

Interview : Guinevere Turner

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Profession: Screenwriter

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Interviewed by:

Anne Crémieux and Céline Murillo

Guinevere Turner is an American screenwriter, actor and director best known for co-writing and starring in independent lesbian features *Go Fish* (Rose Troche, 1994) and *The Watermelon Woman* (Cheryl Dunye, 1996), and writing a number of more mainstream feature films, including *American Psycho* (2000). Throughout her career, she has gotten involved in feminist and LGBTQ+ features, shorts, and TV series, including *The L Word*'s first two seasons. She is highly respected both in indie film circles for her contributions to queer cinema and in Hollywood for her collaborations on a number of critically acclaimed box-office successes. She continues to use her clout to advocate for greater representation and visibility of queer people and to support queer content making.

Anne Crémieux : I believe you always wanted to be a writer, before you met Rose Troche and collaborated on *Go Fish*, did you ever think you might work in film and TV?

Guinevere Turner: No, exactly the opposite in fact. I had a romantic idea of myself as a novelist. I don't think I had a clear idea, even into college, that screenwriting was an actual job, separate from being a director. But then, I met Rose Troche, who had just gotten her MFA from the University of Illinois and was making art films. She had gotten her hands on a bunch of 70s porn negatives and was scratching them to make these very experimental short films. I was a writer, she knew how to make movies, and there was no lesbian movie out there that reflected our regular, old, dumb life in any way. We had that ridiculous confidence of people in their 20s thinking how hard can it be? Let's make a movie! And we did, but it was very hard.

Anne Crémieux: It was supposed to be just this one movie?

Guinevere Turner: Yes, absolutely. But because of the widespread attention *Go Fish* received, people started asking me to be in movies and to write movies.

Anne Crémieux: How did you write *Go Fish*?

Guinevere Turner: At first, we just had ideas for some of the more experimental sequences. Once we shot them, the excitement and the energy that came out of the whole experience made us actually write a script. There always was a documentary element to the movie and there is a lot of unused footage – I hope Rose has it somewhere – of us and our friends talking about our life. I remember a conversation about what the word lesbian means. Or sharing coming out stories -- basic things that were invisible in the 90s. The more we shot, the more we wrote. We worked on it together. I wrote all the voiceovers. We argued a lot. Rose wanted it to end with some act of violence against one of the main characters, maybe an attack on the street, gay bashing... I kept reminding her that we had set out to make a happy gay movie. Not that homophobia is not a real thing, whether back then or now, but that was not the story we were telling. We broke up in the middle of making the movie – maintaining the joyfulness and earnestness of the script was a feat in itself!

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8ybjptUoPSU>

Anne Crémieux: So you made *Go Fish* because you felt nothing was reflecting your life within lesbian circles?

Guinevere Turner: I had seen *The Hunger* (Tony Scott, 1983) in high school, that's the first lesbian film I ever saw. I had seen *Desert Hearts* (Donna Deitch, 1985), *Claire of the Moon* (Nicole Cole, 1992). I had not seen *Personal Best* (Robert Towne, 1982). The movie that actually inspired us to make *Go Fish* was *Switch* (Blake Edwards, 1991) in which a womanizer – a term I hate, what does it even mean? Are there menizers? – anyway, he dies and his punishment is to come back as a woman. He comes back as the actress Ellen Barkin and in one scene, the man trapped in a woman's body goes to a lesbian bar because he just wants to be with women. That scene was just ridiculous! The bar had framed photos of Garbo and Dietrich on the walls, everyone had long permed hair yet everything was butch and fem with women slow dancing by the piano bar... It was the straw that broke the camel's back. Where was this place? It does not exist. It was a form of negative inspiration: we needed to make our own story.

Céline Murillo: Have things changed?

Guinevere Turner: Yes. Although still today, many lesbian films are written by men, including gay men, and many women write stories that are not particularly about women.

Anne Crémieux: Has #MeToo changed the industry?

Guinevere Turner: #MeToo has affected the whole country but certainly, in the entertainment industry, people feel threatened. That is not what it's for. In the 90s, people would accuse you of being PC. I'd always say, "I'm sorry, I'm not politically correct, I'm politically aware, thank you very much." #MeToo is getting the same kind of treatment.

Céline Murillo: Isn't script writing one of the more open professions in the film industry, when it comes to women?

Guinevere Turner: Things have improved because of diversity initiatives where companies hire with quotas of women, people of color, queer people. I don't want to be a cynic but I do feel it's based on toeing the line rather than seeking women and recognizing they are talented. I often hear how people tried to hire a crew of color but just couldn't find any. Why can't you be the first one to take a chance on a person who hasn't gotten all the chances because of their race or their gender or their presentation? Be the person who makes it happen, take the risk.

Céline Murillo: Are the diversity initiatives working?

Guinevere Turner: Somewhat. But I still feel I am very much in the minority. I will often be in a room full of screenwriters with very few other women. Especially in the genre I write. There are more women in romantic comedy. I write satire biopics and drama, which is much more male-dominated. Arguably, *Go Fish* is a romantic comedy, although it's experimental and has a political agenda. But *American Psycho* (2000) is very much a satire. The men it satirizes often love it. They do not get the joke, which I take as a meta accomplishment: them not understanding that it's about them proves who they are, that they only see what they want to see, which is fancy clothes, handsome men, status, money. It's both hilarious and a little disturbing. I'm just incredibly lucky that *American Psycho* gave me man cred. Men love that movie, straight and gay, because Christian Bale's body is insane. Women not so much.

Anne Cremieux: I saw it with my girlfriend when it came out, and we loved it, and I remember talking about how it was pure satire of the 1980s. So, it surprises me, is it maybe that a lot of women don't even see it?

Guinevere Turner: To be honest, I probably wouldn't see it because of the word "psycho" in the title. I don't need to see more violence against women. The reviews were mixed. Women in my own circle of colleagues and acquaintances come to me now, saying they watched *American Psycho* because it was on TV, and that it's actually a feminist film! As if I could do anything else. Don't they know me? After *Go Fish*, would I make a movie full of violence against women for the paycheck? It's been a slow burn. It was released 24 years ago and they are doing a remake of it.

Anne Crémieux: It is a cult movie. How did *American Psycho* happen after *Go Fish*? What's the connection?

Guinevere Turner: I certainly have two very different sets of fans with these two movies! I am a Gemini after all. The connection is that the producer of *Go Fish*, Christine Vachon, also produced Mary Harron's first film *I shot Andy Warhol* (1996). That is how Mary and I ended up in the same room. Mary told me I looked like Betty Page, who I had never heard of, and that's when we decided to write the script of *The Notorious Bettie Page* (Mary Harron, 2005). We were just incredibly compatible creatively.

Céline Murillo: And *American Psycho*?

Guinevere Turner: Someone came to Mary Harron with the *American Psycho* project and she decided that with the right adaptation, she could make it into a feminist film. Frankly, I was not exactly into horror movies. I'm a big wuss, I usually can't even watch the trailers! But there is a whole community of women who love horror movies and who embrace me for it! No one seems to remember that the first thing I wrote off the top of my head, unprovoked, was a romantic comedy. *[laughs]*

Anne Crémieux: Well, you've done a lot of action horror. Looking at your IMDb page, I saw you were credited for the script of *BloodRayne*, which looks like a medieval action blood revenge drama that I have not seen.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RW-J678jbUw>

Guinevere Turner: *BloodRayne* is the worst movie ever. At the premiere, I was laughing out loud in the theater. I could not believe what I was seeing. The project was way outside anything I ever wanted to do, much less cared about, but the director and my manager were so intense that I let them pressure me into writing it. I wrote a first draft which they just grabbed and ran with and shot with no rewrites, no notes, nothing! I knew right then it would be a mess, and it is.

Anne Crémieux: Did you mean to make it into a feminist film?

Guinevere Turner: Well, I did write an underwater fight scene between two women who turned out to be Michelle Rodriguez and Kristianna Loken, but that was just a happy accident. I tried hard to make the main character interesting and dynamic, given that she's on a vengeance mission to kill her father. She's half vampire, being the product of a vampire who raped a human, and she has to get across the land to stop her father before he cloaks the world in darkness. So obviously, she's a woman on a mission, she's got power, she's got issues, I thought I could try to make it into something respectable. But they demanded romance. I explained she was a really busy person: she's half vampire, she's trying not to eat humans so she's hungry, she's grazing on sheep which makes her a bit weak, and she needs to save the world – that leaves no room for romance! I wanted her focused on work. But you see, without romance she's not really a woman, that's the problem. They just turned it into something ridiculous with little left of what I had written.

Céline Murillo: Did you feel bad about that?

Guinevere Turner: I didn't care too much at the time. I actually got a Razzie award for *BloodRayne*. It's the opposite of an Oscar, given to the absolute worst thing made that year. It's hilarious. *BloodRayne* was just a weird Hollywood thing that happened to me. That director Uwe Boll is notorious for making terrible movies with big budgets. Ben Kingsley is in *BloodRayne* and got paid around \$25 million to do it. That was just a fraction of the film's budget. *BloodRayne* came out the same year as *The Notorious Betty Page*.

Anne Crémieux: But apart from *BloodRayne*, *American Psycho* and *Charlie Says* are also violent films that a lot of people, like you said, wouldn't watch once they've seen the trailer. Is it a coincidence that you made so many violent films? Was it all because of *American Psycho*?

Guinevere Turner: Yes, men thought *American Psycho* was cool and asked if I'd write a movie based on a video game, *BloodRayne*. The producers of *Charlie Says* were also fans of *American Psycho*. Now that time I agreed I was the right person, but not because of *American Psycho*. I grew up in a cult so that I have a unique perspective on that story. But to answer your question, yes, men run the world and men think that *American Psycho* is a cool movie, so it definitely helps.

Céline Murillo: And did they agree with your vision?

Guinevere Turner: The distributor was so worried that it would be all women talking! That title; *Charlie Says*, is genius because half of the movie is the women in prison talking to a woman psychologist. That is not easy to market. I think they shouldn't have marketed it as just another telling of the same Charles Manson story. It's a whole new perspective.

Céline Murillo: You were going to make it about the women from the start?

Guinevere Turner: Yes. I cannot tell you the joy I felt when I found out that an actual lesbian is at the center of the story: Karlene Faith, played by Merritt Wever, was the psychologist who was asked by the prison warden to un-brainwash them. I met her and spent a lot of time with her. In the movie, she's not out. I have one of the characters ask her if she's a lesbian and she says no, even though we've seen her with her wife, because the real Karlene Faith was waiting for her last child to turn 18 to come out so that her abusive ex-husband wouldn't try to take them away from her. Lesbianism always makes its way into my movies somehow!

Anne Cremieux: You switch from big movies to short films that you direct yourself or you make with friends. How do you manage that? How do you not lose control on big movies? Is it easy to go back and forth like that? Is there pressure not to do it?

Guinevere Turner: Mary Harron, who directed *American Psycho*, is behind a lot of my bigger projects. It gives us both a lot of "big industry cred," you know. But I still want to make queer content, whether or not people are paying me, and to challenge myself. I want queer-looking people at the center, meaning people who actually look like the people in my community. When Mary Harron came to direct on *The L Word*, the first thing she said to me was how all the lesbians on the show looked like me. And by that, she meant fem. That's TV.

Anne Crémieux: And that's what you want to avoid?

Guinevere Turner: I'm balancing both. And big movies don't come along that often. We do have another one with Mary called *The Highway that Eats People* about four teens who are outcasts of the foster care system living off the grid. We wrote the script together, she's directing, we are looking for \$3 million and it's very hard to find a company that will back us up. \$3 million is like 10 bucks in movie-land... My partner is a filmmaker at the beginning of her career and I tell her, "you better toughen up because this is what it looks like." Mary Harron is 70 years old, she's directed seven feature films, tons of television, is clearly good at her job and still, people question us – "Can those ladies pull it off?" Men will be trusted to make five-hour movies, but we're girls, what if we get our period during the shooting?

Anne Cremieux: Alright so I have to ask, what about *Barbie*, or Kathryn Bigelow?

Guinevere Turner: I'm going to start by saying that Greta Gerwig is incredible, and that I'm probably jealous of her career. [laughs] But I saw *Barbie* and the feminism in that film does not exactly have a sista-power circa 1977 vibe, if you know what I mean. It's more like a t-shirt slogan, the kind people wear without really caring what it's about. A t-shirt that would say, "Let's make being a girl a fun thing again." Greta Gerwig is also very likable, white, blonde, she has a famous director husband, she's fun. She did *Little Women*, which I must admit I have not seen, because I am so passionate about the book, I did not want my vision transformed. I feel like I became a writer because of Joe, or maybe because I'm gay and I always thought Joe was, too.

Céline Murillo: But do you think *Barbie* is a good thing, overall, for women in the industry?

Guinevere Turner: I do feel happy for Greta Gerwig and for women directors everywhere that that movie made so much money. But do you know that the marketing budget was bigger than the budget of the movie? It's an overblown commercial with a really thin plot. There is a lot of visual fun and deliciousness but it is still, literally, a commercial. Obviously, Mattel paid for the film. I understand it's supposed to be ironic, except it really is just a commercial.

Céline Murillo: And does it mean producers will trust Greta Gerwig next time? Or is it true that compared to men, women, or lesbians, even with a very successful film, are not guaranteed a next film?

Guinevere Turner: Hum. It does not mean her career is made, no. The dangerous thing about generalizing is that every situation is different. I also feel like I am not old enough, that I'll have a better perspective when I'm 80 on how being an out lesbian has affected my career. Maybe not at all because I kind of have two careers: one where everyone knows I'm gay and looks forward to my next contributions to queerdom, and one where I'm the cool *American Psycho* girl who gets killed by Christian Bale in the movie. Does the fact that Greta Gerwig directed a big-budget film mean men with power think girls can direct movies? I don't think so, it doesn't feel like that from my perspective where my trusted, accomplished colleague, collaborator and friend Mary Harron cannot get \$3 million out of anyone. White men typically go from directing one moderately successful indie film to directing a Marvel movie because everyone's amazed by this young white man. When I heard that *American Psycho* was getting re-made, I told my manager to pitch me, and I love her, but she said, "I think they're probably going to look for a younger voice." They hired a man named Scott Z. Burns who wrote the last *Jason Born Identity* movie and who, by the way, is 9 years older than me...

Céline Murillo: Wow. Yet you still think the industry is changing in terms of opportunities given to women and lesbian screenwriters or directors?

Guinevere Turner: I do think the industry is changing, mostly thanks to the diversity initiatives. Then there are people like the amazing Ava DuVernay, who is actually making a difference. She actively went around looking for women who had made one independent feature but hadn't had another opportunity. At least five friends of mine directed on her show *Queen Sugar* (OWN, 2016-22). It was their first television gig, it's a foot in the door.

Anne Cremieux: Cheryl Dunye is one of them.

Guinevere Turner: Yes. Cheryl Dunye, who wrote and directed *The Watermelon Woman*, had a few projects after that but eventually became a film professor. *The Watermelon Woman* is getting a lot of press for its 25-year anniversary when everyone suddenly feels a black lesbian filmmaker is worth celebrating. There are pictures of us in the *New York Times* 25 years later, which just goes to show you never know. No one was paying attention 25 years ago, outside of the queer world. And Ava DuVernay got Cheryl to come and work on that show. So, it's changing, sometimes for obligatory reasons, sometimes because people like Ava are giving women, and especially women of color, opportunities.

Anne Cremieux: That is similar to what Spike Lee did, mostly for black men, in the 90s and 2000, with a whole generation of people who were production assistants, and more, on his films, and got into the guilds thanks to him.

Guinevere Turner: Women still need that kind of push. I've actually never met her and I don't know her but I just feel like if more people who have power and influence could do things like this, it would get better a lot faster. I am also getting older so that I am being treated very differently than in my 20s and 30s. I had the same brain when I was young, I contributed as many ideas, but people just commented on how I was dressed. Now that I'm not pretty like that anymore, people listen a lot more. Finally, they get that I am wise [laughs]. It would be a whole different story if I was only an actor.

Celine Murillo: Can you talk a little bit about that, about aging as an actor?

Guinevere Turner: I'm 56 now. By the time I was 30 and I wasn't Julia Roberts, there was no imagining a career as a working actress in lead roles. It was never my plan. I'm the lead in *Go Fish* because we knew it would take time and we needed the main actors to be reliable. By the time I was 30, I felt old in movie land. And I was so glad my biggest talent and my sense of self-worth was writing and not acting. As an actor, getting old is a crime, punishable by unemployment. My female actor friends face that reality. I just love being on movie sets, I love playing characters, I'm a trickster, but I don't need it and I don't think it's the best thing I can contribute to the world. Being older, there are less roles, but they are often more interesting. And most importantly, you are taken more seriously as a writer. People used to think I was trying to sell them a script because I could not get a part but now, no one expects me to act anymore.

Céline Murillo: So, getting older is not all bad after all?

Guinevere Turner: As a writer, getting older also gives you perspective. I got so nervous shooting *American Psycho*, Mary was worried. I don't get nervous anymore, I think I'm a much better actor because I can just have fun and not worry so much. Did you see Anna Albelo's movie *Who's Afraid of Vagina Wolf* (2013)? That's some of the most fun I've ever had on a movie set. I'm playing a character who's playing Elizabeth Taylor and Anna just told me, "listen, she's not necessarily a good actress". That is the best permission I've ever got from a director. I'm playing this iconic role in a film that is already a hot mess and I'm not very good, so there's no way to do that wrong!

Anne Cremieux: Talking about *Vagina Wolf*, I'm wondering if you'd have done these projects, like *The Owls* (Cheryl Dunye, 2010), if you had had the Hollywood career that some men get for being as successful as you were with *American Psycho*? Or do you think you would have always gone back to queer collective indie films?

Guinevere Turner: Hum... That is where my heart is. Very queer, hilarious, fantastical projects. Would I have time if I was famous and I were in a Marvel movie? How boring, I'd rather watch a million Elizabeth Taylor movies and practice my worst impression of her. It's hard to say. I'd like to think that I would be exactly who I am, I would just own this house I live in instead of renting it. My whole career people have said they were impressed that I have not sold out, that I continue to make work with integrity and social relevance. Honestly, I've never had any big sellout opportunity presented to me.

Anne Cremieux: What's the most profitable thing you ever did?

Guinevere Turner: By far, *American Psycho*. I get residuals checks 24 years later. I didn't get paid a huge amount to write it but over the years, certainly. *Go Fish* was paid \$177,000 to split over the course of four years. I think Rose thought it was not a good deal but I was happy to get paid.

Anne Cremieux: When you're young sometimes you have to sign that first contract.

Guinevere Turner: Especially since it wasn't about the money for us. We just wanted this movie to be out in the world. I think the reason that movie stands a test of time is that it was genuinely coming from our hearts and our need to have it be out there in the world. We were not doing it to make money, we weren't expecting anything, we would have given it to the distributor for free!

Anne Cremieux: Exactly.

Guinevere Turner: Then we got smarter. We saw our male contemporaries, like Kevin Smith for example, with almost the exact same product, all of a sudden skyrocketing, getting opportunity after opportunity. Straight men. We were reminded the world is not run by lesbians. We were delusional for a minute, we thought that because we were being recognized by mainstream press, we would have that same access.

Anne Cremieux: The thing about sexism, or any discrimination, is that it gnaws at your confidence. How can you ever be sure you would have made it as a straight man?

Guinevere Turner: It's the extra layer of pain – some part of you thinks you are not as talented. And you can't lament that it's because you're a woman or because you're out, maybe you just sucked in that meeting. It's deeply unsettling. I really feel there was a whole decade of my life where I was too pretty to be smart. That's not something you can complain about.

Anne Cremieux: Do you ever insert that in what you writing?

Guinevere Turner: It took me three decades to write a book about my childhood. I needed those three decades. I cannot reflect on what is not over yet.

Anne Cremieux: You are going to write a book in 30 years about your career, then?

Guinevere Turner: Yes, I will be 86.

Celine Murillo: Are you writing for women actors over 30?

Guinevere Turner: Yes, as a side project – no one's paying me and no one has asked me to do this – I am trying to write a romantic comedy vehicle for Holland Taylor and Sarah Paulson. An age-gap movie with no hot young thing, because they are both too old for that. I'm writing parts they never get to play. Holland is a bohemian who created an alternative art school, and Sarah's a startup millionaire. Would you watch that movie?

Celine Murillo: Yes, I would!

Guinevere Turner: I am very aware of my age, of the perspective, and relative power to get a movie made with older women. Sarah Paulson is around my age, a bit younger, Holland is 30 years older than her. There are so many brilliant actresses who aren't working, it's genius on ice.

Celine Murillo: Imagine if women were getting the same opportunities as older actors?

Guinevere Turner: Harrison Ford has a television show right now. He's great, I love him, but aside from Lily Tomlin and Jane Fonda, it's very rare for women to have long acting careers. And I'm not writing a movie about being old, their conflicts are elsewhere. It's not about Diane Keaton being too old to be desirable. It's also different for lesbians: queer women are allowed to get old and still be desirable. The beauty standards are so different. I want that reflected in the movie.

Anne Cremieux: You are really good at writing stuff that is not about the obvious. *Go Fish* is not about being a lesbian, no one is coming out. Throughout your career, even though you remain queer and never discard it, you don't try to be a spokesperson.

Guinevere Turner: I've learned from experience that nobody wants to feel like they're being taught a lesson. You got to entertain them. *American Psycho* is an example of that. *Charlie Says* is possibly my most serious movie. The story has been done so many times, people expect something very specific. It did not do very well, but I think it will age well.

Anne Cremieux: I agree, because it's about brainwashing and manipulation. And not just the power of a man over women, he also dominates the other men on the farm. They only get women if he gives them and in one scene, completely humiliates them. I thought that was chilling.

Guinevere Turner: Thank you, it was important for me to show how coercion works, to show him not so much as a master of all evil but as a very talented con man. If other men weren't submissive to him, they were out.

Celine Murillo: Do you think there is a feminist way of writing film? In the history of film and feminism, there was debate on whether there is such a thing as female writing or female film making, where the camera is used differently, to break the male gaze and dislocate the signs.

Guinevere Turner: That is such a minefield. I don't know if you could define female writing. What I do know is that instinctively, maybe it's just because of my age and my politics, my activism, all of it... I want queer stories to be made by queer people. I want stories that are about important, relevant, complicated things that have to do with women's lives to be told by women and I don't trust men to do it for the right reason. And I would not say this to a mainstream male or even female journalist because of the way it's interpreted but to you, I can say that sometimes I think as I'm watching, "if a man made this, I'm gonna be really pissed." I won't believe or I won't trust it. Does that mean there is an essential kind of womanness? What does that mean for trans and non-binary people? I was never comfortable considering any kind of "woman sensibility" even before I became more aware of gender as a spectrum. I don't want to codify us. So there's a hot mess of an answer for you.

Anne Crémieux: I understand. I saw *Brokeback Mountain* as the premiere of the Paris queer Film Festival, and people hated it. There were a lot of whistling at the end. It was mostly men in the room. I do think the movie is made for straight people. A gay person probably wouldn't be able to do it because sometimes, we need straight men to talk to straight men about us.

Guinevere Turner: Ang Lee can do anything, though, I trust anything in his hands. But I always tell students, and any kind of new writer, they have to decide who they're talking to, especially if you're speaking from a marginalized space. Are you talking to your community or are you educating the rest of the world about who you are? Because those are two very different projects. Generally speaking, new writers will say "both," but I tell them, they must decide which is more important. Trying to please both will just yield mediocrity. With *Go Fish*, it's not that we were only talking to lesbians, it's that we thought only lesbians would care. I encourage people to speak to who they're talking about, because authenticity is the path to universality. I watched *Blue is the Warmest Color* with all of my '90s lesbian cinema politics in place, ready to be mad because it's written and directed by a man, but I was genuinely moved by the heartbreak of first love. That's universal. Then I read about the director and frankly, I can never watch that movie again.

Anne Crémieux: So, it does matter who made the film?

Guinevere Turner: Yes, which is why I teach them this basic writing principle. When their script is a bit of a mess, I ask them, "what do you love about this," or "what's your favorite scene, your favorite piece of dialogue." That's how I guide them to find the story they really want to be writing. I try to help them identify what they are passionate about so they do not write what they think other people will like. I'm trying to give them what I didn't have at their age, which is agency, to make them feel like a creative force who just needs to figure out exactly what it is they want to say.

Céline Murillo: Are there women filmmakers that you feel are very talented but are not getting the career they should?

Guinevere Turner: There are so many. *Appropriate Behavior* by Desiree Akhavan (2014): Here is a queer film that feels fresh and real. She made another movie about queer reassignment camps, *The Miseducation of Cameron Post* (2018). *Bottoms* is another one, directed by Emma Seligman (2023). It's a new generation of women making queer films. It's about young women making all the bad choices. I saw it in the theater and actually missed some stuff because I was laughing too hard.

Anne Crémieux: Yes, it's *The Incredibly True Adventures of Two Girls in Love* (Maria Magenti, 1995) with a violent twist, 30 years later.

Guinevere Turner: It's true, it does have that indie 90 Indie queer lesbian movie spirit without the need to be proper. Without the burden of representation. I talk about that a lot too with my students, how depending on who they are and where they're speaking from, not to let the burden of representation inform everything. Different communities are underrepresented in different ways and sometimes, taking that burden of representation head on is what you need to do to move the needle. But not always. It's certainly interesting to look at a new generation of filmmakers trying hard not to be what we were. We were "gay and lesbian," and the word gay came before the word lesbian, there was no LGBTQIA+.

Anne Cremieux: Is that a good thing, that they are trying to not be what you were?

Guinevere Turner: Well, I'm teaching 18 to 22 year-olds and I certainly see a sense of entitlement we did not have. I mean that in a good way. They don't bring the anger I certainly brought to my 20s and 30s when I was trying to get things done and convince people to give me money or just to listen to what I had to say. They are a step ahead in terms of confidence, and believing that they deserve to be there.

Céline Murillo: You often work with collectives. Is there a strong hierarchy on film and TV teams?

Guinevere Turner: I don't work like other screenwriters. And on big films, I collaborate with Mary Harron so I'm on the set, I'm part of the whole process. That's also why I don't want to generalize. I just got very lucky and I have a lot more access and privilege and people take me a lot more seriously than a lot of women my age who have done as many things but not the same things, not the things that matter to men. And even though I've made relatively big films, I'm not in the industry or in TV like someone like Rose Troche is. I'm on a movie set every four years. I just did a scrappy indie lesbian movie where I played a bartender in a lesbian bar. Young queer women are still making movies that are scrappy and I'm happy to be the wise lesbian voice. Rose's bread and butter is in male-dominated spaces because of the kind of shows she directs. TV is regular work, that's why many people do it.

Anne Cremieux: You worked together on *The L Word* (Showtime, 2004-2009). What was the male presence on *The L Word*?

Guinevere Turner: At first, it was all-women directing, for at least a season, including a lot of Canadian directors because we were shooting in Canada. Clement Virgo started out as DP and later directed. There was also one man in the writing room my first season. He was a retired executive from Showtime, the network that made *The L Word*, and there was some kind of deal where Ilene Chaiken had to give him a shot at writing. He was a lovely man but there were maybe 10 writers, 9 of them were women, non-stop talking, half of us are queer, and he would stop us to ask what we were talking about. I don't think he had any lesbian friends or family. He was very nice, he didn't say much. On season two, there was a one young gay man in the room, and a couple of women who didn't identify as queer.

Céline Murillo: And how was that, working mostly with women?

Guinevere Turner: I really loved that whole process. I would happily work in TV again, in a room run by a women creating stories centering women and queer people. One time, we were complaining about some drama and one woman who had worked on *ER* (NBC, 1994-2009) told us we were crazy, that she was used to men just screaming in her face all day every day and that was her life. We thanked her for giving us some perspective. We just had quiet interpersonal dramas, nobody was being abusive, we were just shady sometimes. I only worked on the first two seasons. I stopped paying attention after that. It's a hard thing to have been there for the birth and creation and formation of characters and their stories, and then to watch it go places you would never have allowed. I just stopped watching.

Anne Cremieux: You played a somewhat evil character on *The L Word*. Was that a comment on your feelings about the show?

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cSzk4TZfViI>

Guinevere Turner: I actually originally auditioned to play Tina, and then I asked my agent if I could come back and audition to play Bette. I thought I was more of a Bette. Obviously, I did not get that part either. Rose insisted I talk to Eileen about being a writer. I thought it was too embarrassing when they've said no to you twice as an actor. But I eventually did. And in the middle of the season, Eileen just asked me if I would be interested in playing a character named Gabby Deveaux. Angela Robinson invented that character. She is hilarious, she is one of the most fun people to have in a TV writers' room because whenever we pitched an idea, like "what if they open a flower shop," she'd say "season 4 episode 10 of *Melrose Place*, they open a flower shop." (They don't.) She knows every single episode of classic TV-series, you name it, *90210*, *Dynasty*, she knew everything. So anyway, she invented that character and I was excited because I had encouraged us to have a villain. I didn't realize it was going to be me but of course, I love to play a villain. Though I would have loved playing Bette.

Anne Cremieux: Since you talked about getting older, and wiser, can I ask you if your relationship to feminism has changed over the years?

Guinevere Turner: I've always thought of myself as a feminist. I used to get that question a lot from mainstream journalism, and it felt like a trick question, to pigeon hole you, to show you are limited. The actual question was: is anything about you interesting to anyone who is a man? I rewatched *Orlando* – which is such an incredible movie interestingly aging as the public is more broadly aware of trans conversation – and I read an interview with Sally Potter from the 90s in which she is asked that question. She said she was not a feminist filmmaker. It reminded me of that moment when you had to prove you reached beyond your feminist community.

- "Are you a feminist?"
- "Well, I don't know, are you going to take me to jail?" I

You did not want the word attached to your name. So, if anything, I'm more of a feminist now. But now there's pop feminism, women running for president, being a girl boss, and the cutesy marketing of it all. So, it's become trickier as I struggle not to be bitter.

Anne Cremieux: Do you have feminist heroes?

Guinevere Turner: Yvonne Rainer. Virginia Woolf. Ntozake Shange. Monique Wittig. Hélène Cixous. bell hooks. Sally Potter. Women I discovered when I was young and want to emulate. I really love the movie *Thirteen*, which Catherine Hardwicke co-wrote with the 16-year-old actress in the movie, Nikki Reed. It came out in 2003. It's a portrait of two 13-year-old girls who are just up to no good, doing drugs, and getting in trouble, but it felt so real and so true. And it felt like a movie only a woman could have made. She went on to direct *Twilight*. I saw *Twilight* because my students were such fans. I thought it was really good. I was not expecting it.

Anne Cremieux: I actually saw *Thirteen* because of *Twilight*, which like you, I saw because of my students. I was very impressed with what it said about being a teenager. The idea that sleeping with someone would literally kill you – what an amazing representation of American puritanism.

Guinevere Turner: The author of the book, Stephenie Meyer, was raised a Mormon. My girlfriend is much younger than me, saw *Twilight* when she was the right age for it. She was hurt that I saw it as a morality play because it had spoken to her as a teenager – her little queer self had been touched by this puritan madness. I've been talking with Catherine Hardwicke about being the director of the adaptation of my memoir.

Anne Cremieux: Is that going to happen?

Guinevere Turner: I'm having a hard time squeezing it into a movie. I would like it to be a limited series. The screenplay is 144 pages, which is a lot more than the average 105. I think it could be a four or five part series. With Katherine attached, I hope I will find money to do it. I asked Katherine what made her decide to direct *Twilight*. She said she went to readings of the book and she saw the passion of young girls for the story, that's when she decided to direct it.

Celine Murillo: It's an impressive film in terms of visuals, with lots of cinematic ideas in the film.

Guinevere Turner: That's why I love Katherine as a director. Her most recent movie, *Mafia Mamma* (2023), is a sort of farce with Toni Collette getting sucked into the Italian Mafia. Two minutes into the movie, a cart of oranges is overturned and there is a beautiful shot of oranges rolling down stone pavement. I asked her if it was in the script. It was not, but oranges, Italy, *The Godfather*. It's a reference and it's beautiful. I love this woman.

Céline Murillo: For her style.

Guinevere Turner: Yes, that's what she does.

Anne Cremieux: Well then, you're going to have to find that money!

Guinevere Turner: Yes, and we will [*laughs*]. **Anne Cremie & Céline Murillo: Thank you for you time**