representation is how the media gives meanings towards something that has no meaning beforehand. The meaning could be a positive one or a negative one. Hall explains that the media has so much power to influence the people; thus, everything is in a precarious position until there is a clear depiction according to how the media portrays them (1997:1).

Cinematic representation is also derived from Hall's principle theory of representation. Hall explains that specific cultural identities must be represented in the cinema, as it helps the groups who are being represented reaffirm their identity and can be the subject of discourse by the society that consumes the cinematic experience (1989:14).

Representation for queer characters in the cinema has evolved through times since its earliest appearance. The first-ever appearance of queer characters was in 1895 in an experimental film titled *The Gay Brothers*, directed by William Dickinson, which shows two men dancing fancily. This particular action of men dancing shocked everyone due to its perverse nature Hollywood struggled with representation for queer characters with the existence of the hays code, created in the 1930s, which prohibits studios from producing movies that consist of perverse acts and censors homosexuality and transgenderism in the cinema (Russo, 1995:56). In the 21st century, the representation for queer cinema has gotten much better with the increasing number of released films that show queer characters each year. Gay & Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation (GLAAD) noted that in 2019, 118 Hollywood films had characters that identify as LGBTQ+ (GLAAD Media Institute, 2020).

2.2. RESEARCH METHODS

The methodology used to analyze films in the case studies is divided into two methods: method of research and methods of approach.

2.2.1 Method of Research

The method that is used for the research in this paper is the library research method. According to George, library research is an extension of the ideas from the writer, which complement other related literary materials and sources (2008:1). This method is used to collect data from relevant literary works related to the subject of the study. In this thesis, the writer will primarily collect the data from films in the study case, *Rent* and *Dallas Buyers Club*. The secondary data will be collected from previous studies, academic journals, e-books, and relevant digital articles.

2.2.2 Method of Approach

The approach used to analyze and answer the subject questions in this thesis will primarily use comparative analysis methods. According to Esser and Vliegthart, the comparative analysis serves multiple functions in answering questions in a wide range of processes. Moreover, comparative analysis improves the understanding of a different structure against the other structure being compared (Esser & Vliegthart, 2017:6). According to Willemen, the best way to identify comparative film studies is to analyze the text's mode of address, which appears through the better elaboration of film theory by paying attention to consequent modulation of cinematic 'speech' or discourse (2002:168). This cinematic discourse includes social and historical elements of the film that is being compared (2002:169).

A sociological approach is also applied to analyze the intrinsic and extrinsic aspects of this thesis. According to W. Witte, the sociological approach in literature

cannot be separated from Marxist theory. These questions heavily influence the sociological approach regarding the material reality of social, economic, and political factors in literature (1941:90). In this thesis, this method will be supported by other theoretical frameworks: *bury your gays*, representation, heteronormativity, and homophobia.

The new historicism approach is used to analyze extrinsic aspects of both films, which will incorporate research from multiple sources of media. This approach is essential to gain a historical and social understanding of how the discussion was created and the problems in its conceptions (Tyson, 2006:286-287).

In comparing both case studies, the writer will try to incorporate several dialogues from both films. These dialogues will be selected with the support of the representation theory relating to the portrayal of queer characters in both movies, which will face death at the end of the story, additional aspect that will be analyzed from both of these queer characters through characterization study and analysis through the aforementioned theoretical framework based on their portrayal in the film.

CHAPTER III

RESULT & DISCUSSION

3.1 Comparative Intrinsic Analysis Surrounding the Queer Characters

3.1.1 How Characters Manifest Queerness in *Rent* and *Dallas Buyers Club*

In this thesis, the writer will talk about the queer character from each film that faces death in the end, hence making the film have *bury your gays* plotlines. The dead queer character in *Rent* is Angel Dummot Schunard (Wilson Jermaine Heredia), and the dead queer character in *Dallas Buyers Club* is Rayon (Jared Leto). Jagose explains how queer is defined as an umbrella term for the LGBT+ community (1996:1), which Angel and Rayon are portrayed.

In *Rent*, there are multiple queer characters: Maureen, a bisexual performer artist, Joanne, a lesbian lawyer, Tom Collins, a gay professor, Angel's love interest, and Angel herself. Angel is portrayed as a drag queen and transwoman who is a street musician who plays percussion. Despite how her identity is never disclosed on whether she identifies as a transwoman or not, or whether she uses feminine pronouns (she/her), her character is mainly portrayed to wear feminine attire. Most of her friends call her with feminine pronouns, which denotes that her gender identity differs from her biological sex.

Mimi : "... *there was this skinhead that was harassing her, and she just walked right up to him and said: "I'm more of a man than you'll ever be, and more of a woman that you'll ever get"* (Mimi, Rent, 1:45:49 – 1:46:03)

The monologue above is a story told by Mimi about Angel's experience defending herself from someone who harassed her during her funeral wake. From the monologue, we can see how Angel identifies herself neither as a woman nor a man, which affirms the analysis of Angel's gender non-conforming identity. We can also analyze her gender non-conformity through her expression. Angel is depicted as a tall, skinny gender non-conforming figure wearing short hair wigs and carrying a backpack filled with percussion sticks. We first see her wearing a red coat, zebra stockings and belt, and knee-length boots (see appendix 2.7 for reference). Later on, she is seen wearing a multicolored jacket, floral skirt, and heels. During the New Year celebration, she is seen cosplaying as Pussy Galore in one of the scenes with a long blonde wig and pink outfit (see appendix 2.8 for reference). She was only seen out of her crossdressing attire during her last moment at the AIDS support group and the hospital, where she is not wearing any wig and only wearing plain clothes (See figure 2.9).

Angel's queerness is manifested throughout the show through her gender expression or how she expresses herself, which breaks the heteronormative norm as a drag queen who crossdresses. Michael Warner explains that it is vital for queer people

to assert themselves into the heteronormative society because of how heteronormative society behaves as an indivisible essence of all groups (1993: xxi). Crossdressing hence could be seen as an act that does not conform with the heterosexual perception or rules of dressing according to the traditional gender identity, hence why crossdressing affirms queer identity in Angel and other transgender people. Angel's queerness is manifested through her gender expression, non-traditional gender identity, and same-sex relationship with Tom.

In *Dallas Buyers Club*, the only prominent queer character is Rayon and later her love interest, Sunflower, although they do not get as much screen time. Like Angel, Rayon has never identified herself, nor is there any description of her gender identity. Rayon is portrayed as a crossdressing drag queen and a transwoman, despite some scenes where she was still being misgendered and only being labeled through her homosexual status. Rayon is an AIDS patient and is going through an AZT trial to test its effect on HIV/AIDS patients. AZT trial was a drug testing trial which was condoned by the FDA in the 1980s to test the efficacy of azidothymidine (AZT) drug in HIV/AIDS patients. The trial was super controversial because the trial randomly assigned the participants with either the AZT or placebo for six months to see how the “drugs” were developed in each assigned group. Neither the doctor nor the patient knew what drugs they were assigned with (TIME magazine, 2017). Rayon is always portrayed wearing full makeup and feminine articles of clothing as well. Rayon affirms her identity as a transwoman in the scene where she puts her makeup on and tries on a

pink dress, crying and looking at her reflection (see appendix 2.10 for reference). The only time Rayon wears masculine attire is during a meeting with her transphobic father to ask for help for the buyers club business by cashing out her life insurance money (see appendix 2.11 for reference). Buyers club is a collective local cooperation club to purchase goods in lower prices than the market or goods that aren't widely available in the market. During AIDS pandemic in the U.S, this collective became very popular to distribute AIDS medications which were not approved by the FDA as well disseminating informations about HIV/AIDS (Lune, 2007:53-54).

Rayon : "*God, when I meet you, I'm gonna look pretty, even if that's the last thing I do. I'll be a beautiful angel*"
(Rayon, Dallas Buyers Club, 01:26:21- 01:26:35)

The monologue above is an example of the longing that Rayon feels about her trans identity, she wants to look pretty like an angel, this scene cemented and validated Rayon's transness because she is seen wearing makeups and trying on a dress while looking at her reflection (see appendix 2.10 for reference). Rayon's queerness can also be seen manifested in her relationship with Sunflower, a crossdresser who is dying cause of AIDS. Despite being the other queer character in the film, Sunflower will not be discussed further because they do not face death by the end of the film, hence entirely irrelevant for the *bury your gays* analysis. To conclude, queerness manifested in Rayon through her gender expression, gender identity, and the non-heteronormative relationship she has with Sunflower.

Both *Rent* and *Dallas Buyers Club* portrayed some prominent queer features for both Angel and Rayon, which both would ultimately end up dead due to AIDS. The similarities that can be found in the way queerness manifested in both films are through non-heteronormative gender identity, which is embraced by Angel and Rayon, breaking gender expression through crossdressing and same-sex relationships.

3.1.2 Comparison of AIDS and Social Settings Portrayal in *Dallas Buyers*

Club and Rent

Most of the settings in *Dallas Buyers Club* take place in 1985 Dallas, Texas. We first know about Rayon's workplace background during her conversation in the hospital with Ron Woodrof. Rayon explains how she shares the AZT medicine she receives during the trial with one of her work friends. Next, we see Rayon in her workplace where she usually offers her service in a gay bar, where she recommends Ron Woodrof to sell the illegal AIDS medication he gets from the Mexican underground hospital facility (see appendix 2.12 for reference).

Social conditions that center on Rayon as the queer character put on a stereotype that working class transgender or queer people in general always seek financial security by commodifying their bodies for prostitution. Another example of this precedent can be found in several motion pictures with transgender or queer characters such as Sin-Dee Rela from *Tangerine* (2015), Kimmy from *The Hangover Part II* (2011), Angel from *Pose* (2019), and many more. Moreover, the film portrays Rayon as a drug addict; this is also mainly a stereotype in popular media, associated with working class people

who work in prostitution or the adult entertainment industry. Some example of this stereotype can be found in characters from motion pictures or shows which works in prostitution and having a drug addiction such as Mimi from *Rent* (2005), Jane from *Sweet Jane* (1998), Marion in *Requiem for A Dream* (2000).

Dallas Buyers Club takes place in Dallas, Texas during early years of the AIDS crisis. The film portrays how the people still treating AIDS patients with hostility and believing that AIDS is an exclusively homosexual "disease" this is shown when the main character, Ron Woodrof, breaks down the news to his friends about his AIDS diagnosis, his friends' reactions were quite hostile by immediately accusing him of being gay and using it as an insult. Ron is portrayed as a heterosexual man who is also homophobic, especially at the beginning of his relationship with Rayon. He would mistreat her and see her as a disgrace due to her queer identity. The homophobia and transphobia faced by Rayon is something familiar also faced by AIDS patients everywhere; not only did they face hardships in getting help and treatments that they needed, but they were also being associated as a part of the queer community, which created an implicit bias in the way society perceived the disease and queer community in general (Wollitski & Fenton, 2011:16).

Rent takes place in New York City in the early 1990s. The social setting surrounding *Rent*, in terms of queerness and AIDS, has been much more progressive than *Dallas Buyers Club*. The film portrays Angel as a street musician and a freelance worker who accept requests from people to do chores. Angel is also surrounded by

supportive friends who respect her and never ridicule her gender identity, unlike Rayon's character. The portrayal of Angel as a transwoman or drag queen who do not work as a prostitute breaks the stereotype of how transgender is usually portrayed in popular media, as mentioned above.

In *Rent*, Angel, who is also struggling with AIDS, regularly attends an AIDS support group. A support group is typically a gathering of people who share the same sickness, such as cancer or HIV, where they sit around to talk about anything and support each other (see appendix 2.13 for reference). This particular support group is nonexistent in *Dallas Buyers Club*, as what is portrayed in the film in terms of support is merely a hospice for the AIDS patients to take care of themselves until they die. Despite its similarity with how buyers club in real life are supposed to run, AIDS support groups do not regulate illegal HIV/AIDS medication and only act as a supporting system for AIDS patients (Saag, 2014:146).

Moreover, there are some differences regarding social settings in *Dallas Buyers Club* and *Rent*. *Dallas Buyers Club* takes place in Texas in 1985, which is the beginning of the AIDS crisis era, where the reception for people who have AIDS is still hostile and primarily associating the virus with the queer community, hence creating an implicit bias that HIV/AIDS can infect only the queer community. Moreover, the film also portrays the creation of a buyers club where AIDS patients could get illegal medications to treat the virus on a subscription basis, where the profit is shared by Ron,

who does all the illegal buyings, and Rayon, who finds the market basis for the customers who are AIDS patients.

In comparison, the portrayal of AIDS in *Rent* is much more progressive, in a way that no characters or storyline discriminates against people with AIDS or associates AIDS with the queer community. The other portrayal about how there is a support group for AIDS patients in the film also proves how the social settings have much more improved if being compared to the setting in *Dallas Buyers Club*, with the only support that the AIDS patients get is from the hospital where they receive hospice waiting for their death.

The stark similarity from each portrayal of these communities is that both still see HIV/AIDS as a death sentence because there are no medications approved by the FDA yet in *Dallas Buyers Club*, which leads to the assumption that the virus is a death sentence. Meanwhile, in *Rent*, despite how AIDS medications, the AZT, is already widely distributed, there is still a lack of research on HIV/AIDS and medicine development; thus, these support groups exist merely as a literal supporting system and catharsis for AIDS patients to accept their fate. This is shown in the lyrics of one of the songs in *Rent*, sung by the AIDS life support group participants during their meeting, which was titled "*Will I*."

*"Will I lose my dignity?
Will someone care?
Will I wake tomorrow from this nightmare?"*
(AIDS support group participant, *Rent*, 0:52:40-0:54:11)

3.1.3 Cinematic Analysis Comparative Concerning The Identity of Rayon and Angel

Cinematic analysis can be traced to how the camerawork and shots surrounding Angel and Rayon are done—starting with cinematic analysis for Angel. In the movie, we can see that Angel has consistently been shown together with Collins and with all of her friends. In these examples (see appendix 2.7, 2.8, 2.14 and 2.16 for references), whenever Angel is wearing feminine attires, she is always shot together with her friends and lover with a long shot and eye level angles, where there is no space at all between her and her friends. These examples show that Angel is not afraid, confident and comfortable with her trans identity and wearing feminine expressions when she is around her supportive friends and family. In comparison, when we see Angel out of her feminine attires, she is usually shot with a long shot frame, and there is always an empty space next to her, like when she was seen working as a street musician at the beginning of the movie (see appendix 2.16 for reference), and when she is attending the AIDS support group (see appendix 2.9 for reference). The most plausible interpretation from the first scene where she is seen working as a street musician is how she wants to be safe from queerphobia, because she is alone, hence making it a part of survival strategy for her to work and remain discreet. However, from the scene where she is in the AIDS support group, it can be interpreted that she wants to blend in with the other members of the support group, to see herself as mere humans with AIDS that

might be dying soon, outside from all of her glam persona within her feminine attire. The empty space next to her, in contrast with how there is no space at all when she is wearing feminine attires among all of her friends, symbolizes how empty she feels outside of her feminine attires that affirm her identity as a transwoman, and how she feels alienated without it as well.

The way Rayon is shot, is also similar with Angel when it comes to showing off her identity. From these examples (see appendix 2.6, 2.17, 2.18 for reference), since Rayon's primary job is in the prostitution industry, hence why most of the times she is consistently shown by wearing feminine attires with makeups and wig. However, the film progressively shows how her appearance and expression started to change as well along with her drug addiction and her AIDS that got worsen by days. This is shown by how she often take off her wig and ultimately wearing a masculine attire, in suit, with no makeup and styled her hair to present in a masculine way. She did that, when she was about to meet her brother to ask for his help to sell her life-insurance money in order to bring the buyers club back to business (see appendix 2.11 for reference), it can be said that this was the lowest point of her life. Another shot showing her without her transwoman persona and expression is during a scene in her bedroom where she is praying about how she wants to look pretty when she died and goes to heaven (see appendix 2.10 for reference). Both of these examples are shot in close-up to show Rayon's grief and sadness when she is faced with two adversities: first, sacrificing her dignity and comfortable expression as a transwoman to meet his brother and ask for

help, second, on her dying days when she realizes that her time is near. These close up shots are meant to convey the sadness for someone who have lost her identity and her battle against something she is punished with due to the nature of her sexuality and job risk.

3.2 *Bury Your Gays Trope Comparatives in Rent and Dallas Buyers Club*

This chapter will further draw comparisons for *Rent* and *Dallas Buyers Club* to determine where each film would fit in the category from the list of Hulan's *bury your gays* categorizations. Moreover, this chapter first and foremost analyzes aspects of homophobia and heteronormativity within each film and how those aspects have a role in creating the trope, starting with and why it is problematic.

3.2.1 Comparison of Overt Homophobia and Heteronormativity in *Rent* and *Dallas Buyers Club*

Identifying overt homophobia can be quickly done by identifying the manifestation of the act in the film, which mostly comes in violence. Forms of violence itself can vary, including but not limited to: verbal and physical assault, harassment, bashing, discrimination, hate crime, and many more. Violence against queer people was at an all-time high, especially during the AIDS crisis in the United States, primarily due to the stigma that queer people are the carrier and source of the virus, which pretty much was the reason why homophobia was rampant during this era (Wollinski & Fenton, 2011).

The occurrence of overt homophobia present in *Dallas Buyers Club* mainly takes form in verbal harassment and insult towards Rayon's gender identity and verbal insult towards individuals with AIDS by putting stigma on them and calling them homosexual slurs, which Ron faces. He also can be seen as a heteronormative character due to his portrayal of masculine persona; this includes how he enjoys bull-riding, having multiple women as a sexual partner, and working hard labor job as an electrician on a construction site. In *Rent*, only one specific act panders onto homophobia, a story told by Mimi during Angel's funeral wake about how Angel defended herself after being verbally harassed by someone about her identity and appearance. Meanwhile, heteronormativity in both *Rent* and *Dallas Buyers Club* is mainly shown through some characters' still perception of Angel and Rayon as a man, despite their non-conforming expression, by using traditional masculine pronouns (he/him) on them, while both Rayon and Angel themselves never claimed as such.

3.2.2 Analysis of Covert Homophobia and Heteronormativity in *Dallas*

Buyers Club

Meanwhile, in comparing covert homophobia in both films and how it will relate to the association of *bury your gays* trope, we have to look deeper upon each queer character portrayals while critically analyzing how they are written. Starting with an analysis of Rayon from *Dallas Buyers Club* and how she is written in the film. Aside from her striking presence of non-conforming gender identity, shown throughout the film, and her queerness, Rayon is also portrayed as someone with multiple afflictions. First is

her queer identity, which was heavily considered as something perverse, and second is her drug addiction, which ultimately leads to the main source of her suffering instead of having AIDS that eats her alive. These afflictions show how miserably written Rayon is as a queer character who struggles with lots of adversities. Moreover, her role in the film is merely limited to being an auxiliary for Ron Woodrof in realizing his ambition for creating the buyer's club and capitalizing on the unapproved AIDS drugs within the queer community. This was done mainly through Rayon's significant role in giving ideas on charging people to buy the drugs, becoming a liaison for queer customers to buy AIDS drugs in their buyer's club, and later using her life-saving money to save the buyer's club when it receives penalty from the court due to its illegal status (Copier & Steinbock, 2017:928).

Rayon's bodily-trans presence in the film is also rarely touched despite the attempt to exploit her trans identity. Copier and Steinbock compare Rayon's role as a character in general with the black mammy stereotype, despite her whiteness and calling her the transgender mammy. Rayon is portrayed as a transgender character with a heart of gold, which provides servility and pledges allegiance towards the heteropatriarchy hegemony, just like how black mammy character becomes the ally and helper for the white family they work for, transgender mammy is also there to become the helper to their cisgender ally (2017:929). Rayon can solve everything that Ron needs and comes with all the necessary materials to help Ron, taking care of him when he is sick, while also educating him on understanding the queer community to

make him accept the queer community positions her as an educator, which is also the characteristics of being a mammy (Ryan, 2009:129).

Moreover, aside from the trans mammy issue, Rayon's limited elaboration on her arc, motivation, and presence of trans-experience make her character seemingly made only to fetishize trans identity. Rayon's looks are mostly presented and inspired by drag queen persona in the 1980s instead of an actual transgender person who wishes for transitioning process. There is no further explanation on what Rayon wants as a transwoman, such as the desire to take hormones or surgical procedures to complete her trans identity. However, her character is portrayed in various sexual stereotypes of non-conforming identities and practices, which prove how unimaginative her portrayal is (Copier & Steinbock, 2017: 928).

3.2.3 Analysis of Covert Homophobia and Heteronormativity in *Rent*

Rent covers covert homophobia more scandalously because it involves a plagiarizing scandal by *Rent*'s writer, Jonathan Larson. Sarah Schulman, in her book *Stagestruck*, reveals that the conception of *Rent* was a fusion of a storyline from classic opera *La Boheme* by Puccini and taking some materials from Schulman's fiction, *People in Trouble*, where Larson admitted of using materials from the book for the Broadway musical conception, during a dinner party in Richard Rogers Awards Dinner in 1994 (Schulman, 1998:13). Some similarities that can be found from *Rent* which are an exact copy of *People in Trouble* materials, include the portrayal of lesbian lovers trapped in a love triangle with a heterosexual man, the portrayal of interracial queer

couple where one dies because of AIDS. Both take place in East Village, filled with AIDS patients, homelessness, queer community, and artists (1998:15).

Aside from the plagiarism controversy, Schulman herself is a lesbian writer while Larson was a straight man. By using Schulman's works to make a very profitable and popular musical and now into a film adaptation, without acknowledging and crediting Schulman, to begin with, makes *Rent* as a media which capitalizes off off actual queer work for the profit and legacy of a heterosexual man, which inherently considered as a homophobic act. The creation of *Rent* and any other media that portray queer characters but was created and produced by heterosexual people create disillusioned and watered-down images of homosexuality and queerness. This results in portrayals and representations that are not genuine, full of stereotypes, and positioning queer characters merely as a tragic supporting character in sub-plots, and usually putting a straight character as the hero of the story (Schulman, 1998: 148).

The creation of fake homosexuality and misleading representation in the media becomes an important subject of discussion when analyzing *bury your gays* trope. Schulman explains that up until her book is published; several components of disingenuity can be identified from many films within queer cinema, which are: how queer content is only permissible if it is merely about romance, mild homosexual portrayal in heterosexual paradigm is also okay to be made, with a preference towards the creation of gender-bent characters or drag persona but still with straight identity, no mention of homophobia in the content or something that made straight people look

bigoted, and putting queer characters as sidekicks and never as the main protagonists (1998:147). Those analyses correlate directly with what Hulan formulates within her *bury your gays* framework history and conception, that the creation of the trope initially was to prevent social backlash from the society about homosexual contents in mainstream media, thus creating portrayal which frames homosexual characters in negative manners, this later becomes a tradition which Hollywood still adopts to this day (2017:19).

From these analyses, both *Rent* and *Dallas Buyers Club* manifest covert homophobia by transforming into a vehicle where heteronormativity can prevail through the heroic portrayal of heterosexual characters, even in the queer-themed cinema. Whether it is happening intrinsically within the film or involving external factors, straight people capitalizing from queer trauma in the cinema creates a world where queerness can be acceptable for the heteronormative society. They are portrayed as the hero, while actual queer characters are only there as gimmicks and empty vessels, whose sole purpose is to glorify these heterosexual heroes of the story. After comparing both case studies, there are stark similarities in how queer characters are portrayed, especially within the AIDS storyline. The portrayal of AIDS in cinema, becomes a platform to champion straight characters as the hero of the story who saves the day in the AIDS storyline while also achieving their goals and objectives, on the other hand, queer characters whose identities and stories are exploited to alleviate these straight protagonists, become mere skeletons.

3.2.4 Categorizing Dead Queer Characters in *Rent* and *Dallas Buyers Club* within the *Bury Your Gays* Framework

Haley Hulan explains that the requirement for literary works to be associated with the *Bury Your Gays* (BYG) trope is if a literary work consists of a queer character who faces antagonization, villainization, death, and bad endings in general (2017:19). The four archetypes within the tropes themselves (see pages 14-16 above) serve to analyze and categorize the trope more profoundly, elaborating the framework and traits in each archetype. These frameworks will categorize the queer characters in this thesis to see what archetype suits them the best based on their portrayal.

The first character to discuss is Angel from *Rent*. Angel's significant story arc involves her relationship with Colin, and the only plot that makes her stand out is where she is dying because of AIDS and eventually dies. This is followed by a funeral wake scene, where her friends reminisce about her and how much she means to everyone. Afterward, the group split due to bitter arguments. A year later, the main protagonist, Mark, quits his job to pursue his film career passion, while his roommate Roger sells his guitar and moves to Santa Fe for a better opportunity. Angel's death inspired the main protagonist's decision to get their life together, which Mark and Roger imply in a song they sing together, "*What You Own*." In the film's final scene, Mimi, Angel's best friend, had a near-death experience where she claims to have seen Angel during her unconscious state. Angel told her to "turn around girlfriend and listen to the boy's song"

(02:05:47, 2005), referring to Roger's feelings for Mimi. Mark ultimately finishes his film, which is a documentary of his friend group that he has been recording for the past year, with Angel showing up in the documentary's final scene.

From the details of Angel's storyline mentioned above, there are only two highlights that we can take for her role in the film: first, her newly bloomed relationship with Colin and how she is always present to support her friend group; second, her battle with AIDS which eventually takes her life and becomes a uniting moment for her friends and how her friends are trying to get their life together after her death. Hulan categorizes this as *bury your gays* as catharsis, where a queer character death becomes a catharsis or redefining moment for the other characters, where the way they grief and cope is through transformation and using death or antagonization as a voice of reason to change life for the better (2017:22).

Evidence of these transformations from the cathartic process can be seen from the decisions made by the characters right after Angel's death and how the other characters can fulfill their ultimate goal from their storylines. Mark finishes his film project; Roger can finish his song and get back together with Mimi, Maureen and Joan are getting back together as a couple, Mimi remains alive and can find love in Roger, while Colin is able to cope with Angel's death and brings the memory of Angel with him everywhere. It is safe to say that Angel's role when she was alive is to become the glue in the friend group, as mentioned by Maureen in the funeral wake scene, while after she dies, she becomes the reason for the characters to achieve their dreams and

hopes. Angel's dreams and hopes are never further explained, making her entire character merely tokenistic by flaunting her queer identity and using a queer relationship to define her.

Similarly, in *Dallas Buyers Club*, Rayon's entire story arc is limited to being the supporting character for Ron Woodrof, the main character. Rayon is only narrowly depicted as a transwoman sex worker who meets Ron by coincidence when they are both getting taken care of in a hospital for AIDS. Later they agree to work together to capitalize illegal HIV/AIDS drugs Ron smuggled from abroad, while Rayon is tasked to establish a market within the queer community. Ron relies so much upon Rayon to find profit with this market segmentation of queer people, with the rising cases of HIV/AIDS among the gay community, making them seek easy, discreet, and effective drug vendors free from stigma, which Ron provides through the buyers club.

Rayon's health rapidly deteriorates with her drug abuse, despite the success of the buyer's club. Later, the club would be under the surveillance of the FDA and local hospital because they are taking away patients from the hospital and treating them with illegal drugs. Moreover, neither Ron nor Rayon own a medical certificate to treat patients, resulting in the disbandment of the buyers club and confiscation of all the illegal drugs that the buyers club possessed by the FDA. In order to bring back the business, Rayon is willing to sell her life insurance to his homophobic brother, who is a lawyer, while dressing up in masculine attire, sacrificing her dignity as a transwoman, to help the buyers club back to business while Ron is doing nothing. When the business

is thriving, Rayon is also seen with her partner, Sunflower, who look happy together. Ultimately, her drug addiction and her AIDS take her life away. After Rayon's death, Ron takes action to sue the FDA for abuse. Despite losing the case, the jury allows him to take the illegal drugs for personal consumption.

Rayon's death can be perceived as a form of punishment for her gender identity and sexuality, as she struggles with her initial work as a prostitute and is portrayed to have drug addiction later on. These particular characterizations on how prostitutes are always suffering from addiction are nothing new in the cinema. In Rayon's cases, using this particular characterization of her identity as a transwoman/gender-non conforming sex worker being highlighted with drug addiction portrays two harmful stereotypes: first, the portrayal that transgender characters are always working in prostitution, and second, the association of prostitution industry with drug addictions which eventually takes away her life. Rayon's queerness in the story is being punished because she had to work in prostitution for an unknown reason; hence the queer portrayal is stereotypical, and she becomes an addict through her prostitution job. Hulan explains that this type of characterization in fictional works is categorized as *bury your gays* as exploitation, where a story puts queerness in the limelight just to punish them and put them in a negative light (2017:21). Just like how Rayon's queerness is constantly exploited as the queer helper for Ron and the buyers club, while she never had any development or desires for herself.

CHAPTER IV

CONCLUSION

From using *bury your gays* framework to draw comparisons from *Rent* (2005) and *Dallas Buyers Club* (2013), in terms of the queer representation, social settings, and category, especially its place within the framework's main categorization; the writer finds that *Rent* portrays its dead queer character, Angel, as a catharsis based on the way the film merely assigned her for two roles: a token character to add diversity of queer identity in the friend group among the main characters, as well as ultimately making her death due to AIDS as a cathartic process for the rest of the friend group to get their lives together and achieve their individual goals to honor her memory, while Angel herself was never portrayed to have any dreams or goals. Furthermore, the creation of *Rent* is also problematic to begin with due to the plagiarized nature of *Rent*, which plagiarized the book *People with Trouble* by queer author Sarah Schulman. Larson was a cisheterosexual man who capitalized off of queer work to gain all the fame and success that he earned with *Rent*, even until today, which makes all queer portrayal in his work is disingenuous because of the hetero-gaze.

In comparison, according to Hulan's framework and categorization, *Dallas Buyers Club* portrays the trope more to the more extreme, as they portray the dead queer character, Rayon, in an exploitative manner. This is shown by how the film in general only exploits her queer identity by making her a stereotypical vessel of working

class transwoman who works in prostitution and struggles with drug addictions. Moreover, her role in the film is limited only by being the savior and helper for the main cisheterosexual protagonist, without creating a genuine trans character with desire as a transgender person, like fully transitioning or getting hormone replacement therapy. Ultimately, her death is caused by drug abuse, as the prominent cause, in addition to AIDS, that gets worse time after time; this plotline portrays transgender life negatively as it only shows how throughout her entire life. Rayon suffers from transphobia, discrimination, and bad life choices that ultimately lead to her death, while dedicating her last years of life helping a cisheterosexual man build his business and gain profits.

In the end, despite no longer enforcing *the hays code* that prohibits homosexuality content from being shown on the silver screen, Hollywood as an industry, along with the mainstream audience, are still very heteronormative and against the idea that queer people can be the hero of the story, and only prefers the portrayal of homosexuality to not be too explicit by either minimizing the role of queer characters or exploiting queer identity only as a shock value just to put all of these characters to receive bad endings and even being killed off in the end. As long as there is no deconstruction and abolishment of these heteronormative ideas, the *bury your gays* trope in queer cinema will prevail.

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APPENDIX

I. Synopsys

1.1 Synopsys of *Rent* (2005)

In the early 1990s when America is still struggling with HIV/AIDS crisis, two bestfriend are living together in an apartment complex. They are Mark Cohen, a Jewish freelance filmmaker and Roger Davis an HIV-positive ex musician who was a drug addict. In the same apartment, a young pole dancer, Mimi Marquez, who is also an HIV-positive, is living in the same complex with Mark and Roger. Mark used to date Maureen Johnson, a bisexual performance artist who is currently dating Joanne Jefferson, a lesbian lawyer. Mark and Roger are also friends with Thomas 'Tom' Collins, a gay philosophy professor, who happens to date Angel Dumott Schunard, a transgender street musician. Both Tom and Angel are suffering from AIDS. The apartment complex where they live is owned by Benjamin 'Benny' Coffin, who used to date Mimi and live with the gang, but now their friendship is estranged after Benny married the daughter of a real estate mogul and becomes their landlord.

The premise of the first act of the film revolves around the reluctancy and refusal of the tenants in the apartment complex that Benny owns to pay rent. Benny warns the tenants that they would get evicted if they don't pay rent. Thus, Maureen

helped by Joanne and Mark are preparing for a protest concert, both being wary with each other since they both are in one way or another Maureen's lover. Roger and Mimi start develops feelings towards each others, Roger struggles with Mimi's addiction and convinces her to stop using drugs. Meanwhile Angel and Tom are also getting close after Angel helped Tom when he was mugged, they both start dating and going to AIDS support group together. The concert turns chaotic after Maureen's performance, while Mark records the whole ordeals. Act one closes with the gang having dinner together, embracing their friendship and their bohemian way of life.

The second act is about the obstacles face by the gang. Mark and Roger inevitably get evicted from their apartment, Joanne proposes to Maureen after seeing her flirting with another man, while they were helping Mark to get a job in TV studio after his footage of the concert's riot made into the news. In the engagement party, Maureen is caught flirting with another man again, which angers Joanne and breaking off their engagement after a huge fight. Roger finds out about Mimi's past relationship with Benny, and break off his relationship with Mimi after finding out that she has been using drugs again. Angel is hospitalized because her AIDS is worsen and complicate her condition, which ultimately leads to her death. After the funeral, the couples got into huge fight, and blame each other for Angel's death because everyone thinks they are selfish for ignoring Angel's condition, the gang is then separated for a year. New year's eve a year later, the gang returns in Mark and Roger's apartment after finding Mimi collapses in the street, she passes away momentarily before she is awake

conscious and tells everyone that she sees Angel saying it is not her turn to die yet. The gang celebrates life as Mark plays the footage of the gang that he filmed throughout the year.

1.2 Synopsys of Dallas Buyers Club (2013)

Taking place in Texas, 1985 during the beginning of AIDS crisis in America, an electrician named Ron Woodrof got electrocuted in his job one day, and being hospitalized. The doctors diagnosed him with AIDS and is given 30 days to live. He initially refused to accept the diagnosis because he thinks the virus only contagious towards homosexuals, but then remembers he once had sex with a woman who is an intravenous drug user as he does research about AIDS. He gets fired from his job, and is eventually evicted from his home. Ron is informed by his doctor, Dr. Eve Saks, that there is a pharmaceutical company that is currently testing new drug called AZT to treat HIV/AIDS patient, however only chosen patients can be the subject of the testing, with half getting AZT and half getting placebo in order to see whether the drugs work or not.

Not giving up, Ron tries to bribe a hospital worker for the leftover AZT, but the drug only worsen his condition, because he also consumes cocaine while talking the medication which get him hospitalized again. This is the first time he meets a transgender with AIDS named Rayon whom he is sharing the hospital chamber with and happens to be one of the chosen patient for the AZT testing. His desperation leads him

to a Mexican secret hospital owned by Dr. Vass who got his license revoked for using illegal drugs to treat HIV/AIDS patient. From Dr. Vass, Ron finds out that AZT is toxic and kills the remaining healthy cells inside his body. Dr Vass gives Ron a cocktail of supplements consist of vitamins, Ddc and Peptide T, which all are still not legal in the US. Fast forward 3 months later, Ron's condition is so much better, he realizes that he could make money by selling the mixed drugs from Dr.Vass to another HIV/AIDS patients, he then begins drug-selling business, after acquiring them in Mexico under the reason of personal use.

Ron struggless with the drug-selling business at first, not knowing where the target market was and only sells at support group and gay bar. One day, he is reunited with Rayon, who hears that Ron now sells better drugs than the one she is taking, Rayon offers to be his business partner since she knows a lot of patients who are in need of AIDS treatment, hesitated at first but eventually he agrees with the proposition made by Rayon. The business is named "Dallas Buyers Club" which charges \$400 membership, with the benefit of unlimited supplies of the drugs, the business immediately gains traction. Ron's relationship with Rayon warms up as the business makes them good friend, as he keeps warning Rayon who is now an addict, to stop using cocaine. One day, after acquiring a new drug called interferon in Japan, Ron suffers from heart attack which makes him immediately hospitalized, the doctor finds out that he runs an illegal drug business, which infuriates them for disrupting with the AZT trial, and gets Ron arrested and the drugs confiscated by the FDA. Dr.Saks

however, believes that the business is actually helping patients to get better, which she does not see from the AZT trial patients, but she cannot do anything to help.

The FDA has been monitoring Ron's buyers club for a while now, and ultimately in 1987, they make an adjustment which states that all use of unapproved drugs is illegal, including the use for personal need. Rayon, concerned about the business, asks help from his father for monetary support, she gives the money to Ron to get more drugs saying that she gets the money by selling her life insurance. Ron travels to Mexico to obtain more peptide T for the business, but going back home only to find that Rayon has passed away from the AIDS and drugs complication. This tragedy also angers Dr.Saks as she finds a new study about how AZT is proven to be ineffective. The board of doctor in the hospital discovers that Dr.Saks has been asking the patients to go to the buyers club instead of taking the AZT trials, which makes them ask her to resign, but she wants to be fired instead.

It is getting harder to obtain Peptide T in the US, which concerns Ron, he changes to prioritize the drugs for patients who are in dire need of it without charging money. Later in the 1987, Ron sues the FDA for banning the rights of AIDS patient to get the treatment which has not been approved yet despite proven to be non-toxic, the judges takes sympathy on Ron and gives warning to FDA yet cannot do anything to champion Ron's case. The film ends with the revelation that FDA allows Ron to use

Peptide T, and he dies 7 years later after the verdict that he only had 30 days left to live.

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III. Biography of Screenwriters

III.1 Jonathan Larson

Jonathan Larson was an American composer and playwright born and raised in New York on February 4, 1960. Since early age, he has been involved with music and performing arts, he is influenced a lot by musician such as Billy Joel, Elton John and The Beatles. His musical style is also influenced by composer such as Stephen Sondheim. His works are heavily discuss about social issue, homophobia and HIV/AIDS.

After graduating from high school, he attended Adelphi University majoring in Acting with full ride scholarship, this is when he started writing and composing for plays and musicals. After graduating, he participated in a theatre program which obtained him an equity card for the Actors' Equity Association. During this part of his life, he lived in a small apartment, with a lot of roommates and improper living conditions, this is what inspired him to write a play based on his inadequate living condition, which was the genesis of *Rent*.

Before *Rent*, he was already writing and producing plays and musicals, albeit small but garnered huge succes. Some plays that he wrote includes, *Sacrimmoralinority* which retitled *Saved! – An Immoral Musical of Moral Majority*, this was written to be performed in his almamater. His next play is called *Superbia* in 1990, which never came into full production due to legal issues. In 1991, he wrote the musical *tick, tick... BOOM!* Which made it into an off-broadway production and got him recognition from Stephen Sondheim himself and earned him the *Stephen Sondheim award*.

Helped by the playwright Billy Aronson, which initially wanted to write a musical adaptation from the Opera *La Bohème* with a new style, taking place in New York and its crowded inhabitants, Jonathan Larson began incorporating his ideas on impoverished apartment complex with its struggling tenants, and came up with the title, *Rent*. After agreeing with how the settings and plots gonna be, both Larson and Aronson decided to make the project as a Broadway musical, which did happen.

Rent was a massive success both off and on Broadway, which always attracted sold out crowds. The show was running on Broadway for 12 years, from April 1996 until it closed in 2008. Larson, through *Rent* received a lot of accolades, including one *Pullitzer Prize*, four *Tony Awards*, three *Drama Desk Awards* and many more. A lot of different productions of *Rent* are made by international theatre, including a film adaptation in 2005, directed by Chris Columbus and features most of the original Broadway cast.

However, Jonathan Larson died before even witnessing the success of his musical. He died due to aortic dissection which believed caused by his Marfan syndrome. He passed away the morning of *Rent's* first preview off-Broadway on January 25, 1996. The Larson family and the American Theatre Wing honor his death and legacy by the creation of *Jonathan Larson Grant*, which aims to give aid for writers to proliferate their works.

III.2 Craig Borten

Craig Borten is an American screenwriter, which was born on September 16, 1965. He grew up in Pennsylvania and finishing college in Syracuse University in New York, and made a big move to California for a filmmaking career. He has been writing scripts for more than 20 years, mostly for spec and major studios. His career take off after writing the script for *Dallas Buyers Club* with Melisa Wallack.

The script for Dallas Buyers Club has ben written since 1996, it took a long way for Borten to be able to make the script into film, with many obstacles came in his way. The genesis of the script came after he met the person who inspired the film to be made, in 1992, Borten interviewed the original Ron Woodrof about his buyers club, Borten decided make the interview as a script for a film. Despite succesfully sold the script to a production house, with Woody Harrelson in mind to play the main role, the production studio dissolved. Another deal to make the film from Borten's script fell through in 2001, after he rewrote the script with Melisa Wallack. Finally in 2009, both Borten and Wallack were able to secure the rights for the script, production house and Matthew Mccounaghey to play the lead role. The film is released in 2013, almost 20 years after Borten finishing the script.

The film received positive reviews, garnered high income and numerous accolades, which ultimately earned Academy Awards nominations for *Best Picture* and *Best Original Screenplay*. After *Dallas Buyers Club*, Borten wrote scripts for numerous projects, such as *The 33* and *Sergio*. He is currently writing a biopic of John D. Rockefeller, titled *Titan: The Life of John D. Rockefeller*.

III.3 Melisa Wallack

Melisa Wallack is an American screenwriter and film director, born in Minnessota, April 1968, she graduated from Skidmore College with degree in English and Business. Before her screenwriting journey began, she established a company called *NightOwl Discovery* alongside her sister, which specializes in big data, governance, and compliance for regulated industries. Her first exposure towards screenwriting was when she made a big move to Los Angeles to expand her company and met a lot of writers there.

Her screenwriting credits includes; *Meet Bill* in 2007 in which she also directed, *Mirror, Mirror* in 2012, *Dallas Buyers Club* in 2013, which she collaborated with Craig Borten as the original screenwriter, and earned her an Academy Award nomination, and *The Last Witch Hunter* in 2015.