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Shaping Identity: Male and Female Interactions in Cinema

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Shaping Identity: Male and Female Interactions in Cinema

by

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A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
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ABSTRACT

Since the inception of cinema, women have been portrayed with the typical identities of emotionally and physically weak characters; this portrayal led to their subsequent dependence on men. Men were usually the protagonists and/or the heroes, following their archetypal journey. Thus, women's position in early cinema was to exemplify what men were not, placing the former in the diminutive position of the Other. One may conclude that men were often defined by what women lacked, and the women were defined by their relationships with these heroic men. As time progressed in the history of cinema, women's images retained part of this former definition; however, their identities were also shaped by the manners in which they related with the male characters. This scenario remains consistent in contemporary cinema as well. The research will reveal how the stereotyped women's identities change as they interact with the male characters; specifically, it will address the roles of the femme fatale in American cinema and the prostitute in Italian cinema. There are various factors that shape identity in film and literature. However, this research will focus mainly on male and female interactions in these areas: Postwar Italian cinema and American film noir. It will enhance research conducted by various film theorists and reveal the significance of shaping identity with gender interactions. Moreover, it will determine that shaping identity often serves as a significant catalyst for narrative.

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Introduction and Statement of the Problem

Since the inception of cinema, women have been portrayed with the typical identities of emotionally and physically weak characters; this portrayal led to their subsequent dependence on men. Men were usually the protagonists and/or the heroes, following their archetypal journey. Along this cinematic path, they perhaps would encounter a woman who needed "saving" from some evil forces. Incapable of defending herself, she would shriek or faint, only to awake utterly protected by the hero's efforts. Thus, women's position in early cinema was to exemplify what men were not, placing the former in the diminutive position of the Other. One may speculate that men were defined by what women lacked, and the women were often defined by their relationships with these heroic men.

This diminutive concept may suggest emotional problems for women viewing film, as it promotes a situation that may cause some viewers to identify with these insipid characters. Early twentieth century society prohibited women from asserting their personal desires. However, numerous films from this era suggested that this type of woman "got the hero" in the end. For example, in the "screwball" comedies of the 1930s to 1950s, the final plot sections typically ended in marriage. The stronger women, unable to be "tamed" were "tossed aside" in favor of those more acquiescent and docile. In *My Man Godfrey* (1936), Carol Lombard's character wins Godfrey's favor as she plays the insipid and "daffy" young woman, contrasted to her beautiful yet stern, strong-willed

sister. These docile characters conceded and desired to form the identity the men ordered, as all humans want to be loved and accepted. In actual life situations, aside from the cinema, problems arose when it was improbable for viewers to meet the criteria, either through inherent strengths or ethnic disparities. For example, the female viewers may not look the same as the female viewers, that is, they may not possess the definition of "beauty." The typical "Hollywood beauty" was described as Caucasian, often blond, and approximately 25 years in age. This presented problems for ethnic or older women. Although some viewers may enjoy the cinema because of the fantasy world perfection, this still remains a subconscious dilemma for those who do not meet the unrealistic standards.

If women did not fit the typical "damsel in distress" description—blond, young, and Caucasian—they often experienced an identity crisis. Black cinema existed, of course, in the early twentieth century; however, in the standard White-focused cinema, Black women were cast in subservient roles such as maids or nannies. Moreover, if White women viewers objected to adopting this stereotypical identity of the young, blond, Caucasian characters, they had no choice but to identity with women in film whose characters contrasted with them, often the older, dark-haired, "spinster" or uncooperative women. Female viewers whose identities matched the latter were forced to witness the perils experienced by the radical females, subjecting them to possible inferiority complexes because they simply did not "measure up."

Hence, one might assume that placing female cinema characters in positions of power would eliminate any crises or negative implications. This is not always the case, as powerful women in cinema often suffer the consequences of their authoritative

personalities. Observe the role of the powerful, dark-haired sister in *My Man Godfrey*. In the end, she loses any hope of achieving happiness in a relationship, as the sought after male protagonist ends up with the demure, silly, blond sister. This sends a strong message to female viewers who sought their own identities as the heroes or protagonists exhibiting power that the submissive woman wins in the end.

Conversely, as the years progressed, film revealed that female characters' strength often increased due to the extreme adversities they endured such as Sophia Loren's character in *Two Women*. She and her daughter suffered unbearable rapes, and their tenacity and determination surfaced despite their traumatic experiences.

Moreover, there exists other types of power for female characters; for example there is sexual power displayed by the prostitute and the femme fatale. These women, although powerful in their own sense, possibly suffered personal trauma despite the emotional strength in the prostitute and the mind control in the femme fatale. Similarly, it remains apparent that the plots were still based on their connections with men, and these connections shaped their dynamic identities. However, in contemporary cinema, the physical power in the "angry woman" implies strength in her ability to fend off male physical abuse and attack. Yet the source of their anger typically follows emotional or physical abuse from a male character; thus, their on-screen personalities were designed from their male interactions.

Additionally, despite the mental acumen present in these female characters— ambitious enough to support herself, as in the prostitute in the Italian cinema *Mamma Roma*; manipulating strong men by her wit in the femme fatale in the noir *Double Indemnity*; and the ability to find and exterminate men who are trying to kill them in the

contemporary angry woman film *Kill Bill*—their character definitions still depend on and change with their associations from the male characters. These changes through association often serve as the narrative that moves the plot forward.

However, only the femme fatale and the Italian prostitute will serve as the basis for this research. Additionally, references to early female characters in Renaissance drama that experienced similar plot changes will also be addressed, mainly as early background information for the female submissive stereotype. The subsequent chapters will produce research results highly suggesting that these character types have changing identities; they are shaped due to their plot interactions with the male characters. One significant factor of these interactions is that the male characters, in essence, control this identity shaping for the female plot characters; the female's changing identities effectively serve to advance the film narrative. The purpose of this research is to note the specific constructs employed in cinema that indeed advance the plot and possibly serve as a forward motion for the narrative. Notably, there are numerous changes in these male and female interactions that influence the plot advancement, denouement, and conclusion. Thus, this research will examine how these unions alter and expand the movement of the story line.

Specific films that will support this hypothesis include *Mamma Roma* (1962), *Le Notti di Cabiria [The Nights of Cabiria]* (1957), and *Double Indemnity*. Reference to Shakespeare's *Taming of the Shrew* will outline the basis for the submissive female in early drama. Other related films will support theories suggested in this research and will provide additional argument. Problems that exist resulting from identity shaping in film include the following issues for contemporary women viewers:

1. Women's identities in film are continually changing, leading to unstable conclusions about women's personalities;

2. Female viewers often want to assume popular identities imposed on them by society and popular culture, which often objectifies women;

3. Advertisements, billboards, and other media promoting film often display women as objectified and stereotyped.

However, these negative issues do not directly relate to the focus of this research—the changes in female identities in film highly contribute to the depth and dynamics of the plot.

Literature Review

Numerous research articles and reports have been conducted on female characters in cinema and other dramatic venues. A qualitative research review, which investigated the various literature and subsequent implications, noted that others definitely examined women's purposes and descriptions in film. However, their investigations mainly centered on women's oppression, omitting possible sources of these continued subjugations.

The research articles did not focus on the worldwide incidents of increased violence toward women nor did they reveal them, therefore, as merely "objects" with questionable identities. Women as receivers of violence from male perpetrators assume the male-forced identity of "battered women," which did not appear in the literature review. Also, the review did not address the popular subjectivity of female entertainers— Hollywood "glamour girls," "sex symbols"—as these types of media figures stimulates the popularity of female objectivity. Moreover, another issue not clarified was that female

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directors, not the typical mainstream type, need their work appreciated and viewed not as rogue, but rather the up and coming standard. Although this research will limit investigations to a few films and early drama, the films will mainly serve as the basis for further research, laying the outline for investigative criteria revealed in the Discussion and the Conclusion sections of this research.

However, it is significant to note that during the 1970s, which was considered a time of "awakening" for oppressed women, several female videographers entered the formally male-only profession. Their work was not closely documented and an accurate history of their achievements is severely lacking in accountability. Melinda Barlow (2003) suggests that studying this history will also lead to a research of the feminist movement and how it reflected on women in several areas.

An interview by Gideon Bachmann (1994) with Federico Fellini—the latter a screenplay writer and director who portrays women in various identities—although helpful and revealing, leaves much room for interpretation and criticism. When studying Fellini's films, Bachmann's interview provides substantial guidelines to interpret Fellini's work, and helps to investigate the director's controversial films of the 1950s and subsequent decades. Fellini's characters often portrayed strong psychological situations, with their outward actions often based on their emotional strife. His plots typically evolved around significant sexual, emotional, and religious strife. Fellini's films were often banned for these reasons in countries that held strong Catholic beliefs.

Two of Peter Bondanella's well known books include significant information about the origin of Italian cinema and its progression to current day standards. Included

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are various selections from several Italian directors with valuable insight provided for numerous films. A significant amount of post-war Italian cinema addresses issues of women, and these issues usually point to stereotyped identities such as the prostitute in turmoil with her personal life (*The Cinema* 1992; *Italian Cinema* 2001). Although the female characters experience these conflicts, the shaping of identities as they struggle to uncomplicate their lives often serves to promote plot movement, which will be demonstrated in the research section about *Mamma Roma*.

Other struggles for female characters appear in science fiction movies such as *Jurassic Park* (1993) and *Gattaca* (1997), as they identify contemporary women as poor examples of how they should act as wives and mothers: "*Jurassic Park* shows us a white nuclear family threatened from within by feminism--by scientist women, divorce, and little girls who play sports--and from without by the fecundity of 'Third World' monsters" (Briggs, Kelber-Kaye 2000). Hence, the symbolism of the movies' plots intimates that unless a woman conducts herself in "traditional" manners, she is inept **a**nd incompetent:

> *Gattaca*, on the other hand, expresses its concern about gender and reproduction through a moral narrative that warns us about a future in which reproduction as we know it is at stake. When reproductive technology becomes the norm, the film says, "natural" motherhood is sacrificed, with dire consequences for both the social order and sexuality. (2000)

In these film plots, the hero pursues and takes possession of the eroticized female, the object of his desire, whether or not the plot is a conventional romance. She is not a

presence in and of herself but both an extension and negation of the hero, an idealized

figure who signifies his fate. Not only does the very act of "looking" cause the audience

to identify with the hero, but the filmmaker is all too often himself a male. In the same

type of argument, Carolyn Brown addresses two films: *The Dust* (2003) and *The Piano*

(1993). "Both are subversive tales that rely on unconventional narrative techniques to

examine and challenge female subordination and ethnocentric ideological systems"

(2003). Notably, the author stresses the argument that this researcher posits: women are

typically identified in film mainly by their interactions with males—they lack their own

static identities. This lack is portrayed by their identities being again shaped by their

continual male relationships. This development often changes throughout the film's plot

as the female characters experience varied circumstances with their male counterparts.

This review was the only one that closely mirrored this researcher's investigations;

however, the films reviewed were contemporary and did not address any early twentieth

century films.

Overall, research reveals that changes among real women's identities in the

workplace, the home, and other cultural venues in turn impacts how women define

themselves in contemporary lives. Some cultures still cast women in subservient roles

while others, including third world countries, are experiencing freedom to identify

themselves in more positive roles. Thus, women born into new cultures that allow women

to determine their own identities may experience surprise or dismay when viewing film

from earlier decades. When addressing cultural studies, Manuel Castells (2001)

investigates the "global forces" impacting societies, those that incur significant impacts

on identifiable civilizations. He particularly addresses the changes one observes in

ethnicity, ideology, and gender worldwide. His in-depth study of nationalism within various countries supports his revelations of global impact across diverse classifications. He also addresses how these changes impact the patriarchal society. This supports the fact that films impact how societies view themselves, which leads to cinematic plots that in turn reflect these typical zeitgeists.

Robert Corber (2005) investigates possible lesbian "visibility" in the classic film, *All About Eve* (1950). Although his research mainly addresses the extensive homosexual references in the aforementioned movie, one notices several critical inferences. For example, even the lesbian character is defined by either her identity as a male figure—dyke, butch—or by her lack of identity *with* a male figure; hence, her consequent homosexuality surfaces. Additionally, the author delivers an excellent history on the deliberate and unfair "witch hunt" of the 1950s and the government's fears relating to homosexuality as a "hidden" condition. In this case, the woman's identity is shaped by her lack of interaction with men; thus, one could posit that her identity is designed by the absence of men in her life.

Often in cinema, an absence of male interactions with a female suggest that the latter possesses a strong character—she is feminine, yet she is in a tough, heroic role usually portrayed by men. Thus, the strong woman can only be so if she assumes a masculine persona. Moreover, female characters' roles with their male counterparts contribute to their shaping identities; often, they are shaped into an extremely masculine role. Theresa Geller (2004) studies another area of stereotypical women in contemporary cinema: the angry or "tough chick." In *The Long Kiss Goodnight* (1996) and *The Matrix* (1999), Geller attests that the current "Hollywood tough chick" represents a woman

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contrasted by the accepted extant definition of woman. She is tough mainly because she is "at odds" with the social norm, that is, the conflict with the male character(s) in the film has shaped her identity. The author notes, too, that the famous Hollywood actor, Geena Davis, for example, plays a tough chick in some movies, and this type of character role places women in a new identity—that of an androgynous figure who has no specific gender identity at all.

Female characters are often identified by their materialistic gains and contrived beauty, adding to their mystique. This researcher interprets Stephen Gundie's research as yet another illustration of the Hollywood female character's unstable identity. Often, viewers are unaware of the characters' underlying identities, as they are merely an image of their outward dazzle and allure. Gundie (2002) further analyzes the Hollywood glamour and mass consumption in Europe after WWII, specifically in Italy. He notes that the media honed in on the United States and its ostentatious portrayal of women in cinema. "If properly employed, this…can account for the particular seductive appeal that capitalism was able to take on in the early stages of mass consumption, help it to bypass arguments about exploitation, imperialism, inequality, and alienation"(101). The author addresses all definitions of consumer-accepted glamour, including how "women were groomed and molded into glittering, ideal types whose fortune, beauty, and spending power, and exciting lives dazzled the film-going public"(103). This glamour, or American appeal, suggests that often western feminist movements are not reflected in eastern media, and that this stems particularly from differences in semiotic portrayal in film (Imre 2003). Imre also intimates that when representing female gender, directors often employ "narrative and visual coherence" (178). She suggests that these two

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techniques provide such pleasure for viewers that they have become a staple to ensure the film's success. Moreover, "the feminist resistance… must work with narrative to represent women's historically and semiotically specific desires, while it must continue to examine the contradictory position of the female subject within representation" (179).However, not all cinema must conform to or adhere to ideological paradigms, as there exists no one specific definition. As an aside, it appears that by contriving the female characters' portrayals to suit the male gaze, [1] the former's identities are compromised or shaped to suit the male characters' expectations; yet literature and publications on the "male gaze in cinema" will not be addressed in this research.

Plots that alter women's identities through male interactions will be slightly addressed in this paragraph. This inclusion requires notation because there exist films that include no male and female interactions. Some critics relate this to the absence of women in critical theory applications. Luce Irigaray "critiques the exclusion of women from both philosophy and psychoanalytic theory" (22). Her investigations analyze women's subjectivity and identity in a patriarchal society. She notes, too, that women's exclusion merely emphasizes their *inclusion* by their absence. The exclusion may be observed in the androgynous character as well as the lesbian. The absence of any male characters shaping their identities in fact suggests their identities remain as such because of their lack of male interactions.

Thus, a new subculture may exist that attempts to redefine women's shaped identity, or that of the repressed woman, through its portrayal of visual fiction. Moreover,

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[1] To generalize this term, the "male gaze" is a situation where women in cinema are viewed as objects of desire and beauty, enhanced by specific camera angles and techniques. The women are often fetishized, and the audience is always considered to consist of men who expect to be sexually stimulated by these portrayals.

research reveals that pornography, as a contrived art, reduces the sexual acts to that of unnatural desires or desires that exist only for film viewing; hence, the "symbolic castration" (25). Often, the manner in which male and female interactions are portrayed in film, that is, those that shape the female's identity, are at times influenced by the cultural norms. Naturally, these vary among different countries. In some countries, pornography assumes various levels and often shows in the film's rating. Katrien Jacobs investigates the various genres of sado/masochistic and often pornographic plays, and how they attempt to squelch the typical patriarchal society. She suggests that the form of "staged types of eroticism become the equivalent of a symbolic castration" (25). However, by investigating the root of most pornographic plots—a submissive woman obliging every sexual whim of the male—Kathleen Karlyn (2011) addresses the recently popular trends for movies to portray the middle-aged male's "crisis," usually "relieved" by an extra-marital affair with a much younger woman.

In this type of film, the wife is usually a career-oriented and often successful businesswoman; however, her identity is flawed because she does not fit society's norm of a "good mother" or subservient "wife" (81). Thus, her husband, often suffering from a "mid-life crisis,"[2] is forced to seek the innocent and doting woman in the guise of a young girl. She mentions *American Beauty* (1999) as well as *Primary Colors* (1998), the latter a film patterned after former President Clinton's affair with a young female intern. These types of plots suggest that contemporary woman's liberated role is simply another shaped identity; it also suggests women should return to their former unsubstantiated and

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[2] It is suggested that men and women who approach their forties often reflect on their past lives. If they are not satisfied with their achievements at this stage, they may resort to unconventional behavior as acts of defiance.

also shaped identity of the obedient wife, which will "stop" their husbands from pursuing other women. This is mentioned to illustrate how the character shaping is significantly influenced by the current cultural definitions.

Aside from scenarios of pornography and males' "mid-life crises," characters also interact with each other according to the general political and cultural atmosphere at the time of production. Katarzyna et al (2007) examine current cinematic landscapes from the perspective of "transnational feminist practices and methodologies, focusing on film, media art and video essay" (37). The first section of their work addresses the movie, *Babel* (2006), noting the desperation female characters experience when crossing national borders. They often alter their character identities to survive their diaspora or their illegal quests for salvation. Typically, they are cast as weak, timid, yet eventually manipulative in their forced survival techniques. In this example, the females' characters are shaped by the cultural repression, and not necessarily forced by their male interactions per se.

Although this research addresses specific areas that do not include pornography or mid life crises, these two criteria were mentioned to reveal that other issues besides male/female interactions occur when shaping identity in film. Also, when pornographic films exist as a highly popular venue in various countries, the male and female interactions possibly still influence other filmmakers if the former is accepted as an art form worth considering.

For example, when investigating articles involving international studies, Heather MacRae offered various observations about women's portrayal in a subculture. She also addresses pornography films and how they contribute to objectifying women. MacRae specifically addresses the German pornography filmmakers, as she hopes to dissuade

them from producing these movies. "The representation of the female body is treated as a commodity, free to be traded and moved throughout the Union "(316). Her premise lay in that Germany remains one of the most powerful forces in the filmmakers "union" in Europe. Thus, these cinematic-shaped identities contribute highly to women's definition in cinema for other film genres.

Often, the ensuing shaped identities result from unfair stereotyping. Notably, this depends on the cultural norm at the time the film was produced. Frances Negron-Mutaner (2000) states that often film plots reveal the directors " [perseverance] in a long tradition of representing Latinos as inherently musical and performative subjects, ready to wear their sexualized identity for a white audience at the drop of a hat"(88). The author notes specifically that women in *West Side Story* (1961)—the film adaptation from the Broadway play—were one of two personalities: the virgin, and a sassy-mouthed dancer. Maria, a Latina and the "virgin," was in love with the benevolent White man—Tony—a member of the all Caucasian "Jets" gang. Alternately, the "sassy" woman, Anita, was equally matched with the virile and dangerous character, Bernardo—a ruthless member of the Latino gang, the" Sharks." It certainly appears that these two women's identities were definitely shaped by their relationships with the men assigned to their cinematic roles.

One may argue that women's identity shaping exists not only by men, but women as well. As mentioned in previous paragraphs, this research only addresses one factor of identity shaping—the female's identify shaped by her male interactions. However, to consider an alternate scenario, it remains critical to note that this research focus is not the idealistic interpretation. Siane Ngai critiques the movie, *Single, White Female* (1992), for

one, noting that women's identity is often shaped by their envious relationships with other women; however, this correlation often still stems from their competing desires for a male character. For example, the women often envy the other women's husbands and what the men provide for them:

> These films often rejuvenate antiquated stereotypical representations of female relationships from woman's films of the 1930s and 1940s. They represent women's friendships as plagued by jealousy, envy, and competition for men, and they teach women to beware of and fear one another. By focusing so strongly on conflicts between women, they obscure other issues related to women's position in society, relieve men of any responsibility for women's problems, and suggest, instead, that women should grant men primary importance in their lives because they are the only ones upon whom women can rely. (183)

Conversely, women's identities may be shaped in a reversal of a typically weak women interacting with a strong male figure. For example, in some scenarios, strong women come in contact with the emasculated protagonist. His quest is to gain back his strength by subduing her and reacquiring what he "lost." Thus, the woman serves as simply an entity that reveals what the man is not, and her subsequent identity is shaped by these interactions. In Constance Penley's book, *Feminism and Film Theory* (1988)*,* she discusses narrative cinema, visual pleasure, paranoia, and sexual difference, including articles by the well known feminist, Laura Mulvey. Initially, Penley addresses films by Raoul Walsh, noting that the female characters are supposedly strong, determined, and free from masculine dominance. However, Penley takes "offense" with that definition, as she reveals that the construction of the discourse belies the women's supposed

"autonomous" characters; it reduces them to "images and tokens functioning in a circuit of signs, the values…have been determined by men" (26).

Moreover, one of the films in this research, Fellini's *Le Notti de Cabria,* highlights female character changes with male interaction. The director presents these changes in an almost dream-like state in various sections of the plot. This research will attest to Fellini's portrayal of women as an emerging strength despite their former repression. As a continuum of women's struggles in patriarchal societies, Alessia Ricciardi's article (2000 focuses on Fellini's disjointed and often "Picasso-style" (208) of fragmented plots, which reveal the director's innovative style. Additionally, the author notes that the plots typically depict Rome's new identity—including that of women—in a city celebrating its actual expansive material wealth. This portrayal of Roman wealth is accurate, as Rome has greatly recovered from its former war-torn state.

Also, this identity shaping exists in other cultures, reflecting the social constructs that identity these female characters in the first place. When considering ethnicity when investigating how Black women are portrayed in film, one must first study how their White counterparts are illustrated, particularly in crime films. Historically, crime films presented White women as "ornaments," and/or also mothers who were consistently relegated to the periphery. These women were no more than objects and prizes, traded and acquired at the end of city warfare. As Carlos Clarens characterizes "the girl," she is simply as follows:

> a nagging, simpering mate trying to restrain the man from taking to the road or to
> crime or some such alternative, any of which were vastly more attractive and

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romantic than sex-denying domesticity and a nine-to-five job. This was an appeal

that men could identify with. (Smith-Shomade 27)

These characters represented how the men shaped the women's identities, depending on

whether they wanted excitement, albeit it dangerous, or simplicity leading to ennui and

depression.

When investigating a historical cinematography, one observes that identity

shaping for women was highly dependent on their societal status and position. As the 20th

century advanced, so did the cultural identities of ethnic women. Beretta Smith-Shomade

(2003) suggests that Black women's characters were similarly constructed by Black

directors and screenwriters, as in Oscar Micheaux's *Underworld* (1937), and Ralph

Cooper's *Dark Manhattan* (1937) (42). However, this changed during the 1990s wave of

Black "gangster "films, when numerous African- American women occupied positions

and spaces previously reserved for men only, and they were mostly White (25). Smith-

Shomade refers to the former "Blaxploitation" films, which included angry Black men

who directed their consternation toward angry White men. However, she notes that this

current genre of "gangsta" films addresses, too, the "angry Black woman" that tends to

stereotype Black women as they are portrayed in contemporary film.

Addressing Black women in film, according to Sullivan (2000):

Recent cultural critics point out that the primary images of black women in film

have been largely harmful and inaccurate stereotypes. Bobo explains that

throughout the history of Hollywood cinema, we find 'a venerable tradition of

distorted and limited imagery of representations of black women, who have been

limitedly characterized as sexually deviant, as the dominating matriarchal figure,

as eternally ill-tempered wenches, and as wretched victims. (33)

Classical Hollywood portrayed Black women as domestic servants while more recent

texts focus on Black women as 'welfare' mothers (33). However, recent film grants more

freedoms to Black women in their character interactions. Nevertheless, this "power" is

typically related to her relationship with the male figure, one who has shaped her

identity and remains a constant influence on her life. In this article, the author illustrates

a new definition of Black women in film, mainly that of a lesbian filmmaker or woman

in power.

If one wishes to research works on shaped identity, it remains essential for the

researcher to investigate the basis of humans' identity, based on inherent stereotypes or

even class archetypes. This investigation will allow one to understand the "how's and

why's" of human personality, and it provides an excellent philosophical investigation into

the human psyche. When considering this type of psychological aspect of identity,

although Carl Jung wrote several authoritative texts, Storr (1983) sums up several of

Jung's theories in his book; thus the book would serve as an effective guideline for

psychological investigations.

Theoretical Framework

This dissertation research agrees with any typical qualitative method addressing

gender theory; that is, an interpretive approach to employing these methods for

examining research. The theories and results in this dissertation compliment gendered

concepts including the texts that were reviewed; this partnering will allow other

researchers to investigate films from a broader perspective, providing more

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comprehensive views of the issues. Moreover, it revealed that the researcher identified plot scenarios and character developments that easily support the research purpose and rationale. Chapter One introduces the purpose and scope of the dissertation, which notes that women have often been portrayed in standard formats with their identities accepted as shown in the plots. The women were often portrayed as emotionally and physically weak characters; this led to their subsequent dependence on men. Men were usually the protagonists and/or the heroes, following their archetypal journey. In pursuing their hero's path, they often encounter a woman who needed "saving" from some evil forces. Incapable of defending herself, she would expect and gain complete confidence in the man's ability to protect her. Thus, women's position in early cinema was to enhance the role of the male hero, and they happily acquiesced to his masculine strength. As the decades passed in the twentieth century, women's identities were shaped in increasingly more powerful definitions as they interacted with the male characters, and these occurrences led to a progressive narration.

In some film plots, men were often defined by what women lacked such as fortitude and emotional strength, and the women were defined by their relationships with these heroic men. Consider the male/female relationship in *Stagecoach* (1939), as John Wayne and Clair Trevor portray these types of characters: the strong man rescues the weak women from danger. The women are extremely grateful to the heroic male character.

As time progressed in the history of cinema, women's images retained part of their stereotypical and weak definition; however, their identities were also shaped by the manners in which they related with the male characters. This scenario remains constant in

contemporary cinema as well. Therefore, the research will reveal how the stereotyped women's identities changed throughout the plot as they interacted with the male characters; specifically, it will address the roles in American cinema of the femme fatale and a typical character in Italian cinema, the prostitute.

The research reviews the current literature and notes similarities among them. The areas that will be investigated include the characters of the American role of the "femme fatale," and the typical portrayal of the Italian prostitute.

Chapter Two of the dissertation will review three films that address these two stereotypes, noting the similarities and identity shaping of the female characters:

1. Italian Cinema and the Prostitute

    a. *Le Notti di Cabiria, Mamma Roma*

2. The "Femme Fatale"

    a. *Double Indemnity*

References to early female characters in Renaissance drama that experienced similar plot changes will also be addressed, mainly as early background information for the female submissive stereotype. Increasing awareness of these themes would prove beneficial; one should also investigate the origins of violence-directed plots against women. This research will investigate the Shakespearean era and a famous play that exemplified this type of violence.

Shakespeare's plays often reveal the plight of dominant women in Elizabethan and later Jacobean periods. However, the "plight" is usually the woman's problem with her identity or personality, something to be resolved by men. Moreover, plots that Elizabethan theater-goers found especially humorous were ones involving the unruly

wife. The research will closely investigate *The Taming of the Shrew,* one of

Shakespeare's most popular comedies, later made into contemporary movies such as *Kiss*

Me Kate (1948).

Chapter Three will also discuss the results and implications of the research.

Moreover, the emerging limitations the researcher encountered in the findings will be

qualified. Considering that only three films depicting two genres were investigated,

further research into other genres such as horror, comedy, and others that do not include

Italian and film noir cinema, would most likely reveal others factors that shaped women's

identities in film. Following this discussion, these further research areas and its merit will

be addressed. Chapter Four will supply a conclusion to the research and indicate the

value of the research results.

. . It is clear that rhetoric is something one can decorously indulge in as long as one knows where it belongs. Like a woman, which it resembles ('like the fair sex'), it is a fine thing as long as it is kept in its proper place. Out of place, among the serious affairs of men ('if we could speak of things as they are'), it is a disruptive scandal-- like the appearance of a real woman in a gentleman's club where it would only be tolerated as a picture, preferably naked (like the image of Truth), framed and hung on the wall. (15-16)

The Epistemology of Metaphor, Paul de Man

Women as a "Throwaway" Gender: Power, Control and Dominance in Film

Women's identities in film are formed by various situations, especially with their contacts with the male characters. "Sexual assault…it's not about lust and desire, it's a violent crime of power, control, and dominance" (Crisis 2005). From Biblical times to Shakespeare's era to contemporary times, in literature men desire "power, control, and dominance" over women. Nowhere does society continue this theme more than in various genres of cinema. It is not so much that plots exemplify stories of rape—correctly touted as an act of empowerment and control rather than sexual urgency—but rather the language of film, the often "silent" language that suggests women are inconsequential and disposed of as easily as one throws out the trash. Notably, not all cinema portrays women in this fashion. However, it remains significant to become more aware of these themes as with others; one should also investigate the origins of violence-directed plots against women. This investigation may suggest how some women's identities are shaped throughout the film, especially in violent scenarios. This section will investigate the Shakespearean era and a famous play that exemplified this type of violence.

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History of Typical Themes or Plots--Shakespeare

Shakespeare's plays often reveal the male dominance women experienced in Elizabethan and later Jacobean periods. However, this situation is usually from the woman's problem with her identity or personality, something to be solved by men. Stage plots that continually entertained Elizabethan theater-goers were humorous ones involving the unruly wife. Consider *The Taming of the Shrew,* one of Shakespeare's most popular comedies, later made into contemporary movies such as *Kiss Me Kate* (1948):

> The idea for *Kiss Me, Kate* was planted in the mind of producer Saint Subber in 1935. While working as a stagehand for the Theatre Guild's production of *The Taming of the Shrew*, Subber noticed that the stars of the show, Alfred Lunt and Lynn Fontanne, had a backstage relationship that was almost as tempestuous as the one they had onstage while portraying Shakespeare's famous quarrelling couple. The writers created a play-within-a-play that follows the lives of egotistical actor-producer Fred Graham and his temperamental co-star and ex-wife, Lili Vanessi in a production of, you guessed it, Shakespeare's *The Taming of the Shrew*. Cole Porter's brilliant score borrows freely from Shakespeare's dialogue for lyrics in the musical numbers that take place "onstage" but makes use of more modern syntax in the "backstage" numbers. (*Kiss* 2005).

What happened in this play that made it so welcomed by audiences from Shakespeare's time to the contemporary era? The extremely patriarchal Elizabethans were humored by what still amuses current audiences. The "messages" were loud and clear; women were

easily disposed of, or at least their identities. This becomes evident when one examines the background of the original play and determines what "messages" audiences received and still receive today.

'Tis not a year or two that shows us a man.
They are all but stomachs, and we all but food;
They eat us hungerly, and when they are full
They belch us.

(Othello III.iv.)

Figure 1. Shakespeare's Disposable Women (Source: Bevington, David. Complete Works of Shakespeare, Longman: 1997.)

Shakespeare and Women's Roles

When reviewing cinema from its inception, one may notice that women are portrayed in various roles; however, one also notices that women's identities are often shaped by their relationship to men. A woman may be someone's wife, someone's jilted lover, someone's subordinate in the workplace, or she may simply be cast in another role the viewer easily sees as affected by her male relationship. Coincidentally, this "relationship" usually runs the gamut from her conversely stating her opinions, opposition in the home or workplace, to a happy ending resulting from her learning how to fit into the man's life. This format appears so often in film that one wonders what possibly influenced this theme; when researching renaissance plays, it becomes evident that this could possibly have initiated the theme of the unruly woman who learns how to fit into society. Upon further examination, the results are significant, and to the contemporary semi-liberated audience, they reveal acts of cruel and unusual punishment.

"Katharina," a character in the play *Taming of the Shrew*, speaks her mind, often to the discomfort of the male characters in the play such as her father, (Baptista) and her husband (Petruchio). As in the play, Elizabethan society punished women who dared to challenge the imposed "silence;" they should speak words that appeased the patriarchal society. Simply put, those who did not conform were either publicly humiliated, or worse yet…publicly tortured, verbally and physically.

Historical records reveal one of several torture devices patiently designed, shaped, and forged to carry out the anguish. "[These] torture devices from the period [include] a 'scolds bridle'. These devices were clamped over the accused's head, and a spiked tongue made sure the victim could not scream" (Museum 2005). The visual implication of this description is quite horrific; however, it actually existed in previous decades. Hence, one realizes the structure of a Scold's Bridle, circa 1589, often employed to "tame" or force a woman to relinquish her "scold" or "shrew" personality (2005). Schuler describes the tortuous device as "a metal 'brank' or gag for punishing shrews, called the 'Witches Bridle'" (387).Thus, women were often forced to assume identities contrary to their natural desire, one that was more suitable for Elizabethan society. Schuler also states, "In Elizabethan court proceedings, the crimes of witchcraft and scolding were sometimes explicitly connected […] and cucking stools were used to discipline scolds, shrews, and witches alike" (387).

Figure 2. Renaissance Era Cucking Stool (Source: http://www.flickr.com/photos/)

A "cucking stool" was a chair to which a woman was strapped, barefoot and bareheaded, and trounced through the town amidst catcalls and jeers (Ducking 2005). Normally, these devices were employed, hopefully, as a last resort; however, it makes one wonder what psychological tortures were inflicted prior to ever reaching this stage. Perhaps they were equally as inhuman.

Consequently, consider that Elizabethan women feared both the psychological as well as physical tortures that awaited them should they adopt a shrewish attitude. Thus, after establishing this concept, examine the identity of Katharina or the supposed "shrew" or "scold" in Shakespeare's *Taming of the Shrew*. Shakespeare has often been touted as a chauvinist: "Shakespeare can be understood to have played a significant role in the continuance of patriarchy. [He] has been made to speak mainly for the right" (Lublin 401). Perhaps if one views *The Taming of the Shrew*, one would agree. Outwardly, the bard portrays Katharina as an eventual obedient wife who "learns" passivity and supposed culture. However, a closer textual examination suggests that perhaps inwardly, Shakespeare reveals that Katharina is merely an "invisible" entity; one ignored, scorned, and worst of all—silenced. Thus, investigating this particular Shakespearean play, which relates to Renaissance attitudes toward women, will illustrate a possible basis for women's identity in current film portrayals.

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Baptista's Treatment Renders Her Insignificant

Considering Lublin's statement in the previous paragraph, perhaps Shakespeare's women do reveal incomplete examples of liberation. The characters do not reveal the ability to sustain their independence of thought and actions. Consider Katharina's treatment in the beginning of the play. "She was a lady of such an ungovernable spirit and fiery temper, such a loud-tongued scold, that she was known in Padua by no other name than Katharine the Shrew" (Lambs 2005). Thus, the poor woman's identity was formed mainly by those who resented her forthright and bold manner—she was not even granted the courtesy of her full name.

Her father, Baptista, publicly humiliates her by informing the eager suitors who both want Bianca, Katharina's demure sister, that they cannot have her until he marries off Katharina. "For how I firmly am resolved you know/ not to bestow my youngest daughter before I have a husband for the elder" (I.i.49-51). Thus, Katharina remains inwardly saddened and embarrassed as she realizes the father favors her younger sister. Her snide retort to her younger sister merely covers up her pain: "It is best put finger in the eye, an she knew why" (I.i.79) which hints at her sister's insincere humility. Katharina refuses to emulate her younger sister's submissive demeanor.

Katharina's resentment follows Bianca's display of obedience and supposed modesty, which wins the hearts of Bianca and her suitors. Consequently, the father raves about Bianca's attributes and vows to seek tutors for Bianca; however, he neglects to seek the same for Katharina, much to the latter's heartbreak. Baptista declares, "Schoolmasters will I keep within my house/ Fit to instruct [Bianca's] youth (I.i. 94-95). Hence, Baptista ignores Katharina as if her presence is unknown, or worse yet,

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insignificant. It is not until later in the play that he attributes the tutors to Katharina when he addresses the tutors: "Take you the lute, and you the set of books;/You shall see your pupils presently." (II.i.106-7). However, perhaps he included both daughters solely because Petruchio, who was displaying interest in wooing Katharina, was listening to this exchange.

In the same Act, the "gold-digging" man, Petruchio, upon hearing of Katharina's wealth, bids her father to introduce him to Katharina. When initially questioned by Petruchio, "Pray, have you not a daughter called Katharina, fair and virtuous?" (II.i.43), Baptista answers by saying, "I have a daughter, sir, called Katharina" (II.i.44). Apparently, her father refuses to prescribe any adjectives to his daughter, the non-person, and even neglects to say she is "named" Katharina, and reduces her to an entity that is "called" something.

As the play progresses, Baptista and Petruchio agree that Katharina should wed Petruchio. Yet when the two intended lovers meet, Katharina abhors Petruchio, which becomes apparent when he states, "Myself am moved to woo thee for my wife." (II.i.194); and Katharina retorts, "Moved? In good time! Let him that moved you hither/Remove you hence." (195-6). Thus, one realizes that Katharina wants nothing of this man or marriage at this point in her life.

Conversely, Baptista "shoves her off" on Petruchio, agreeing to the marriage even before Petruchio and Katharina meet. This fact reveals itself when Petruchio replies, despite Katharina's protests, "Thus in plain terms: your father hath consented/That you shall be my wife; your dowry 'greed on;/and will you, nill you, I will marry you." (II.i. 268-9). Therefore, one sees that Katharina has no voice and no choice in this matter. Her

father treats her as an invisible entity, something to be dismissed to the first man who woos her, mainly to ease the father's conscience to allow him to let Bianca *select* her husband.

Katharina as an Object of Sport

Thus, Petruchio correlates finding a wife as an enjoyable way to spend some time, perhaps similar to shopping for other necessary commodities. He informs his friend, Hortensio, that he comes to Padua to "happily wive and thrive as best I may" (I.i.54). When he discovers that Katharina is considered an unpopular and unwanted choice, with her wealth to support her, Petruchio suggests it could be a fun challenge. "I come to wive it wealthily in Padua;/If wealthily, then happily in Padua."(I.i.74-5). One concludes that Petruchio sees his upcoming marriage simply as a "game" to prove his superior skills as a "tamer" of women.

Hence, Petruchio likens his actions toward taming Katharina similar to what he would do with a falcon. He ignores her when she falls off her horse, and when she defends the servants as they recoil from Petruchio's unjust treatment, her husband sends her to bed without any dinner. "My falcon now is sharp and passing empty,/and till she stoop she must not be full-gorged." Apparently, his cruel treatment of her exists to "break her spirit," similar as he would in sport with an animal or wild bird. As the play progresses, Petruchio wagers on his ability to train a woman in the ways of obedience and passivity, which will make her suitable for her husband.

Katharina is Silenced; Her Identity Forsaken

Katharina's opinion or independent thought is never considered or heard. "Recent criticism has noted the voicelessness of the female subject in Renaissance poetry

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perpetrated by the oppressive male creator" (Stapleton 282). Note that in *Taming of the Shrew,* although the woman (Katharina) speaks, it is decided that she will be ignored—no one will "hear":

> Say that she rail, why then I'll tell her plain
> She sings as sweetly as a nightingale.
> Say that she frown, I'll say she looks as clear
> As morning roses newly washed with dew.
> Say she be mute and will not speak a word,
> Then I'll commend her volubility
> And say she uttereth piercing eloquence,
> If she do bid me pack, I'll give her thanks,
> As though she bid me stay by her a week.
> If she deny to wed, I'll crave the day
> When I shall ask the banns and when be married. (II.i.170-80)

Thus, Petruchio has already decided that whatever Katharina desires, he will deny her the pleasure of acknowledging it. He may as well have clamped a "scold's bridle" upon her head.

Moreover, in Act II, scene 3, one sees that Katharina's word remains worthless. Petruchio states ,"That upon Sunday is the wedding day," to which she replies, "I'll see thee hanged on Sunday first." (295-6). However, immediately after her denial, Baptista says,"God send you joy, Petruchio! 'Tis a match. (317). Again, her words are rendered vacant; she will do as her father and suitor desire.

As the wedding day ensues, Petruchio arrives quite late and garishly attired; perhaps he wanted to show Katharina how it feels when someone acts rude and inconsiderate. He continues his coarseness by forcing her to leave the wedding ceremonies even before the dinner has been served. However, his lessons mainly stem from his proclamation that she is his "property." Despite her protests that they indeed stay for their own wedding dinner, Petruchio proclaims to their guests, "She is my goods,

my chattels; she is my house,/my household stuff, my field, my barn, my horse, my ox, my ass, my anything." (III.ii230-32). Thus, her voice again is not heard, and they leave despite her legitimate protests.

Petruchio's "taming" ensues, and he continuously ignores her voice, even when they are together at the haberdashery. No matter what garment Katharina selects, Petruchio proclaims it is not good enough; thus, she never receives it. However, Katharina says, My tongue will tell the anger of my hear/Or else my hear, concealing it, will break,/'And rather than it shall, I will be free/Even to the uttermost, as I please, in words." (IV.iii. 74-80). Yet her words are insignificant to him, and as he rejects each garment, he pretends that she has agreed with his decision.

Toward the end of Act IV, Petruchio has forced Katharine to agree with whatever he says, even if it is obviously incorrect. "What you will have it named, even that it is,/And so it shall be so for Katharine." (iv.21-2). Thus, when Petruchio says the "moon is the sun," or vice versa, she will agree with him. Her individuality and identity have also been silenced. Although the audience knows that Katharina does not agree with Petruchio, she is forced into silence and submission. No one will listen to what she has to really say about the topic.

No one knows for sure if Shakespeare's play was a parody about how women were treated horribly, or if he intended to illustrate through drama what happens to shrewish woman. Nevertheless, the significance cannot be overlooked from this dramatization. First, women who do not obey their husbands will suffer psychological and physical abuse. This was evidenced by Petruchio's amusement at his wife's distress, and his using her at the butt of jokes when he was with his friends.

What supports the focus, too, of this research is that Katharina's identity changed immensely throughout the play. She was first a single, older woman, considered a "spinster" by Elizabethan standards. Her father forced her into the role of a fiancé, as he convinced Petruchio to marry the elder daughter. The father knew he would be successful because of the hefty dowry he offered to the future husband.

Despite her protests, her father changed her identity from that of a spinster to one of a wife, although an objectionable one. Throughout the ensuing drama, one observes the step by step identity changes incurred by Katharina as Petruchio intimidates and squelches her independent and obstinate thoughts. Finally, Petruchio has succeeded in molding her identity to that of the perfect and submissive wife. Without Katharina's refusal to conform, the play would not have progressed and the identity changes would not have served as the narration's forward movement.

Italian Cinema and the Prostitute

In the 1950s, America was swooning over Elvis Presley and Marilyn Monroe, Willie Mays made history in a Giants-Braves game, and college students crammed into phone booths and Volkswagons (*This* 1988). Meanwhile, Americans were also reading the best sellers; *The Power of Positive Thinking*, by Norman Vincent Peale; and *I Led Three Lives,* by Herbert Philbrook. However, in Italy, consumers had been exposed to the delights of the "Golden Age of Cinema," a celebration of cinematic innovations, which occurred approximately between the years 1948-1958 (1988). Italian cinema was in the midst of a major cultural shift, and one of the non-conformists included the famous Italian director, Federico Fellini. The following sections will address the extensive

identity changes that occurred in one of his more illustrious films portraying the plight of a forlorn and naïve prostitute, Cabiria.
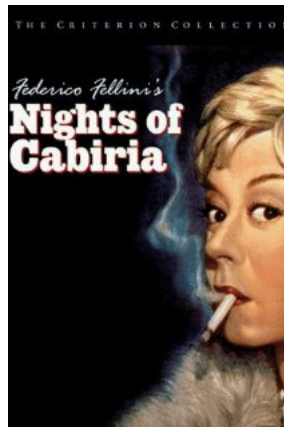
Figure 3. *Le Notti di Cabiria* (Source: http://bt.eutorrents.com/imagehost/images/lenottidic.jpg)

The 1957 film, *Le Notti di Cabiria,* depicts an emotive plot that relates specifically to psychological alienation and personal despair (Bondanella, *Italian Cinema*). Although the movie contains Neorealistic traits such as the poverty and despair of women in a country separated by numerous class struggles, this still differs from early Neorealist films in that it focuses specifically on the character, or more closely, it examines Cabiria's plight. Additionally, her plight is often based on inherent flaws in her psyche, probably due to her prostitution and abuse by her clients. Yet her image appears as one reflected off the masculine identity. As Luce Irigaray suggests, a woman's identity "bounces off" mainly from the men's definition, which sadly is limited to descriptions of her reproductive organs (133). This objectification serves to limit a woman's identity solely to her relationship with a man. In this movie, the men delight in offering their diminutive "names" to her and their friends. However, some "names' occur through the actions of the conniving males, specifically from "Giorgio" and "Oscar." In these

instances, the names are often formed in the viewers' minds, assigning an "invisible" identity to the main character; these will be addressed in subsequent paragraphs.

One notices that due to Cabiria's deleterious relationships with men in *Le Notti di Cabiria,* her self-image suffers greatly. Her continual physical and emotional abuse forces her to strongly question her value as a woman, and also simply as a human being. Her subconscious attitude perhaps plays a significant role in her continual demise and misfortune. Fellini's acute interest in the psychological work of Carl Jung may have prompted him to create movies displaying the thoughts from the unconscious. Jung suggests, "The unconscious can be recognized as a co-determining factor along with consciousness […] then the center of gravity of the total personality shifts its position" (Storr 19). As Storr suggests, Jung's work directs people to "pay attention to the voice within," and from this investigation, one will learn the meaning of life (20). In *Le Notti di Cabiria* , Fellini's central character, "Cabiria," listens mainly to the voices "without." Her identity is determined by several people in the film, specifically the male figures whom she sadly encounters. Her recognition of her inherent worth as a woman and divine creation does not appear until the final scene in the film.

Her "divinity" surfaces throughout the film as evidenced by her sweet naiveté and her innocence. These qualities exist despite her horrid life as a prostitute. As Bondella mentioned about Visconti's work, which is similar to Fellini's, "The most humble gesture of a man, his face, his hesitations and his impulses, impart poetry and life to the things which surround him and to the setting in which they take place" (*Italian* 26). Thus, one observes evidence of this focus in Fellini's film. They are displayed by the emotive facial expressions and Cabiria's general, fairy-like character.

However, in *Le Notti di Cabiria,* the central character is a woman, and it is a woman whose face, hesitations, and impulses depict the "poetry" of her life and resignation. Furthermore, notably she is simply a reflection of her position with the men in her life. She has no stable identity, and her character is defined continuously by her association with the men. Cabiria is a prostitute, and because of her relationships with the male characters Fellini introduces in the film, she allows herself to become society's stereotypical definition of a pathetic and uneducated whore—simple, desperate, and looking for unconditional and true love. This research will also examine the constant negative influence her unconscious mind receives due to the identities thrust upon herself by her male encounters. These subliminal suggestions occur repeatedly throughout the film; thus, they possibly contribute to a harmful self image. Finally, specific camera techniques and lighting demonstrate Fellini's creative genius by noting how they elicit a specific emotional reaction in response to the events of the destructive plot.

In movies as literature, or in cinematography, despite any possible dissonance, the viewer is automatically biased [3] by the narrator, in this case the director and screenplay writer. These examples will be noted in another section addressing camera techniques. However, throughout the film, *Le Notti di Cabiria,* one witnesses her identity shaping often by the names "spewed" at Cabiria throughout her life.

Giorgio, Neighbors, and Pimps

The majority of these "spewed" names instill a pejorative effect to the main character, and the first example occurs during the drowning scene. Pushed into the deep

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[3] Several factors contribute to a definition, and in fact, no single explanation is accepted as truth. In autobiography, "truth" is based merely on memory, an inaccurate source due to time. Biography is usually written by an extreme admirer or avid hater of the person; thus, it remains colored by personal bias.

water by her scheming boyfriend, "Giorgio," who stole her purse while she struggles for her life, Cabiria is fortuitously saved by some young boys in the vicinity. Near death, she is pulled from the water, and through the efforts of nearby adult males, brought back to life. When she is recognized by some of the male neighbors, her identity is easily dismissed as that of a "local tramp" and they simply shake their heads in wonderment and disgust at her despair. Thus, her life remains insignificant; the issue is quickly forgotten by the men who saved her life.

Once Cabiria realizes her supposed boyfriend Giorgio plotted to kill her for her money, she calls herself "a fool." "Tramp and fool"—the names are thrown at her define the only "comfort" as she regains her life from the traumatic drowning incident. However, she only continues to suffer, as she receives no sympathy from her prostitute friends and their pimps. In fact, as she approaches a car full of men in her "business" neighborhood, they laughingly say to each other, "Here comes the psycho." One wonders why they think she is mentally incompetent. Perhaps it is simply because she seeks something more than the lives to which her friends sadly resign themselves. Thus, as she desires to rise above her peers' expectations, she is touted as mentally deranged, or "psycho." Cabiria dares to dream that she will have another identity, one much happier than the one she is cursed with at the present time.

Consequently, her peers, or the other prostitutes, reveal yet another identity shaped by men in the movie. "You're a *princess* to the men if you have a nice car." As Cabiria doesn't have a nice car, or *any* car, she is called a "lousy loser." Even the pimps have names for Cabiria. To stop her from being a "loser," one pimp suggests she come work for him rather than being on her own. Cabiria immediately recognizes the "name"

he wants to give her now. She angrily answers, "I'm not a slave." Already in the first part of the movie, one observes she has been identified as a "lousy tramp, psycho, loser, fool," and now the pimp implies she should be his "slave." Despite the numerous identity changes, the variety serves to move the plot forward and provide more clarity to Cabiria's changing personalities.

Alberto, Humanitarian, and Ball Player

As the movie progresses, she encounters a famous movie star who just had a fight with his jealous and glamorous girlfriend. They create quite a spectacle, and after the girlfriend absconds in a cab, the distraught boyfriend is left sitting in his expensive and luxurious convertible all alone, despondent. Cabiria, a witness to this sordid affair, attempts to become obscure but the man notices her in the close proximity.

As their eyes meet, he calls to her, "Hey you!" After a brief exchange, he brusquely orders her into the car. He never asks her name and is content to consider her as "Hey, you." Yet he is delighted to learn that she knows *his* name, the famous movie star, "Alberto." However, he still does not consider her worthy of addressing her in the same, more personal context. Up to this point, he has not asked nor does he appear to care about her name. He knows her identity—she is a prostitute.

Yet, he apparently decides to amuse himself and he takes her to a fancy nightclub. Once they enter the elite club and she is noticed as his companion, she is addressed by the waiter as "Signora," a title she readily accepts with a smile. This title implies that she is the famous star's wife, otherwise they would have called her "Signorina," or worse.

Once they are seated at the bar, Alberto introduces her to the bartender as "the lady," and at this point, Alberto finally asks her name, mainly because he realizes he may

have to introduce her again to one of his elitist friends. When she tells him, "Cabiria," his puzzled laugh leads one to think he is merely patronizing her by feigning interest in her fancy name.

Cabiria is glowing with her newly formed "identity," and when they leave the club and drive past some of her prostitute and pimp friends, she shouts at them to notice whom she is with, as she considers the association with a famous movie star a complimentary attribute to her identity. They arrive at Albert's apartment, and now she realizes that he knows she's a prostitute; yet he still treats her with tenderness and respect. He orders food for her as he knows she has not eaten in quite awhile. After the earlier painful encounter with his greedy and ungrateful girlfriend, one supposes Cabiria is a welcomed but temporary change for Alberto.

Suddenly, to complicate matters, the girlfriend arrives at the apartment and storms in to reconcile with Alberto; Cabiria is hurriedly ordered to hide in the bathroom before the girlfriend notices that Alberto is not alone. Cabiria naturally obliges as she is used to doing what men tell her do, and quietly suffers as she sees her dreams vanish; Alberto reconciles with his girlfriend and she spends the night while Cabiria remains hidden in the bathroom for hours. Alberto has rendered her invisible, and her identity changes from a pampered (yet temporary) date to that of an invisible entity. The dog her only company, Cabiria is trapped in the bathroom, and she spends the night hidden away, no better than a mere animal.

After the girlfriend leaves, Alberto offers no excuses or apologies to Cabiria. He insists on paying her for the night, however, thus identifying her as someone whose time is usually paid for (a prostitute). Alberto has now shaped her identity again into that of a

whore. He drops Cabiria off in her usual neighborhood without any explanations or apologies, and she is approached by a truck driver who unflatteringly calls her "Shorty." He apparently recognizes her as a neighborhood prostitute; her identity has quickly gone from "Signora, lady, Cabiria, invisible woman, whore" to an even more diminutive one, figuratively and literally—Shorty. Cabiria is saddened by her return to reality and former identity as only a prostitute.

In a subsequent section of the movie, Cabiria encounters a "man with the sack." He appears to be a mysterious person yet a generous humanitarian, so she accompanies him as he generates his nightly rounds, distributing food to the poor. He offers to drive her home, and he never refers to her as a prostitute, even if he assumes this is the case. When he does ask her name, she replies, "Maria," which the viewer now realizes is her actual name, an identity hidden up to this point. Thus, she only reveals her true identifying name when it is to a humanistic, considerate man who asks her for this information. Therefore, one notices that he, too, has shaped another identity for the sad, little prostitute—her given name. It is the only time she allows this vulnerable "person" to surface. Although he is kind to her, he leaves her without presenting an offer to see her again.

As she again has to return to her own neighborhood, she faces a group of baseball players, who instantly call out to her: "Hey, blondie!" She attempts to ignore their jeers and walks past them, totally confused as to who she really is in this world. Cabiria's life appears to shift from one identity to another, and even a pilgrimage to honor the Virgin Mary—another woman, by the way, whose identity is shaped by her relationship to men—brings her no salvation. "We're still the same," she sadly confides to her friend,

Matilda, as they return without having received "grace" from the Virgin. She feels no hope in bringing her life and identity closer to a happy state.

Holy Man, Oscar, Parading Youths

Cabiria encounters a holy man in her walks, and he identifies her as an incomplete and confused person through his casual questioning about her apparently sad state. She informs him that although she visited the Virgin Mary's holy site, she is still the same as before and does not feel she received any special "message" or "gift" from the Holy Mother. He asks her whether or not she is married. To her negative reply, he states "All girls want to get married. You should get married to be in God's grace." Her wide-eyed stare into his face hints that she now realizes the reason for her pathetic situation. She has the wrong identity in this Christian world. Her face reveals that she has discovered the meaning to her unhappy life. All she has to do is get married and all will be well.

However, wanting and getting are two different things, and as Cabiria reflects on her plight, she wanders into a variety show to try to erase her sadness. She is "shaped" into yet another, albeit negative identity: a magician "transforms" her from a street-smart roughneck, a persona she adopts among the crude male customers, into a vulnerable and sweet woman while under the hypnotist's spell. Her transformation stems from an encounter with an imaginary lover named "Oscar" while under hypnosis. In her hypnotic trance, she reveals her strong desire to find true love and marry. The male magician has shaped her identity into that of a fragile, sweet, innocent child-like woman.

Upon her release from the magician's spell, she resumes her original hard-hearted and disillusioned persona. As she leaves the arena in shame, as everyone is ridiculing her, a man rushes up to her declaring his undying love, and convinces her that *he* is the man

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for her, mainly because *his* name is Oscar. She does not realize that his name is not really Oscar, and he merely plans to take advantage of her in some way. After a two-week courtship, he dupes her into believing his false claims of true love. He tells her to sell her house and all her belongings so they may go off together in search of a new life as husband and wife. "Oscar" has shaped her identity into a woman in love, full of everlasting trust and devotion.

She becomes the obedient woman in a glowing yet false love affair, which defines another identity; she willingly obliges him and meets him in a distant location. Her ravishing and divine identity quickly dissolves as she realizes Oscar has merely used her, mainly to steal her money and abandon her in a remote area. In her emerging and gut-wrenching despair, she begs him to kill her and end it all. Murder was not his intention, although he briefly contemplates it. "Oscar" quickly absconds with the money, leaving her to her hysterical torment while she eventually "dies" as she assumes another identity. Thus, one notices that she experienced another series of conflicting identities—single and incomplete, joyful and engaged to be married, and totally betrayed and alone. Truly, as a human being, these men have rendered her "invisible" as their continual identity-shaping leaves Cabiria, and the viewers as well, wondering when the changes will stop.

The movie ends with her assuming her final identity for the saga, as she experiences an epiphany by a group of joyful youths when they parade past her, reveling in their inherent and innocent joy. She experiences a form of "rapture," and her tears slowly melt away in her private ecstasy. She hesitantly at first yet confidently walks alone— part of the welcoming youths—walking in time to their blissful music. Cabiria's concluding identity, stimulated by her crushing and counterfeit love affair with the lying

and conniving Oscar, includes that of a woman who finally realizes her truth worth; it's perfectly acceptable to "walk alone" in this world. She realizes her inherent beauty and grace and that it depends on no one's definition except her own.

Cinematic Techniques[4]

Cabiria's multiple identities are enhanced by Fellini's artful casting and camera techniques. Film critics note her outward identities:

> It sometimes seems that she is a sprite merely masquerading as a woman; she has a light, almost ethereal presence, though at the same time she exhibits an earthy quality that gives her character such complexity, which removes any semblance of stereotype one may assign to her character as a `lady of the evening. (JHClues 2005)

One wonders how many times she must succumb to the ill treatment by her interactions with the male characters in the film, yet she manages to maintain a personal triumph at the end despite her unfair situations. As noted by Clues (2005), Fellini ideally cast Giuletta Masina in the role of "Cabiria," a "gentle soul at heart who manages to maintain a positive outlook even in the face of adversity" (2005). Her continuing hope for a better life appears throughout the film.

Fellini illustrates these occurrences—or identity changes—with various film techniques, especially his treatment of "chiaroscuro," which is the effects of contrasting light and dark. Although the film is cast in black and white, he makes excellent use of high contrast, especially by illuminating the area around Cabiria's head from an unknown

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[4] "During the editing of this film, editor Leo Cattozzo developed the CIR self-perforating adhesive tape splicer, also known as 'Costruzione Incollatrici Rapide', the 'Cattozzo', Guillotine-, CIRO- or ARRI Splicer), which made him rich in the 1960s and earned him an Academy Award in 1989 [http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0050783/]

light source. This resembles the emotive Baroque style of painting, usually characterized by this same technique.

Fellini wrote most of the scenes occurring in the night or dark nightclubs and bars. Thus, her glowing blond hair and "halo" suggest to the viewer that her identity includes some hidden "grace" or "salvation." The majority of women around Cabiria—the other prostitutes—has dark hair, which in contrast further casts Cabiria's illusion of undiscovered yet evident purity with her blonde tresses.

The director instructs the camera to photograph Cabiria in several long shots, usually when she is walking away from a desperate and disillusioning situation. One views her from behind, as she walks away, head bowed, becoming smaller and smaller. "Directors use zoom shots to indicate importance or to reveal something" (Borchers 148). Thus, Fellini includes close ups of her face, especially to depict her silent yet observable emotions.

At the end of the movie, as Cabiria experiences her final emotional assault—Oscar's betrayal and abandonment—she for the first time is cast in shadow; the unknown illumination disappears. It does not reappear until she encounters the reveling youths and discovers her true self worth at the end of the film. Fellini's camera person bounces the camera to correspond with her dancing movement, following her as she joyfully steps along with the exuberant crowd. Once again she is bathed in light as she embraces the glorious and spiritual light of self-discovery.

Literature Review

De Lauretis (1994) notes that feminist issues or struggles appear in the films of Pasolini, Fellini, and Bertolucci; they attempt to dissuade the stereotypical views of

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women. "There is indeed reason to question the theoretical paradigm of a subject-object dialectic…Woman enters history having already lost concreteness and singularity…the most abstract measure ever invented by patriarchal ideology (143). Some critics attest that Fellini instigated the emerging feminist views, and perhaps this remains true.

Cabiria is depicted with multiple yet demeaning identities; thus, the problem women experience in a patriarchal society become more noticeable. Although the feminist movement surfaced full force in the 1960s, the undercurrent of dissatisfaction was thriving in an unfair society. "Betty Friedman's book [*The Feminine Mystique*] discussed the 'problem that had no name.'" (Borchers 330). Of course, the most notable feminist movement appeared in the United States; however, the literature became widespread and provided knowledge for underground groups in other countries. "Flora Davis explains that media 'brought about' widespread transformation in how Americans thought about women She argues that books, articles, films, and television shows helped spread feminist ideas" (331). As far as the movement in European countries, "They [consumers] learned to purvey a dream world that keyed in with other images of the West as Italy's destiny, America as a model society" (Gundie 103). Thus, critics understand that Italian consumers were influenced by American media. When one critiques Fellini's films, an undercurrent of feminist appeals surfaces through close readings or observations, which matched similar movements occurring in America of women's newly formed identity.

Unlike one of Fellini's other films, *La Dolce Vita* (1960)*, Le Notti* illustrated women's struggles with identity, whereas the former depicted women's success. Gundie states, "A more modern image of the elegant woman took shape" (117). He further notes

that this film revealed that a woman of *any* social class could reign supreme, and she was "…not defined by conformity to social norms or by grace and poise but by autonomy, style, travel, and wealth" (117). Thus, contrasted to *Le Notti,* one observes that only a few years later, Italian women's identity revealed drastic and positive changes.

Statistics reveal definite and often significantly high increases in the divorce rates in Italy, a mainly Catholic country that discourages divorce (Castells 141). A factor such as this one demonstrates a decline in a formerly strict patriarchal society. By 1992, approximately 20% percent of Italy's households were comprised of single person households (151). Additionally, statistics suggest a definite increase in Italian women's employment, and by 1993, 43% of jobs were held by women. This demonstrates a significant increase from the era of *Le Notti,* when the majority of women's jobs included those not socially accepted such as prostitution. Clearly, Fellini used his film to draw attention to women's plight in the 1950s.

One of the major factors of women's "plight" naturally included their identities as structured within their social confines. "Prejudices and discrimination are based on racial, ethnic, and social distinctions" (Bridwell-Bowles 4). Presently, these factors still influence people's status within their individual communities. They may even be classified according to family order such as first born, middle child, or another place in their "arrivals." However, those are classifications that one cannot change.

By studying identity issues in the media, especially film, one can determine the political and social zeitgeist. Fellini's films, including *Le Notti,* contextualize feminine issues by comedy, farce, or tragedy. However, one must still consider that film, as any

literature, remains open for interpretation. Once the film is produced, directed, and shown, it no longer belongs to the scriptwriter or director. It belongs to everyone. Fellini stated:

> My films are separate entities, free to divulge themselves in whatever area they choose. It's like traveling together for a time under some common, soft roof hanging from a loosely filled balloon, in a bubble which I am called upon to design, to fill, to limit, and to give character to. Once I have done this, as far as I am concerned, our roads diverge completely. He—the film—goes along his road, with the feather which I had thought he wanted me to give him, with the identity which it had seemed to me he had wanted me to define. (Bachmann 5)

Fellini assigns a masculine gender to his films. However, considering it remains unique that he would assign *any* gender—some suggest that all his films are autobiographical—one must consider that no sexism exists in this connotation. Additionally, Fellini provides clues to his films' intentions—there is no specific definition; anyone is free to absorb whatever he or she decides to do. The intricate significance of his "releasing" the film to the public allows him to ignore any critic's deconstruction, as it is no longer his film. Thus, one enjoys the luxury of indulging the psyche in Fellini's work. In the case of *Le Notti*, this researcher chose to view Fellini as an innovator and collaborator for women's rights, as witnessed by the identity issues in the film.

Italian Cinema, Neorealism, and the Prostitute as Mother

Italian "Neorealism" in cinema was not defined by a specific "movement" or direct change. Instead, it gracefully emerged close to post-war Italy years perhaps as a

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result of economic conditions, broken dreams, and the stark reality of a country divided by socio-economic struggle and poverty. To achieve this means to the end, directors focused mainly on the intrinsic problems experienced by the characters, most of whom were non-professional actors. Directors were less concerned with displaying the country, and were more intent on focusing on the internal strife of each character.

In Luchino Visconti's *Obsession* (1943), he draws from author James Cain's classical literature—*The Postman Always Rings Twice*, *Mildred Pierce*—and relates a story of romance, poverty, and inevitable loss. However, the squalid conditions that dominate every scene serve as an underlying metaphor: there is no hope for any of the main characters. They remain in their hopeless situations no matter how they struggle to rise above their problems and class status.

In *Obsession,* the plot reveals a scenario bred from despair, lust, and pathetic attempts for happiness. Visconti employs close-ups and tragic displays in mise-en-scene that act often as a foreshadowing of the tragic future. One will recall a scene where Gino, the intruding lover, is shaving with a straight razor while the camera focuses, too, on the soon to be murdered husband.

The plot opens with Gino, an unemployed drifter and criminal, arriving in town and meeting the repugnant husband, Bragana. His much younger and smoldering sexy wife, Giovanna, locks eyes with Gino and their immediate lustful attraction is established. Visconti focuses on their faces, and although the dialogue does not support the occurrence, the viewer knows danger lurks from the intensity of their gazes.

However, Gino realizes that this could draw him into an impossible and dangerous situation, so at first he resists any further connection with the Braganas. Yet as

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time progresses, one views the corpulent Signor Bragana in all his disgusting naturalness: thus, the viewer even feels pity for the hardworking Giovanna as she obediently serves her inconsiderate husband's every whim. It remains apparent that she has no way out of this situation, and one assumes that she married him merely to upgrade her position in life. Her futility as a woman in this era, in Italy or anywhere else in the world, endears the viewer to her plight. Her identity at this point is that of a trapped woman.

Eventually, Gino returns and he and Giovanna consummate their latent yet inevitable desire for each other. She plots to have Gino kill her husband, and although he hesitates, his lust for the pitiful yet voluptuous woman overcomes his better judgment. Visconti ensures that the viewers realize the hopelessness of the situation, and when the lovers attempt their escape to a life that promises more hope, happiness, and love, tragedy strikes them down: an automobile accident separates the lovers forever as Giovanna is dead at the scene. Ironically, although Gino escapes responsibility for Signor Bragana's death, he mistakenly is charged with Giovanna's death. Thus, no one wins, and all their efforts were in vain. Readers may recognize this scenario as it was repeated in American filmmakers' production of *The Postman Always Rings Twice,* which was produced in two later versions.

Visconti presents this common theme, that of star-crossed lovers, in a setting and plot that serves as a metaphor for the socio-economic conditions in Italy at the time. There existed no hope, and all attempts at escape were futile. Instilling a Marxist theme, the lovers' attempt to break away from the futility and poverty of their present lives was hopeless. The wretched lives they led were their individual "crosses to bear," and all efforts to rise to another standard of living, especially for Giovanna, were unsuccessful.

The undertones resemble a tragic opera depicting the desolation of a poet's lament. Considering that Visconti was an accomplished writer and emerged from a wealthy family, his interest in Marxist themes and tragedies was contradictory to the rules. However, as a Neorealist director, he effectively demonstrated the struggles the lower and middle classes experienced in the troubled times of war torn and post war Italy. These factors highly contributed to the proliferation of female prostitution in Italy.

Another example of the era is set in poverty-stricken Sicily, *La Terra Trema* (1948). This film reveals the conflicts that prevailed in Italy in those post war years. The "American Dream" was obviously confined to America, as the main character in the movie revealed there were no dreams of any type in Italy, only "nightmares." Ntoni, a young man who descends from a long line of fisherman, yearns to provide a better life for himself and his large family. Following his father's death during a fishing incident and continuing years of basic struggles, Ntoni decides to embark on a capitalist venture. After mortgaging his extensive family's modest house, he and his brothers gamble on starting their own fishing business. Ntoni assumes that this will bring greater rewards to his family, and thus his sisters will attain a higher status in life as well. This greater position in their lives will ensure they "marry well." There were no opportunities for decent women other than to get married. Ntoni wants to save his sisters from a desperate life as prostitutes. This was how their identities were revealed—by their husbands. Hence, one sees that "family" exists as a solid foundation and Ntoni's intentions are not selfish ones, but ones that will provide essentials for his family.

However, Ntoni and his brothers remain at sea a long and difficult time, and during his absences chaos ensures in the Valastro family. Without any substantial

income, Ntoni's sisters experience the results of their poverty. It appears that the absence of some men influences the sisters' identities, as they becoming more destitute. One of his sisters succumbs to advances by an official, who exploits her naiveté and youth by plying her with gifts, which are in return for sexual favors. Her reputation disintegrates over time, and any hope of her "marrying well" is lost. Her identity suffers as her interactions with other men increase, as she exhibits her desperate need to gain material wealth.

As the fishing season progresses, Ntoni encounters other hardships besides stormy times at sea. He is ridiculed by his peers, and the buyers refuse to acknowledge his catch. It appears that the power positions in the community's industries are controlled by the wealthy business owners; the average worker is incapable of permeating these select social circles. Additionally, the individual worker lacks any means to rise from his working status, as the businessmen in the fishing industry absorb most of the profits; this leaves only a pittance to each of the fishermen. Upon Ntoni's humble return, he is admitted back into the working circle, but not until after he is verbally and physically tormented, perhaps to teach him a lesson about "knowing his place." His place eventually becomes that of protector and bread winner for his sisters despite the former sins they committed to survive in his absence.

The entire movie demonstrates the futileness of the poor Sicilian town of Acitrezza and its community. The town is a synecdoche for several towns that existed on the coastal area and perhaps inland sections as well. The natural setting reveals the substandard living and working conditions in Acitrezza; however, at this time, poverty and starvation existed across the southern part of Italy.

Visconti, as always, was concerned with the plight of the working class, and in his quest for realism, ensured no professional actors were employed; in fact, most of the "actors" were actual fisherman from the coastal town. Thus, one sees the irony in hiring poor people to play themselves in a movie. In essence, no one was playing a "role" at all except for that of his real life. Hence, Visconti's cinematic illustration actually revealed the personal, familial, and community conflicts of a war torn nation, and a town seeped in hunger and dismal living conditions. Notable, *La Terra Trema* concludes in despair and leaves viewers with the glaring vision that the weak have no opportunity in post war Italy, nor perhaps in any European community in that era. This adds to the dilemma women face as they are forced into prostitution.

Contrarily, conditions in more northern Italian towns represent the opposite. For example, Rome is displayed with its grand opulence in *La Dolce Vita* (1960), contrasted to the poverty of the Sicilian town of Acitrezza as witnessed in *La Terra Trema.* Yet one stands to gain more insight about women in this Italian life by investing the differences that exist in one city. This will also serve to demonstrate the varied lifestyles that prevail within one country, typically divided into the rich north and the poor south.

For example, in Pier Pasolini's movie, *Mamma Roma* (1962), one views the disparity and hopelessness of the working class living in the outskirts of Rome. In Fellini's 1960 film, *La Dolce Vita,* viewers witness the decadence of the wealthy citizens enjoying the high life in Rome. Yet in Pasolini's film, which is set in outer Roman communities, the film shows the separation of classes. A Marxist review on these two movies reveals the stark differences that exist within one city; thus, the microcosm is created that exists as the working class.
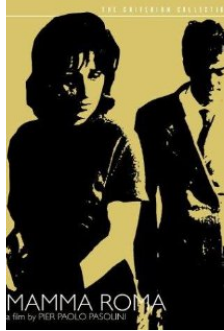
Figure 4. Anna Magnani in *Mamma Roma* (1962)

(Source: http://www.moviefone.com/movie/mamma-roma/)

Mamma Roma

Set in the shanty-town areas of the outskirts of Rome, *Mamma Roma* reveals the squalor and poverty that prevail in these areas. The majority of the actors were merely citizens from these parts, and they easily portrayed life as it existed in the petty criminal areas. Pasolini's graphic depictions of the underworld set a stage, and they act as foreshadowing of the impending tragedies. Mamma Roma, a supposed reformed prostitute, attempts to upgrade her life to provide a suitable setting for the return of her teenage son. Viewers realize that although at first Mamma Roma is revealed as a prostitute, her son shapes her identity again as a mother. She longs for a better life to provide well for her son. Her "new," apartment remains still as a substandard one, and she continually looks out the window facing north, hoping to move even farther north, or toward the more elite sections of town; she is in denial—Mamma Roma cannot possibly invade the richer northern area of Rome because she is and has always been poor.

The film depicts people walking around barefoot wearing shabby clothes; one teenage girl, Bruna, already the mother of one baby, is actually one of the area "sluts." The local boys show her no respect; however, Mamma Roma's son, Ettore, is not like the

other boys. He is kind to the poor girl. Viewers wonder if he perhaps sees the girl, Bruna, as a younger version of his mother—alone with a son, no father present nor no one even defined as a father. Ettore's thoughts about Bruna also shape her identity from prostitute to revered mother.

Mamma Roma's identity at this point is one of a loving mother, despite her past illicit actions. She wants to provide a suitable and clean atmosphere for her beloved son, Ettore. However, she has another identity that she hides from Ettore: she is and has been a prostitute, working hard to survive in one of the few jobs afforded to women at this time in history. Although she detests her past, she has to delve back into her former yet sordid lifestyle merely to get her son a job. She contacts her former friends and pimps, who now identify her as that of a prostitute, and they stage a scenario to blackmail a restaurant owner into providing a job for Ettore. She beams with pride as she and her friend visit Ettore on his new job as a waiter.

Unlike his mother, he soon quits his job as he has no desire to join the class of people who value material things as emblems of their worth. He prefers the lazy, poverty-laden lifestyle of his peers. The teenage boys appear to have too much time available to them, and apparently are not in school. They simply hang around gambling, and plan ways to steal money for cigarettes and alcohol. In between these scavenges, they converge about Bruna; and whether she's willing or not, they engage in group sex with her. Pitifully, she often welcomes the attention and concludes that she is a much wanted and desired beautiful young woman, which is based solely on the boys' sexual attention. It is never mentioned whether she intends to move out of this lifestyle, get a job, or whether she even detests her life. Apparently, she accepts it as the norm from living in

the underworld of Rome's outer circle. Bruna's identity is consequently displayed by her sexual escapades with the teenage boys. She already has one child, and her prostitution is the only way she can support herself. Bruna has to risk getting pregnant again, as the sexual interactions are the only way she can support herself. Birth control pills were not available in war torn Italy.

Mamma Roma discovers Ettore's lowly lifestyle, but she is incapable of doing anything about it. Previous to his actions, she was forced back into her prostitution by her blackmailing pimp; however, Ettore discovers his mother's background and now present occupation. Bruna, who has no real identity, serves as the messenger—she tells Ettore how his mother earns her money. Apparently, Ettore refused to see former signs that would have alerted him about his mother's profession.

Thus, Mamma Roma's identity is now changed in the view of her son, Ettore. Her blackmailing pimp shapes her identity as that of a prostitute, which in turn forces her son to be reviled by this newly discovered identity. He has no respect for his mother and merely scoffs at her when she attempts to persuade him to come back home. He is too immature to realize that his mother has no other "skills," and that she is supporting herself and him, too, the best she can in her situation.

Out living on the streets, as appears to be the situation for his friends as well, he turns to thievery. Ettore ends up in jail: despondent, sick, and crazed with severe fever. Again, Mamma Roma is helpless to save him, and he remains in jail, deathly ill with a curable illness, yet uncared for until he quickly dies from neglect. His fevered illness was treated as insanity, and he was left to die strapped to a table. Upon hearing of his death, Mamma Roma attempts to commit suicide by jumping from her apartment window—the

"north" window that used to offer her hope for a new life—as she now realizes her dream

for happiness with her beloved Ettore will never appear. She will never get to live outside

her squalid neighborhood. She is doomed to only look out her window at her rich,

northern neighbors. Her final despair is in knowing that no matter how hard she wants,

she was and still has to be a prostitute; that life and identity will be with her forever.

Mamma Roma's identity varies throughout the film depending on the plot

scenario with her son and her "clients." She vacillates among prostitute, former

prostitute, concerned mother, angry mother, despondent mother, and suicidal mother.

These identities align closely with Ettore, her beloved son, and how he is viewing her in

the film. In one scene, there exists an almost Oedipal construct when Mamma Roma is

slow dancing in the arms of her son. With her head nestled on his shoulder, and their

arms around each other, the absence of the father is strikingly obvious. Thus, in that

scene, her identity is shaped by Ettore into that of a "lover," not a mother.

Nevertheless, Mamma Roma's identity is continually marked, too, by her poverty

and location. She lives in the southernmost part of Italy, Sicily, which has always been

considered the area where destitute people live. Also, she often looks out her northern

window, wistfully wishing she could move there. The farther north people live in Italy,

the more people reveal a superior wealth. A film that was made and set in the northern

Italian city of Rome, *La Dolce Vita* (1960), exemplifies this scenario.

The lifestyle in *La Dolce Vita* displays a totally different scenario, although the

characters' lives are still mingled with tragedy. Yet the "tragedies" are on a higher level,

and are often quickly forgotten as their opulent and rich lifestyles soon blur any sorrow.

In Fellini's movie, Marcello, a rich playboy, spends his days indulging in parties and sex,

as do his friends and cohorts. This lifestyle contrasts highly with Ettore and his friends; however, both character groups from both films are lazy and unconcerned about others.

When comparing *Mamma Roma* with *La Dolce Vita*, contrasted to Ettore, Marcello's days are spent engaging in sexual liaisons with a variety of women, including a famous film star, Sylvia; Maddalena, whose sexual prowess intrigues him; and last of all, his actual girlfriend, Emma, who attempts suicide because of Marcello's escapades with the other women. Marcello has other rich friends, including his male friend, Steiner. Steiner hosts gallant and extravagant parties, host to several of Rome's rich and decadent travesties and freaks. The alcohol flows like water from an infinite spring, and the topics of conversation include lewd banalities. None of these people appear to work either, similar again to those in *Mamma Roma.* However, unlike the characters in *Le Notti,* they do not have to work. Everyone appears independently wealthy, and their worries stem from simply not having enough fun or diversity. Yet similarities between this movie and *Mamma Roma* exist mainly because both setting are in Rome; however, the differences abound in the individual outcomes of the characters associations and wrongdoings. The male and female interactions remain significant as they deeply reflect each one's description.

In *La Dolce Vita,* people are driven around in limousines, or else they drive their flashy convertibles through the beautiful streets of downtown Rome. In the outer cities of Rome, the residents drive no cars; if they are fortunate, perhaps they will have a motorcycle. However, most walk barefoot through the streets. Their parties consist of a stolen bottle of wine, and it is consumed in the streets or outside an abandoned cave. The

latter is also the site for their sexual liaisons. In the Roman inner city, sex is performed amidst silken sheets, satin draperies, and crystal chandeliers.

One of the rich and ambiguous characters, Steiner, who hosts one of the wild parties, ends up committing suicide in the film; this appears to be the only answer for these spoiled rich people when they are faced with troubles. A quote from Steiner sums up the mindset of these selfish, affluent, and ungrateful people:

> Don't be like me. Salvation doesn't lie within four walls. I'm too serious to be a dilettante and too much a dabbler to be a professional. Even the most miserable life is better than a sheltered existence in an organized society where everything is calculated and perfected.

Yet one compares this to Mamma Roma's life that was contorted and miserable because of her abstraction and poverty.

However, Steiner is not referring to the "miserable life" that prevails in the outskirts of Rome. He knows nothing about true poverty and despair. He leaves his affluent world in a cowardly fashion, taking his own life. Marcello remains alive, continuing to wallow in the "swampland" of Rome's inner city. In *Mamma Roma,* the viewer realizes that Mamma Roma will continue to live in her outer city squalor, as there is no hope from escape for those people, either. These two worlds are within one, and they are barricaded by class structure, family background, and monetary status. Marcello affects the women he encounters, yet he remains the same—alone. Mamma Roma is affected by the men she encounters, and she, too, remains alone.

Femme Fatale Identities Emerge from Their Relationships with Men

The "femme fatale," a significant figure in noir film and literature, is an identity often shaped because of her relationship to men. Without their presence, her manipulative and scheming character would have no one to affect. Thus, the male character—often deemed the "victim" –on whom she inflicts her poisonous acts, perhaps exists as the instigator of this action. Stated in other terms, how could the "femme fatale" persona exist without the man? This section will demonstrate specific areas in noir film where this type of woman propagated her actions by the willing accompaniment of her "victim," consciously or unconsciously on his part. The research will also determine whether events could have occurred without the man's acquiescence. For example, the questions could arise whether in *Double Indemnity* (1944)*,* was the femme fatale motivated by the male victim's desire for her or would she have performed the evil deed—murdering her husband—without his help. No one knows whether she attempted the same deed on her own, and obviously failed, before she encountered this willing accomplice. Questions such as these can be applied to another film, *Sunset Boulevard* (1950)*.* Research on these questions in other noir movies will help explain the power of the femme fatale and lend credence to her identity as such. This identity often exists due to her relationship with the victim, so named because of his fatal attraction to the woman protagonist.

Noir film typically includes characters who are all suffering their personal turmoil. This turmoil leads to numerous conflicts in the film, and often the turmoil ensues from actions of the femme fatale. In his article, "The Power of Blackness" which appeared in *American Literary History* (2004), Charles Scruggs states that film noir illustrates a few significant themes including that of "angst, alienation, and an unstable

universe." He may also have included the presence of a "femme fatale," often referred to as a "dame" in the noir plots. Webster defines femme fatale as "A woman of great seductive charm who leads men into compromising or dangerous situations" or that of "an alluring, mysterious woman." Enter, "Norma Desmond" (*Sunset Boulevard*) and "Phyllis Dietrichson" (*Double Indemnity*).

The rhetoric and grammar in noir film exhibits several identifiable characteristics. These characters include the use of overlying narrative, glamorous clothing and tailored suits, and specific diminutive terminology. In *Sunset Boulevard,* the narrator supplies the emotional thought and lack of it exhibited by the parasitic man, Joe Gillis. The narrator is already dead, similar to the technique used in the contemporary film, *American Beauty*(1999). The advantage of this technique is that the viewer knows the underlying motives behind each character's actions, and the narrator is often omniscient, supplying the details one would perhaps miss without the explanations.

For example, in *Sunset Boulevard* (1950)*,* Joe reveals his depression from being an unsuccessful script writer. He tries to work hard but the results are always futile. When he meets Norma Desmond, his main interests are simply to become adept at his writing trade and make a name for himself through his work. However, as Norma plays on his weaknesses and offers him a life of luxury, he initially declines her offer. As the narrator, Joe explains that he has integrity and refuses to live off a woman's money. Yet as time goes on, the narrator reveals his "entrapment" into Norma's world, and he eventually accepts her gifts, money, love; not only through inherent greed, but pity for the woman. Had the narrator not explained this to the viewers, his intentions would have been deemed as merely selfish and crude.

Joe's concern for Norma's feelings forces the audience to feel sorrow and regret for Joe's death at the end, which is what the narrator wants everyone to experience about him. Thus, he plays down his interest in the young female writer with whom he associates with during the late hours of the night, and instead implies that their association exists mainly to produce his work. Yet the viewers are not fooled, as they realize that he is lying to Norma about his whereabouts, and is in fact falling in love with the young woman.

Thus, despite the apparent omniscience of the narrator, one learns to mistrust him and wonders if he indeed knows his own mind. This ambiguity instills yet another suspenseful trait in noir film, and encourages to viewer to excitingly anticipate the outcome of these mixed emotions. Additionally, the viewer realizes that the character must have either been justly punished or unjustly sacrificed, as he is already dead. Therefore, the viewer attempts to determine what could have led to his fatal demise, which enhances the viewing experience.

One notes, too, that the narrator as well as other characters employ genre-specific terms such as "dame," "baby," "broad," and other terms applied to the women in the film. There are not typically any flattering terms related to women in noir film—very seldom are they referred to as "ladies" or any other respectful terms. Yet considering that the women in noir film consist typically of a femme fatale, these terms seem appropriate to the viewer; even if they do not play the femme fatale role, the men treat them as less deserving of respect simply because they are submissive women.

However, even when the women are cast as innocent characters such as Phyllis' step-daughter in *Double Indemnity,* she is still referenced as a "beautiful dame" and open

bait for any man's admiration. The rhetoric in noir film is that women exist simply for man's pleasure, and they are mainly cast as either ruthlessly controlling or pathetically subservient.

Scruggs (2004) further states that these traits serve as a "bridge between high and low cultures." In these movies, these traits not only "bridge" the cultures, they serve as a separation for them as well. In *Sunset Boulevard* and *Double Indemnity*, one notices that wealthy women initiate relationships with men of lower social standing and class. They both manipulate the men to serve their needs or desires. However, one notes that without these men present in their lives, the "femme fatales" would have no title as such. The conditions that describe this noir title exist mainly because the women seek release from their "angst, alienation, and unstable universes" (Scruggs 2004). This section will investigate the traits that existed in these women's lives and their subsequent relationships with the men that changed their identities to that of the femme fatale.

Sunset Boulevard (1950)

Consider the basic plot of *Sunset Boulevard,* and investigate the possibility of alienation. Norma Desmond lives alone with only her pet ape and a former husband reduced to simply a loving caretaker. She lives in desperate wait hoping that Cecil B. DeMille will call her to star once again in a movie, a plot she has written and hopes to star as the leading woman, "Salome." This is her only goal, and every day is simply another step hopefully closer to her impossible goal. It is impossible because by 1940s standards, she is too old to be of any value in movies anymore. Norma refused to accept this and holds on to her unreasonable goal.

Viewers do not know that he is her former husband until the end of the film. However, Max, experiences angst from attempting to maintain Norma's self esteem, and he heartbreakingly watches as Norma passes several younger and more virile men through her bedroom and marriage chamber. Max also works hard to ensure Norma thinks her fans still care about her, even to the point of writing false fan mail to her. He lies to her when the producers reject her inquiries to star in their films; and in the end, completes his final yet sympathetic lie-- "Lights, camera, action!" as she thinks she has finally been accepted to star in a film; however, she is actually being led off to prison for the murder of Joe.

Additionally, Joe Gillis, Norma's new "pet" or "gigolo," as society labels men of this type, dwells with his own continual angst of being torn between living in poverty or accepting Norma's generosity. He begrudgingly succumbs to her generous offers of clothes, jewelry, and palatial lodging. His angst increases once he realizes the price he must pay for luxury—loss of personal identity, goals, and love. The saying "You can't make a silk purse out of a sow's ear," surfaces when one notices that despite Joe's new wealthy living conditions, he inwardly longs for his former poverty-stricken yet exciting life.

These factors all contribute to Scruggs (2004) final point, which is one of an unstable universe. It definitely reveals itself in several dimensions simply by examining the characters demise. No one displays this instability more than Norma Desmond. In this instability, the character's identities are easily shaped, and the changing identities often serve as the narrative that moves the plot.

Norma's angst stems from her being cast aside as a once great but now aging glamour queen. She has no real life, as every day for her is a new "role" in which she has been cast; and one of these roles is an insane, yet clever, manipulative femme fatale used to getting her way no matter whom she destroys. This destruction may be an emotional one such as what she does to Max; or emotional and fatal, which she finalizes with Joe's undeserved murder. In one significant shot, after a most likely intended failed suicide, she plays the role of the rejected woman, "plagued by sorrow" to the point that she attempts but does not succeed at suicide. It appears that her suicide attempt was yet another ploy to manipulate Joe into coming back to her out of pity.

This idea surfaces for a few logical reasons. First, she knew there were no locks on the doors, so she would not succeed in her suicide action because Max or Joe would come to her rescue. In fact, the camera focuses on the unlocked door right after Norma enters her supposed "death chamber." Additionally, the viewers do not know that she actually cut her wrists, as they are mysteriously already bandaged. The director, Billy Wilder, perhaps did not include that shot to create the image of manipulation or deception on Norma's part. Desmond's former husband turned butler, Max, and everyone else are always part of a staged process to maintain Norma's false "glory," so perhaps Max and the doctor were part of this drama to lure Joe back.

Note in the attempted suicide scene how she is perfectly posed and coiffed despite her immediate attempt to take her life and endure the visit with her doctor. When Joe enters the room, he is met with the picture of a beautiful yet aging woman, posed perfectly in her glorious bed. He is so moved by this picture he lovingly removes her dainty shoes to make her more comfortable.

As Norma "awakes" from her traumatic episode as Joe removes her shoes, she realizes she has won him over. She raises her arms, displaying her dramatic-looking bandages for him to see on both her wrists. Furthermore, even if her suicide attempt was real, note how she plays one of her "tragic woman" scenes with the "crocodile tears," which amazingly disappear when Joe gives in to her wishes. Joe, forgetting that she is a great actor despite her years, is overwhelmed by this display and finally kisses her as a lover—her lover and captive. Not only has Norma's identity been changed back into a woman regaining her lost love, but Joe's identity has been changed back into her unwilling yet hopeless lover.

In the end, when Norma realizes that Joe is not giving in to her every wish, which in this case is to be home with her every night, she murders him in a jealous rage. Yet viewers must wonder whether this was really the case. Perhaps it was simply another role she was playing—that of the tragic woman scorned. She was so used to Max "fixing" everything for her, and she possibly thought he would do it again. When Max could not bring Joe back home this time, Norma's identity changed into that of a murderer.

However, the police were called and Norma had to answer for this crime. It appears, however, that her interaction with Max changes her identity from criminal to a pathetic depressant. One would think that this horrendous crime would throw Norma into the depths of guilty despair; however, she plays her final femme fatale role at the end of the film. In her unstable universe—one that exists solely for the benefit of Norma Desmond—conveniently forgetting that she just committed murder, she quickly reverts to the role of the returning glamour queen. This was enabled by Max telling her that she was going to appear in a film; all she had to do was walk down the stairs. Even Cecil B.

DeMille—played by himself out of respect for Gloria Swanson, one of his actual film starts—waits for her at the bottom of the stairs and has his cameramen shine their lights on her. DeMille and Max change Norma's identity again from that of a murderer to an againl famous movie queen. This persona was also enforced by DeMille telling her he was "filming" her for a movie. Norma assumes her "the show must go on" role: a role that consumes her and dictates her every move in life. "Mr. DeMille, I'm ready for my close-up." This line indicates that Norma has assumed yet another identity, based on the one she shared with Mr. DeMille—that of the beauty queen.

Thus, after close examination, one learns that Norma Desmond's "femme fatale" title is exacerbated by her relationship with Joe Gillis. Although Norma exhibits qualities that do not fit the typical definition of a femme fatale, she indeed illustrates some significant qualities. Prior to meeting him, she was simply an aging silent film start, silenced herself because of the changing times. Even when she first meets Joe, he says to her, I remember you. You used to be big." Norma proudly answers, "I'm still big. It's the movies that are small."

Thus, she had convinced herself that the public was at fault for their "stupidity" in rejecting her. Her low self esteem is atypical of the femme fatale, but she uses this poor quality to advance her relationship with Joe, ignoring his actual desire for the younger woman writer.

Double Indemnity (1944)

Angst, Alienation, and an Unstable Universe

She had it all—beauty, brains, and a wealthy husband who adored her. One would think that Phyllis Dietrichson's world was anything but unstable. However, a universe

based on boredom and loneliness serves as fodder for trouble. Prior to meeting Walter

Neff, a struggling insurance salesperson, Phyllis was simply living out each day in a

conditioned daze, finding little comfort from her husband's perfunctory attention. In her

marriage, her husband's indifference had fashioned her identity as that of a sad and

neglected housewife.

Enter Walter Neff, the man who would change Phyllis' identity from a bored,

lonely yet wealthy housewife to that of a femme fatale. As Walter appears at the

Dietrichson mansion to answer a call for automobile insurance, the talented actors, Fred

MacMurray and Barbara Stanwyck, ensure that viewers notice the immediate attraction

between them; their locked eyes and nervous body language reveal their cloaked sexual

attraction for each other. Phyllis' world, full of angst due to her boring marriage, is about

to become even more complicated.

The plot thickens as Walter Neff, a semi-successful salesperson due mainly to his

sales savvy, attempts to sell automobile insurance to Phyllis' husband. When he later

returns to their home to firm up the deal, Walter discovers that Phyllis is alone. Prior to

her former attire when her husband was present, Phyllis is now wearing an alluring and

flimsy peignoir outfit, one that accentuates her glamorous figure and does not go

unnoticed by Walter.

As the story progresses, Phyllis portrays her supposed horribly boring life to

Walter, and he, now mesmerized by her manipulative ways, succumbs to her advances

and their affair begins. She creates angst in Walter's world where before none existed.

His attraction for her, which prompts immediate attention for Phyllis, shapes her identity

into that of an anxious woman, no longer content with her former ennui.

Phyllis, as always the beautiful and seductive woman, suggests to Walter in desperate tones that they can be together forever if only he would help her rid her dreary life of her boring husband. At first, Walter rejects her proposal, despite his strong attraction to the beautiful woman. However, as Phyllis continues her sexual implications and actions, Walter begins to imagine an exciting life with this sensual woman.

His angst continues, yet they plot the murder and successfully perform the evil deed—the husband is brutally murdered. No one suspects them as the murder appears accidental. Additionally, the "accidental double indemnity" clause now yields quite an award for Phyllis. Through her interaction with Walter, her identity has been shaped from a bored housewife, to a femme fatale, to that of a murdering accomplice who is also now quite wealthy from the insurance payoff.

Femme Fatale's Identity Shaped by Her Relationship with Men

If the female character has no one to manipulate, it would ensue that she loses her title of "femme fatale." In film noir, the woman can control the male character with her sexual wiles, and she soon acquires the femme fatale title by her manipulations. **"**If the contingent turn from free choice to inevitability is aligned with a masculine gaze appropriating a seductive feminine body, one must not overlook the fact that as bearer of the hero's look, it is the *femme fatale* who manipulates the outcome of their fatal meeting (Bronfen 105). Additionally, Bronfen states, "She is not only sexually uninhibited, but also unabashedly independent and ruthlessly ambitious, using her seductive charms and her intelligence to liberate herself from the imprisonment of an unfulfilling marriage" (105). Again, the femme fatale would not benefit from her "seductive charms" if there were no man to seduce.

Furthermore, the common trait among this type of woman is that of an exhaustive power, a power that continues to lead the man and often both of them to meet their tragic fate. However, although she gains power over the noir hero by nourishing his sexual fantasies, her own interest is only superficially erotic. She entertains a narcissistic pleasure at the deployment of her own ability to dupe the men who fall for her, even as she is mercilessly manipulating them for her own end (Bronfen 106). Hence, without any men around to "dupe," the femme fatale loses her power and often regresses into the role of submissive female.

In Wilder's film, *Double Indemnity,* it appears that the two lovers are almost fated to meet each other, and upon their obvious "love at first sight" encounter, the femme fatale surfaces as an entity and allows her to act out the traits associated with the stereotypical controlling woman. Additionally, these traits only exist mainly due to the noir male character who uses the femme fatale often as a fulfillment of his sexual fantasies. "One could speak of her as a figure of male fantasy, articulating both a fascination for the sexually aggressive woman, as well as anxieties about feminine domination" (Bronson 106). Thus, one understands that without the male presence, the femme fatale would not be a sexual fantasy; she exists because he places her in that category.

Similar to this category is the role Norma Desmond plays in *Sunset Boulevard.* Joe Gillis' penchant for following the path of least resistance—becoming Norma's love slave—reveals that he turns over the power to her, producing the femme fatale image. As with Walter Neff in *Double Indemnity*, Joe Gillis initially rejects this role; however, he eventually succumbs to the will of the woman whom he places in the authoritarian role.

Furthermore, Slavoj Zizek suggests:

> The *femme fatale* functions as a symptom of the *noir* hero's fatal
> enjoyment in such a way that, by destroying her—Walter Neff will shoot
> Phyllis Dietrichson in the heart—he hopes to purify himself of the desire
> she inspired and the guilt this entailed. In so doing, however, the *noir* hero
> not only does not recognize her as separate from him (thus denying her
> humanity), but also remains blind to the encrypted message about the
> fragility of his existence that she embodies for him. (Bronfen 107)

This statement further relates the noir man to the femme fatale, as it suggests that the two exist as one entity—one cannot exist without the other. In essence, these two figures signify one character, and this supports the theory that the femme fatale remains subservient until her "alter ego" surfaces in her life—the man who provides her with a new identity.

This emergence of the femme fatale and her supporting characters is typical of most film noir, the man who is manipulated by the seductress. One sees this in *The Killers* (1946), directed by Robert Siodmak. Ava Gardner plays the role of such a character, one who casts her "spell" upon an innocent Swede, innocent that is, until he is smitten by her. He loses everything in life because of his phenomenal attraction to her, and her power over him gives her the title of femme fatale.

> In noir both woman and film are invested with the power of fascination by the *un*
> *homme fasciné*. For there is almost always one—and only one—for whom
> fascination with the femme as image proves fatal. And, like all exceptions, his

task, like hers, is double: to break *and therefore* uphold the reassuring rule, about

femmes, films, and fatality. (Harris 110)

Thus, Harris agrees that the role of the femme fatale depends on her often fatal

relationship with the man, in this case, the one who succumbs to her powers, or the

"fascinated man" (109). Harris also indicates that the femme fatale's character in noir

cinema exists principally to "bring about [the man's] destruction" (111). Moreover, one

again realizes that the man's demise must be promoted by the sexually powerful woman.

She cannot exist as this dominating force if there were no man on which she could evoke

her dark powers.

Femme Fatale Incapable of Surviving on Her Own

Interestingly, one observes that although the woman overpowers the man, thus,

her identity deems her a "spider woman" (Harris 111) or sorts, she must lose in the end.

As she was allowed to control the man, she is typically "punished" by dying (*Double*

Indemnity). One wonders whether the script calls for this severe ending to send a message

to society: a strong woman must either be tamed or killed. Perhaps this exists as a

warning to postwar women, the time when noir proliferated: maybe women were able to

fill positions in the workplace while the men were at war[5], but now they must forfeit this

temporary power position and resume that of the submissive woman. "Mary Anne Doane

understands the fact that [the femme fatale] is usually declared to be an embodiment of

evil, and punished or killed, as a 'desperate reassertion of control on the part of the

threatened male subject" (Harris 113). Thus, one understands the subliminal message in

noir film: a woman able to seduce a man and induce him to succumb to his fallibilities

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[5] During WW II, women filled industrial positions to replace vacancies left my men in the service ("Rosie
the Riveter").

must be punished.[6] Harris suggests that Phyllis Diedrichson may simply be "a figure of projection for masculine anxiety" (114). Whatever one determines as the character's purpose, extensively one realizes her dependence on the fallible male for her identity.

In *Double Indemnity,* Walter Neff objectifies her and never fully realizes her identity as anything other than someone who is acted upon. He fixates on her ankle bracelet in one scene, not really noticing that she is a whole woman and not simply a "pair of great legs." Neff, as with Joe Gillis in *Sunset Boulevard*, merely thinks of these women as objects to use or exploit. Thus, the femme fatales exist mainly to promote the males' fantasies: sex and money. Perhaps these identities make it easier for the women to be obliterated at the end of the story. If they never existed as real human beings, perhaps it remains simple for them not to exist at the end of the saga.

Critics such as Harris and Doane read the "femme fatale as a symptom of patriarchal anxiety about feminism" (114). Surveying typical film noir stereotypes of these figures suggests that the women must remain "hidden," or "silent" in the end, as they are relatively only a reflection of the man's inner fears and shortcomings. For the man to discover resolution at the end, she must disappear so he can become whole again, even if it means he is executed or killed. His death absolves him from any guilt he suffers from being a part of the powerful woman who controlled him. She existed mainly to allow him to progress through his "learning stage," and in the end, the man resumes his former identity.

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[6] In the 1981 film, *Body Heat*, starring Kathleen Turner and William Hurt, the femme fatale follows through with all the factors mentioned in this research. Contrarily, not only is she allowed to live at the end of the film, but she ends up in a luxurious island setting to live happily ever after. The *homme fasciné* goes to jail for life, as he is the only one charged with the femme fatale's husband's murder. One wonders if this is a representation of women's advanced position in society at the time of this film's production.

Another standard characterization is that of the disposable woman. They are usually strangled or murdered in the end, and their deaths are inevitable, even if it turns out to be an accident as in *The Postman Always Rings Twice.* One notices, too, that even while the women are living, they live a silent "death" portrayed by their unhappiness or boredom. For the male "victims," there are no pictures on their desks of their wives or girlfriends, and one is assured that their wallets lack the same replicas. Kathleen Turner states about her character's role in *Body Heat* (1981):

> …Matty was clearly not waiting for anyone else to rescue her. She was a woman well aware of the tools she had been given—the abilities to attract and manipulate men   […]

Matty may have gained the riches she desired but has realized that she lost the ability to trust in love. (58)

Thus, by her own hand, Matty has made her identity invisible. Although she lives at the end while her *un homme fascin* [intrigued or transfixed man], Ned Racine, goes to prison, she does escape to a remote island living out her lifelong dream and her fantasy life. Ned cannot find her although they were supposed to meet after the murder; so in essence, she has become "invisible" to everyone. Some may argue that she ends up all alone, but when viewing the closing scenes of her on the remote island, she does not seem to care.

Her interactions with Ned throughout the film shaped her identity from that of a bored housewife, to femme fatale, to a murdering accomplice. However, her lack of interaction with her lover at the end again changed her identity to an uncaring, cold,

narcissist; thus, in this example, her lack of interaction with the male protagonist still forged a new identity.

In most noir film such as *Double Indemnity, The Postman Always Rings Twice,* and *Sunset Boulevard,* the women often serve as catalysts to drive the men toward an inevitable sorrowful end, justifiable due to their inherent fallibilities of lust, greed, and vengeance. Thus, as supposed evil people, they exist as "hidden" or "silent" characters, often referred to simply as "dames," "babes," or "honey." Note that the men in noir film have no such terminology or any diminutive terms applied to themselves.

Although the typical noir film woman is insignificant, she is often liberated. However, the pattern reveals that strong, liberated women are sure to meet an untimely end, whether it be death or abandonment or some other self-sacrifice. In *Sunset Boulevard,* Norma is quite self sufficient in her mansion with her jewels, ornate dress, and servants. Yet she is quite disposable at the end, as she must suffer the consequences of murder, murder of a man who used her and played with her affections for his worldly gains. One may argue that murder does not portray justice for heartbreak; hence, symbolically, Norma was "dead" way before her years, if one considers her missing identity.

In *Double Indemnity,* Phyllis dies in the end, lost in her lover's hatred and the shadow of her dead husband's murder. Hence, one wonders why these women are always cast in this demise. In the postwar era, people were returning to an affluent society, exemplified by the ornate dress and homes in noir film. Yet women, who during the war assumed power through temporary employment, were now being told they had to step

down to their pre-war submissive positions. Perhaps this was the film media telling women to beware of what could happen to a liberated, powerful woman.

Sexual Tension as the Woman Assumes the Femme Fatale Identity

Commenting on the 1982 film, *Body Heat:*

Ned says Matty has a body she shouldn't be allowed to go out in. His attraction to her is so visceral that he paces like a caged leopard ensnared by Matty's sexual bait; his desire is so intense that he smashes all boundaries of social acceptability and morality. (Turner, 70)

Sexual tension proliferates in noir fiction. This serves to advance the plot toward an unsavory end. The tension is never due to typical situations between two young or new lovers; it exists usually between a gruff yet weak man becoming "ensnared" by the all-knowing and powerful femme fatale. As noir examines the benefits of good versus evil, the viewers know that nothing good can come from this type of sexual union. Indeed, the interactions of the femme fatale and the unsuspecting male shape and promote the forward motion of the plot narrative.

For example, in *The Postman Always Rings Twice,* Cora, an unhappy and bored housewife, lures her victim into a murderous plot. Joe, the unsuspecting seedy yet handsome drifter, at first tries to ignore the temptress' beauty. However, as usual in this genre, he succumbs and falls prey to the consequences.

Ideally, the men always reject the advances at first, which intimate that they are not really at fault. The tension builds because the man has to fall victim to the powerful sexual allure of the femme fatale. Had he simply smiled and agreed to her advances at the

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beginning of her sexual assault, the viewers would have been disappointed at his weakness.

This stems from the stereotypical traits of the main male character in noir fiction. He should be tough, powerful, handsome, and strong. Yet his fallibility surfaces when faced with the insurmountable power of the femme fatale. "It wasn't his fault, you see." Thus, the sexual tension serves as a metaphor for the "evil of powerful women" over unsuspecting men. Nevertheless, the interactions shape the woman's identity; as stated before, the femme fatale would not exist with the male characters' opinions of her.

In *Double Indemnity*, Phyllis evokes sexual tension from the moment the two first meet. They continue their weak attempts to hide their attraction by posing as interested people in an insurance transaction: he as the seller and Phyllis as the buyer. However, it is soon revealed that Phyllis is indeed the "seller," as it is her sexual allure and body she is "selling" in exchange for murder and freedom. Again, Walter initially rejects her advances with his words, but his sensual body language and lingering admiring glances reveal his true intent and impending acquiescence.

In *Sunset Boulevard,* the sexual tension arises between Joe and his young writer friend, as they attempt to stay away from each other as Joe is living with and "off" Norma. This selfish act serves to alert the audience of a possible betrayal in the works, which could have led to Joe's death. The viewers already know Joe is dead, as he says so when he begins the narration in the motive.

Additionally, in this same movie, sexual tension arises between Joe and Norma, as he realizes that his sexual rejection of her led to a suicide attempt. One sees that Norma has truly become infatuated and enamored with Joe, yet he succumbs to her

advances merely out of pity and greed. This trait serves to inform the audience that sexual relationships founded in evil or weaknesses lead only to certain demise and fatalities. In the end, Norma has completely lost her mind and her identity.

Contemporary Women in Cinema: Angry, Powerful, Vigilant

Similar to how the 1960s American woman began protesting her subjugated state, the contemporary woman in cinema is also angry. She exhibits anger at her situation in life, not unlike the femme fatale of the 1940s film noir genre. However, her anger is in her control; she does not use other men who serve as her pawn in her quest for relief. In the contemporary scenario, her anger often stems from physical or mental abuse she suffered in a personal or familial relationship with these men. She is angry for a reason, and this is revealed by her look, her demeanor, and her attitude.

She is determined to fight back now. Her role is often one of revenge, and she exhibits complete control and physical ability in this quest. Gone is the sexy, sensual, manipulating woman of former decades in cinema. The contemporary woman does not use her sexuality to manipulate her admirers. She does not use promises of undying sexual favors; nor does she suggest a helplessness, one that would encourage her "knight in shining armor" to help plot her escape.

However, the contemporary and angry woman still displays a fetishized image of a woman, in this case a powerful one—one who has a perfect and sensual body and is naturally beautiful. Instead of being clad in a sexy and glamorous negligee or cocktail dress, she instead is typically clad in black leather or a similar tight material, one that shows every strong and sensual curve of her extremely powerful body. Her hair is usually short, and it is often black or dark brown. She scoffs at those who admire her dark beauty

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and power, and uses this as a means to laugh at their attraction. The contemporary woman has no love for men, as she often has been abused or manipulated by them in her lifetime. It is now her time to take complete control of her fate. However, even in this genre, the female characters' identities are shaped by their former interactions with men, those who have created the anger and revenge.

The irony is that this type of strong woman must assume a masculine look to make viewers believe she indeed has excessive control and power. Her hair is often cropped short and she wears no frills or laces. These factors suggest that for a woman to be strong, she must look like a man; however, her body is still "fair game" for the male film viewers, as she often dons a dominatrix look, complete with black leather jumpsuits and exotic weapons. She is adept at using all these weapons, as her mission is to kill, not to seduce. Apparently, the strong woman of the late 20th century cannot present a typically feminine image from former decades in cinema, as noted in the film noir section of this research. Instead, the contemporary woman in cinema often exhibits the results of the 1960s "bra-burner," equal-pay fighter, pro-abortionist, and anti-sexual harassment" woman. She has "won her case," but she is now considered evil, a non-lover, a vigilante, a loveless example of what happens to women who fight back against their male characters.

> *I am seriously unhappy about the way women are "sold" today, through film and*
>
> *media. I don't think women want to be anorexic. I don't think they want, as they do in*
>
> *Charlie's Angels, to strip and lap dance—how humiliating. How hypocritical. Who determines*
>
> *that model of attraction? I walk around in the world every day, and I don't see anyone who*
>
> *looks like that.* (77)

<div align="right">Kathleen Turner, Send Yourself Roses</div>

Chapter Three—Discussion

Film Noir—Basic Traits

In the American postwar era, people were returning to an affluent society, exemplified by the ornate dress and homes in noir film. Yet women, who during the war assumed power through temporary employment, were now being told they had to step down to their pre-war submissive positions. The proliferation of film noir movies portrayed women in negative ways, and their final demise was to put them back in their submissive place. Critics may wonder if this was society's way of showing women what happens to them if they attempt to exert independence and power over their male partners.

In film noir, the narrator as well as other characters employ genre-specific terms such as "dame," "baby," "broad," and other terms applied to the women in the film. There exist no flattering terms related to women in this type of film—this highly contrasts with how women were previously described as "ladies" or other similar respectful terms. Women's roles in film noir often consist of the typical femme fatale, a term quite opposite from anything respectful or endearing. Thus, considering that term, viewers accept that men treat them with disrespectful terms. However, even the women who are not cast in the femme fatale role are often treated with abusive actions because they serve as a foil, or submissive, to the femme fatale.

For example, even when the women are cast as innocent such as Phyllis' step-daughter in *Double Indemnity,* she is still referenced as a "beautiful dame," and "open

bait" for any man's admiration. The rhetoric in noir film is that women mainly exist for men's pleasure, and these women are cast as either ruthlessly controlling or pathetically subservient. Perhaps this illustrates the contrasts that existed in women in the film noir era: those who remained at home during the war stayed as housewives upon their husband/soldier's return from battle. The women who out of necessity filled the factories as replacements for the men at war, often demanded to stay at work and continue to earn money.

Although that is a subjective observation, controversy exists about a true or definite outline of film noir; however, upon close investigation, there exist commonalities that appear often enough to separate noir from other genres. To accurately depict these traits, it remains more comprehensible when illustrated by example. The following categories will be investigated, specifically those of lighting, music, narration, character identity, and more code. The descriptions will highly suggest that film noir exists in a category or its own.

Another rhetorical and visual aspect of noir film exists in the particular style of dress. The men all wear suits, and their hats are cocked at a slight angle, partially obscuring their eyes. They have no body jewelry except for maybe a watch, and their dress is mainly conservative, yet formal. In most films, the men are dressed this way even when they are relaxing at home. They are not portrayed as contemporary casual, which would be exemplified if their outfits included jeans, sneakers, and t-shirts. The wealthy men even wear smoking jackets and ascots when they are at home, and their hair is short, neat, and slicked back with hair oil.

The women are dressed formally as well, although their styles are not quite as conservative. They wear dresses most of the time and high-heeled shoes. Their hair is perfectly coiffed, almost elaborately, and they wear several items of body jewelry. At home, they wear glamorous satin and lace dressing gowns and high-heeled house slippers, almost in a fetishized manner.

If the woman plays the role of femme fatale, she is pictured in even more formal attire, and usually quite revealing with high-cut side slits in the dresses and skirts. The dressing gowns resemble sheer negligees, and they are conveniently belted loosely, allowing them to show their wearers legs in a provocative manner, Women clad in jeans, shorts, or workout wear are not the main focus of dress.

These rhetorical elements inform the viewers that the film was made in post war times. The gruff, gravely and often monotone the males employ, even when addressing the women with their diminutive terms, play up the noir image of the "tough guy." Once the viewers witness the particular dress style exhibited by both genders, this, too, dates the film to the noir era.

In *Double Indemnity,* Walter Neff, a struggling yet semi-successful salesperson due mainly to his sales savvy, attempts to sell insurance to Phyllis' husband. When he later returns to their home to firm up the deal, Walter discovers that Phyllis is alone. Prior to her former and more modest attire when her husband was present, Phyllis is now wearing an alluring outfit, one that accentuates her glamorous figure—this does not go unnoticed by Walter, and Phyllis did not want it to go unnoticed.

Not only the clothes, but setting significantly identifies film noir. One would be hard-pressed to view a film noir set in a sunny countryside, and hardly a scene occurs that

is not dimly lit or portrayed as night time. It has been touted that the atmosphere in a nightclub or bar precludes the evil happenings that may incur when humans are exposed to mind-altering alcoholic drinks and often available narcotic drugs. This atmosphere includes dimly lit rooms, people gathered together in feeble attempts to assuage their loneliness and despair; and a backdrop permeated by the perils of the nighttime darkness, penetrating the rooms through whatever windows may exist. Thus, this describes the similar setting of film noir.

Therefore, one of the stereotypical noir film traits is that of the darkness. The characters' backgrounds are obscured in this doom; mainly, the plots are written so that viewers see the story during the night hours. Brief daytime shots serve only as a contrast to the majority of dark scenes. Perhaps one of the reasons for this proliferation of night-time shots exists to relate the good versus evil underlying metaphor. Evil deeds and plots are the mainstay of noir film, and most people relate fear and mystery and death to the darkness. Additionally, if the scenes occur mainly at night, this allows the opportunity for viewers to observe the grandiose and often opulent décor of the interior of homes, complete with liquor displays and expensive crystal decanters and glasses. America was recovering from the war time poverty, and viewers wanted to see examples of wealth. They had been exposed to rationing, poverty, and death for too long a period of time.

Viewers sense that no good could come from this type of setting; the characters are often contrasted with a light source emanating from behind, bathing them as in a surreal type of glow. Their images are cast in the shadow, hiding the emotional facial traits from the audience, similar to how their thoughts are hidden within their subconscious minds. The Baroque-like illuminations, or characters awash with the stark

effects of chiaroscuro, add to the foreshadowing of the ensuing ills that overpower victims in this setting. For example, in *The Killers,* viewers are introduced to this genre with focuses on the dark streets, two unidentified men entering a diner, late at night. Their faces are half hidden by their hats, pulled down to defy any clear descriptions. Rooms are usually dimly lit, often a single bare light bulb providing the only light. Not only are brightly lit rooms missing from the settings, but the light often washes the characters with shadows form the window's Venetian blinds, covering them with jail-like bands—perhaps foreshadowing their often ultimate doom.

The use of non-diegetic dramatic music adds to the mystery of the darkness, music unheard by the characters but serving as the ultimate suggestion when they are experiencing the "darkness" of their crimes or actions. Even at the end of the film, when often a semblance of order is restored, the somber music reminds viewers that in effect, there are no "winners" in film noir depictions. The dimly lit scenes and disturbing music add to the viewers' revelation that they have witnessed the impossible journey into the character's unconscious, an area as dark as the room.

Nothing adds to the drama as much as the unconscious dealings and control of the unwittingly protagonist in film noir. For example, consider the supposedly innocent character in *Double Indemnity*—a typical hard-working "slob," trying to get by in life by selling life insurance. His last sale, that to the husband of a woman who has encircled his heart, or perhaps only his libido, proves to be the undoing of his complete moral code. This film exhibits one of the most famous femme fatales, a woman whose attraction leads to the demise of the poor "sucker," helpless in his desire to win her love and her body.

Similar to the black widow spider that kills after she mates, the femme fatale often leads to the male character's "death," perhaps not always literally, but figuratively, as her own charms uncovers his peripatetic nature. This resembles the scenario in the film *The Postman Always Rings Twice,* when a lonely man, a drifter in his world and in his jobs, succumbs to the charms of a desperate yet beautiful woman. It is the desperation for a better life that motivates the femme fatale, as she desires to break from the unfulfilling relationship in which she already stagnates. She teams up and exploits the desperation of a lonely man, one who has failed to reach his intended grandiose and often unnatural goals in life that forces him to seek comfort in the pathetic disintegration of his soul.

Often, this "selling of the soul" in exchange for supposed happiness leads to his death. In film noir, one of the characters usually narrates the film. This constant verbal accompaniment fills in the details of the male protagonist's thoughts, allowing viewers to acknowledge the workings of his self-destructive mind, one that often leads to his untimely death, literally or figuratively, by the femme fatale with whom he has partnered in their dark scheme.[7]

Walter's angst continues, yet they plot the murder and successfully perform the evil deed. No one suspects them as the murder was contrived to appear as an accident. Additionally, the "accidental double indemnity" clause now yields quite an award for Phyllis. However, although Phyllis assumes the femme fatale role, consider that if the woman has no one to manipulate, she losers her title of "femme fatale." Several critics note that this type of character is not only sexually uninhibited, but also unabashedly independent and ruthless, using her seductive charms and her intelligence to liberate

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[7] A similar technique is employed in *American Beauty,* a more recent film yet one with noir elements including a femme fatale and voice-over narration by the already dead protagonist.

herself form the imprisonment of an unfulfilling marriage. Thus, if there were no man to seduce, the femme fatale would receive no benefit from her seductive charm.

Phyllis' identity is easily shaped by Walter, as he objectifies her and never fully realized her identity as anything other than someone who is acted upon. He fixates on her ankle bracelet in one scene not really noticing that she is a whole woman and not simply a "good looking dame." Walter and Joe Gillis in *Sunset,* merely think of these women as objects to use or exploit. Thus, the femme fatales exist mainly to promote the males' fantasies, typically about sex and money. These identities make it easier for the women to be "discarded" at the end of the story. If they never existed as real humans beings in the men's minds, their obliteration is easily accepted.

Furthermore, the common trait among this type of woman is that of an exhaustive power, a power that continues to lead the man and often her as well to meet their tragic fate. However, research suggests that although the man is attracted to the femme fatale because of her seductive beauty, the woman usually derives no actual sexual pleasure; she simply enjoys the narcissistic power her beauty provides for her, and she intensely enjoys her new power position over the unusually overbearing male. Hence, without any men around to "dupe," the femme fatale losers her power and often regresses into the role of the submissive female.

In *Double Indemnity,* it appears that the two lovers are almost fated to meet each other, and upon their obvious "love at first sight" encounter, the femme fatale surfaces as an entity; this transformation allows her to act out the traits associated with the stereotypical controlling woman. Viewers note that her new association with Walter has shaped her identity into someone unlike the traditional and loyal housewife.

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Additionally, these traits only exist mainly due to the noir male character who uses the femme fatale as a fulfillment of his sexual fantasies. The fantasy is usually an admiration of the powerful woman, and, of course, the desire to possess her body. Thus, one understands that without the male presence, the femme fatale's identity would not be shaped as a sexual fantasy; she exists because he places her in that category.

Sexual tension proliferates in noir fiction. This serves to advance the plot toward an unsavory end. The tension is never due to typical situations between two young or new lovers; it exists usually between a gruff yet weak man becoming "ensnared" by the all-knowing and powerful femme fatale. As noir examines the benefits of good versus evil, the viewers know that nothing good can come from this type of sexual union; thus, the coupling of *un homme fasciné* with the femme fatale seals their unhappy fate.

Consider the following scenario in *The Postman.* Cora, an unhappy and bored housewife, lures her victim into a murderous plot. Joe, the unsuspecting seedy yet handsome peripatetic, at first tries to ignore the temptress' beauty. However, as usual in the film noir genre, he succumbs and falls prey to the consequences. Ideally, the men always reject the advances at first, which suggests that their final acquiescence implies they are powerless and not really at fault. The tension builds because the man has to fall victim to the powerful sexual allure of the femme fatale. He must do this to shape her identity into this new form, releasing her from her captive and submissive role.

Had he simply smiled and agreed to her advances at the beginning of her sexual assault, the viewers would have been disappointed at his weakness. This weakness stems from the stereotypical traits of the main male character in noir friction. He should be tough, powerful, handsome, and strong. Yet his fallibility surfaces when faced with the

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insurmountable power of the femme fatale. This dispels any thoughts that his entrapment was his own fault. Therefore, the sexual tension serves as a metaphor for the "evil of powerful women" over unsuspecting men. However, she was shaped into this identity by his reaction to her sexual advances. If Walter had simply ignored Phyllis and concentrated on his insurance business, she would have remained the bored, submissive housewife who simply longed for a better life.

In *Sunset,* the sexual tension arises between Joe and his young writer friend, as they attempt to stay away from each other as Joe is living with and "off" Norma. This serves to alert the audience of a possible betrayal in the works, which could have led to Joe's death. The viewers already know Joe is dead, as he says so when he begins the narration in the film. Additionally, in this same film, sexual tension arises between Joe and Norma, as he realizes that his eventual sexual rejection of her led to a suicide attempt. One sees that Norma has truly become infatuated and enamored with Joe, yet he succumbs to her advances merely out of pity and greed. This trait serves to inform the audience that sexual relationships founded in evil or weaknesses lead only to certain demise and fatality.

Additionally, surveying typical film noir stereotypes of these figures suggests that the women must remain "hidden," or "silent" in the end, as they are relatively only a reflection of the man's inner fears and shortcomings. For the man to discover resolution at the end, she must disappear so he can become whole again, even if it means he is executed in prison or killed in his own realm. His death absolves him from any guilt he eventually suffers from being associated with the powerful woman who controlled him. She existed mainly to allow him to progress through his "learning stage," and in the end,

the man resumes his former identity. He indeed becomes simply a victim of the woman he shaped into a femme fatale, a victim of her misdirected power.

Although the typical noir film portray woman as insignificant, she is often liberated by her interactions with the male lover. However, the strong, liberated woman surely meets an untimely end, whether it is by death or abandonment or some other self-sacrifice. In *Sunset,* Norma is quite self-sufficient in her mansion with her jewels, ornate dress, and dedicated servants. Nevertheless, she is quite disposable at the end as she must suffer the consequences of murder, murder of a man who used her and played with her affections. In *Double,* Phyllis dies in the end, tragically lost by her lover's hatred and in the shadow of her dead husband's murder. Hence, it appears these women are always cast in this sorrowful light in the end of the film.

In the postwar era, people were returning to an affluent society, exemplified by the ornate dress and homes in noir film. Yet women, who during the war assumed power through temporary employment, were now being told they had to "step down" to their pre-war submissive positions. Perhaps this was the film media telling women to beware of what could happen to a liberated, powerful woman.

In *Sunset Boulevard,* viewers empathize with the femme fatale in the film, Norma, as this remains a typical trait too, of noir film—that of being unable to characterize the people as either all good or all evil. The characters are "gritty," that is, their personas appear often as decent human beings, yet they become caught in the "web" or their own weaknesses. The women, especially, are no longer portrayed as innocents or "Madonnas," typical of earlier film. These women instead are "street-smart," and they long for better lives than their female counterparts, as portrayed in previous film genres.

In film noir, the man are often hard-working, yet they, too, long for better lives such as those with easy money, easy women, and a seemingly easy way out of their self-imposed imprisonments of the mind. In *Casablanca* (1942), the protagonist, Rick, is shielded in the darkness of the night, in his nightclub, and in his secretive personality. No one really knows his background or why he hesitates to return to the United Sates from Casablanca. Although he helps Elsa, his true love, escape with her husband in the end—sacrificing his own love for her so she and her husband, Victor, may reach safety—he still is guilty of murdering an innocent albeit unfair official to accomplish his final sacrificial act, allowing Elsa to escape.

Thus, one acknowledges that in film noir, some type of accepted moral order is often restored at the end. Although Rick murders in an altruistic act for his love and her noble husband, he loses Elsa forever and must remain in a country from his motherland. Similar to this film, moral issues are addressed in *The Postman.* The infamous couple who murdered the woman's innocent and kindly husband to further their own decadent desires, escapes conviction through the cleverness and manipulations of their attorney. However, in a fatal car accident for the woman, the man is wrongly accused of causing her death to collect insurance money. He is convicted of this crime despite his innocence, and he is to be executed for her murder. However, he accepts his fate as he never recovered from his guilt of killing the femme fatale's husband.

In *Sunset,* Norma "gets away" with murder, as she has completely gone insane at the end of the film. Viewers know that she will not be held accountable for her murderous crime. Yet viewers also realize that Nora lost in the end. She never did return

to the "big screen," as she hoped, and no one wanted her in the movies anymore. This included her dear friend and director, Cecil DeMille.[8]

Often, the rich femme fatales, as with Phyllis and Norma and even Matty in *Body Heat*, team up with less affluent men for various reasons; but in particular, to serve as a cohesive device between the two classes: the middle class working people and the rich and powerful upper class. However, the femme fatale takes advantage of these lower class men to help her manipulate them. They already feel less empowered because of the differences in their social classes. Yet without these men present in their lives, the femme fatales would have no titles as such. The conditions that describe this noir title exist mainly because the women seek release from the angst in their own unstable universes. Their subsequent relations with the men changed their identities to that of the femme fatale.

Phyllis was simply living out each day in a conditioned daze, finding little comfort from her husband's perfunctory attention. Her world, full of the stated angst, became more complicated and exciting when she met Walter. Instead of fulfilling her desires for a more exciting and fulfilled life, she suffered from her narcissistic pleasure. She manipulated him to such a degree that she in turn fashioned her own end. Truly, the two exist as one entity—one cannot exist without the other. In essence, these two figures signify one character, and this supports the theory that the femme fatale remains subservient until her alter ego surfaces in her life—the man who provided her with a new identity.

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[8] Cecil DeMille, a real life director, played himself in the film and returned to the screen as a tribute to Gloria Swanson in her fantastic work as Nora.

This "oneness" is a typical situation in film noir: the man who is manipulated by the seductress. One sees this also in *The Killers*, as noted in previous sections. Ava Gardner plays the role of such a character, Kitty Collins, a woman who casts her "spell" upon an innocent Swede— innocent, that is, until he is smitten by her. He loses everything in life because of his phenomenal attraction to her, and her power over him gives her the new identity and title of femme fatale. Thus, the role of the femme fatale depends on her often fatal relationship with the man, the one who succumbs to her powers. Her character in noir cinema exists principally to bring about the inevitable destruction of the empowered man; he then realizes his demised is promoted by the sexually powerful woman. Hence, the femme fatale exists as this dominating force because of the men upon whom she can evoke her dark power. Notably as well, this type of woman usually perishes at the end. Whatever determines the character's purpose, extensively one realizes her dependence on the fallible male for her identity. Once he regains his stature at the end of the movie, usually either through absolution through confession or punishment by being incarcerated, the femme fatale surrenders her temporary power status[9].

Noir characters typically assume basic stereotypical traits. One standard theme is that of the overworked, gruff, seedy detective. Additionally, the characters' personalities are ambiguous, and one has no clue to their pasts. Their emotional intent is as obscured as their pasts, and the viewer is left to wonder who they really are in the film. These traits expand the viewers' suspense and add to the classic noir genre's appeal.

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[9] It has been noted in previous sections that the production of the more contemporary film, *Body Heat,* demonstrated a contrary ending: Matty ended up on her island paradise, completely free of guilt and punishment for her part in the murder.

For example, in *The Maltese Falcon* (1941) film, directed by John Huston and based on the novel by Dashiell Hammett, the main character's description includes that of pithy or gruff; however, particular scenes reveal his sensuality and emotion. Yet he cuts it short leaving the viewer to wonder if he is as tough as he seems to be.

Nevertheless, the detective, Sam Spade is handsome, smokes, and in control of himself throughout most of the film. The ambiguity exists, too, as the viewer does not receive any background information on Spade. Also, despite Sam Spade's occupation as someone working within the law, he may cross the line ever so slightly. However, he never steps over to the extent where he could be prosecuted or described as a criminal. Sam teams up with Brigid, and together they form the perfect noir duo: both attractive, both determined, and both slightly "dirty":

> Brigid O'Shaughnessy*: I haven't lived a good life. I've been bad, worse than you could know.*
> Sam Spade: *You know, that's good, because if you actually were as innocent as you pretend to be, we'd never get anywhere.*

Another standard characterization is that of the disposable woman. They are usually strangled or murdered in the end, and even while they are living, they live a silent "death" portrayed by their unhappiness or boredom. Although author Mickey Spillane's "Mike Hammer" is much more upscale than Sam Spade, he still engages in women and booze. His women are just as insignificant to him as they are to Spade. There are no pictures on their desks of their wives or girlfriends, and there are no similar photos in their wallets or bedrooms.

Interestingly, one observes that although the woman overpowers the man, her identity deems her a "spider woman" of sorts; she must lose in the end. As she was allowed to control the man, she is typically "punished" by dying, as what happens in

Double Indemnity. One wonders whether the script calls for this severe ending to send a message to society: a strong woman must either be tamed or killed. Perhaps this existed as a warning to postwar women, the time when noir proliferated: maybe women were able to fill positions in the workplace while the men were at war,[10] but now they had to forfeit their temporary power position and resume that of the submissive woman. This suggests a subliminal message in noir film: a woman able to seduce a man and induce him to succumb to his fallibilities must be punished. Her changes, motivated by her interaction with the aggressive male character, indeed shaped her new identity of the femme fatale. Phyllis may simply be a figure of projection for masculine anxiety. Whatever one determines the character's purpose, extensively one realizes that her dependence is on the fallible male for her shaped identity.

Moreover, the femme fatale may exist as a synechode for the patriarchal angst about the emerging feminism, which eventually led to female liberation movements surfacing in 1960s literature, film, and society. Surveying typical film noir stereotypes of these figures intimates, too, that the women must remain "hidden" or "silent" in the end of the story, and they are relatively only a reflection of the man's inner fears and shortcomings. For the man to discover resolution in the end, she must disappear so he can become whole again, even if it means his death. This in turn eliminates any guilt he experiences from succumbing to the powerful woman who controlled him. She existed mainly to allow him to progress through his "learning stage," and in the end, the man resumes his former identity. He indeed becomes simply a victim of her misdirected power.

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[10] During WWII, women filled industrial positions to replace vacancies left by men in the service ("Rosie the Riveter").

Background on War-torn Italy and the Prostitute

A war-damaged country, Italy, struggled to regain its former status, including personal pride, aesthetic wisdom, and centuries of proud culture. However, similar to any country destroyed by war, as evidenced today in the Middle East, rebuilding these tenets remains an almost non-existent task, as portrayed in the Neorealistic Italian cinema. It appears that the "residue" of annihilation and death remain, if not in the landscape but rather in the souls of the victims.

Italian Neorealism in cinema was not defined by a specific movement or direct change. Instead, it gracefully emerged close to post-war Italy's years perhaps as a result of economic conditions, broken dreams, and the stark reality of a country divided by socio-economic struggle and poverty. To achieve this means to the end, directors focused mainly on the intrinsic problems experienced by the characters, most of whom were non-professional actors. They were less concerned with displaying the country, and were more intent on focusing on the internal strife of each character.

For example, in Visconti's *Obsession* (1943), his film relates a story of romance, poverty, and inevitable loss. However, the squalid conditions that dominate every scene serve as an underlying metaphor: there is no hope for any of the main characters. They remain in their hopeless situations no matter how they struggle to rise above their problems and class status. The plot reveals a scenario bred from despair, lust, and pathetic attempts for happiness. Visconti employs close ups and tragic displays in mise-en-scene that act often as a foreshadowing of the tragic future. One will recall a scene where Gino, the intruding lover, is having with a straight razor while the camera focuses, too, on the soon to be murdered husband. Audiences fear, at first, that this will be a

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murder scene. However, Gino does not plan to dispose of the husband at this point in the film.

The plot opens with Gino, an unemployed drifter and criminal, arriving in town and meeting the repugnant husband, Signor Bragana. His much younger and smoldering sexy wife, Giovanna, locks eyes with Gino and their immediate lustful attraction is established. Visconti focuses on their faces, and although the dialogue does not support the occurrence, the viewer knows danger lurks from the intensity of their gazes. However, Gino realizes that this could draw him into an impossible and dangerous situation, so at first he typically resists any further connection with the Braganas.

Yet as time progresses, viewers witness the corpulent Signor Bragana in all his disgusting naturalness; thus, they even feel pity for the hardworking Giovanna as she obediently serves her inconsiderate husband's every whim. It remains apparent that she has no way out of this situation, and one assumes that she married him merely to upgrade her position in life. Her futility as a woman in this era, in Italy or anywhere else in the world, endears the viewer to her plight.

Eventually, Gino returns and he and Giovanna consummate their latent yet inevitable desire for each other. She plots to have Gino kill her husband, and although he hesitates, his lust for the pitiful yet voluptuous woman overcomes his better judgment. Viewers no longer pity her as her identity has been shaped into that of the femme fatale. Contrarily, it still elicits some pity from the audience, as they realize the hopelessness of the situation.

After they murder the husband, Signor Bragana, the lovers attempt their escape to a life that promises more hope, happiness, and love. However, tragedy strikes them

down—an automobile accident separates the lovers forever as Giovanna is dead at the scene. Ironically, although Gino escapes responsibility for Signor Bragana's death, he mistakenly is charged with Giovanna's death. Thus, no one wins, and all their efforts were in vain.

Visconti presents this common theme—that of star-crossed lovers—in a setting and plot that serves as a metaphor for the socio-economic conditions in Italy at the time. There existed no hope, and all attempts at escape were futile. Instilling a Marxist theme, the lovers' attempt to break away from the futility and poverty of their present lives was hopeless. The wretched lives they led were their individual "crosses" to bear, and all efforts to rise to another standard of living, especially for Giovanna, were unsuccessful. The undertones resembled that of a tragic opera or the desolations of a poet's lament. Considering that Visconti was an accomplished writer and emerged from a wealthy family, his interest in Marxist themes and tragedies was contradictory to the considerations of his affluent class. However, as a Neorealist director, he effectively demonstrated the struggles the lower and middle classes experienced in the troubled times of war torn and post war Italy.

Furthermore, Visconti also takes on the task of the almost documentary yet brilliant film, *La Terra Trema* (1948). In this film, he reveals the almost humorous attempt of a small time fisherman to achieve his own business. Men and women always held dreams of personal gain throughout history, but in this film, Visconti reveals through his Neorealistic techniques, the futility and absurdity of such thoughts. As noted,t Visconti was born into the wealthy class, yet he persisted in angering his family by

sympathizing with and demonstrating the futility of the Italian working class through his cinematic work.

Set in poverty-stricken Sicily, *La Terra Trema* reveals the conflicts that prevailed in Italy in the post war years. The "American Dream" was obviously confined to America, as the main character in the movie revealed there were no dreams of any type in Italy, only "nightmares." "Ntoni," a young man who descends from a long line of fisherman, yearns to provide a better life for himself and his large family. Following his father's death during a fishing incident and ensuing years of struggle, Ntoni embarks on a capitalist venture. After mortgaging his extensive family's modest house, he and his brothers gamble on starting their own fishing business. Ntoni assumes that this will bring greater rewards to his family, and thus his sisters will attain a higher status in life as well. This great position in their lives will ensure they "marry well." Hence, one sees that family exists as a solid foundation, and Ntoni's intentions are not selfish but ones that will provide essentials for his family. This highly contrasts to films that focus on prostitutes, as they have no caring families and must take care of themselves.

Ntoni and his brothers remain at sea a long and difficult time, and during his absence, chaos ensues in the Valastro family. Without any substantial income, Ntoni's sisters experience the results of their poverty. One of his sisters succumbs to advances by a wealthy official, and he exploits her naiveté by plying her with gifts in return for sexual favors. Her reputation disintegrates over time, and any hope of her "marrying well" is lost. She has assumed the unwilling role of a prostitute merely to incur material trinkets.

As the fishing season progresses, Ntoni encounters other hardships besides stormy times at sea. He is ridiculed by his peers, and the buyers refuse to acknowledge his catch.

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It appears that the power positions in the community's industries are controlled by the wealthy business owners; the average worker is incapable of permeating these select social circles. Additionally, the individual worker lacks any means to rise from his working status, as the businessmen in the fishing industry absorb most of the profits. This leaves only a pittance to the fisherman. Upon Ntoni's humble return, he is admitted back into the working circle, but not until after he is verbally and physically tormented, perhaps to teach him a lesson about "knowing his place."

The entire movie demonstrates the futileness for the poor Sicilian town of Acitrezza. The town was a synecdoche for others that existed on the coastal areas and perhaps inland sections as well. The natural setting reveals the substandard living and working conditions in these small towns; at this time, poverty and starvation existed across the southern part of Italy. It remains no surprise that prostitution flourished in this atmosphere.

The peasants who suffered the consequences of military greed and power remain victims after the war has ended, the literal war, so to speak. Yet the internal war, that of the aberration of human spirit, fledges on with the tenacity of a well-fed virus. Prior to Fellini's filming of *Le Notti di* Cabiria, Vittoria DeSica presented the *Bicycle Thief.* Viewers are shockingly forced to witness this criminal behavior by a kind and loving husband, explicitly depicted by several factors. This included the casting of natural actors, that is, people who were unknown by the general movie-viewer population. The actors who play the lead roles in this film represent the torments of a loving family unsuccessfully trying to survive. DeSica cast the father well, as the man appeared as the typical Italian male, handsome yet with his good looks clouded by poverty and

hopelessness. His wife is a young woman whose looks are fading the same as the sheets on their bed, the ones she continues to pawn to get money for basic necessities. Their young son, an emotive actor even for a child, plays his role well. Moreover, the viewers suspect that none of these people are really acting, as they have lived the roles they now play in the film. DeSica understands that using relatively unknown actors completes the illusion of reality.

DeSica's story is enhanced by the standards that describe Neorealist film, for example, the film's setting. No fancy Hollywood or Cinecittá movie sets illustrate this story; the film is produced directly on location in a poor section of Italy. No well-known actors appear in the scenes, and the extras are most likely regular citizens of the destitute area, delighted simply to have a job, albeit a temporary one.

Often, the division between northern and southern Italy, the latter representing Italy's poor, is depicted in the characters and the plot. In this particular film, the divisions are not the main focus, as the entire population exists in some type of poverty from the street urchins to the few who are employed. In the research on the prostitute in Chapter Two, this feature was noted as well when addressing the poverty experienced by the characters Cabiria and Mamma Roma.

Another constant in Neorealist film includes the characters' piety and religious dependence. As in *The Bicycle Thief, Le Notti di Cabiria, and Mamma Roma,* it appears they fear even God has turned away from them, as the peasants often turn to the community soothsayers, those who provide hope for them with their so-called "visions."

In high contrast to the small southern Italian towns, in Fellini's *La Dolce Vita,* various factions are displayed much differently in the more northern Italian cities.

Religion becomes a farce, beginning with the statue of Jesus flying overhead, suspended from a helicopter. The camera focuses on bikini-clad beauties who wave at the helicopter, not in tribute of Jesus, but to the handsome man flying in the plane. Contrary to earlier Italian cinema, this film stars an exceptionally well known actor, Marcello Maestroianni, one whose typically handsome face appeared in multitudes of Italian films. Ever the stereotype of the Italian playboy, his role in this film remains the same in real life. Rather than the character representing the war torn country of Italy, Marcello serves as the synecdoche of the new Italian male, situated in the decadence and self-absorption of the affluent city, Rome. Similar to the father in DeSica's earlier film, that is, the father in *The Bicycle Thief,* Marcello does not work much. Yet in this case, it is by choice and convenience. He writes for a popular newspaper, and apparently he does not have to work much, as the film shows him in various non-working situations. He flits his days away, either making love to various women or drinking at nightclubs and at home parties of the elite. The film is laced with the opulence of Rome, and includes the introduction of the affluent Americans, illustrated by Anita Eckberg's character of a famous American actress in Rome mainly to shoot a film.

In *Le Notti,* Cabiria seeks advice from a priest, who really provides nothing for her except to make her feel incomplete because she is not married. Her excursion on a religions pilgrimage reveals no relief or divine intervention. God has indeed turned away from Cabiria, and she only finds solace in the end with a group of strangers. Mamma Roma gains no happiness from her religious attempts, and the director, Pasolini, even mocks religion at the end by displaying her dead son in an apparent crucifixion mise en

scéne. Apparently, prostitutes are not granted the favor of religious benefits and God

does not communicate with them or help them.

A return to Neorealist aesthetics and politics appear in *Le Notti,* incidentally

starring Giulietta Masina. Although she was a well known actor at the time, the

remaining characters are relatively unknown, at least to the international movie viewers.

The plot focuses on the "other side" of Italian life, mainly on that of the prostitutes,

contrary to the greed and opulence in *La Dolce Vita.* This time it is the women struggling

to make their way in the world, limited by job opportunities and gender discrimination.

The main character, whose real name in the film is not revealed until the very end, suffers

from a non-identity crisis, as she hopes to raise her status in life by association with what

she deems decent people. A wealthy man invites her to spend some time with him, but he

does so only because at that time, his beautiful and wealthy girlfriend has left him in an

emotional conflict. The subservient prostitute, pathetic in her wide-eyed innocence,

believes she has truly found the man of her dreams in this wealthy "john," who at first

treats her with apparent respect. He takes her for drinks and introduces her to his

companions at the bar. Upon reaching his hotel room, he orders her rich food and drink.

However, as the plot unfolds, she sadly resigns herself to her original lower-class

status, as the wealthy man forces her to hide in the bathroom when his girlfriend returns

for a joyful and sexual reunion. Cabiria remains in the bathroom all night, her only

companion—a dog. This scene reminds the viewers, unlike the plot in the unbelievable

American film *Pretty Woman* (1990)*,* prostitutes cannot cross the class structure line. At

the end of the film, Cabiria discovers joy only in her subconscious retreat into innocence.

She joins a parade of youths, singing and dancing in their oblivious lives, her future

success or failure left up to the viewer. Thus, it appears that Italian cinema does not stray far from its Neorealistic roots. Marcello never finds happiness despite his affluence, as the principles and tenets on which the country was founded linger close to his heart. He longs for the comfort of true love and family, yet he has failed at both. This is similar to the situation in *The Bicycle Thief* as well. Also, in *Le Notti,* Cabiria's feeble attempt to rise above her lowly social class fails as well, and like Marcello, she delves into her own consciousness, searching but never finding her true resolve.

In Pasolini's film, *Mamma Roma,* one views the disparity and hopelessness of the working class living in the southern outskirts of Rome. Yet in *La Dolce Vita,* the decadence of the wealthy citizens enjoying the high life is yet another viewpoint of the great city, Rome. Although it is the same city in both films, it represents two different cities through each director's portrayal of the separate classes.

In *Mamma Roma,* the setting is the shanty-town areas of the outskirts of Rome; it highly contrasts to the opulence in Fellini's film about "the sweet life." The graphic depictions of the underworld set the perfect stage for prostitution and despair. Although Mamma Roma is a reformed prostitute, she is forced back into that dark life simply to provide for her teenage son. Surrounded by barefooted people living in squalid conditions, Mamma Roma ignores this; she is disillusioned by thinking she can emerge from her low social class to the much coveted one of her northern counterparts.

The local girls have no choice but to engage in prostitution, as they have no viable means of support. Viewers are not startled to learn that Mamma Roma was also a prostitute when she was a young woman, as this seems one of the few professions available to women in that era. Although she has left that unsavory world, she is forced

back into it to maintain her new apartment. Also, she arranges deals with unsavory characters to ensure her son, Ettore, gains employment at a local restaurant.

To her dismay, Ettore quits the job, and Mamma Roma feels the pain of realizing she has sacrificed for her son, yet he does not appreciate the job. Of course, he has no idea that his mother engaged in criminal activity to provide him this employment. However, when he does learn that his mother was a former prostitute and in fact has returned to that profession, he leaves her in disgust. At this point, he selfishly loses respect for his mother, completely ignoring the sacrifices she made for him. Ettore prefers not to work but steal for a living, and his criminal activities lead to his incarceration and subsequent death. There are no happy endings in this post war era, and there are no happy endings in this type of film.

Mamma Roma attempts suicide, but is saved from his demise by her friends, only at the last minute as she attempts to jump out the window. The tragedies in Neorealistic Italian cinema never end, and the hopelessness and despair are evident to the conclusion of the film. Suicide exists in other areas of Italian cinema, especially in the more contemporary version, Fellini's *La Dolce Vita.*

One of the rich characters, Steiner, commits suicide. This appears as the only answer for these spoiled rich people when they are faced with troubles. Although he has a wonderful family, including a devoted wife and small children, he apparently has too much; he complains because his life is too good and longs for more excitement. Steiner thinks his life is "miserable," simply because he is not challenged.

Steiner is not referring to the miserable life that prevails in the outskirts of Rome such as the one experienced by Mamma Roma. He knows nothing about true poverty and

despair. He leaves his affluent world in a cowardly fashion, taking his own life. Marcello, the rich playboy, remains alive and continues to wallow in the "swampland" of Rome's inner city.

For Mamma Roma, she will continue to live in her outer squalor, as there is no hope from escape for those people, either. Thus, one views two worlds within one, barricaded by class structure, family background, and monetary status. These class struggles for women were typically displayed in their poverty-forced prostitution. For Mamma Roma, it proved only to result in her greatest loss, that of her son, Ettore.

Pasolini's References to the Unconscious, Classical Literature, and Renaissance Art

"Just wait. Your mother will make you into somebody. You'll be the envy of everyone"[11]

"No critic, as Barthes has pointed out, has an extra-terrestrial right to know the language of the artist" (Rohdie x). After production of his first film, *Accatone* (1961), Pier Paolo Pasolini produced *Mamma Roma* (1962). It remained impossible to even define his work as a particular "school," as his cinematic endeavors belonged to no particular category; they were that inventive and revolutionary. Successfully attempting to define Pier Paolo Pasolini's artistic intent by investigating and critiquing his films remains an enigma. Even Gordon says, "The most sober and serious critical work on Pasolini was guilty to some degree of [distortion]: (vii). Research reveals extensive analyses by credible scholars, and drawing from their observations, one may arrive at subtle conclusions. Gordon suggests that Pasolini progressed into film—only after

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[11] …as said by Mamma Roma to her son, Ettore, the former played by Anna Magnani in the film, *Mamma Roma*

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successfully delving in poetry, literature, and the theater—to reach a form of literary "utopia" (190). Moreover, it may be that his successes in the former genres led to his instilling them into his cinema, namely poetics, drama, and literature. Additionally, through close examination and by comparing his work to significant styles, one may conclude that particular factors such as Pasolini's exploration of the unconscious and regression to classical literature and Renaissance art may have influenced his film style.

According to Rohdie, "Roberto Longhi, […] great Italian art historians of the 30s and 40s […] had a major influence on Pasolini's appreciation of medieval and Renaissance art; Pasolini paid direct homage to [them] in *Mamma Roma* (186). Pasolini has been compared to Renaissance artists, mainly because his films expressed more than simply what the pictures were displaying. Walls suggests that Renaissance artists "sought an interpretation of the inside life of the one pictured" (*Three* 80). Thus, in Pasolini's films, "his pictures reveal, similar to Fellini's work" (80); people, images, and environments that greatly surpass the mere film plot. Pasolini draws from Renaissance art, specifically the Baroque period, to convey emotion through similar images. In *Mamma Roma*, he uses the female characters to shape and narrate the plot, often through the Renaissance images of Holy Mary—Mamma Roma as a pseudo-mother of Jesus who was crucified—and the crucifixion simulation when Ettore lay on a wooden slab, dead from his own negligence. However, in this research, only a background of what influenced Pasolini in his work will be addressed, rather than an in-depth discussion of those characters' religious signifiers.

Pasolini and the Baroque Influence

Pasolini's love of Baroque style paintings possibly led him to depict its use in his film. First, one must study a brief description of this style to discover its invention in Pasolini's work. Baroque style employs ovals and curved lines with elaborate interiors. The sculptures often concentrated on extremely dramatic scenes.[12] Generally, Baroque painting demonstrates use of bright colors and dramatic lighting. One sees examples of curving lines as well as use of complicated decoration. Caravaggio, one of Pasolini's favorite sources for his literary and cinematic work, displays dramatic use of light and shade:

> Lights and shadows environments involve very realistic scenes. Caravaggio likes painting the most realistic aspects of reality. This is why we are able to feel cruelty seeing his pictures. This way of painting was not well accepted, as society was not prepared to admit that revolution. Until them, only idealization was shown by artists. Painting Biblical characters in a non-majestic way was inconceivable. Caravaggio chose a woman drowned in the Tiber with her swollen face and stomach like a model of Maria, in *The Death of the Virgen.* It was considered like a jeer to Christianity. (Spanish 2004)

Caravaggio also depicts Christian scenes using non-ideal characters and scenes from daily life, similar to Pasolini's techniques in several films including his second, *Mamma Roma.*

In the film, the final scene reveals her son, Ettore, dying on a table, where he is strapped to a table in a "crucifixion" position. Prior to this scene, he becomes a disturbed

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[12] This is related to *The Ecstasy of St. Teresa,* which also illustrates Catholic mystical doctrines as well as the veneration of the saints.

young man, turning to thievery to avenge his mother's carnal sins as a prostitute. Thus, he is an unlikely candidate to portray an example of Jesus Christ. However, in Pasolini's final scene, this young and handsome man, whose hair gently frames his sweet face, dies in a configuration that emulates the familiar Christian crucifixion scene. The background light, extremely bright and casting high shadow behind the dying Ettore appears to come from no definite source. However, this "light source" exists as a ray highlighting the figures. The screen shot comes from above the reclining figure, so because one is actually viewing the man from a skyward angle, it appears as if he is upright on a cross. Again, this imitates the familiar scene, especially as portrayed, too, by Baroque painter, Mathias Grunwald, in his 1515 work of the *Crucifixion.*

In the gripping scene that accompanies Ettore's desolate death, one sees Mamma Roma crying out in emotional pain as she sees her dead son laid out on the wooden slab. She has to be physically supported by her friends, as she almost falls to the floor with grief. Mamma Roma, a reformed prostitute, as with Ettore, remains an unlikely candidate to play the "Virgin Mary's" role. There is a specific similarity to the scene in Grunwald's crucifixion scene, as the real Virgin Mary has fallen down, supported by her friends.

Additionally, in the movie, note that Mamma Roma, in her despair, attempts to fling herself from a window to her death. This follows her observation of her son, laid out on a bed of penitence in the pose of Mantegna's 1510 painting, *Cristo Morto* (Rohdie 12).

In the beginning of the movie, another scene reflects on DaVinci's *The Last Supper* (1497), as a wedding party is gathered along the lengthy dinner table, the bridge and groom centered with their attendants placed horizontally from each side. Also, later

in the film as Mamma Roma attempts to earn money by selling food from a push cart, one notes the similarity again to another classical painting. "Mamma Roma, pushing her fruit and vegetable car before her, seems to be mounting the hill of Calvary" (Greene 26). This refers to Raphael's famous 1515 portrait portraying the ascent of Jesus and his followers to the place of his crucifixion.

The tragedies that prevail in *Mamma Roma* imitate what Pasolini constructed in another film, *Teorema* (1968): juxtaposing elements from traditional religions […] and scandalous transgressions" (Bondanella 283). In that film, an entire family is ruined by a handsome male stranger seducing the whole family, males and females, even including the maid. After his mysterious departure, each person's life has dramatically changed for the worse except for the maid. Some critics associate the stranger with a god, or God, who came into the people's lives and forced them to accept the consequences of their actions. This occurred in *Mamma Roma* as well, as she had to live with the results of her decadent life and so did her son. Linking a prostitute and her juvenile delinquent son to images of the Virgin Nary and Jesus Christ certainly evokes passionate responses from viewers, good or bad; moreover, it prompts viewers to investigate deeper meanings. Hence, this action encourages one to explore the unconscious interpretations of the movie and, in fact, all of Pasolini's films.

Pasolini and the Unconscious

Viewers wonder why Ettore's death was necessary, an innocent youth simply corrupted by his mother's past. Pasolini suggests that when "man" moves beyond myth, he loses his identity (Bondanella 279). This attests to one such "explanation," if that exists at all. Thus, perhaps when Ettore realizes his mother's sordid past as a prostitute,

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his image of her and him exists now as something evil, tarnished, unclean. The supposed idyllic life Mamma Roma outwardly portrays of herself and their future life together is destroyed. Pasolini may have written the film concluding with Ettore's death as a fitting end to a demoralized fairy tale. Bondanella suggests that Pasolini employs this destruction of nature scenes to emulate the destruction of the pre-industrial culture he [Pasolini] admires both in Italy and in the Third World. Apparently, Pasolini equates industrialization as a loss of working humans, replaced by machines.

Pasolini's critical viewpoints exist in metaphor, not only in destruction of humans' self-actualization, but also pertaining to sexual encounters. In *Mamma Rona*, in several scenes she is portrayed as a solitary figure, walking the streets in search of answers to her life, past and present. Pasolini pictures her numerous former lovers as brief, cosmic, almost ghostly figures who flit in and out of the scene as Mamma Roma walks briskly in self contemplation. She continues to walk on despite them "bursting" into her space, as they answer her self-investigative questions with harsh and caustic answers of their own. In essence, Pasolini reveals her mind "speaking" to her accompanied by the images of all the men with whom she sexually encountered during her promiscuous life.

Her attempts to hide her past from her son contribute to her frustrations throughout the story. "Mamma Roma's desperate attempts to keep Ettore from becoming a manual laborer […], and by doing so deny his natural class allegiances, ultimately lead to his death and her despair" (Pier 178). Rumble suggests that Pasolini employs images, in one scene, a "motorcycle," to demonstrate her "yearning to escape from the confines of the sub-proletarian ghetto and […] to escape prostitution" (178). Thus, Pasolini uses

imagery to portray the other's unconscious fears through symbolism; she fears her son will discover her sordid past, and she fears he is becoming a Communist when he denigrates his fellow workers for boasting when they have "money in their pockets" (178). The imagery reveals the probable theme through the symbolism of the motorcycle: Mamma Roma desires to escape from her past and provide a happier and wealthier life for her beloved son. Pasolini's theme of mother and beloved son stems from elements of his own life as well as that from classical literature. He alludes to this topic in several scenes as well as other classical themes.

Pasolini's Influence from Classical Literature

Pasolini alludes to Dante's *Inferno* in several films such as *Accatone* (1968) and *Salo* (1975); this appears to represent one of his favorite themes. Addressing *Mamma Roma*, Patrick Rumble notes, "Pasolini wanted to invoke the *Inferno* {Dante] within that film" (Pier 178). Thus, in the ending, Ettore recites parts from the classical poem. Considering that the film depicts the "petit-bourgeois ethos of the reformed prostitute," this places her in a "Hell" more devilish than when she lived in the slums (178). As the film progresses, Mamma Roma and Ettore "descend" into their individual and private "Hell." Her staunch and fervent attempts to hide her sordid past are continually thwarted by characters from the bygone days resurfacing to remind her of her former sins. Ettore, her beloved son, wants to adjust to his new life with his mother, but circumstances surface that confuse and sadden him: he meets his fatal demise in the end. With this horrible ending, Mamma Roma reaches the pit of her suffering and wishes to end her life.

Not all scenes in this film are tragic, and when they are delightful, they often allude to excerpts from Socrates' *Oedipal Rex.*[13] However, perhaps his fascination with this classical theme evolves from his own relationship with his mother, whom he cherished in life as well as in death. "In the small cemetery of Casara, Pasolini lies buried near his adored mother" (Green 3). Pasolini's cousin suggested that the former's mother bestowed upon her young son all the love she refused his father. Pasolini also revealed in his adult life that he felt "an antagonist dramatic tension between his father and himself from childhood on" (4). This perhaps suggests that Pasolini never "rejected the mother's love" in exchange for an adult love relationship with another woman.

In *Mamma Roma,* Ettore's mother lives entirely for her son. She spent her past years as a prostitute, saving all her money so she can reclaim her son and bring him "home" to live with her. It remains a mystery about Ettore's father. The story reveals that Mamma Rona married a 70-year-old man when she was fourteen, but she left him to go into prostitution, mainly as a way to get away from the older man. The other man in her life, her pimp and captor, never suggests that Ettore is his son; however, he does attest to his own sexual escapades with Mamma Roma. Hence, these facts suggest that the father is "dead," or absent, and now the son is free to "be" with his mother.

In another musical and impassionate scene, after reuniting with her son and taking him to their apartment, Mamma Roma quickly puts on some music and teaches her son to the Tango, which is a sexually suggestive dance—not a typical dance for a mother and son to enjoy. Ettore strangely does not resist, and in the final part of this scene, the couple

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[13] This, incidentally, is the title of another Pasolini film, a revival of the classical myth.

is clearly experiencing physical and emotional bliss, as evidenced by their tight embraces. As she holds her son extremely close, the camera focuses on her pleasure at having him in her arms, as displayed by the ecstasy-laden look on her face. Ettore easily "falls' into the role of son/lover by "burying" his face in his mother's neck and hair. They remain as such throughout a romantic, lengthy, and suggestive dance segment.

As the plot progresses, Mamma Roma surprises her son with a new motorbike, something she acquires through her contacts with her former lovers/sexual clients. As they ride happily together on the new bike with him driving, she encircles his body and rests her head against his young but broad shoulders; his delight with the bike and her physical closeness is evident on his face as they continue for quite awhile in this scene.

As Ettore settles into his new life, he meets several young women his own age. One particular girl attracts him intensely, Bruna, and he exhibits a sincere interest in the girl perhaps because she reminds him of his mother in looks and in social status when she was younger. However, Bruna is touted as very promiscuous, and already has a son out of wedlock. In one scene, when Mamma Roma refuses to give him money to buy Bruna an expensive gift, she tells him, "The only woman you need now is your mother." Mamma Roma desperately and continuously attempts to discourage his feelings for Bruna, implying that the girl is beneath his class; however, one notices that Bruna may be a younger version of Mamma Roma in every way. In fact, Bruna is the one who reveals to Ettore about his mother's scandalous past; Bruna claims that she thought he knew about her former profession.

"Everyone knew about it," she scornfully retorts.

One suspects that Bruna is in turn jealous of the mother as the latter is of Bruna.

As Pasolini was known to be a Marxist, one may interpret this scene in that sense (Greene 58)., concluding that Mamma Roma displays scorn for the girl because of her low class. Yet, perhaps she was motivated by her own incestuous thoughts and desires as well. Additionally, as the girl is a younger version of herself, she may think that Ettore has no need for Bruna, as he already has a mature version in his mother.

Nevertheless, lust turns Ettore into a thief, and he steals his mother's favorite record, a gift to her from his father. [14] He sells it at the market and pockets the money. Thus, in essence, he has "killed" his father, as the record was the last vestige of his mother's physical connection to him.

Similar to other critics, according to Greene, the famed French philosopher "Gilles Deleuze offers a less literal interpretation of Pasolini's theories" (107). Deleuze suggests that Pasolini displays inward as well as outward messages with his cinema.

> Like his films, his theories were concerned less with the inscription of things than with things themselves, less with representation than with the mythic layers underpinning our inner selves, and our most seemingly rational impulses and construction. (107)

Thus, the textual interpretations reveal a more subjunctive theme, and closer investigations of color, lack of color, and music hit at innovative techniques as well.

Therefore, Pasolini's brilliance is revealed by the compilation of several factors in his direction and screenplays. Bondanella states, "As we might expect in a film by Pasolini, the achievement of self-consciousness comes from specifically sexual

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[14] On an Oedipal note, as the father is absent, Ettore cannot destroy him; thus, he "eliminates" the father by removing the memento.

encounters" (281). Pasolini's Oedipal references in *Mamma Roma* possibly insults the

mother/son relationship, yet he explains their "fall" by his references to Dante's *Inferno*.

Pasolini's innovative juxtaposition of divine classical art with scandalous

characters perhaps reflects his true sentiments about the middle class. Several critics

suggest that Pasolini detested this particular class. Bondanella refers to another Pasolini

film, *Teorema,* when he states, "Perhaps in no other film has Pasolini so graphically

expressed his hatred of the middle class" (283). As noted, in that film, the entire middle

class family is sexually seduced, leaving them to deal with their sins. The effrontery of

imposing the structure of classical, religious art on disgraceful situations may imply

Pasolini cared neither for public approval nor for traditional techniques.

Mamma Roma was the last of Pasolini's films to include a Neorealistic venue, as

his later films delved more into religious eccentricities. Addressing the audiences

exposed to later films, Bondanella says, "He insults their values and forces them to

untangle an essentially experimental film narrative through allegory and parable" (283).

Pasolini's brilliant rhetoric and innovative techniques were not met with universal

enthusiasm, and in 1975, he met a tragic death.

> On Novermber 3, 1975, he was found brutally murdered on the squalid outskirts
>
> of Rome. Thus ends the life of a man whom society acclaimed yet criticized,
>
> applauded yet struck down, martyred yet denied "sainthood. (Green 218).

Breene reveals an excerpt for his youthful diary where Pasolini compared himself to

"Christ on the Cross." Perhaps this explains Pasolini's continual references to classical

art, literature and the unconscious:

I would direct my feelings to piety and prayer. Then there would clearly

appear in my fantasies the desire to imitate the sacrifice Jesus made for

others, to be condemned and killed despite my total innocence. I saw

myself hung, nailed, on the cross. My loins were scantily wrapped by this

thin stip and an immense crowed watched me. My public martyrdom

wound up becoming a voluptuous image and, bit by bit, I was nailed up

with an entirely nude body…With arms outstretched, with hands and feet

nailed, I was totally vulnerable, lost. (220)

Changes in Italian Women's Identities

In *Le Notti,* Cabiria's plight focuses more on society and how these social ills

affect the common people. Some critics attest that Fellini instigated the enraging feminist

views, and perhaps this remains true. By depicting Cabiria with multiple yet demeaning

identities, the problems women experience in a patriarchal society become more

noticeable. Although the feminist movement surfaced full force in the 1960s, the

undercurrent of dissatisfaction was thriving in an unfair society. "Betty Friedman's book,

The Feminine Mystique, discussed the 'problem that had no name' (Borchers 330).

Of course, the most significant movement surfaced in the United States; however,

the literature became widespread and provided knowledge for underground groups in

other countries.

Flora Davis explains that media 'brought about' widespread transformation in

how Americans thought about women. She argues that books, articles, films, and

television programs helped spread feminist ideas. (331)

As far as Europeans, "They [consumers] learned to purvey a dream world that keyed in with other images of the West as Italy's destiny, America as a model society" (Gundie 103). Thus, critics understand that Italian consumers were influenced by American media. When one critiques Fellini's films, an undercurrent of feminist appeals surfaces through close readings or observations, which matched similar movements occurring in America of women's newly formed identity. Italy's film market was not as successful as the American films; thus, they hurried to emulate what was occurring in more contemporary American media. Moreover, in Fellini's newer films, the feminist undercurrents emerged despite the lewdness and debauchery of the settings.

Le Notti illustrated women's struggles with identity whereas *La Dolce* demonstrated women's successes. Gundie states, "A more modern image of the elegant woman took shape" (117). He further notes that this film revealed that a woman of any social class could reign supreme, and she was not "defined by conformity to social norms or by grace and poise but by autonomy, style, travel, and wealth" (117). This illustrated that a woman was not defined by any former social norms. These new definitions reveal drastic and positive changes in women's character identities in film, notably in Italian cinema. Thus, contrasted to *Le Notti,* one observes that only a few years later, Italian women's identity revealed drastic and positive changes.

For example, the divorce rates in Italy "soared" to unheard of heights. This was an enigma, considering the high Catholic population in Italy, a religion that not only frowned on divorce but forbade it as an act against God's law. By 1992, the household structure comprised of single person or single parent families increased along with the divorce rates. Fortunately, statistics reveal a parallel increase in employment

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opportunities for women. Only one year later, almost half the jobs in Italy were held by women; by 1993, 42% of the jobs were filled with female employees. This is a far increase from the time when the only job poor Italian women could attain was a low-paying servant—which was limited as the wealthy class was not that prolific in the southern Italian towns—or else that of a prostitute. This demonstrates a significant increase from the era of *Le Notti*, when the majority of women's jobs included those not socially accepted, as previously mentioned, prostitution. Clearly, Fellini used his film to draw attention to women's plight in the 1950s era.

One of the major factors of women's "plights" naturally included their identities as structured within their social confines. "Prejudices and discrimination are based on racial, ethnic, and social distinctions" (Bridwell-Bowles 4). Presently, these factors still influence people's statuses within their individual community. One may even be classified according to family order such as first-born, middle, child, or other birth position. However, those are classifications that one cannot change. By studying identity issues in the media, especially film, one can determine the political and social zeitgeist. Fellini's films, including *Le Notti,* contextualize women's issues by comedy, farce, or tragedy. However, one must still consider that film, as with any literature form, remains open for interpretation. Once the film is produced, directed, and shown, it no longer belongs to the scriptwriter or director. It belongs to everyone. Fellini stated:

> My films are separate entities, free to divulge themselves in whatever area they
> choose. It's like traveling together for a time under some common, soft roof
> hanging from a loosely filled balloon, in a bubble which I am called upon to
> design, to fill, to limit, and to give character to. Once I have done this, as far as I

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am concerned, our roads diverge completely. He—the film—goes along his

road, with the feather which I had thought he wanted me to give him, with the

identity which it had seemed to me he had wanted me to define. (Bachmann 5)

It is amusing to note that Fellini addresses his film as "he," which could be construed as

identifying his films as autobiographical[15]. However, considering it remains unique that

he would assess *any* gender to his film, one must also consider that no sexism exists in

this connotation. Additionally, Fellini provides clues to his films' intentions—there is no

specific definition; anyone is free to "absorb" whatever he or she decides to do with this

information. The emotive significance of his "releasing" the film to the public allows him

to ignore any critic's deconstruction, as it is no longer his film. Thus, one enjoys inducing

the psyche in Fellini's work. In the case of *Le Notti,* this researcher chose to view Fellini

as an innovator and collaborate for women's rights, as witnessed by the identity issues in

the film. However, one should feel free to indulge in personal interpretations, for as

Fellini concluded, "Upon completion, this is the moment when the film takes on a

personality which you may not have planned, and it's out of your hands" (Bachmann 15).

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[15] There are critics who attest to this autobiographical stance of Fellini's films.

Chapter Four: Conclusion

For centuries, humans have been fascinated with photography, and in one of its earliest forms created quite an excitement. In 1873, a famous photographer, Edward James Muybridge (1830-1904), accepted a challenge to determine whether at any given time, a galloping horse had all four feet of the ground. Muybridge's work with photographing several photos of the horse in action led to his amazing conclusion: the "movie" showed that the horse did indeed have all four feet off the ground at one time.

Figure 5. Muybridge Photographs Horse in Mid-air (Source:www.precinemahistory.net/)

Ever since that time, humans' fascination with photographs that produce a moving image became paramount. However, in contemporary cinematic production and research, the viewer is often concerned with scholarly investigation of the extensive work that produces a film; this includes determining how the characters' identities are formed. This dynamic strategy includes numerous definitions; thus, there exist numerous areas to

investigate about film identity. The scope of this research was narrowed to the way women's identities were shaped in cinema, and it investigated three films: *Le Notti di Cabria, Mamma Roma,* and *Double Indemnity.* These films were selected to illustrate how two typical female stereotypes—the prostitute and the femme fatale—were forged or altered in the interactions with their male counterparts in the films. The results provided scenarios that clearly demonstrated how not only were the female roles altered, but more importantly, these alterations served as a "narrative" that cleverly propelled the plot forward throughout the film. As the women's interactions with the men occurred, it often signaled a specific change in plot direction or conclusion. Film production has certainly evolved extensively from the early experiments by Muybridge and others (Burns, 1997). Current scholars regard film not only as a brilliant media form that has progressed extensively and technically throughout the years, but also as an extensive stronghold from which to investigate various factors.

This research focused mainly on women's changing identity in three specific films and how this was influenced by the male characters they encountered. From Biblical times to Shakespeare's era to contemporary times, in literature men desire "power, control, and dominance" over women. Typically, society continues this theme quite often in various genres of cinema. When depicting violence against women, it is not so much that plots exemplify stories of rape—correctly touted as an act of empowerment and control rather than sexual urgency—but rather the language of film, the often "silent" language that suggests women are inconsequential and disposed of as easily as one throws out the trash. Notably, not all films portrays women in this fashion. However, it remains significant to become more aware of these themes as with others; one could also

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investigate the origins of violence-directed plots against women. This may suggest how some women's identities are shaped throughout the film, especially in violent scenarios. Although this research does not address horror films, it remains a vital genre to research for violence-laden modes. Moreover, the results of this research produced some insightful facts that should provide more in-depth studies of gender identity in cinema. Changing identity and its ramifications remain only one factor compiles the construction of a film; however, in its researched simplicity, it nevertheless powers significant plot movement by its inclusion.

Women's identities in the three films researched—*Double Indemnity, Mamma Roma, Le Notti di Cabiria*—focus on the plights of women too weak to obtain what they want from life. In one case it is individual, personal, and sexual freedom. Another supports the theory that women want financial independence to live and love in whatever manner they choose. Finally, the last film depicts the struggle that single, young women with no special skills resort to self-destroying tactics simply to survive. In all three films, the women's weaknesses force their identity changes throughout the films.

This diminutive concept may suggest emotional problems for women viewing film from the 1940s to 1960s era—when the films were produced—for contemporary viewers. Despite feminist protests, women still struggle with survival in their homes, in their personal relationships, and in their workplaces. Often, women recognize themselves in cinematic characters, and they could subconsciously identify with these insipid women. Additionally, female film viewers were also influenced by societal "brainwashing" suggesting that this type of woman "got the hero" in the end. For example, in the "screwball" comedies of the 1930s to 1950s, the final plot sections

typically ended in marriage. The stronger women, unable to be "tamed" were "tossed aside" in favor of those more acquiescent and docile. In *My Man Godfrey* (1936), Claudette Colbert's character wins Godfrey's favor as she plays the insipid and "daffy" young woman, contrasted to her beautiful yet stern, strong-willed sister. These docile characters conceded and desired to form the identity the men ordered, as all humans want to be loved and accepted. In actual life situations aside from the cinema, problems arose when it was improbable for viewers to meet the criteria, either through inherent strengths or ethnic disparities. For example, the female viewers may not look the same as the female viewers, that is, they may not possess the definition of "beauty." Although some viewers may enjoy the cinema because of the fantasy world perfection, this still remains a subconscious dilemma for those who do not meet the unrealistic standards.

Double Indemnity and the Femme Fatale

In *Double Indemnity*, Phyllis is initially portrayed as an extremely attractive yet dutiful wife. Her husband takes care of her and is a hard worker. Although Phyllis does not appear to be overly enthusiastic in this role, she nonetheless appears mildly content, or one would assume. It quickly becomes apparent that in Phyllis' world, the outer content exists as a clever facade for malcontent and life-changing angst. The viewers quickly realize that a universe based with boredom and loneliness serves as fodder for trouble. Prior to meeting Walter Neff, a struggling insurance salesperson, Phyllis was simply living out each day in a conditioned daze, finding little comfort from her husband's perfunctory attention. In her marriage, her husband's indifference had fashioned her identity as that of a sad and neglected housewife.

Enter Walter Neff, the man who would change Phyllis' identity from a bored, lonely yet wealthy housewife to that of a femme fatale. As Walter appears at the Dietrichson mansion to answer a call for insurance, the viewers notice the immediate attraction between Walter and Phyllis; their locked eyes and nervous body language reveal their cloaked yet potent sexual attraction for each other. Phyllis' world, full of discontent due to her boring marriage, is about to become even more complicated. Thus, in this scenario, the first interaction with the male, Walter, signals a definite change is about to surface. This exists as a skillful manipulation of the characters and the plot merely by their meeting each other.

The plot thickens as Walter Neff, a struggling yet semi-successful salesperson due mainly to his sales savvy, attempts to sell insurance to Phyllis' husband. When he later returns to their home to firm up the deal, Walter discovers that Phyllis is alone. Prior to her former attire when her husband was present—that of a demure housewife—Phyllis is now wearing an alluring outfit, one that accentuates her glamorous figure and does not go unnoticed by Walter. This second interaction allows viewers to realize that Walter and Phyllis' chance meeting has now advanced to a second one, a meeting that was clearly and highly anticipated by both parties. Walter's excited yet controlled attention to her sexy outfit and her blatant display of it suggests that both are eagerly enjoying the flirtation.

As the story progresses, Phyllis portrays her supposed horribly boring life to Walter, and he, now mesmerized by her manipulative ways and sexual allure, succumbs to her advances and their affair begins. She creates angst in Walter's world where before none existed. It would even suggest that she wanted him to share in her own distress by

creating some in his life. His attraction for her, which prompts immediate attention for Phyllis, shapes her identity into that of an anxious woman, no longer content with her former ennui. At this point, the viewers acknowledge that both characters have altered each other with their interactions, and the plot reveals that their exciting yet sexually motivated world will eventually lead to their well deserved demise.

As noted in previous sections of this research, the plot and character interactions in film are clearly influenced by socio-cultural factors, and that premise exists in this story as well. When the film was produced, women were mainly housewives and were supposed to have no outside interests except their husbands, their homes, and their children—if they had any. In current film scenarios, the majority of women would not be portrayed as housewives unless they had recently given birth and were staying home only to care for a newborn child. Once the child passed the first few months, contemporary women would rely on daycare facilities to watch their children while the women return to their pre-birth-delivery employment.

A scenario such as that in *Double Indemnity* would not exist in 21st century cinema. In fact, the stereotypical femme fatale would now perhaps exist in the workplace, as she would be portrayed as an energetic "go-getter" who uses her feminine wiles to overpower an employee standing in her way of success. However, this archaic scenario still proves to illustrate how the sexual climate can alter identities, whether it exists in the home or in the workplace. Moreover, the traits that encompass the femme fatale's identity are simply the same traits that one requires to succeed in the corporate world: "…but also unabashedly independent and ruthlessly ambitious" (Bronson 105). Ironically, these are traits that must be attributed to males in the corporate world for them

to be viewed as leaders. Often, problems exist when women assume these same traits in the same workplace scenario. One may wonder if this is due to the adjectives attributed to the less than ethical "femme fatale."

Upon returning to the world of seduction and mystery, the plot in *Double Indemnity* moves forward toward its eventual climax. Phyllis and Walter continue to meet, and their relationship, albeit one-sided, forges ahead to its obvious next stage. Phyllis, as always the beautiful and seductive woman, suggests to Walter in desperate tones that they can be together forever if only he would help her rid her dreary life of her boring husband. At first, Walter rejects her proposal, despite his strong attraction to the beautiful woman. However, as Phyllis continues her sexual implications and actions, Walter begins to imagine an exciting life with this sensual woman.

His angst continues yet they plot the murder and successfully perform the evil and murderess deed. No one suspects them as the murder appears accidental. Upon their acquittal, the "accidental double indemnity" clause now yields quite a reward for Phyllis with the insurance money, sold to her husband by her lover, Walter. These types of sins will never go unpunished in the mid-century era, and in the end they both receive justice deserved. Through her interaction with Walter, her identity has been shaped from a bored housewife, to a femme fatale, to that of a murdering accomplice, to that of a dead woman. Moviegoers in that era would expect that evil will not triumph over good, and that is exactly what happens. In this classical film scenario, everything must be neatly resolved at the end, and this film lives up to its expectations, as Phyllis is shot dead by Walter.

One wonders whether the script calls for this severe ending to send a message to society: a strong woman must either be tamed or killed. Perhaps this exists as a warning

to postwar women, the time when noir proliferated: maybe women were able to fill positions in the workplace while the men were at war[16], but now they must forfeit this temporary power position and resume that of the submissive woman. "Mary Anne Doane understands the fact that [the femme fatale] is usually declared to be an embodiment of evil, and punished or killed, as a 'desperate reassertion of control on the part of the threatened male subject" (Harris 113). Thus, one understands the subliminal message in noir film: a woman able to seduce a man and induce him to succumb to his fallibilities must be punished. Harris suggests that Phyllis Diedrichson may simply be "a figure of projection for masculine anxiety" (114). Whatever one determines as the character's purpose, extensively one realizes her dependence on the fallible male for her identity. The two exist as one entity—one cannot exist without the other. In essence, these two figures signify one character, and this supports the theory that the femme fatale remains subservient until her "alter ego" surfaces in her life—the man who provides her with a new identity.

Film theorists, sociologists, and psychologists would benefit from this research as it illustrates the "twists and turns" in life that cause good people to make bad decisions. Moreover, an underlying metaphor may be that of women beginning to revolt against their pre-determined roles as housewives. Those who hold or have held that title may argue that the job is an extensive and often exhaustive one, and they would be correct. However, those protesters may be speaking from personal choice, and not one of a society that demands they assume that role. The femme fatale character existed in

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[16] During WW II, women filled industrial positions to replace vacancies left my men in the service ("Rosie the Riveter").

Biblical stories[17], and is not confined to World War I and II era productions. What

remains significant is how cinema uses the stereotype to correspond with cultural norms

throughout the decades. This is an area that would benefit from specific research such as

how the femme fatale surfaces in contemporary cinema considering *Kill Bill* (2003, 2004)

as well as science fiction; for example, consider the roles in *The Matrix* (1999) and in

Superman (1978). These women were extremely capable of defending themselves and

did not need a man to do their evil work for them.

Figure 6. Barbara Stanwyck (Source: http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0036775/)

Director Billy Wilder artfully cast Barbara Stanwyck in the role of Phyllis

Dietrichson, the epitome of "femme fatales." In real life, Stanwyck was an energetic,

ambitious woman who knew she wanted the better things in life. She worked hard and

sought after jobs that would lead her to financial success. Starting as a chorus girl, she

eventually was cast in Hollywood film productions. *Double Indemnity* was perfect for

Stanwyck, as her smoldering looks and subtle yet powerful sexuality presented a stunning

impact on audiences. Although censors did not allow explicit love scenes, her

performance implied such intense sexuality that audiences knew all too well what

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[17] Delilah, Salome, and Lot's daughters were a few of the Biblical women who controlled men with their
beauty and sexual prowess. <http://www.bible-topten.com/bad_women.htm>

occurred between Walter and Phyllis in the film's plot. Critics suggest that she set the pattern for future femme fatale roles in noir cinema (IMDb 2010).

Mamma Roma and Mother/Son Relationships

A major factor in Italian cinema is its close portrayal of life, depending on which sections of the country are addressed. Typically, the southernmost residents illustrate the most destitute, yet often the most pious. Perhaps when nothing else is available for them, the poor reach closer to a spiritual world, one that offers sweet promises unlike the unsavory one that exist in their lives. Conversely, as one studies the populations in the more northern Italian sections, affluence abounds and religious or spiritual commitment often resounds only in the churches on weekends. Those who live in the south are discriminated against by their northern counterparts, and the former are often considered no better than mere animals. One may assume that the more affluent northerners are frightened by the poverty and destitution of their southern neighbors, as it clearly demonstrates what could happen to them if they do not maintain their elevated statuses.

Thus, the most dramatic and depressing film plots are often located in the southernmost regions. Such is the case with the scenario in *Mamma Roma,* as it is located in the southern and war torn area in the southernmost outskirts of Rome. Although Rome is not one of the southern cities in Italy, there are areas of northern cities that depict the attitude towards anything "southern."

Also typical of Italian cinema in this era, the Neo-realistic traits easily surface in *Mamma Roma's* plot scenario. For example, the majority of actors are relatively unknown except for Anna Magnani, who portrays the main character, Mamma Roma. There are no fancy film sets and most scenes are simply filmed mainly on location in

outdoor areas in Rome. Additionally, the film tragically depicts the extreme problems the

people encounter in their every day struggles simply to survive. There are no happy

endings or smooth resolution in this type of film.

In *Mamma Roma,* one views the disparity and hopelessness of the working class

living in the southernmost outskirts of Rome. Contrast this with the scenario in Fellini's

La Dolce Vita. The decadence of the wealthy citizens enjoying the high life is yet another

viewpoint of the great city, Rome, but mainly in its central and affluent location.

Although it is the same city in both films, it represents two different cities through each

director's portrayal of the separate classes.

In *Mamma Roma,* the setting is the shanty-town areas of the southernmost

outskirts of Rome; it highly contrasts to the opulence in Fellini's film about "the sweet

life." The graphic depictions of the underworld set the perfect stage for prostitution and

despair. Although Mamma Roma is a reformed prostitute, she is forced back into that

dark life simply to provide for her teenage son. Surrounded by barefooted people living

in squalid conditions, Mamma Roma ignores this; she is disillusioned by thinking she can

emerge from her low social class to the much coveted one of her northern counterparts

simply because she wants it to be that way.

The local girls have no choice but to engage in prostitution, as they have no viable

means of support. Mamma Roma was also a prostitute, as this seems one of the few

professions available to poor women in that era. Although she has left that unsavory

world, she is forced back into it to maintain her new apartment, one that she saved to

obtain for her son's return to live with her. It is not known why he was not with her

before, yet it is irrelevant to the film's main premise. Mamma Roma hides her dark and

nighttime profession from her beloved son, Ettore, and takes on other responsibilities during the day selling fruit. Also, she arranges deals with unsavory characters to ensure her son, Ettore, gains employment at a local restaurant. Clearly, she remains present in the crooked and illegal world despite her desire to be a model and respected Roman citizen. To her dismay, Ettore quits the job, and Mamma Roma feels the pain of realizing she has sacrificed for her son, yet he does not appreciate the job she obtained for him. Of course, he has no idea that his mother engaged in criminal activity to provide him this employment. However, when he does learn that his mother was a former prostitute and in fact has returned to that profession, he leaves her in disgust. Ettore does not realize that the pimps blackmailed his mother into returning to her prostituting lifestyle.

At this point, he selfishly loses respect for his mother, completely ignoring the sacrifices she made for him. Ettore prefers not to work but steal for a living, and his criminal activities lead to his incarceration and subsequent death. There are no happy endings in this post war era, and there are no happy endings in this type of film. Mamma Roma attempts suicide, but is saved from his demise by her friends, only at the last minute as she attempts to jump out the window. The tragedies in Neorealistic Italian cinema never end, and the hopelessness and despair are evident to the end of the film.

One of the most significant identity struggles in this film is for Mamma Roma. It is mainly by her various interactions with men that she attains any structure. At the beginning of the film, her boisterous and crude personality is demonstrated at a wedding scene, where she sits near her former pimp, Carmine. Viewers are not clear on her relationship with that man, but it is apparent that he had a strong attachment to her at one time. She is taunted by his bride in a song that suggests Carmine rejected Mamma Roma,

his middle-aged whore, and instead married her. Mamma Roma's loneliness and rejection are hidden sloppily behind her outlandish and supposedly uncaring frivolous manner.

Once Mamma Roma realizes she has to prepare a decent home for her returning teen-aged son, her demeanor changes to that of a loving and caring mother. Ettore is pleased with the apartment, although it is extremely sparse and located in the poor area of the southern outskirts of Rome. He and his mother laugh and dance to music, and all seems well.

It is worthwhile to closely investigate the dance scene between Mamma Roma and her son, Ettore. Pasolini, the writer and director, was noted for his rogue and anti-religious depictions. In fact, *Mamma Roma* was banned at first and not released until several years past its production date. In the dance scene, Mamma Roma clings closely to her son as they dance cheek to cheek, her body pressed closely and suggestively against his. The two nuzzle each other as if they were lovers, rather than mother and son. As they continue to dance, their ineptness with a new dance causes them to fall on the bed together. Their remaining in that position as they giggle about it suggests that Pasolini may be casting them in an Oedipal scenario. Some critics analyze this scene as a blasphemous depiction of the Christ clinging to his loving mother, Mary. Whatever scenario is selected, Mamma Roma's relationship and subsequent identity in that scene was definitely altered by her interaction with Ettore.

As the plot ensues, Mamma Roma discovers that her virgin son has explored a sexual relationship with a beautiful yet young and poor prostitute, Bruna. The mother reacts violently and displays horror at her son's actions. She negates in her own mind that she, too, is herself a prostitute. Perhaps she does not forget that she is one, too; one may

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posit that Mamma Roma has now become a jealous lover once she discovers her son has strong feelings and interest in another woman—a much younger and more beautiful version of herself.

Noting the plot progression, Mamma Roma surprises her son with a new motorbike, something she acquires through her contacts with her former lovers/sexual clients. She jumps on the motorcycle and clings to his body as they laugh and enjoy his new present. Again, Mamma Roma's identity is reinforced as that of her son's lover, as a mother and son would not incur the physical closeness these two characters do in this motorcycle scene. The continual mystery about Ettore's father, which is never mentioned or alluded to in the film adds to the Oedipal reference..

In another almost surreal scene, Mamma Roma reveals all the identities she has incurred in her life as she walks down the street, spouting her actions to whatever man appears to walk by her. They appear to be "dropping from the sky" or perhaps "escaping from her subconscious" as all the men she has encountered in her long life of prostitution. It exists as a tragic scene, one that reveals what Mamma Roma has experienced in her life—poor and at the mercy of her male clients with no hope for a more positive outlook. It also illustrates Pasolini's fascination with the unconscious, a major factor in his films.

At the end of the film, Ettore is incarcerated and strung out on a table in a scene similar to a crucifixion. He was arrested as his life as a thief led to his demise. Sadly, he dies of neglect as no one knows where he has been detained. When Mamma Roma finally discovers where her son has been abandoned, she rushes to find him only to have arrived too late. In death, her beloved Ettore has left her forever. She is no longer a mother, and her identity, well known to her now more than ever, has been reduced to that of a worn

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out, middle-aged, and destitute whore. Her suicide attempt fails, as her friends come to the rescue. The window that once served as the one she would face and stare at the better life to the north now became the window from which she wanted to end her life. It is almost as if she realizes her dreams to better her life are a moot point, and the window is now her "enemy," laughing in her face about her misfortunes..

In one of the final scenes, after witnessing her son's dead body laid out in a Christ-like crucifixion position, she crumples to the floor supported by her friends. The scene closely mocks the scene at the base of Jesus' cross when he has finally died. Thus, Pasolini's plot now transforms Mamma Roma's identity from that of a middle-aged whore to one of the Virgin Mary. Perhaps viewers would prefer to have this holy image as their final one, rather than the real identity they know Mamma Roma possesses. The quick identity changes throughout this film prompted by her changing relationship with her son, Ettore, provide an intense study of male and female relationships in cinema and how they affect the plot's forward motion. Anna Magnani magnificently performed the role of Mamma Roma. Her exuberance and commanding demeanor clearly illustrated a determined woman passionate about her life, her future, and her son.

Figure 7. Anna Magnani (Source:www.wikimedia.org/)

In Magnani's actual life, she had one male child who was stricken with polio and remained crippled his entire life. It appears that she brought her personal feelings into play when she felt despair for Ettore, which contributed to her fantastic acting. Her abilities were admired by excellent critics, including the famous Italian director, Rosselini. In fact, one of her Oscar winning films, *The Rose Tattoo* (1955), was fashioned after a Tennessee Williams play, *The Rose Tattoo,* written specifically for Magnani. He was especially smitten with her at their first meeting: "I never saw a more beautiful woman, enormous eyes, skin the color of Devonshire cream" (IMDb 2011). However, she did not star in his play, as her English was not up to par; yet she magnificently starred in the film of the same name (2011).

Le Notti di Cabiria

This research examined the constant negative influence Cabiria's unconscious mind receives due to the identities thrust upon herself by her male encounters. These subliminal suggestions occur repeatedly throughout the film; thus, they possibly contribute to a harmful self image. Throughout the film, *Le Notti di Cabiria,* one witnesses her identity shaping often by the names "spewed" at Cabiria throughout her life. The majority of these "spewed" names instill a pejorative effect to the main character, and the first example occurs during the drowning scene. Although she at first is considered a poor, wretched woman suffering some emotional pain, this quickly changes once they discover her identity at that time—a poor, waifish, intimidated prostitute. This occurs within minutes of her rescue, as one of the men recognizes her from the streets.

This film most likely provides the most identity changes compared to *Double Indemnity* and *Mamma Roma.* Throughout all these changes, there exists one specific

factor to consider—the character, Cabiria, is easily molded, deterred, abused, and sacrificed. This is not a strong character as are the femme fatale in *Double Indemnity* or *Mamma Roma*— the latter a tough, street-smart, older prostitute. One feels pity for Cabiria throughout her character changes. Conversely, in the other two mentioned films, Phyllis draws no pity from anyone, that is, the audience probably feels her shooting death was well deserved.

Mamma Roma may elicit sympathy from the viewers as they realize her powerful love for her son, Ettore; however, viewers may also determine that she lost the only person who mattered to her because of her former sinful life. The Catholic religion does not believe that prostitution is sometimes out of necessity and not choice. The religious factor entered quite strongly in *Mamma Roma,* which was not as evident in *Le Notti di Cabiria,* although there were religious references. Nonetheless, Cabiria appeared to be in favor with the nuns and priest with whom she came in contact during the film. In fact, at the end, her pious face is bathed in special lighting techniques that suggested a halo or innocence. At no time is Cabiria ever defined as an evil or sinful person. In *Double Indemnity,* absolutely no spiritual or religious inferences were present, except perhaps for Walter's speech at the end, suggesting that evil has its price and cannot win in the end.

Cabiria evokes sympathy from viewers from the very beginning, when she almost drowns and is saved by nearby rescuers. It is evident that she did not want to be saved, but she is rescued, anyway. The men are quite concerned about her physical state until she is identified as one of the local prostitutes. Once they learn of her identity, she becomes disposable and they simply leave her there. Apparently, they think a prostitute is

not worth saving, a sentiment that often prevails today if one reads current police reports.

From a report gathered in 1998 by a grant supported by the National Science Foundation:

> In terms of how the law treats prostitution, most people favor the status quo. Only
> 12% think that prostitutes are treated unfairly by the law and another 16-23%
> think they are treated too leniently." (Smith 4)

This comment suggests that at the time of that survey, only a small percentage of the population considers prostitutes worthy of concern. Most likely there are various surveys that reflect attitudes worldwide, but this was simply a survey conducted in the United States. China and Thailand, which have the largest number of underage prostitutes, are recently enacting laws to curb this horrific practice, as most of the prostitutes are minors. However, the number of children sent to other countries for prostitution is still clearly astronomical in the Asian countries.

> CHILD TRAFFICKING - Reportedly 15,000 women and children were trafficked
> into "sex slavery" in China. There are reports of children being kidnapped or
> purchased from orphanages for sexual abuse, child pornography, and body parts.
> (Child 2010)

Moreover, China's government has increased its task force to investigate and deter this horrible trafficking of their children for prostitution. This issue has global attention and numerous steps have begun to address this problem.

However, in the setting of *Le Notti di Cabiria,* no one is concerned about child prostitution. The reasons for this social neglect are the same; poverty and starvation force people to undertake roles they would not normally seek in a more stable world. Cabiria

presents a childlike figure in the film, and she appears to even more waifish and pathetic because of this portrayal.

Once Cabiria realizes her supposed boyfriend Giorgio plotted to kill her for her money, she calls herself "a fool." "Tramp and fool"—the names are thrown at her define the only "comfort" as she regains her life from the traumatic drowning incident. However, she only continues to suffer, as she receives no sympathy from her prostitute friends and their pimps. In fact, as she approaches a car full of men in her "business" neighborhood, they laughingly say to each other, "Here comes the psycho." One wonders why they think she is mentally incompetent. Perhaps it is simply because she seeks something more than the lives to which her friends sadly resign themselves. Thus, as she desires to rise above her peers' expectations, she is touted as mentally deranged, or "psycho." Cabiria dares to dream that she will have another identity, one much happier than the one she is cursed with at the present time.

As the plot moves forward, Cabiria encounters her street friends, who make fun of her dreamy persona and her wish to simply be loved by a decent man. She has already been rejected by one lover, but she does not give up hope. Later in the film, she encounters a famous movie star who just had a fight with his jealous and glamorous girlfriend. They create quite a spectacle, and after the girlfriends absconds in a cab, he's left sitting in his car all alone, despondent. Cabiria, a witness to this sordid affair, attempts to become obscure but the man notices her in the close proximity.

As their eyes meet, he calls to her, "Hey you!" After a brief exchange, he brusquely orders her into the car. He never asks her name and is content to consider her

as "hey, you." Yet he is delighted to learn that she knows *his* name, "Alberto." However, he still doesn't consider her worthy of addressing her in the same, more personal context.

Yet, once they enter an elite nightclub and she is noticed as his companion, she is addressed as "Signora," a title she readily accepts with a smile. This title implies that she is the famous star's wife, otherwise they would have called her "Signorina," designating a single woman.

Alberto continues his amused seduction by suggesting they ride in his glamorous convertible, which Cabiria delights in doing so. She especially enjoys this as she passes her street friends, and she calls to them so they will notice her riding with the famous movie star in his luxurious car. They return to his apartment, and now she realizes that he knows she's a prostitute; yet he treats her with tenderness and respect. Although Alberto is upset about the fight with his girlfriend, he apparently takes pity on Cabiria and orders food for her. At this point, viewers assume that he cares more for her as a person than a sexual object.

Viewers are also amazed when Cabiria encounters a wealthy man at an opportune time, and perhaps they think she will have some type of salvation, finally. Yet when she ends up in his car as his famous and beautiful girlfriend has just broken up with him, viewers know that this encounter between Alberto and Cabiria will not progress beyond a simple "trick"; however, the wealthy man fools the audience and Cabiria for awhile, and even himself. After taking her to an upscale nightclub, he treats her like an upper class woman, even asking her name. Again, Cabiria's trusting soul thinks this man could really love her and take care of her. He encourages this sentiment by his takin her to his luxurious apartment and orders expensive food and drink for the two of them.

Unlike the plot scenario in the farcical film, *Pretty Woman* (1990), the handsome rich man does not become immediately smitten with the child-like Cabiria. In fact, he quickly passes her off to hide in his restroom when his girlfriend shows up unexpectedly at the apartment; she is penitent and professes her love for him. The former couple spend the night together— making love, eating and drinking, and having a great time. The man completely forgets about Cabiria, and she spends the night hiding in the restroom with the dog. However, viewers wonder why she allows that denigration to occur, and perhaps it illustrates the plight of the Italian prostitutes in post-war Italy; they have no choice but to obey. Their continually down trodden lives force them to forfeit their self respect in exchange for survival. It also demonstrates the class divisions in post war Italy, as they are limited to the wealthy and the extremely destitute; there is no middle class.

Nevertheless, her continual physical and emotional abuse forces her to strongly question her value as a woman, and also simply as a human being. Her subconscious attitude perhaps plays a significant role in her continual demise and misfortune. By suffering continual abuse, her self esteem eventually assumes a downward spiral.

Although viewers are delighted to see that Cabiria is treated with deference by the priest, the next man she encounters, it simply demonstrates the complexity of her cinematic character. Prior to this scene, she is abused by the wealthy man, Alberto, followed by a scornful episode from her peers when they ridicule her for being "dumped" by a man she thought loved her, again Alberto. Cabiria finds content with her association with the priest, if only for a moment as their encounter is brief. However, he provides an endearing identity for her by revealing her real name—Maria. This helps viewers realize

that although she is Italian society's scapegoat for its own social ills, she is still a significant human being with a real name.

Conversely, her humanity is threatened again when she is tricked and emotionally abused by the next male encounter—"Oscar." She becomes a victim of a stage charlatan who hypnotizes her for the amusement of his lower class audience. As her mind wanders into her personal dream fantasy, she mouths the name of her supposed lover—Oscar. The hypnotist awakens Cabiria from her fugue, and she is immediately embarrassed. She realizes she voiced some extremely personal issues; everyone was laughing at her. Sensing her naiveté and vulnerability, a dishonest man from the audience pretends to be her beloved Oscar for whom she has been searching. Her desperation to be loved becomes evident as she succumbs to his advances and is convinced she has met the intended "love of her life." This action immediately evokes sympathy from the audience, as they wonder how often this poor childlike woman will be duped by these men.

Viewers have been programmed so far to realize that most likely there will be no happy endings for Cabiria, and they are correct. Oscar plots to kill Cabiria and take her life savings with him. At the end, he decides to let her live, but he runs away with her money. She may as well be dead as she has sold her house and lost all her money to Oscar's thievery.

Symbolizing the strong hope of the Italian people despite their situations after the war, viewers are treated to a more positive scenario at the end of the film. The ending shows Cabiria experiencing an epiphany of sorts; she encounters a musical parade of people who are apparently enjoying themselves. The music is upbeat and everyone is smiling. At a time when Cabiria has experienced her lowest point in life, her identity is

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altered one final time. She becomes enraptured by the people and their music and joins in their parade. This possibly illustrates a new hope for the people living in post war Italy: despite their destitution and despair, the proverbial "light at the end of the tunnel" exists for them as well in a display of a Monet-like impressionistic setting.

Le Notti di Cabiria delightfully demonstrates how identity changes throughout a film propel the narrative to tell its story. Despite Cabiria's pathetic relationships with various men, she finds peace in herself at the end. The audience applauds this ending as they suffered along with her ill treatment by the men in her life. Viewers can accept the identity changes because in the end, she finds her own identity, albeit it a subconscious

Fellini brilliantly starred Giulietta Masina[18] in this role, as her childlike, angelic face and demeanor made the abuse more despicable in its stance. In fact, the film won an Oscar for Fellini, and Masina won the "Best Actress" award at the Cannes film festival. Critics allude that Masina was a great inspiration to Fellini, and her starring in several of his successful films—such as another Oscar winning film *La Strada* (1954)—verified this statement.

Patterns of Masculinity

Although this research investigated how women's identities were shaped by their male character interactions, it of course is not the only way identities are formed in cinema or any art form. To avoid any solipsistic overtures by this research, other identity formations most likely occur as well. Current patterns of masculinity exist in literature and film, and they also serve as a formative narration. Moreover, it, too, has been located as a significant catalyst, if you will, to forward the intricacies that define intrigue and

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[18] Giulietta Masina was married to Federico Fellini from 1943 until her death in 1994, which followed his by only a few months..

mystery within the cinematic genre. However, this factor also relates to the time period within its scope.

For example, the definition of masculinity partners with various occurrences worldwide. When investigating ethnographic research results, it clearly indicates the vital connections to socio-economic conditions. That is, the power status among European and North American corporations forced men to succumb to monetary definitions. They acquired status symbols such as sports cars and magnificent homes in suburbia; they fought hard in the corporate "jungles."

Women's Changing Roles in Society

Additionally, as women's liberation movements surfaced across North America and into European countries, their social and workplace identities altered as the decades passed. As both genders enjoyed the liberties that progress provided, these changes became evident in film as well. These socio-economic changes offer extensive areas for further research. The often termed "Women's Liberation Movement" that surfaced in the 1960s influenced how film viewers perceived women's roles in their lives and also how they were portrayed in the media. These factors were considered by script writers and directors; therefore, construing plot scenarios and character identities depended on the current cultural norms. For example, a film produced in 2012 that emulated the lifestyle of men and women in the 1960s television show, *Leave It to Beaver,* would be considered a farcical depiction. Thus, identity formation must depend on societal acceptance as well, that is, if the director wants to produce a successful money-making film.

Moreover, this research only addressed critiques from the standpoint of a mature, White, middle-class female. Naturally, personal biases influenced observations

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on how identities were shaped, alluding to the male inter-personal relationships in the three selected films. However, several biases were caused by cultural and societal changes that occurred from 1950 to the present 21st century that affected women's stance in society. No harsh judgmental or solipsistic attitudes were evident during the extensive research and reporting.

Contemporary American and World Cinema, Television

Another area to consider for future research includes media portrayal in countries other than Italy and the United States. Women's identities in cinema vary among cultures, and numerous articles have been written about this subject in contemporary world cinema. These and other factors outside the realm of cinema influence how identity is portrayed in film, which was mentioned in several areas in this research. However, it remains crucial to study advertising and television media including weekly drama. Naturally, research is never completed in one area, mainly because it is a dynamic process. One scenario influences the next, and so on.

Numerous contemporary films in the United States openly depict homosexual relationships. Women's identities may alter in contrary ways when the women interact in this type of scenario rather than in the heterosexual encounters addressed in this research.

Moreover, one should consider how female interactions with homosexual males influence identity changes. For example, the popular American television sitcom, *Will and Grace,* reveals how they met in college and Will had not faced his homosexuality at that time. The couple was engaged to be married, and despite society's acceptance of pre-marital sex, they had not encountered this act. Viewers regard Will's hesitance as a deep respect for Grace's Jewish upbringing. Grace simply regards it as something that has to

be accomplished before the wedding takes place. Her identity changes once she [and Will] finally admit—during a supposed plan for a sexual encounter—that Will is a homosexual. However, although the wedding plans are extinguished, she agrees to live in the same apartment with him and assumes the stereotypical role of "wife" in a heterosexual relationship, sans any sexual encounters. As time passes, if and when Grace has a relationship with a boyfriend, the boyfriend must accept Will as part of the "deal," which naturally leads to the dissolution of the heterosexual relationship. The same scenario occurs with Will and his male romantic interests. Viewers wonder why Will and Grace continue to remain basically celibate, forsaking personal satisfaction by their ongoing insistence to be together. Perhaps it remains a way to satisfy the viewer percentage who wants to believe that Will and Grace can be "cured" if they stay together, or that Will eventually will "give in" to his "secret" love for Grace and marry her.

Identity shaping in the media remains indeed complex, yet the fact remains that identity is still shaped, albeit varying manners depending on each separate scenario. Scholars interested in mapping the structures would benefit from comparison and contrast, as most likely one depends on the other, that is, a symbiotic chain of overlapping definitions.

Thus, considering that only three films depicting two genres were investigated; further research into other genres such as horror, comedy, and others that do not include Italian and film noir cinema would most likely reveal others factors that shape women's identities in film for all cultures.

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