

Spring 5-2019

Powerful Silences: Examining the New Woman's Femininity and Relationships in Silent Films

Maria Kranidis

Follow this and additional works at: <https://knowledge.library.iup.edu/etd>

Recommended Citation

Kranidis, Maria, "Powerful Silences: Examining the New Woman's Femininity and Relationships in Silent Films" (2019). *Theses and Dissertations (All)*. 1707.

<https://knowledge.library.iup.edu/etd/1707>

This Dissertation is brought to you for free and open access by Knowledge Repository @ IUP. It has been accepted for inclusion in Theses and Dissertations (All) by an authorized administrator of Knowledge Repository @ IUP. For more information, please contact cclouser@iup.edu, sara.parme@iup.edu, edzimmer@iup.edu.

POWERFUL SILENCES: EXAMINING THE NEW WOMAN'S
FEMININITY AND RELATIONSHIPS IN SILENT FILMS

A Dissertation

Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies and Research

in Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Philosophy

Maria Kranidis

Indiana University of Pennsylvania

May 2019

Indiana University of Pennsylvania
School of Graduate Studies and Research
Department of English

We hereby approve the dissertation of

Maria Kranidis

Candidate for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Thomas Slater, Ph.D.
Professor of English, Advisor

Michael Williamson, Ph.D.
Professor of English

Chauna Craig, Ph.D.
Professor of English

ACCEPTED

Randy L. Martin, Ph.D.
Dean
School of Graduate Studies and Research

Title: Powerful Silences: Examining the New Woman's Femininity and Relationships in Silent Films

Author: Maria Kranidis

Dissertation Chair: Dr. Thomas Slater

Dissertation Committee Members: Dr. Michael Williamson
Dr. Chauna Craig

This project studies how women in silent film experimented with new identity roles from 1915-28. To accomplish this, I will consider the lives, work activities, and performances of three significant actresses of the era through their biographies, press coverage of them, archival documents, and performances. These three are Alla Nazimova (1915-26), Gloria Swanson (1915-28), and Clara Bow (1921-28). Each became a major "star" for a short period during a time in which popular conceptions of women's sexuality, the nature of marriage, and women's presence in the public realm was changing in major ways. In other words, millions of women were going through these changes, so the depictions of coping with the world that these actresses presented had major impact that has yet to be adequately considered. One reason is that while each one came from very troubled backgrounds, they succeeded by creating on-screen characters who had a tremendous appeal. Therefore, the questions of how their personal histories influenced their performances, which influenced others, and in turn changed their identities, are fascinating questions. Specifically, my interest is in how they enacted romantic and marital relationships as a basis for discussing their work, their personal lives, and their popularity.

The creation of the "new woman" enforced many difficult choices for relationships, especially marriage. Sexuality and sensuality became instrumental toward power contradictions in ways of the

past. Many of the roles these actresses play are defined by their sexual power. This change in approach to love affairs and self-identity created new situations for relationships to be explored, especially in silent film. I will draw on historical information to analyze the ways in which the roles these actresses play and the situations presented in their films as a challenge to the old traditions of marriage and relationships by changing morality and personal pleasure to reflect the needs of the new culture in America. I will also include the historical analysis of the roles of women in Hollywood during the silent era in connection to the real women and their product using Wendy Holliday's analysis of Hollywood during the silent era.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

My endless gratitude to Dr. Slater who inspired me the moment I discussed my love of silent films and how he believed that it was fate that we meet and work on my project. He has taught me that the study of past women in silent film is endless in its scope. My endless gratitude to Dr. Chauna Craig and Dr. Michael Williamson for caring about the project from beginning until completion. To Dr. Downing whose class I sat in first as an older professional, far away from home, and he encouraged that studies have no age. To my family, who believed in my pursuit of a Ph.D. and supported my ideas. To my daughter, Theonie, whose life has always been my inspiration. My husband, Matthew, whose patience with my many interests, and his love of silent films, are priceless! And to my sweet grandson, Achilles, who has brought happiness and urgency in my life. But most of all, to my mother, whose fantasies about immigrating to America were never fulfilled. To her I dedicated the life I live. The life she had hoped for. To the women whose struggles in changing their lives while portraying possibilities for other women in their films remains open to all kinds of love.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter		Page
1	INTRODUCTION: HOLLYWOOD AND STAR PRODUCTION	1
2	FEMININE SEXUAL PERFORMANCES: ALLA NAZIMOVA'S INTRODUCTION OF QUEER SEXUALITY IN <i>THE RED LANTERN</i> (1919); <i>CAMILLE</i> (1921); AND <i>SALOME</i> (1919)	18
3	MATERIALISM AS POWER: GLORIA SWANSON'S TREATMENT OF OBJECTIFIED WOMEN IN <i>MALE AND FEMALE</i> (1919); <i>DON'T CHANGE YOUR HUSBAND</i> (1919); AND <i>WHY CHANGE YOUR WIFE?</i> (1920).....	59
4	THE FLAPPER'S CHASE: CLARA BOW'S SEXUAL AGENCY IN MODERN RELATIONSHIPS IN <i>IT</i> (1927); <i>GET YOUR MAN</i> (1927); AND <i>WINGS</i> (1927).....	102
5	CONCLUSION: SILENT LIBERATIONS AND SUGGESTED FUTURES... ..	144
	WORKS CITED.....	155

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION: HOLLYWOOD AND STAR PRODUCTION

When Barbara Walters interviewed Gloria Swanson in 1981 right after Swanson's autobiography was published, her main questions were about Joe Kennedy and their affair that lasted from 1927 until the end of the 1930s. Walters asked Swanson if she felt guilty about being married and having an affair with a married man. Then she asked her if any members of the Kennedy family had contacted her to ask her questions about the affair or the book. Swanson said no. After the interview Walters told her audience that she had contacted the Kennedy family to ask how they felt about Swanson's autobiography. And then she went on to quote from a letter she had received from Eunice Kennedy. It read,

My mother is honest in her conviction that her forty five year marriage to my father was the happiest part of her life. My father helped her in the raising of the children and the creation of a stable home. My mother between the ages of eighty and ninety has written her own biography and it has inspired people everywhere. Swanson's may make her a popular figure but what lasting value has her life left us?

Perhaps this is the most important question one must answer before moving forward in any analysis of the social and cultural impact silent film stars have left us with and why. What caused the need for them to be created and did they fulfill that need? This interview mirrored much of Swanson's life in the ways that it represents the time of her fame. Her popularity many times depended on the journalists who followed her life's every move, her presentation of the glorious feminine on screen and her marriages and affairs. Walters does not ask anything about her art nor does she concern herself with any questions that include an analysis or a specific event about her

performances or a specific film; instead, the question is focused around the illicit affair and scandal that it potentially held. The letter written by Eunice Kennedy is one that also dismisses Swanson as an artist. It minimizes the power of film as art and the way she compares it to her mother's life refocuses marriage as the ultimate truth of happiness, precisely what Swanson's films tried to challenge: the cultural normative of marriage.

This chapter will focus on the critical framework of my dissertation, the breakdown of my thesis, and provide biographical information, historical contexts, and cultural additions to the overview analysis of Alla Nazimova's, Gloria Swanson's, and Clara Bow's careers. Each chapter's purpose will be defined in combining historical aspects and cultural demands that these actresses responded to through the different modes or styles of femininity they portrayed. Private lives are changed once they are put on screen, and these actresses drew on their private lives in their performances. Audiences were then influenced by the presentations of the new woman's interactions and actions within romantic relationships on screen. Coming from different backgrounds, yet similar in connection to how they were treated in the world, all three of them were seeking a change for themselves and in doing so they created opportunities for their audience. The modern world was altering lives for many women who could now see through these actresses' work new ways of approaching marriage and relationships.

This chapter will here introduce some of the ways that these relationships were challenged on screen. I will include a brief history of Hollywood and how material gains for women at the time reflect the political climate that women were experiencing in the first feminist wave. I will also look at the transitional ways women gathered information about style and fashion as they became the mass costumers of the ideology of change. The idea that art reflects reality and vice versa is perhaps most important when applied to film. We look at art as the stabilizer of specific

times as it reflects its norms and obscurities. Film can be seen as the opposite of such claims. Film destabilizes the world it produces for at the time it is produced. This idea of movement and change towards the future creates awkward moments in film that one can see as experimental moments of action. I will look at how these moments reflect love as a new experience, one that influences the way relationships are developed. These three actresses were able to combine with their own complicated pasts a kind of future that was nurtured by profession, art, and wealth, providing them with an independence that produced a struggle to balance an identity as frail as the new woman's was and the powerful one they had to handle in private and in public.

Two important theories in my work will be the theory of the "male gaze" as it brings to question the ideas of love and desire for viewers. While examining specific scenes in films, the ideas of Judith Butler's *Gender Trouble* will be included, especially in relation to Nazimova's acting. A very important part of looking at stardom will help the reader stabilize a position of viewing the lives of the actresses and films presented here situated in a world of new strangeness and moving into the future of women's liberation through film viewing.

As it is impossible to analyze every aspect of American cultural effects of the early modern times, or every historical aspect that influenced the changes that occur in culture, my study will focus on how these actresses' feminine roles were constructed by Hollywood and how those fictional creations influenced the meaning of love and romance in relation to marriage in the roles they play. Each actress presented in this study functions within a specific context of Hollywood's design to fulfill and integrate a cultural awareness of femininity for consumption. The three actresses are connected by that design even though their performances differ in delivery and their lives, even though similar, differ in background. They each fulfilled audience needs differently. In my research I have discovered that there is a continuity of how the feminine

New Woman behaves in films and what the affects were for the audience in relation to the stars who portrayed them. Alla Nazimova established her role as a Madame of theater, and then film; a woman whose art is apparent in the way she lived her life; extraordinarily dramatic and performative on and off screen. Her audience thought of her as a star: one that creates fictional characters with her talent. Gloria Swanson creates a world that can be bought through materials. She uses her body as a platform to display a new production of identity. Her audience loved her because she presented her own life as an example of how women could obtain power through materialism. She inspired women audiences to want the same life. Clara Bow did not depend on materials to portray the New Woman. Her body was the sexual vehicle to accomplish a better life. She was the girl next door who did not have much but beauty and great attitude. Her audience saw her as one of them. Bow offered the clues to change by being herself. Many women viewers saw these actresses as new inspirational leaders during the first feminist wave. Nazimova, Swanson, and Bow brought themselves to the screen as the image of future and past combined, connecting themselves to other women of the time by bringing to the screen issues that were not open in public for discussion or debate. Sexuality as a commodity within a new economic system seems to be the focus of many of their roles in their films. They do not portray their own sexuality as a means to physical pleasure: instead, it is a powerful position of negotiating a new political position in the new world. Their presence on screen goes beyond the appearance of clothing and hats, make up, short hair, and smoking in bars while drinking illegal booze, even though these choices were part of the outcome of social and cultural changes. In a way, the early silent actresses envisioned and transformed feminine abilities by creating a new

feminine world of fantasy. In that fantasy lies a reality about women's roles in transition that still needs to be explored so we can understand the relationships between their lives and their performances, the influences of their artistry, and the limits for women at the time.

For instance, in chapter one, I will examine the ways Nazimova's stardom and popularity are connected to the strangeness of her acting and the cultural movement aimed at reforming the immigrant experience and Americanizing it on stage and film. Her experience is unique in the way it presents a new feminine while normalizing the queer spectacle. Nazimova is complicated because of both the historical specifics of immigrant movement in the country at the time, her own private affairs in bisexual secrecy, and her performance that is all combined into a popularity emanated by the new sexuality and its social impact. Her roles of romantic love and desire in *The Red Lantern* (1919, Albert Capellani), *Camille* (1921, Ray C. Smallwood), and *Salome* (1923, Charles Bryant) are strangely connected to a kind of deviance that is not obvious to first impression. It requires an analysis of meaning in the ways of representation of love.

When Nazimova came to America in 1905 she already had a career in theater. She brings a movement of theatrical energy to silent film. Born in Yalta, Russia (at that time) she joined a group of actors in a private school setting. They became her family and her art became her only expression of love. They toured to New York and by 1906 she had gained popularity for her artistic uniqueness on stage. Her fan base by 1910 was female (like for most female stars) and remained so whether she performed on stage or screen. *Motion Picture Magazine* referred to her "seemingly overwhelming appeal for the feminine sex." She popularized the exotic feminine and the lesbian chic.

In her own life as an immigrant to America, she cultivated a cult following of her mysterious feminine gender roles. She is unique in her portrayal of the new femininity that embraced strength and strangeness in one. Her roles in film bring into discussion the needs of the

times during which she was popular. The culture of immigrant pleasure and fantasy in film was at a high as many working girls visited the theaters often. Nazimova created elegance from different worlds that were unlike the ones of those who viewed her films. Many categorized them as highly artistic, as Nazimova had full financial and editorial control of her films. However, we can now see the ways in which she was awkward and can apply queer theory to many of her actions.

Her acting style was unique as well as her foreign new ways of communicating love and feminine power to her audience. Nazimova's popularity and wealth played roles in the control of her productions (*Camille* and *Salome*) as well as her ability to create a new aesthetic on screen. I will look at her films closely and make connections between her own history and her performances. Nazimova referred to silent film as photo drama where she popularized the European exotic. She also played with the tastes of her audience as she stretched the dimensions of gender and sexuality in her performances. Patricia White refers to her star image as "defined by its contradictions; the aesthetic qua femme fatale meets the new woman qua lesbian" (78). Her characters in these films differ from the modern women of the time whose roles demonstrate the ability to conquer men or control events in their lives; Nazimova brings to the screen a sense of separations between character and circumstance. In all three movies I have chosen for analysis here, the main character dies at the end and even though not liberated through her desires or sexuality, she experiments with the idea that freedom might be just in the struggle to choose and not in the final choice

In the second chapter, Gloria Swanson's glorious emergence as a star is specific to DeMille's design of a materialistic happiness that overtakes traditional love and romance. Gloria Swanson became a famous sex symbol and discusses her real life's conditions in order to protect

the image on screen. Three of Swanson's films, all directed by Cecil B. DeMille, will be included for discussion: *Male and Female* (1919, Cecil B. DeMille), *Don't Change Your Husband* (1919, Cecil B. DeMille), and *Why Change Your Wife?* (1920, Cecil B. DeMille). Many of Swanson's films presented the actress with dilemmas that were new and breaking moral ground. She is seen as a mannequin on screen whose ability to demonstrate fashion covers her artistic abilities so that she is overlooked as a serious actress until her last performance in *Sunset Boulevard* (1950). I will make connections between her family life and her own private confessions to establish a new perspective of what life she presents on screen. Most importantly I will look at the ways that situations are handled in her film that reflect the cultural and social concerns of the time.

Being a modern woman meant keeping up with the competitive world of feminine sensuality in a masculine world of approval. A feminine self-image seemed to be held by a certain kind of woman, one who does not want to be bothered by what husbands need but who toys with their desires and makes marriage more adventurous. And the fact that Mr. Gordon, in *Why Change Your Wife*, suggests his wife wear different types of more trendy fashion clothes but fails to create a better relationship with her suggests that the feminine sexual imagination might be enjoyed by men but it is not controlled nor probed by them because women must participate in order for the fantasy to exist. It also shows that men and women are not allies in marriage. That the commitment and the responsibility fall on the woman as the man need not make any changes or adjustments to stay desirable. Later in the film the wife chooses her own sexual appeal according to her own examinations of fashion. Or perhaps we can look at her new self-

discovery as an opportunity for women to establish new sexual relationships because the new path has already been available to them as the film shows through how it presents the new woman.

Why Change Your Wife? seems to suggest that feminine sexual imagination is a reflection of self-discovery not in opposition to male desire but instead a feminine self arises from the troubled times of marriage to allow women to become something new. In the meantime, the woman is in total control of the masculine desire toward her newness. As a matter of fact, Elizabeth while married, challenges the idea of what a wife's role should really be. It is not an ally relationship to the husband who does not face the same challenges of self-identity, yet he is affected by the choices new women are pursuing. Married life as a whole is reexamined.

Why Change Your Wife? also raises the question of whether a woman who uses her own sexuality is in accordance to a male mentality or using real feminine imagination. He approaches her again later in the film and finds her totally attractive because she has learned to treat her body in a different manner than a mother figure does. The new woman seems to not disassociate herself from her gender; as a matter of fact she creates a new role for self and for other women in the ways that she handles life. She eliminates the perception that family, home and child in marriage take priority over woman's desire and creates new individual choices. These choices even though new, become public as women audiences are exposed to how to dress differently, drink and dance in public.

In a reversal of the roles, in *Don't Change Your Husband*, the choice made by the wife is to leave her husband who is too familiar and too comfortable in his ways with her. Not caring for

his sexual appeal she moves on to a modern man who turns out to be unkind and untrustworthy. The film pays focus to the alluring attraction of material things in marriage as they can influence the moral grounds of marriage in the name of luxury and sexuality.

Looking at relationships based on a struggle between power and control within a marriage, *Male and Female* emphasizes the attraction between Lady Mary Loam and Crichton, her servant, in a reversal of roles of power. When the aristocratic family find themselves stranded on an island, it is Crichton, the servant, who provides the knowledge for their survival. His primitive survival ways instill in Lady Loam a need that is sexual in nature but wild in the sense that as a woman she allows desire to take precedence over marriage and class.

Her roles in *Male and Female*, *Don't Change Your Husband*, and *Why Change Your Wife?* are examples of situations that borrow directly from the cultural and social discourse of the time. Swanson sets the stage for future stars to act the way the public perceived them, as royalty. Her materialistic exhibit of clothing and luxuries promote a lifestyle that is desirable by both men and women. Men desire her and women want to be like her. This is a phenomenon that continues to feed her career. Her roles of romance and marriage are connected to a dilemma between what a woman must give up and what she hopes to gain in return. Her appearance and sexual mannerisms allow her to compromise a situation of commitment through marriage which must first endure a test of moral value in contrast to a materialistic existence. Her femininity also helps an analysis of whose pleasure she is accomplishing, the female's or the male's. Have men unwittingly created a game that empowers women to use sexuality in ways not done before? Finally, the way to Gloria's heart is through her silk and satin. Men must be able to either break the barrier, as in *Male and Female*, or commit to satisfying her need for beautiful things before he is traded in for luxuries.

In the third chapter, I take up the question of femininity through humor and comedy. Clara Bow has a casual way of selling femininity to her audience and making it accessible to the working class women who view her. Bow represents the hope that relationships hold a non-class in the future. I include her films *It* (1927, Clarence Badger and Josef von Sternberg), *Wings* (1927, William Wellman) and *Get Your Man* (1927, Dorothy Arzner) in my analysis of relationships represented by her joyful mannerisms. Bow's life is appealing to the audience because her roles are representative of the poor urban girl, who through her body movements, finds true love and money. Her popularity of the time suggests that her sexuality as the 'it' girl is one that reflects a specific cultural and economic moment in history. Her go-lucky attitude is a reflection of changing gender roles and social expectations. Bow's real life started with a troubled past but that particular trouble contributed to her ability to act and escape her own private life. Her own relationships and longing for the ideal marriage suggest that the times were not convincing to the flapper that the fun would last forever and that finally, the only way to stability and happiness was through marriage. The way to get to that marriage for a famous sex model was to negotiate a new kind of struggle. Using a theoretical background of the sex symbol and how an icon is created the project will develop by the actions in film that show Bow's ability to seduce an audience. It will also focus on actions in her relationships in real life based on her biography and background and the way she becomes totally different on film.

It (Joseph Von Sternberg, 1927) explores the identities actresses relate to their audience while challenging the socially structured roles accepted until then. Their experiences are transformed through a silent reading of makeup, facial expressions, new clothing, new haircuts, and a hopeful tomorrow. While creating an artistic set to be viewed in these films, something amazing and magical happens in the process. The dream or fantasy becomes tangible for the

common viewer. Jane Gaines argues that "these actresses' bodies were part of the material used to build a fantasy mise-en-scene (23). Certainly we can see in these early films a connection between the erotic body, new ways of behaving toward pleasure, and relationships to a fantasy that is rooted in material possessions. The "movies provided spaces in which experimentation with feminist identities might happen" (Holliday 441). Not only new feminist identities but also a new feminine ideal emerges, one in which women can ask more in marriage other than domestic duties. An escape from those roles seems possible not only by rebelling against the old but also by creating a new feminine which allows women to sexualize their own lives and find pleasure in their relationships with men.

It is a romantic comedy so it does not measure to a heteronormative community of a specific social standard. As comedies exaggerate the social norms, it appears to be setting up a standard of its own. In that respect, the idea of "it" is new and modern and suggests a different way for women to look at themselves. It does not need anything in response in order to be fulfilled. As a matter of fact the audience wonders whether this kind of existence is possible to maintain after the woman marries. Perhaps the desire is to be fulfilled by a man who wants to possess the "it" in Betty (Bow's character) by offering her marriage. Yet this bodily display of sexuality and sex appeal changes the assumption that marriage had been functioning on, one of low temperament, obedience, and commitment. This film does not offer a solution to a different kind of marriage for women but it does open up the conversation of what happens to women who are aware that they possess "it" after they marry. By using sexuality, she breaks the barriers between the poor girl and the world of money.

Bow's other two films, *Get Your Man* and *Wings* deal with the possibility of change in love as they represent a change of attitude toward planned marriages in opposition to true love

and attraction. Both films challenge the reassuring roles of women in love who wait for their claimed partner for marriage. They instead become benevolent in that prior commitment to themselves until they meet the true love of their lives. In *Wings*, the challenge of love is shared by two men who must first survive war before they return to the civil duties of love, yet it is the image of the new woman in a locket to whom the winner hopes to return home. Even though *Wings* is a war movie by many definitions, we get to see Bow in (and out of) uniform and in some scenes in the incarnation of a Parisian dancer in order to get John's attention while he is drunk. Sexuality functions as an alternative to romance and love. Bow's roles create a meditation between men and their commitments to themselves and to other women by the way Bow's natural beauty provides a look at serious relationships and their power within the social system. Silent films were perhaps the first mass media productions to expose women to other ways of living. Miriam Hansen tells us that "The cinema provided for women [. . .] a site for the imaginative negotiation of the gaps between family, school, workplace, between traditional standards of sexual behavior and modern dreams of romance and sexual expression, between freedom and anxiety" (118). We can examine the possibilities it created for women as films presented a new way of being.

Film as a new art form translated lives during that period. Silent films today have become time capsules of flesh and bone of the decisions women were making about their appearance, behaviors toward marriage, love and children, and their abilities to reject the previous conventional roles. These films allow us to look into the psyches of the women characters who personified the feminine imagination of their times. The early actresses developed these characters from new cultural influences and conventions and show us how even though many of their outcomes end up in marriage, the socially structured roles have been tested, negotiated,

reexamined, and even abandoned before they enter into relationships. As the first movie stars "embodied the American woman on screen fueling dreams of different kinds of lives, they provide a glimpse of heaven, an escape" but other times they confirm that the viewer's life is worth something more than she thought (Basinger 184). Most silent films address issues in relationships as partnerships would, unlike the previous power structures that existed in marriage and love. Those relationships can be affected by the ways new women consume material wealth related to appearance. They become, for the first time, the urban women who possess more public spaces with their presence and their ideas.

Women's identities are many times at odds with the world in these early films. Love and romance controls how women view their world by desiring new ways of dressing and of behaving toward men and other women. Many films portray struggles women encounter in fleeting moments of beauty and/or attraction. Some films emphasize appearance in ways that beauty becomes pleasure in relation to fashion, establishing a new identity in coordination with the image of the modern woman who is more powerful in sometimes subtle ways and aware of changes in her world. Mrs. Gordon in *Why Change Your Wife?* finds out precisely how different and competitive the world has become outside her marriage. She realizes that changing the way she looks might not change her values of love in marriage but it will bring her husband to a self-evaluation about marriage as a commitment. Her changing her appearance also establishes a different value system in marriage in regards to sexuality as an aesthetic and as a political power play. Silent films reveal how women negotiated new roles of independence. At times the actress appears to be acting for others as well as for herself. Her movements seem

experimental either in a humorous romantic way or in movements that encourage a new strangeness of appearance and being. Her facial expressions in the brief close ups tell a very clear story of emotional newness.

In many films the roles of women seem to depend upon a dream or ideal according to the story line. Women whose behaviors or lifestyles do not accommodate old traditional roles seem to be in some sort of trouble. In *It*, Bow struggles to find the right approach to the man who will lead her into a new luxurious life. Her sexuality is naïve yet sexy and powerful in the ways she seduces him to pay attention to her. In this process of discovery on new grounds the actress on the screen provides for the woman viewer a dream that might become possibility. Historian Wendy Holliday discusses how the modern woman did not have a sense of individuality: "They struggled with the very real issues of careers, marriage, children and sexuality in their everyday lives" (214). We also know that the modern woman of the silent film era was no longer under the guidance and support of the old Victorian system of "the self as unified and whole" and that "it came under scrutiny" during the modern movement (Holliday 121). Women's roles in silent films presented different motives and priorities as well as individual ways of finding pleasures in love and marriage.

The modern woman of silent films knows that there are changes in her destination but seems uncertain of them. In these silent films, the modern woman is one whose appearance influences other women not so much by her accomplishments in life but by her characteristics that are beginning to show in physical ways. Wendy Holiday writes, "The visual representation of the modern woman literally gave women new ways to picture themselves" (343). In the least, silent films created a new social sphere where women could be together while new ideas were being presented. It is safe to say that the modern woman was trying to establish a new identity while

also trying to deny the examples of earlier women. Ann Douglass argues that the modern woman "had something to gain from the demise of the Victorian matriarch" (7). The new women of the teens and 20s were focused on the demolition of the past as much as they were in the creation of the new. When we look at film in these terms we can then conclude that the new roles silent films created for women reflect on the old roles so they can replace them with new in their existence. The new woman does dress differently, and by doing so she not only demands a different kind of life in marriage, but she also proposes a new exaggerated existence for the women whose roles were shaped by Victorian standards. Douglas also argues that the Victorian matriarch was "scapegoated by her descendants and its demolition in the early twentieth century constituted nothing but a crisis in a firmly patriarchal or male-dominated culture" (7). These changes were bound to happen due to the industrial changes that urbanized women's experience and created different identities for the modern world.

The urban world of public events in cities seemed to bring women to new expectations of themselves. The idea of city life becomes the catalyst of composition between women's sexual roles; the women are sometimes imitators of a new lifestyle and creators of fashion. They show that they can accomplish much more by the way they use their talents to become consumers and lovers at the same token. In *Fabrications*, Jane Gaines argues that by 1927, "histories of the movie palace reveal some of the ways in which consumerist social philosophy in urban America coincided with the building of a motion picture audience" and that "men were not only realizing that women must have pretty things, they were telling them they must" (122). Women's presence on screen and in theaters created a public display of new feminine pleasure found in material things. Gaines adds, "It is stressed by 1927 that the importance of women as the primary motivators of film attendance and argued that both the appeal of the film and the allure of the

theater must be geared to pleasing women's sensibilities" (124). So when we see Gloria Swanson or Clara Bow on screen, are we to think of them as promotional deities of a materialistic industrial urban world, or are we to see them as unique individuals who inspire others to join the fantasies they create for the audience? I guess a bit of both and more is happening as actresses portray possibilities for the future.

Finally, my concluding chapter will reflect on how the basis of my thesis has been developed in connecting these three actresses in ways not done before. I will examine how the way I follow the biographies and the cultural and political climates of the time they were popular in connect their artistic presentations of their personas on film as an amalgam of their true personalities and styles. This chapter will conclude the project as it reinforces the thesis by proposing specific questions about silent film that still need to be examined such as the cultural and social economic needs of the times and the process through which particular modes of behavior were promoted or challenged. Looking at the beginning of a specific period and making connections to the lives of the women who acted new parts brings to light the possibility of other ways of looking at silent films as a form of art that really did influence life more than recreate it. The discussion here will lead the reader to agree that the private lives of actresses were vital to the ways they behaved on the screen and look at the ways in which they were portrayed as illusions of themselves. Then the questions might arise of how we connect theory and history and private lives together to understand better how women's lives are not to be treated as a singular identity in order to determine a theoretical approach.

Silent films did not allow women or men spoken language with which to transmit masculinity or femininity in their roles. Instead, actors had to employ a spectrum of actions through body movement and eye contact to lead the audience to a place of comfort or discomfort

with their object of desire on screen. In silent films women used all the silent communicating signs available to the world of film. Many would argue that silent films became a psychological dream world filled with the symbolic practices of one's wishes or nightmares but silent film in its power connects to audiences through images based in reality, including the lives of the performers that influence those who receive them. This dissertation will move towards understanding that process by examining the lives and careers of Alla Nazimova, Gloria Swanson, and Clara Bow.

CHAPTER 2

FEMININE SEXUAL PERFORMANCES: ALLA NAZIMOVA'S INTRODUCTION OF QUEER SEXUALITY IN *THE RED LANTERN* (1919): *CAMILE* (1921): AND *SALOME* (1923)

Before Alla Nazimova became the most popular actress in Hollywood, known as Madame Nazimova, she had already lived a life that was to destine her to stardom. Her life as a young girl living in Yalta, and later on as a young woman studying in Odessa, is written by her as if she were designing the making of a character in a play. Even though her autobiography was not completed, her biographer, Gavin Lambert, follows her motivations as moments of realization of the ability to act as if the art had haunted her. Later on Nazimova said that the creation of Nazimova the star had always stayed in the shadows behind her waiting to come into light. The act of consciously making herself a star is in many ways the sentiment of a modern woman reaching to redefine herself and create a world where all challenges may be conquered and acted upon.

By the time Nazimova came to America, she was already a popular theater performer. Coming to America established for her a way of becoming liberated from marriage, heritage and a culture that according to her treated women as prostitutes in marriage. Her decision to stay in America and not return back to Russia is the beginning of what Wendy Holiday calls the Modern Woman who can be “career-oriented, physically attractive and independent” (54). The theater culture in New York City established autonomy for Nazimova where she could live a life fulfilled with artistic expression and financial independence. By pursuing this life style she joins the many women who within the theater world “nurtured career ambitions, and shaped personal identities” (57). In her early years in New York City while performing in theaters, she was

“earning a considerable amount of money for the first time in her life; she was feeling her power as a star, and beginning to live like one as well” (Lambert 142). Her early roles of Hedda Gabler and Nora in *A Doll’s House* gave her popularity, but Nazimova was not sure that she wanted to be like the women she played. Lambert writes, “Although an emblem of the Modern Woman onstage, and proud of it, she was not completely sure she wanted to play the same role in life” (143). The act of consciously making herself a star was in many ways the sentiment of a modern woman reaching to redefine herself and create a world where all challenges may be confronted. Richard Dyer argues that the early theater actors “promoted themselves as well as the characters they played in the process” (91). Nazimova’s life was double in many ways. She promoted the roles of the characters she played while at the same time promoting herself as an actress. But her private self and the public one were separated through different desires and many social restrictions. Her bisexuality and her Jewishness forced her to take control by hiding in marriage and in denial of a past. Her secrets established a persona that was mysterious and became the force in constructing distinct individuality in her acting.

Drawing from theories of stardom by Richard Dyer on how stars function in films and how an image of a star is made, and the biography by Gavin Lambert, we can look at Nazimova’s role choices and artistic development in her films to identify performances that signify relationships between her own personal life and the adoption of the modern woman as an image of power. Across these connections, theory of the “queer gender” by Patricia White and Judith Butler will articulate Nazimova’s complicated performative roles that display resistance to the existing norms and “articulates the female both as subject and as object” (Bean and Negra 17). Marriage and love become dominant forces in how the characters Nazimova portrays deal with and control the outcomes of their own lives as they challenge restrictive gender ideologies.

By the time Nazimova came to Hollywood, she was already a popular theater performer and had performed in New York City, travelled throughout the United States, and established a first real home in upstate New York, which she called Who-Torok, Little Farm, in Russian, planning to never return to Russia. Early on in her career in America, she was settling into the New York area of most of her theater performances and early films. Most early silent films were produced in New York until the 1920s where according to Holliday, “In the first years of moving pictures New York and Chicago were the nation’s film centers [...] because of their access to theater actors and directors” (30). Many companies would move to warm climates in winters and then back to the cities. Low production costs, better climate, large tracks of land and inexpensive bungalow housing, outdoor shooting without restrictions, in Southern California made it the best location for many companies. “By 1915 ‘Hollywood’ was born,” according to Holliday.

Early Hollywood filled many positions from widely separated social classes: “major producers, directors, writers and stars came from elite and humble backgrounds” (Holliday 35). While few had an artistic cultural background or education, Nazimova was professionally trained in theater acting and was a classical violinist. Her training prepared her for the glory she would later accomplish as a star. By 1918 Nazimova decided that she had had enough of the New York cold weather and travelling, so she bought a home in California which was referred to as the *8080 Club* and which she called *The Garden of Allah*: a place where many celebrities of the time gathered to celebrate without prohibitions on sexual expression. In Hollywood, Nazimova was able to celebrate her wealth and fame by keeping company and entertaining “gatherings of gay subculture of ‘sophisticates’ that was expanding rapidly in Hollywood” (Mann 20). Nazimova in many ways brings to Hollywood the “New York theater drenched in gay culture ... whether all the stories about gays were true or not didn’t matter. The perception of truth was all that

mattered” (Mann 30). Mann analyzes the impact that Nazimova’s bold and eccentric vogue had in Hollywood circles. She was the first to define the publicity and film image of actors as players of their own lives.

Looking at Nazimova’s personal life, career, and criticism, it is safe to conclude that her popularity remains in the past because her acting style and the way she lived her life fall into a different time. The women Nazimova portrays in her roles fulfill many of the modern desires of love but are within traditional settings and circumstances. Nazimova was not a type nor was she constructed by Hollywood. She had the ability to be authentic in her own movements and remain true to the characters she played which were always controlled by Nazimova the star. It is said about Nazimova’s acting that if there was an emotion we did not know her face would introduce it to us. When Nazimova is in character, she uses every part of her body as a vehicle to a different experience. Her movements are subtle but in command by an interior motive as she moves her body but deliberately, her face turns and twists in different emotions within a canvas of possibility—her eyes, lips, hair, hands, feet, and body movements are conducted by an energy that even to the current viewer seems new and foreign. The exotic elements of beauty and the foreign portrayal of beauty were embraced by many artists of the time and so it became very popular in film and design. Orientalism became a trend in imitating styles of dress and décor essential to mysterious atmospheres. But most importantly, Nazimova’s ability to absorb herself in the character left viewers with a new sensation of acting: the Nazimova experience.

Nazimova’s roles define sexuality and desire, love and loss, in ways that depict an artistic air in the way she communicates meaning. Other than Theda Bara, and other vamps like Louise Glaum and Valeska Suratt, her contemporaries, who many found boring outside the screen, “Nazimova represented a new, hipper, more sophisticated view of sex” (Mann 60). Nazimova

was the first diva of lesbian attitude and love on the screen. Mann argues that even though her sexuality was not always directed toward women on the screen, “her lesbian passion breaks rules, defies tradition, reverses gender roles, and challenges assumptions, even though it’s ostensibly directed at a man” (60). Evidence of such passion is in all three films that I examine in this study: *The Red Lantern*, *Camille*, and *Salome*. In order to examine Nazimova’s films we must contextualize this idea of “new passion” on screen. We need to look at the introduction to what we now can call “queer.” If lesbianism is a specific passion intended from woman to woman then queer here is a passion intended as an action without restrictions of gender. Nazimova introduces passion in film movements that are recognized as queer, especially in the three films examined here. Her attitude toward desire is constructed within a queer feminine space. The screen then becomes a place of opportunity for the actress to demonstrate how desire and pleasure can be endangered by other established social dominant forces that she must combat and destabilize by passion, either through death or by deviance, in order to prove that the established order is problematic.

Her talent seems to have been born through a need for survival. Her early life of abuse and torment by her father instills in her the need for escape. Through her biography we can envision a girl whose family life was surrounded by competition for love and acceptance by their father, Yakov. Her home life was as turbulent as the political Russian system of her time. After her father forced their mother to exile from her marriage and children, Nazimova found herself in emotional neglect and pain. Her father’s love for her elder sister Nina remained one of the most dramatic emotional factors for the rest of her life. She would often get beatings by her father who repeatedly called her ugly and stupid. In her biography she remembers the moment she discovered the other child within her that needed her sympathy when she was thrown out of her

house and walked for hours until she knocked on her friend's door for warmth. She looked at her image in the glass and realized the power of facial expression. There, she writes, in the reflective glass she found herself face to face with herself. "And as Alla began to cry, still looking her reflection straight in the eye, she took a step back. 'If you must go on crying, don't screw up your face, it looks awful!'" she advised herself. Nazimova comments on this experience as the moment when she realized that this is what she did in every violin concert in school. "What I did at that glass door was the same as what I did at every Christmas concert when I stopped thinking of myself. This girl was the same girl I called Nazimova, the girl who played the violin. She was not I" (Lambert, 59). In this way, the woman born Mariam Edez Adelaida Leventon became Nazimova. Her disassociation from her original identity brought her to the truth of her acting.

Nazimova discovered the mystery and the art of acting unexpectedly at a moment of despair. She distanced herself from her own pain and became a critic of her own expressions. Lambert tells us that she first experienced the distance from her real life after a violin concert as a young girl. For her first violin performance, she was given a different name by her teacher, Adelaida Nazimova. The performance was such a success that many people came backstage to give her flowers and candy. For the first time in her life she felt loved. But her father equated acting and wanting glory with prostitution, so when they went home he beat her. Later on in her teens, Nazimova saw her step mother, and mother, go through horrible ordeals in their marriage to her father and decided that "marriage was no less risky than prostitution" (54). Her own teenage life was affected by men's desire of her and her need to become financially independent became a purpose. Her past of "selling herself" established for her the notion that relationships with men were business arrangements. While a teenager in the Moscow Art Theater she ran out of money for food and shelter. What she refers to as "incidents" in her biography were sexual

exchanges with older men. In examining some of her roles, we can see that Nazimova's take on marriage is one of questioning. In the three films that I have chosen here marriage is not an option for the women she plays. Other factors seem to be more prevalent. As I will explain later, there is no marriage in any of the films discussed but the question of marriage is in the air as the main characters have to face the ultimate choice of betrayal in all situations. Mahlee, in *The Red Lantern*, faces the truth about western discrimination against her Chinese culture; Marguerite, in *Camille*, must leave her lover because he is from a different class; and Salome, in *Salome*, reacts to the king's desire to see her dance. For their inability to escape men's control, the main characters she plays become fallen women and designers of their own destiny. The choice of the fall is established in a queer place of existence, a space that lies between the accepted order of things, with assigned values and meaning, to a new place Nazimova herself must create through her acting.

While in Yalta, Nazimova joined a theater group and acted in minor parts in Chekov plays. She studied under Vladimir Nemirovich who trained his students to "replace the external tricks of personality acting with 'inner movement' and 'emotional merging with the playwright.'" And even though his discipline technique made Nazimova feel uneasy, she found the women in Henrik Ibsen plays full with a modern complexity (Lambert 69). Nazimova found her first experience of Nora, the main character in *A Doll's House*, overwhelming. Nora makes decisions that modern women can associate with but find difficult to carry out. Nazimova found that the heroines who fell hopelessly in love seemed trivial in comparison: "Nora walking out on her marriage and determined to live a free, independent life, left Alla with a great deal on her mind" (Lambert, 70).

Nazimova's perception of marriage had been troubled throughout her life as a young woman. This is evident in her situation of her pretend marriage to Charles Bryant while building her career and still married to the Russian Sergei Golovin. Her theater performances of Hedda Gabler and Nora helped her become a socialite of Broadway. Hedda, the main character in the play, is also a woman who can manipulate events, make choices, and abandon a boring life, even through death. Nazimova finds out that she preferred Henrik Ibsen's women to Anton Chekov's because she found their choices complicated. In these roles she found the new woman who would express personal desires. Her theater performances allowed her to act out transcendence between physical limitations and emotional traumas or oppressions. She preferred roles of women who demonstrate that the modern woman can make decisions that alter men's lives at the end and that their lives are not destined to fulfill only the goals of their husbands or fathers.

So what is the attraction to her audience? What makes Nazimova so popular? In order to answer these questions we will look at the audience that she attracted and what they expected in the dramatization of the feminine in her own style. Silent films were an accessible medium for all types of women to either relate to or criticize popular female images. They helped women examine the silences within their own private worlds and connect to each other through shared experiences. Many believed that "the cinema teaches life" and that it provides for the spectator "direct relations with the events, beings, ideas and objects and the whole world" and that many times the idealism it provides for the viewer might imply that this is the real world (Lant and Periz 263). Art was also part of the front discussion as critics were estimating the functions of art as a universal connector which could not be denied about film. The visual education, creativity, and entertainment of film provided a diversion of film and art. The history of the emergence of a Hollywood censorship code from the early 1920s onwards was on one level, a

response to the public, and women's groups' discontent. Furthermore, "It was also first and foremost, the industry's attempt to set down what was likely to be banned or to provoke actions from state censorship boards" (Lant and Periz 269). But by the early 1920s Nazimova was able to produce her own films and had full control of her productions and artistic direction.

Nazimova arrived in New York in 1905 with a theater group; she did not enter the screen until 1915. During this decade she became the most popular theater performer in America. By the time Nazimova entered the movies in 1915, she already had enough money and success to film her own expressions without much reservation. William Mann distinguishes her as one who knew how to live and act gay, not only in activity but in style. Her life reflects the conflicts of the immigrant success as well as the new world of women who found in films and the film industry ways of living that were not available before. Nazimova learned to be her own critic at a time when the film industry was still being developed and established. Many would argue that Nazimova brought to Hollywood what class the theater actors possessed through years of experience. She joined other powerful artists in Hollywood who also believed that film was an important new art form.

Nazimova seems to be an exception in early Hollywood in the way she lived her life and the way she worked. Her first film role in *War Brides* (1916), a film that is lost, might have put an imprint on how Nazimova was to handle her life and career in Hollywood. Joan, the character she plays in the film, refuses to remarry and organizes the women of the village to revolt against the new rule of reproduction to create new soldiers. Still shots from the film acknowledge that Nazimova the film actress was born and that her destiny was to create an art of the new medium. She was also to introduce to film the queer aesthetic that even to today's audiences seems eloquent and passionate. A still shot shows Nazimova and Nila Mae, one of the other women in

town who also lost her husband in war. She cries to Nazimova about the loss of her dream of having a child with the man she loved. Nazimova holds Nila's face in her hands and leans close to her as if to give her a kiss. The hold is passionate and caring. It is sensual in the way Nazimova closes her eyes and shares a passionate moment of a lost dream with Nila. The passion is directed toward Nila while the expression of desire is directed to the touch as a gendered moment in the film; the emotion is directed toward the same sex, which separates it from traditional cultural practices. Judith Butler clarifies that

the unthinkable is [...] fully within culture, but fully excluded from dominant culture.

The theory which presumes bisexuality or homosexuality [...], effectively forbids from within terms of the culture the very subversion that it ambivalently defends and defends against [...] it becomes a futile gesture, entertained only in a de-realized aesthetic mode which can never be translated into other cultural practices. (104-105)

An examination of such queerness of aesthetic mode and its futile outcomes will be made in the three films I have chosen for discussion here: *The Red Lantern* (1919), *Camille* (1921) and *Salome* (1923). The queer aesthetic does not survive within the accepted "cultural practices" because in order to do so it must be de-realized according to Butler. In other words, a queer gesture in all three films is seen as a subversion of the socially accepted and then it must "die" in the film. Even though, Butler is not applying this theory to film, we can easily see the transformation of the women in the films discussed here as opportunities to examine the birth and death of the queer within particular scenes.

Nazimova's characters die in all three films. The death is not a symptom of the choices she makes in relationships; instead, it appears as a deliberate act of defiance. In closer look of the narrative of the films, the characters are ready for any result of that defiance. The situations are

dire and so the women move to a change in the events that might lead to progress after their death, making the death the most necessary. There were futile relationships in all three films. Looking at how relationships evolve we can make connections between the ways the main characters, Mahlee, Marguerite, and Salome behave toward their circumstances. All three films present a father as the negative catalyst for change. The response from the main characters in the film is to address the father's wants, either through denial or rejection. The abandonment of what the father wants leads the women to their freedom in death. Death symbolizes in many ways the elimination of desire and control over heteronormative obstacles.

We must first look at the ways Nazimova portrays the modern woman in these films in relation to the definitions given to the modern woman at the time. Paradoxically, Nazimova's modern woman is not one. She has difficult situations and plays roles that are controversial not only by the ways that the movie portrays the past but also in the ways that Nazimova plays the role. Mahlee, in *The Red Lantern*, even though it is set in China in 1901, represents the complexities of a woman who follows her own sense of justice. *Camille* is perhaps the most modern of the three in the sense that Marguerite is a popular socialite and probably the one that resembles Nazimova herself the most. And *Salome*, the oldest story of them all is perhaps the most modern in dress and behavior. Nazimova's performance in this film was said to bring the cinema to its artistic height. *Motion Picture World* described *Salome* as "One of the more artistic screen portrayals along the line of what is popularly termed 'high art'" (White 77). And even though *Salome* was not a well-received film, it is still the most discussed and analyzed of hers.

Nazimova was perhaps one of the first true stars in Hollywood. She came already successful through a different art medium. Well known for her performances in Ibsen roles she took the same authoritative attitude to her films. Known for her styles and class she presented an

image of the modern woman in control of her career. Making 13,000 dollars a week, in 1918, she could have anything she wanted: “Metro also gave her the right to approve director, script—and leading man” (Lambert 190). Yet somehow, financial independence was not enough for her to maintain an image that was acceptable; so she created a façade of love and marriage for the world to see while her true passion in relationships was not always acknowledged. Her relationships were always complicated by others’ needs and demands on her. The most complicated seems to be the one with her sister Nina. Nazimova supported her sister and her children entirely. Many times in her biography we get the sense that Nazimova felt very alone in her art and in her heart. By 1926, she had returned to theater for financial reasons. Her expenses were too high, roles in films were not easy to come by, and many of the plays she wanted to perform in were not materializing. She worked too much when she could and she was disappointed when she could not. In her diary she notes, “[I was] so tired of troubles that I was longing to retire from work altogether” (Lambert 288).

What remains interesting in Nazimova’s life is her need to establish a heteronormative façade in order for her to please childhood wishes. Early on in her life she was introduced to men in control who not only bulldozed through her own dreams but who also exiled her mother from her. Her father and brother became forces of resistance against her wishes for independence and artistic expression. She did not see her mother until many years after her father sent her away. Nazimova was in her teens when she and her brother decided to look for their mother and did find her. When their mother opened the door, she asked them to leave and never come back because she now had a new life with a new husband. When they walked away Nazimova describes in her biography, “There were many tears when we parted, but I think they were tears called upon by the disappointment rather than anything else [...]. We were all trying to create a

relationship which perhaps never existed” (Lambert 65). By that time Nazimova had discovered that even if relationships were not real she could bring them to life by acting out her own emotions, and most importantly, she could change the past by replacing it with something new.

By the early 1920s the “Marriage Question” had become evident in Hollywood. Many bachelors and single women working in the industry were gay. These gays of early Hollywood were “not just tolerated, they were actually integrated into the very structure of the burgeoning studio system” but while doing so they also “aspired to a certain social respectability” while “attempting to recreate middle class values and ideals” (Mann 21). By that time Nazimova was already married in appearance to Charles Bryant. Nazimova tried to validate her marriage to her sister Nina who had become in her life a burden of the past. She only confided to Nina but many times in her biography and letters she seems to believe her own lies, especially about Bryant. Biographer Gavin Lambert wrote, “It seems obvious that at first Bryant satisfied her fantasy of a husband who would protect her, and although he disappointed her sexually, he made up for it by being thoughtful and affectionate” (167). He became her manager and controlled most of her business decisions. He later took the role of her director, especially in *Salome*, even though everyone involved in the film knew that the project was under her total control: “Bryant is credited with the film’s direction, he appears to have been in in name only, the star clearly had full authority on her independent productions” (White 65).

Nazimova’s relationships with men and women remain as part of Hollywood during its infancy where women felt free to express themselves artistically and emotionally. Nazimova had the prestige and the money to embrace the new and what she considered the future of style and art. Many have argued that the more she followed that train of thought, the more eccentric her staging and acting became, and the more she alienated her viewers, except the ones who saw her

as the goddess of high art in film. Her first film role of Joan in *War Brides* (1916) is one that reflects on Nazimova's political views on women and war. "Those women who don't believe in suffrage, they are not awake yet that's all," she told the *Brooklyn Eagle*. She saw her roles as a feminist even though she did not declare herself attached to any organized causes. Her roles in *War Brides* (which we can only read about), and her roles in *The Red Lantern*, are connected to rebellion. Both of these roles connect Nazimova to women whose past is motivated by a loss of love and social injustice. In reference to the modern woman her comment that "[s]he has real work to do and she has found it out, and is not going to give it up" might also reflect on Nazimova's attitude about the work she had to do in her films (Lambert 174).

Nazimova's acting is one of fantasy and reality combined, such as were her real relationships. She is as delicate as she is decadent in her roles. She saw her purpose and success in her acting only if she could "make her audience think," yet she claimed that she was destined to live by emotion. If we combine these two approaches to her art, we can see that Nazimova wanted her audience to think about the emotions that she displays on film. And as Nazimova wanted to play the modern woman with unexpected choices, even though many times they could be considered tragic choices, she did not see her roles as win or lose events, only the way she portrayed the roles could be interpreted as either. Her portrayal of her characters in *The Red Lantern*, *Camille*, and *Salome* are connected to a struggle created by the father. He is the main figure who establishes a destiny that can only be overcome through death. Her challenges as an actress had to be clear to her when in her own life her father was the one who tried to control her desire to act. In *The Red Lantern*, her biological father tests the depths of other cultures and tampers with tradition and Mahlee is the outcome of his own sexual deviance. In *Camille*, Ahmad's father sets the rules and controls his son's destiny by asking Marguerite to leave his son

alone. In *Salome*, the father again, the king whose desire of Salome cannot be controlled and tempts her to provide a dance while promising a gift of any kind but underestimates her power to choose beyond his expectations. In many ways, all three films assume that duty designed by anyone other than the woman herself becomes a deadly set up that the woman can only escape through her death.

Some critics have argued that Nazimova abandons realist acting to “act with feeling” in film and becomes more esoteric in the ways thoughts and emotions are motivators of unexpected outcomes in reaction to events. This approach was new, and technically not in total communication with the feelings of the audience. Apparently she was more artistic on stage and left emotions and actions to be interpreted by the audience. Specifically in her performance in *Salome*, her critics argued that this alienated her from her audience and her popularity cooled down because of it.

Narrative of *The Red Lantern*

When we look at her performances and the narratives in *The Red Lantern*, *Camille*, and *Salome*, we can develop a great sense of her artistic abilities. *The Red Lantern* was considered lost until 1996. Therefore much less has been written about the film. My analysis is centered on Orientalism and the portrayal of the yellow face connected to fantasies of stereotypes. By the time Nazimova made this film, she had already created a film persona. She had made six other films before this one and her relationship to her new way of acting was already popular.

The Red Lantern premiered at the Rivoli Theater in New York City on May 4th, 1919. The photoplay was such a box office success that the theater played a “returned engagement” for the first time on Broadway. The Rivoli signed the agreement without having seen the photoplay first. They booked the film without viewing the production convinced of its success because of

Madame Nazimova's name. Nazimova plays two roles, one of Mahlee and one of Blanche, her white half-sister. Her identity is transformed many times as she enters more and more into the world of fantasy. By the end of the film she is the imaginary Goddess who holds the truth about her own people and herself. Her actions confirm her father's inability to control his own desires and so she holds him accountable. The ending of the film confirms the invasion of the West into China. Mahlee through her Goddess's persona controls the imagination of the people as well as their heritage but the audience is left to think of the rebellious Chinese Boxers as the forces disturbing of peace and not as the ones who try to claim their own culture. The film does not point out the racism of the Western world but it does bring to question the dilemma of Mahlee's condition in a world she did not choose and the denial of her own biological father's force on her mother and his denouncement of her as his child.

The Red Lantern begins in a humble town in China. Mahlee is a young woman who lives with her grandmother. While shopping at the street market her grandmother (Margaret McWade) falls ill and Mahlee returns home to find her dying. The grandmother's wish is that Mahlee cut her feet to favor the spirits so they can take her soul to reach Nirvana. Mahlee, totally tormented, begins to cut her foot but faints at the process. She is saved from the act by her own fainting. This becomes symbolic as she is taken to the doctor, Sam Wang (Noah Beery) who works for the Templetons (Winter Hall, Amy Van Ness), a white family of missionaries in China. Sam is westernized as he has received western education and enters their home with comfort and acceptance. Mahlee's appeal to Andrew (Darrell Foss), who is the Templetons' single son, is evident when she takes care of him later on in the film when he is injured in the middle of a Boxer outbreak. Her ability to take care of his physical needs empowers her to feel closer to him

as she knew too well how physical constraints become emotional. After all, she had entered his life through her own injury. Andrew is the one who brings her to his house when she has passed out after her attempt to cut her own feet. This is where she meets Sam, who takes care of her.

Sam has many similarities to Mahlee. He is also a child of violation between his mother and a white man. But his connections are very powerful between himself and the Boxers. He has a plan because he has taken a side with the Chinese culture; he has chosen to be one and not the other. Sam's approach is also of a sexual nature. Mahlee does not trust him in the beginning. He tells her of how similar they are, educated by the Templetons, yet they would never be accepted in the white Westerners' social circle. They are both half white, children of violated morals who have found a subordinate place in the world they live in. They can get an education and surround themselves with the Western traditions and religion, but they will always be seen as Chinese and inferior. Sam has been more corrupted and educated in the world of whites and can show her the way to rebellion. After the maid who was present at the exchange between her grandmother and her father, Sir Philip Sackville (Frank Currier), comes to visit Mahlee and tells her the truth, she decides to go find him. During the revolution Mahlee goes her father hoping to find acceptance; instead, she takes up revenge through recognition of his negligence and violation of his own code of contact through miscegenation. When Sackville dismisses her, she goes back to the Boxers. She meets the empress of China who accepts her as "The Goddess of the Red Lantern." The empress worships her, bows to her, and hopes that her magical, godly powers will save China. At the end, after the failure of the revolution, the empress also calls her a false goddess.

When Blanche, Mahlee's half-sister, Andrew, and Sir Sackville go to find Mahlee they see her at the moment when poison is taking her life. She is sitting in the throne of the goddess, knowing the revolution has failed. After holding Sam as he died, she drank the poison he offered

her. This secures her death on her own accord without being captured by the westerners who would kill her. There is no regret in her eyes, as she is destined to be freed through her death. But Mahlee does not die as a martyr to the Christian cause of missionaries, or as a soldier: nor does she die in rebellion to her own destiny of interracial blood. By killing herself she also kills the part of her she could not accept, the Western, the race that would not accept her as an equal. Because she could not accept herself as either race and cannot confine herself to the assigned domains of existing social formations, she creates a place of the imaginary world of goddesses, a queer place that falls in between. But in that space she cannot survive; having knowledge of both is impossible, so she must die. Her death in this way becomes a cleansing of both through the death of the physical world. It is at that moment of her death that she no longer represents a race. She, without race, is a goddess. That is the moment that Andrew kisses her hand.

Nazimova's Performance

The first scene situates Mahlee in a public space where she is shopping for groceries but her attention takes her to beautiful flowers for sale. The aesthetics of the flower smelling in what appears to be a crowded place seems awkward and odd. Mahlee handles the flower with a gentle touch and brings it closer to her face to smell when she is yelled at by the shop keeper. This act lets the audience see that even though Mahlee appears to be Chinese her behaviors are not welcomed by the Chinese shop owner. The element that stands out the most is in her own body. Her feet are too big for her Chinese body and a spectacle for Chinese culture. She steps on a rock and hurts the bottom of her foot as she sits down and sees that she has a hole at the bottom of her shoe. She takes it off and walks to a shoe maker. At that moment people notice her big feet and make fun of her. In this scene we see Mahlee innocent of the Chinese culture as we will see later she had been innocent to the corruption of both. But her body confounds the perceptions of

others, an enigma she will powerfully employ later in the film. Later when she is in the Templetons' garden with Andrew, she lets her hair down and puts flowers in it. But he notices her yellow hands. Her body once again betrays her imaginary perception of herself as beautiful, or at least, Andrew's ability to see her that way. She becomes once again conscious of how others see her. She loses her innocence through others' corruption.

When Andrew returned from the Boxer attack with a head injury, Nazimova appears totally Chinese, loses the mannerisms and control of the West and cries with sadness of the world around her. She lowers her eyes and twitches to the side when she is seen by Andrew's mother. When Mrs. Templeton sees how upset Mahlee is with the news that Andrew was in an attack by the Boxers, her response is "I'm afraid Mahlee cares for Andrew" and becomes sad and frightened. This kind of interest of care fulfills the structure of race and culture between the European Americans and the Chinese. Mrs. Templeton confronts Mahlee and tells her that even if Andrew wanted to marry Mahlee she would never approve of it. It is this idea that the West cannot meet the East and be one that reinforces Mahlee's decision in joining the revolution.

Film produces signifiers of real or fantastic exchanges within the psychological realm of the audience, giving space for the subconscious as we do in dreams. The real events referred to in the film represent the roles of men and women that are already in play within patriarchal rules. In *The Red Lantern* we have to look at the prejudices of the world of fiction as well as history when it comes to Orientalism, a term first described by Edward Said:

Orientalism is a style of thought based upon ontological and epistemological distinction made between "the Orient" and (most of the time) "the Occident." Thus a very large mass of writers, among whom are poets, novelists, philosophers, political theorists, economists, and imperial administrators, have accepted the basic distinction between East and West

as the starting point for elaborate accounts concerning the Orient, its people, customs, "mind," destiny, and so on. [. . .] the phenomenon of Orientalism as I study it here deals principally, not with a correspondence between Orientalism and Orient, but with the internal consistency of Orientalism and its ideas about the Orient [. . .] despite or beyond any correspondence, or lack thereof, with a "real" Orient. (1-3, 5)

The binary system of thought such as West and East confirms the idea of coexistence persistency. Said adds that you cannot separate power from an institution. For Said, the "institution is one of colonialism where individuality is not possible" (6). For Mahlee this realization is radical in the way she chooses to transform herself as a goddess. More than stylistically, Orientalism in the film is placed in a queer space where the exotic abandons the notions of ordinary and introduces desire and self-awareness in the space between the binary worlds.

Nazimova and screenwriter June Mathis were very aware of the fantasies of Orientalism as a starting point for a transformation of the feminine into the exotic as they had previously collaborated in *Eye for Eye* (1918). They continued to develop the popular notion of women's transformation of character through the dynamics of culturally different agency. *The Red Lantern* is based on a novel of the same title by Edith Wherry, set during the Boxer rebellion. The extravagance and spectacle of the film was a great advertisement. Of course Nazimova's name was one of the great attractions but so was the attempt from the theaters to create a simulated experience of the East. In some theaters, "the ticket booths were designed to look like Chinese pagodas, tea was served and there was incense burning in the waiting halls" (Cinematek). But the real experience was the conflict found in corrupt love that cannot be corrected. The film does not fulfill the requirements of a romance story because it changes purpose as the romance is deadly

and perpetuated by the actions of the Westerners. The attempt to integrate emotional passion with political activity is perhaps the strong connection between Nazimova's and Mathis' ability to make clear connections with the struggles of their own time. They were well aware of the gender roles that women had been forced to play in American society. The popular attitude towards Eastern peoples and cultures as the "other" in the attraction between Mahlee and Andrew correlates with women's status in the West and provides a place for criticizing patriarchy.

Mahlee's deformity separates her from the crowd. This deformity which is Western in nature and biological in Mahlee causes the dynamic of exposure on which she will later capitalize as the goddess. Without a real place in world, the Chinese or the Western, Mahlee succumbs to her awkward feet. Because her feet are not cut and bonded because of her biological father's demand, they allow her into the world of the "superior" race to become Christian and to later teach Buddhist children the new religion. It is the body and its importance that we first notice in this film as we follow Mahlee's struggle to try to do what is morally right for her people. Through the fantastic fiction of the goddess, she elevates herself from both worlds that she had known and lived in. As Mahlee embodies the goddess created in Sam's imagination, she cannot last. She must be destroyed as her powers are limited. This begs the question of whether a goddess is a sexual or a spiritual being as her position in the film as the superior being presents a disturbance to the social order. Her femininity as power is hidden through the emotional crisis but her sexuality is seen as even more tempting as she is all knowing within a role of power. There is a complexity in that power as her actions are fueled by a resistance to the Western rules that limit her access to expression, leads to her spiritual Chinese inheritance, and helps elevate her above physical desire to reach Nirvana. The moment we se

Nazimova enter the film in her goddess costume with her eyes closed, sitting on the throne, just before she will commit suicide, we sense the end of the physical world and the continuation of spiritual. When she joins the Boxers through the conviction of Sam, she is becoming politically and socially involved in the injustices of the world around her, but the motivation of her acts is connected to her gender and her emotional state, her belief that Andrew would never see her as his equal, not only socially but racially, and rejects her just like her father did. Her desire for Andrew is in her perception of him as the same only to discover that he sees her as the “other.” This rejection confirms the idea that she must act. In relation to both cultures, Nazimova’s role as an actress is very important in the way she plays both Mahlee and Blanche, her pure white half-sister, Andrew’s future wife.

The fact that Nazimova herself contains the exotic by being an immigrant; she transforms and further complicates the message of racial biases of the film in establishing a cloudy, queer reality for the audience. The queer aesthetic for her audience is not only through her portrayal of a goddess that must be out of the ordinary cultural practice but Nazimova herself at those moments in the film becomes part of that queer aesthetic. She portrays two women of different upbringing; Blanche who is white, Mahlee, who is biracial, and the goddess that exists in a materialized imaginative. Nazimova as an immigrant without true access to such identities becomes the queer, exotic in the sense that she is the immigrant in America who can perform the queer because she is part of the queer. Her audience, now and then, feel the complexity of her performance and accept the queer as normal.

Later the Chinese people admire her power of appearance as a godly creature that does not share the same qualities with them. She is from a different world, the world of the imagination, the world of dreams, the world of creation. In that view, their view is similar to how

the Westerners treat her, one they imagine but do not know. Nazimova herself made the costumes for the film, so we can follow her vision for a spiritual being seen through garments. In that masquerade, the audience might suspect that she hides her true intentions which affirm the collapse of the feminine as real. From the moment that Mahlee becomes the imaginary Goddess, all possibility is gone for a romantic relationship with Andrew. The appeal of her dance as a Goddess confirms that impossibility. Her costume is provocative and seductive, her legs are covered in pearls and her mid-body exposed to seduce the citizens of rebellion and her film audience at once. She is the exotic “that confuses beauty and moral uncertainty” (Studlar). All three films chosen for discussion include dance. In *Lantern*, Mahlee dances as a goddess; in *Camille*, Camille dances for her quests; and in *Salome*, Salome dances for the court. Nazimova’s dramatic acting in all scenes exposes the female body as a vehicle to seduce and break the limits of objectification. In other words, the female body is an agent of force by creating seduction and controlling it.

By the time Nazimova had decided to film *Camille* and *Salome*, she had developed a very strong bond with screenwriter June Mathis. She had also begun a relationship with Natasha Rambova who was inspired by many European designers in modern design, specifically Aubrey Beardsley, who was part of the 1890’s Decadent Art. She had designed Nazimova’s bedroom in “The Garden of Alla” employing her stylistic preference for arches later evident in her set designs for *Camille* (Marguerite’s bed in the film is situated in an arch). The arches are symbolic of secret spaces, entrances to a different realm, just like Marguerite’s personality changes once she enters her apartment bedroom through the arched door. The arch entrance could also be symbolic of a feminine space that hides behind walls. In the casino it could also represent the entrance to the back stage of a theater, giving the sets multi dimensions of space and feeling.

Before the decision was made to produce and film *Camille*, the three women were working on a film called *Aphrodite*. The film never made it to production. Metro abruptly cancelled the production as Maxwell Karger, the producer for Metro, was shocked to “discover how perversely erotic and violent of a movie, Nazimova, Rambova and Mathis were planning, toning up everything in the novel that had been toned down for Broadway” (Lambert 237). These three women had different approaches to sexuality and saw its functions in different perspectives, but treated sexuality in film in similar ways. Mathis found sexual and erotic situations stimulating to write about and provided a lot of material for Rudolf Valentino in her script that did not make it to the screen. His exotic look was appropriate for the attraction and separation of their love in the plot. Nazimova claimed herself “sexually free because she recognized the importance of sex in her life, Rambova was sexually free because sex never mattered very much to her” (Lambert 236). Her marriage to Valentino later on is recorded in her diaries as one of business and not physical pleasure.

After Metro decided not to produce *Aphrodite*, the three women decided to bring the 1860s story of *Camille* to Paris in 1921. The style was to be modern and the emphasis was to show Marguerite’s sensuality. Valentino was not famous yet and upon the release of *The Four Horsemen*, Mathis suggested to Karger that he be cast for the role of Armand. Lambert suggests that by that time Nazimova and Rambova were interested in each other and saw Valentino as a “visual object.” Both women treated him as an objectified male whose masculine European look was to be treated with feminine finesse. They suggested he cut his hair, pluck his eyebrows, and lose weight for *Camille*. Lambert comments that Nazimova recreated the truth by fictionalizing the way Valentino’s success happened. She had commented that Valentino “was so good in *Camille* that he went from that picture into *Four Horsemen*” but Lambert emphasizes that “*Four*

Horseman was made first, and Valentino's eyebrows are not bushy enough for plucking and he does not look overweight" (Lambert 239). By the time *Camille* was released in September of 1921, *Four Horseman of the Apocalypse* had already been released in March and was gaining great attention. Nazimova was very careful on how to handle the production of her film. She had decided that Valentino would not appear in the final death scene so that he could not steal the emotion that Marguerite's death brings to the audience, nor tarnish the main star of the film, Nazimova herself. After all, this was her film, so she "exercised 'artistic control' in the editing room and snipped him out of Marguerite's death scene" (Lambert 247). Instead she chooses to have Nichette (Patsy Ruth Miller--Nazimova's protégé) as a bride next to her. Watching the film now, some might misunderstand that omission in the film as an editing glitch instead of a calculated, political direction designed by Nazimova to highlight a lesbian desire that is established in a queer feminine space.

Miller had said that they all called the director of *Camille*, "poor Mr. Smallwood because Nazimova gave him so many orders and he had to take them" (Lambert 245). Even though Nazimova hired Ray Smallwood as director she had full control of the filming of *Camille*. This was the last film that Nazimova made with Metro. After this she created her own company, Nazimova Productions. *Camille* satisfied her modern aesthetic and let her experiment with Rambova's artistic style. Her outfits are eccentric and her walk in the first scene is eloquent and controlled by feminine movements. She walks slowly, as we meet her in a public place, outside a theater, walking with a dress train following her, her hair is unruly and her eyes twist in connection to her smile.

Camille is perhaps the only true romance of the three films in this study as it is sexual desire that motivates all action. Even though Nazimova is not the only one to have performed this role, she is the one who modernized Dumas's the most. With Rambova's modern set design and Nazimova's extravagant appearance, the film becomes an "anti-realist" set up as a step toward new thought and expression. Even though Lambert says that Rambova's creativity for modern design falls short in the cottage where Armand's father goes to visit her, I think it is precisely designed to look old and passe because this is where the traditional values are discussed between him and Marguerite. The cottage is the style of realism that was common at the time and helps emphasize the modernism and city life of Paris as it contrasts in style with her apartment. It also emphasizes the binary lives and spaces she inhabits in country and city--the queer life is not contained by either.

Camille opened at the Ritz Carlton Theater in New York on September 12th, 1921. After the showing Nazimova entertained at the theater's reception room. When someone said to her that Camille's apartment did not look like a real home, she replied, "Women like Camille do not have real homes---they merely have places where they exist" (Lambert 248). Emphasizing the fictional existence of woman's passions and affairs, Nazimova stabilized the creativity in which she placed her persona during her films, in the queer space. The main character is complicated and many times not believable in her love for Armand. Her acting is one of pretense--we see her suffer the break up in the comfort of other women, her maid, and Nichette.

Lambert argues that *Camille* is a very unemotional movie: "The opening shot establishes a mood of artifice, as Nazimova makes her first entrance at the head of a stairway leading down to the lobby of a theater" (246). Perhaps it is an act we are witnessing that makes it appear so unemotional. Marguerite acts like she is amused by her company, holding Count de Varville's

arm, but we see later in the film that she really despises him and uses him for his money because he provides wine and food for all her followers who help her maintain the role of the fun hostess. As a socialite she feminizes her appearance and her space. Extremely thin she walks a ballerina, almost in a dance, a performance in a public place. But when in the apartment she enters her bedroom we can see her as a shadow through the transparent curtain. In her bedroom she changes her acting and falls into her cough and illness. The most emotional moment in the film is when her friend Nichette comes to visit her. As she would have done in real life, Nazimova sends Nichette away from the party. Patsy Ruth Miller had told the press that Nazimova did not allow anyone to curse or say nasty jokes when she was present. Miller was only sixteen and Nazimova knew that she was naïve and innocent.

We are told by Prudence, an older socialite who is invited to the party, the one who also invites Gason and Armand that evening to join her that Marguerite knew Nichette from the seamstress shop but we do not know how she is connected to this past. Is it a life she chose to leave behind? Is the audience to question the similarities between the women? In any case, Marguerite is so happy to see Nichette, she leans over and kisses her on the mouth with a distinctly erotic tenderness. Nichette (Miller) was unaware of the coming of the kiss and so responds with eager affection. The moment is sensual, kind, erotic and feminized in a new queer way for film appearance. Nazimova plays Marguerite who cannot open her heart to anyone but to another woman. Her whole role is to pretend in front of men and to entertain their desire for her. Later on in the film, she leaves Armand only when his father tells her that his daughter's fiancé would not marry her had her brother continued a relationship with a fallen woman.

The audience takes on a very important role as we can witness Marguerite suffer in hiding. The other guests are having fun in the apartment and no one really notices that she is not

feeling well. During dinner she drinks a toast to the Count, recites a poem, dances, and then has nothing left. In her bedroom her maid asks her to tell them to leave so she can call a doctor.

Marguerite's response is that no one cares if she lives or dies. She then kisses her maid's hand and when alone she looks in the mirror, stares at her image for a bit, like an actress waiting for the call to enter the stage. She gets up, shakes her head, moves forward and re-enters the main room as if in front of an audience once again. Her bedroom appears as a back stage seen through an arch with gauze curtain, Rambova's trademark. Armand falls in love with her immediately. He wants to follow her and convinces his friend Gaston to go to the party after Prudence tells them there is one. At the apartment Armand tries to get close to her. When he enters her bedroom we get the sense that it is not a private space. He opens up and tells her how much he loves her and she tells him to be like everyone else in the living room and not miss her presence. And then he says what Lambert calls a "Mathis-Nazimova intertitle": "I wish I were a servant—a dog--- that I might care for you." This comment is an example of the limitations of masculine imagination, designed to expose a sexually promiscuous woman's dark need of servitude. This is how their affair begins.

She tells Armand that "it is nothing! See how the others concern themselves?" when he tells her he should ask for the doctor. She tells him, "[Y]ou know who--what I am--go home!" She is certain of his love. The real attractions develop for Marguerite when they are in the country and he reads to her from the novel he gives her as a gift. Her imagination enters the story as the emotions of the film follow the fictional realities for Marguerite. While Armand reads the novel, *Manon Lescant*, by Giacomo Puccini, she envisions herself as the character, Manon, who has to leave town and her lover who gives up honor and country to follow her to the end of the world. The gender roles are changed in real life; it is Marguerite who has to leave honor and

country in order to allow her lover the freedom to be a part of his respectable life. She later has to be the one to leave her lover because her leaving him will help prevent harm to Armand and his sister. Armand's father tells Marguerite, "If you love him, you'll leave him." It is a command, not a request. She obeys, falls on her knees, and kisses his hand. Obedience for Marguerite is in order of hierarchy, the father comes before the son; his wishes are to be respected and followed as he demands what is good for his children according to social norms and not according to his son's desires. The father presented here does not have personal gain from separating the two lovers. His reasoning is that the past cannot be erased and Marguerite's past is following her even though she has left that life behind. The father asks in the name of love that she do the right thing as we see that love is not always kind. It will cause her real torment to return to a life of pretending to be in love with the Count. He has just sent her flowers and is waiting for her response to his overture. She is tormented between true love and the moral standards of the upper class that ban her from Armand's family because she is a threat to his sister's pending marriage.

Armand's father also emphasizes that Armand is about to hand over to her his mother's legacy of money and even though here is a mother and sister issue both father and son focus on Marguerite's decision to keep the structure of power and social respectability in place for them. She holds the power through passion and love to break the chain that keeps them in that order. The moment is one of patriarchal power and female sacrifice. This is the first heroic moment in the film as she will become the tragic heroine in her love tale. First Marguerite says she will not speak to Armand until after the wedding, but the father emphasizes that they should never be together again. She is distraught and confused. She looks at the flowers that the count has sent her and falls to the ground knowing she will have to go to Paris and join him. Before she does s

she writes a letter for Armand and gives it to the father. The way the truth is revealed in the film is in the letter which Armand will receive at the end of the film. Marguerite is already dying and he is too far away.

Armand continues his life without Marguerite, heartbroken from her rejection and abandonment. We see him playing at the casino with a new woman who holds on to him admiring his ability to win all night. Marguerite enters the casino through the center arch of Rambova's design. Three arches, a design almost similar to an Orthodox church, she enters into the light, three steps higher than the rest. In a theater manner entrance, holding on to the count, a "play thing" as she had called herself the night she met Armand, she has used the count for money and security until Armand embarrasses her in the public space. She sees Gaston and tells him, "we both have drifted back to the old life." He tells her that he will be marrying Nichette at the end of the year. Nichette will have the dream Camille wanted in her own life.

When Armand notices her and she sees him there, she is still standing three steps higher than the crowd. Behind her there is a curtain designed in a cobweb. She enters the arch curtained by camellias in floral design, on the left side. When Armand goes to find her, he also stands in front of the cobweb curtain before entering. Symbolic of the emotions within their relationship, he is once again caught in his desire for her. She questions him why he has not left Paris and he says he will but only if she goes with him. She immediately remembers the promise she made to his father and we see the previous scene as in memory, so she tells him she has promised. He thinks she means to the count so he tells her that if she really loves the count then he will leave. She says she does. He raises both fists in the air and then decides to pull her through the curtain and ask the crowd, "Do you know what this woman has done?" He tells them that he loved her more than life but she left him for money. He then touches his heart, feels the money in his coat

pocket, takes it out and throws it on her face. She falls to the ground, looks injured and he reaches over to touch her when he realizes that he is watched--he seems to have sympathy for her or pity. The moment he reaches over we are not sure whether he wants to hit her or hug her, his actions are confusing until he sees over his shoulders that he is being watched by the crowd. Their display of confrontation appears to be on stage. Nazimova's dramatic acting of the fall to the floor, resembles a fallen actress, a completion of the arch design at center stage. Love as display is not real love. Armand says he is done with Paris and Marguerite and leaves the casino. Gaston helps pick her up. She looks around and sees the count hugging the girl Armand was with in the beginning of the evening, convincing her that women are "play things."

In the next scene, Marguerite is in bed dying. It is winter and snow is falling outside the round window. Three men walk into her room to price all of Marguerite's belongings for an auction. "I know why they have come" she says, to her maid. "What does it matter? It is the end." Her life is over. We know she is dying from what seems to be tuberculosis. She begs the men to leave her the book that Armand had given her. The book contains the fictional account of the lovers who do not separate. The lover's promise in the movie is to never leave her side. "Do not weep," she says, "The world will lose nothing--I was a useless thing, an ornament [...] a plaything, a momentary aurora." She dies in memory of Armand holding her and the fantasy love that did not succeed, one of the fallen women who cannot elevate herself socially and whose only escape from suffering is through death. She dies holding the novel Armand gave her, like one would be holding a Bible. "Let me sleep, Let me dream--I'm Happy," she tells them and dies. Finally, happiness is not accomplished by love; instead, it is found in the fulfillment of moving forward without love and without promises, in some place in between fiction and reality, in a queer self-invented place. The same story is found in *Salome*.

By the time Nazimova filmed *Salome*, she was feeling the economic effect of a couple of film failures: *A Doll's House* in 1922 (now a lost film) and *Camille* in 1921. She financed *Salome* in order to have total artistic control of the film. This too became a very costly endeavor as Nazimova contributed \$400,000 of her own money. The attraction to indulge in the story might go back to bringing to life a story that was not allowed through censorship in Russia when Meyerhold had tried unsuccessfully to produce it in 1908, and it is not until after the revolution in 1917 that an enormously successful stage production was produced in Moscow by Alexander Tairov (Lambert 255). The story written by Oscar Wilde provides a fable of forbidden love and a woman who finds a way to break the rules. For both Bryant, who was credited as the director, and Nazimova, the story was a coded fantasy: “she was the one pure creature who lived in a court where sin was abundant” according to Nazimova (Lambert 255). So she decided to play *Salome* as a fourteen year old girl who is willing to give up everything in order to justify love that is scorned.

Nazimova wanted the costumes and set to reflect Aubrey Beardsley's illustrations and also referenced Tairov's production in balletic movements. Nazimova and Rambova, keeping in place the modern version of the old story, decided to create “a series of almost hallucinatory ambisexual costumes” (Lambert 255). The scenes are presented as if on a pair of conjoined stages. We see the court men and women having dinner on one and a courtyard where Jokanaan, the captive prophet is, on the other. *Salome* enters a stage where acting and fiction are possible. Most of the actors on the set are gay, the musicians are little people, and the women who carry the shields for *Salome* are drag queens. She just enters the queer space where the subcultural practices are possible. She also changes the position of her status from the objectified sexual desired female whom Herod, her stepfather and king, can manipulate to perform his wishes, into

the one in control, one who uses that power and changes the relationships between authorities. What appears to be a giving into his desire becomes a condition for her practice of deviant behavior and redefinition of desire.

Many critics have said that the film was not a “true” film and Nazimova herself had described it as a pantomime; the story was well known so the importance for Nazimova’s appearance was on the manipulation of the veils and sexuality as a subtext in the film. Nazimova did not only borrow Wilde’s artistic signature of the play, she also “borrowed the queer one” in focusing on sexuality by making it a female spectacle (White 80). But as opposed to just performing in his text she “asserted her sexual difference” (80). Thomas Cranen working for *The New Republic* had said about the film after screening that it is,

Degrading and unintelligent. Nazimova has attempted a part for which she has no qualifications. [...] Try as she will, she cannot be seductive. [...] The deadly lure of sex, which haunts the Wilde drama like a subtle poison, is dispelled the instant one beholds her puerile form.

White argues that Nazimova was “establishing what had not been yet into a lesbian spectatorship” (White 82). She argues that Nazimova locates Salome in terms of its aesthetic difference” to what was considered and trivialized as modern or avant-garde, sometimes even absurd, at the expense of “queer visibility” (White 71). And she continues that it is “precisely its queerness –strangeness and gayness” that helped fashion Nazimova as an auteur and established her fan base. Even though Nazimova did not gain the appreciation of her contemporary female audience, an appreciation of her queer interpretation of sexuality and gayness finally emerged in the 1960s when her art was revisited and established a cult following. Examining Cranen’s comment about her lack of sexuality begs that we look at the roles of seduction and power in the

film, which means we need to look at how the gaze of desire works in it. The interesting part of this observation is about Nazimova's lack of sexuality.

White also argues that

Generally accepted as the first lesbian filmmaker, Nazimova, like Salome, solicits our gaze at what appears to be an obvious feminine spectacle in order to enact a duplicitous female desire and subjectivity. She further encodes and veils the lesbian authorship by appropriating the authority of Oscar Wilde and the discourse of aestheticism. Her performance of lesbian authorship is also an authorization of lesbian performativity.

(White 81)

If we understood Wilde's play as a male homosexual aesthetic play, then Nazimova's representation is one of lesbianism as the subtext within queer desire. As White states, "Putting herself in his place as opposed to just performing in his text, she asserted her sexual difference" (81). To discuss a film based on a play by Wilde based on the biblical story, one can produce a discourse that crosses over the subtexts. Wilde's gayness and his "camp and aestheticism both enhance and undermine the lesbian specificity of Nazimova's authorial performance" (White 67). Wilde's fascination of the mate who dances in the blood of the one she loves is a bit different than the film Nazimova produces. If the original story was to portray the deviance of the young woman who becomes murderous when she is allowed to choose anything, Nazimova's film manages to emphasize the male lust for power in a world where the woman cannot win. It also displays the conditions under which women desire. "Nazimova may be using Wilde to resist Hollywood, to style herself as an auteur, and to make her deviant sexual identity visible [...]. But importantly she is also using Hollywood, with its mass female audience in mind" (White 81) to expose the breaking of boundaries between gender identities, sexuality and the exotic decadent

behaviors. Nazimova “uses her own Jewishness as well as her sexual agency through the exotic, erotic persona” in her performance (White 79). Ironically, when historians refer to *Salome*, they mention that this is a film Nazimova made honoring Wilde’s play. Her ability to create a lesbian/homoerotic/queer passage into film is dismissed. Besides, the esoteric relationship between her and Salome is also dismissed---Nazimova is the queer, Jewish princess, the Madame of film and theater that hides both attributes in order to survive Hollywood and who in her own life acts the residual experiences of previous social formations while changing the meaning and values.

When *Salome* first appeared, critics and audiences did not really know how to categorize it. Nazimova’s influence on early twentieth century mass culture is due to the way she “exploits an emerging mass, cultural topos—a sexualized, crypto-Semitic and crypto-feminist other” which she accomplishes by “virtue of her own stage reputation—so she exploits the high-art imprimatur of the role associated with Bernhart” (White 79). Salome, the character confirms Ann Kaplan's idea that when the female acquires the gaze, she becomes cold and calculative when the man has become the object of desire (130). When Salome desires Jokanaan, the prophet, she decides to have his kiss even if it means he must be dead to obtain it. Her power is constructed in her sexuality to operate under the king's gaze of her dance and in return her gaze on the prophet is fulfilled. Salome is part of a patriarchal structure of gaze that insists she must become cruel like the males before her in order to possess the male sexual object of her desire. While she does use her sexuality to control the king's desire of her, she becomes the "heiress of cruelty" who will demand what the king is not ready to accept, the influence his own desires have cost. The modern idea that once it is fulfilled the wanting and control of a desire is dead is evident in the king's reactions to his own fulfillment through Salome’s dance and then his destruction of her.

Salome's performance becomes the metaphor of women in the view of men, the king, and everyone else in the court, and her connection to the moon that she always looks up at in the night sky. The moon as the feminine interpretation of natural order, the film tells us, “the moon is looking for dead things” while it is the king, who represents the sun that kills, in other words, the moon only reflects its face through the sun’s movements; therefore, Salome’s reaction to the king’s sexual suggestions is that of darkness and murder. Her resistance to his wishes creates a violent creature that he no longer desires, which diminishes his lust for her.

Nazimova’s portrayal of the role exposes Salome as a young woman who is prey to her step-father’s desires and lust and is not allowed to deny him his request. In exchange she will not allow the prophet to deny her own request. The film “as a coded act of resistance in the regulation of sexual behavior” allows for the final attempt to demystify the mystery of love which according to Salome “is greater than the mystery of death” (White 79). Salome’s resistance to the king’s traditional male authority and the way she demystifies love is by bringing to view queer behavior that is corrected by punishment and death. The perverted desire to kiss the head of the dead prophet lies in the aesthetic of changing “historical constructions of homosexuality and gender, ethnicity and agency” (White 79). The behavior of the Jewish princess who died for her perverse desire “could be constructed as a layered act of coming out” (White 67).

In *Salome*, Nazimova challenged the traditional patriarchal roles in transforming women’s spaces from private and concealed to public and in many ways exhibitionist. The basic concepts of Freudian theory about fetishism and voyeurism have been related to male activity of

the masculine pleasure aesthetic. But the role of the masculine, if we were to accept such a role as a real and ultimate one, leaves the question of how the woman spectator relates to the visual pleasure presented to her in a voyeuristic experience.

Throughout the film the warning in the court is to not look at her. Salome's return of the gaze controls the viewers and reduces them to submission. The court's men protect each other by comments like "you look at her too much!" and to be careful of her looking back. This becomes a time of change of the feminine gaze as the masculine observer or desirer is in danger of her recognition of the male gaze. Her looking at Jokanaan is a violation of many rules in a patriarchal power structure. We are told that in the film, "She kills the thing she loves--She loves the thing she kills." In this structure love and desire are one and the same and the sexual object is a male. His refusal to accept her feminine gaze becomes his demise. Of course, the setup of the film is such that the male gaze is appropriated by the social positions of the men who produce them. The king desires Salome because she is beautiful and refuses him. The justification of refusal by Jokanaan is because he has a higher admiration, beyond feminine desire, which is to God. For Salome cannot claim the loss of the lover without oppression of the father. This appears to be Salome's attempt to claim a lover that brings the oppression of her father, and reconstructs a male dominated history, the theme in many Nazimova films; it is true at least in the three discussed here.

Salome denies the attention the king gives her by shaking her head like a child in a "no" movement while she is aware that her mother, the queen, tells the king to stop looking at Salome. "You must not be looking at her--Always looking at her!" becomes a desire that cannot be fulfilled because of the feminine interference of the mother, and also, mainly, Salome's rejection of him. The mother is more jealous of her than protective. The psychological connection to

masculine power is possible beyond the control of motherly love and the female interpretation of the male gaze. Salome copies the gaze in a new feminine way of desiring the sexually objectified male. Perhaps Salome is not imitating the male sexual power but instead is inventing a new relation between women and the objects they desire. It challenges the assumption that feminine desire must be attained with passive acceptance of the powerful male gaze instead of a destructive, cruel possession that women can practice upon the things they love.

The feminine queer space becomes apparent in the film when Salome walks away from the court and enters a stage where the queer soldiers stand. The king instead of paralyzing the object of desire and reducing her merely into a thing of pleasure unknowingly gives her agency and empowerment as Salome recognizes and uses her sexual power. By the end of the film she must die because her desire and wishes violated the king's logical order of decision making and his acceptance in killing Jokanaan in order to present her with his head for her to kiss. Once she pays back the king by dancing, after his pleasure of desire is satisfied by watching her dance, he did not expect her request to be so cruel, nor did he expect her pleasure of kissing the prophet after his death to be an act of defiance and persistence to her own desires to be satisfied, and so he decides to kill her.

Salome's independence from her own desire resolves in a misanthropic endeavor of sexual resistance. She does not portray any kind of love or pleasure in the fact that she is looked at by all the men in the court. She goes about unimpressed and seemingly bored until she is challenged by the prophet who even though enslaved in a pit does not look up at her; instead, he falls on his knees and says he would never let her touch him. This resistance from the male gaze confirms the idea that male gaze places and displaces women in the matriarchal world of a gender assigned power role which in return creates reaction rather than an action from women.

Silent films did not provide women or men with speech through which they could transmit masculinity or femininity. Instead, it applied a spectrum of actions through body movement and eye contact that led the audience to a place of comfort or discomfort with their object of desire on screen. The face of Nazimova is multi-linguistic. She uses her eyes for every expression the character goes through. Her face transforms many times according to the emotions. As narrative films became longer the character can be developed by the actors' ability to understand and interpret the role. In silent films, women used all the silent communicating signs available to the world of film. "In search of filmic language to express female desire [...] far from losing its avant-garde stamp [...] *Salome* could be seen as linking up artistic modernism with mass-media solicitation of female desire, making the female artist persona visible in/as the spectacularized, performing female body," and through Nazimova's body moving on screen, the experience becomes queer in a public openness (White 71).

Many would argue "that silent films became psychological dream worlds symbolic of wishes or nightmares but silent film in its power connects to audiences in a more real impression of reality. The imaginary relation is defined as literally a relation of recognition" (Cohen 156). While the male gaze was defined by Laura Mulvey as what defines the feminine or female on screen, it remains irrelevant to the queer feminine subject when the woman on screen becomes aware of her own condition under the male gaze and by doing so takes control of her own power as one who is worth being gazed at. In this respect, *Salome* plays the role of the desired object and connects the desire between the images of her as seen by the king to that of the spectator. She practices the same violence of the male gaze onto the prophet.

The prophet refers to *Salome* as the "one who gave herself to the lust of her eyes." The lust of her own eyes at that moment makes her modern, a queer version of the observer and one

whose actions lead her into a violent desire. Her wanting him dead gives her the power to metaphorically transmit her sexuality into a weapon as an observer, not as the common perception of the objectified woman who instead is watched and monitored by patriarchal systems of desire. Nor does she imitate or act like a male observer who does not negotiate with the objectified sexual object. She instead plays within the power of the kingdom and uses her appeal to the king by asking, "If I dance for thee will you give me anything?" and so she has now controlled his desires of her in order to fulfill her own. This negotiation is one of self-assertion and an understanding of her as seen through the eyes of the oppressive male gaze. Her desire to have Jokanaan's head on a platter challenges the control of man and common moral grounds of seduction. There is no negation between the objects of desire that refuse to be submissive. She knows this as she decides Jokanaan's end just as she knows what her end will be after the act of killing him is fulfilled. Her death is similar in many ways; refusal to be objectified, as she dies autonomous.

Nazimova's ability as an actress to combine her own foreign background and her own theatrical experiences in film helped normalize the queer aspects of her sexuality and ambivalence on to her work. Even while the trend to be exotic or to pretend exoticism in fashion and in décor was popular, Nazimova was that exotic. She was not pretending into fashion. In many ways, she epitomized the trend. Nazimova's last film, *Salome*, even though it marks the end of her filming career in many ways, as she financially suffered afterward, it still provided a model that is still visible for "its queerness, strangeness and gayness and it is now possible to nuance that visibility in relation to histories of female sexualities" (White 82). Nazimova fashioned a gay sense in her films that helped create the beginning of history in lesbian spectatorship through her popularity then and her memorialized modernism still. Her

identification of queer sexualization of the feminine through her performance creates opportunities of other women stars to create their own design or interpretation of the feminine. Actresses like Swanson and Bow were to follow.

CHAPTER 3

MATERIALISM AS POWER: GLORIA SWANSON'S TREATMENT OF OBJECTIFIED WOMEN IN *MALE AND FEMALE* (1919): *DON'T CHANGE YOUR HUSBAND* (1919): AND *WHY CHANGE YOUR WIFE?* (1920)

If Nazimova the actress needed to be born from inside her deepest emotions, Gloria Swanson's acting was created by force from the outside appearances of capitalist luxuries and spectacular materials of beauty. Swanson always knew she had something special. Unlike Nazimova who had discovered the need to escape reality by acting and came to America with an air and knowledge of performance, Swanson wanted to create an experience for an audience by using "everything she had" in her physical appearance. She did not recognize movies as an art form at first: she saw them as a way of making money, like many other women who became part of the industry. The rise of the sophisticated comedy in the early 1920s was considered a genre innovation. Swanson's films presented a more liberated America. Films that presented women whose virtues were in question were now considered passe. After gaining the right to vote, women became more concerned with individual pleasures and "the endorsement of the consumption of fashionable clothes and beauty products." This idea was promoted in Swanson's films that "put in place a more modern idea of marriage, based upon the sexualized image of the ideal marriage partner" (Jacobs 86).

Swanson did not realize her power of capturing audiences' attention until she visited Chicago's Essanay movie studio with her aunt at the age of eighteen and made up her mind that this was her future. What is most fascinating about Swanson is her ability to portray roles of the modern woman who "was independent and questioned the traditional value system that victimized women" by challenging the sexual standards of feminine weakness and turning that

sexuality into a strength by living a modern life that demanded attention and extravagance” (Basinger 204). Swanson did understand early on that the movies were a business and as a business woman she could create and communicate liberated ideas and a life style of powerful women who would reshape and redefine social and personal relationships.

As a comedian, Swanson made eight films under Triangle from 1915-1918. But in 1918, Triangle was facing financial bankruptcy, so Swanson followed Cecil B. DeMille’s proposition for work and her new persona. DeMille and Swanson popularized the image of the modern woman who is bored in traditional marriage and looking for a sexually exciting middle class life through luxuries of home and personal decorations. Sumiko Higashi explains that “consumption enforced the objectification of women” and “the reification of human consciousness to human relations in consumer society” (322). However, I will argue that Swanson uses sexuality that rejects and resists objectification; instead, it creates a persona that is liberated by materialism and money and can make choices that reject the traditional value systems of marriage and romance. While examining the persona that Swanson popularized through *Male and Female* (1919), *Don’t Change Your Husband* (1919), and *Why Change Your Wife?* (1920), I will use Miriam Hansen’s analysis of the emergence of spectatorship and Swanson’s instructions through her roles on how to “become correctly modern” through the “appropriation of female desire” in relation to “the lure of consumption” linking women to “cultural construction of the feminine” as part of my analysis (120). I will also use Karen Mahar’s historical analysis of the early film industry to situate Swanson’s popularity, while I argue that Swanson as a powerful star redirects feminine desire and material wealth to a new aesthetic existence for the modern woman audience and resituates the role of the woman in a home with new demands for her married life. The creation of such a new life style promoted women’s involvement in their own lives by changing the rules

of marriage, sexuality, and work. Swanson's true talent stayed misunderstood in history and my analysis will bring to light her natural acting talent and ability to encourage crowds of fans to pursue the possibility of a different life. I will examine Swanson's persona in films and her reinvention of her real self as a star using Richard Dyer's theory of stardom, her biography, and her autobiography.

Born the only child to a couple who would worship her, Gloria Swanson had all the confidence she needed to survive the early film industry in New York and Hollywood. Swanson had a long life which allowed her to be part of sound movies as well as silents. She did not however know what type of a persona she would create for her audience until she met director Cecil B. DeMille. He was the master of remaking the marriage institution and its representation on film. He also had a plan to glorify feminine qualities on film as the modern era expected more of women. The early feminist movements stressed the importance of economic independence; it did not include "equal sex rights" or support the right of women to operate outside the domestic sphere. While definitions of female identity were changing, "cinema opened up a space as well as a perpetual, experimental horizon—in women's lives, whatever their marital status, age, or background [...] it was a place for the imaginative negotiation of the gaps between family, school and workplace, between traditional stands of sexual behavior and modern dreams of romance and sexual expression, between freedom and anxiety" (Hansen 119).

DeMille's take on these new women was to give them a pleasurable distraction from politics and activism. He needed an actress whose comfort would be in front of the camera and her pride would be in the clothes she wore. These he found in Gloria Swanson. DeMille's project of making stars was a calculated plan to feed audiences with rich images for fantasy and secret pleasures. His descriptions of the roles of women in films often opposed the feminist views of

liberation that were popular at the time. DeMille's films presented the new woman almost in a "self-theatricalization in models of womanhood [that] served to validate consumption rather than sexual equality or freedom" (Higashi 320).

DeMille's stars are feminine women in need of products in order to express their femininity, unlike many films of the time where women's physicality was portrayed as strong and competent. In many respects, DeMille saw Swanson as an object of desire to be used as a vehicle towards a social and cultural image that demeaned the feminist goals of the period. But Swanson herself, through her own life, used that objectification as a celebration of the feminine spirit through physical pleasure and romance. Material wealth is portrayed by her as a power to be used in order to progress women's roles in the world. She promotes herself as a star and as a consumer of goods who produces work through her material gain and vice versa. As Richard Dyer writes, "Stars become models of consumerism for everyone in the consumer society" (39).

Swanson, unlike Nazimova and Bow, had a very close relationship with her mother who was her first admirer. She dressed little Gloria with beautiful dresses that she herself made and convinced her daughter that beautiful things make people beautiful and that beauty was a ticket to be used to get anything she wanted. She also had a good relationship with her father. Her biographer, Stephen Shearer, argues that she always looked for her father in her relationships with men. The men she married and had relationships with had to be older and worship her. He was the first to treat her like a star. Her name at home was Glory until she was a teenager and had performed in a musical. Her father sent her flowers and signed the card for Gloria. That was the moment of a new identity for her. In her autobiography, Swanson tells that "I was no longer the little girl, Glory. I was Gloria. I was the lead and I was good" (22). With fame and admiration came transformation to a new identity and a new life.

Swanson's biography many times reads as a filmography with commentary but we can follow Swanson's development as a star by the roles that were given to her and the ways that Hollywood constructed her image on screen. Many who knew Swanson during her fame have commented that "Gloria was the leading female exponent of her pictures; the public assumed she was in person the same character she portrayed on the screen" (Shearer 76). Under DeMille, Swanson became the actress who could and should not be filmed without "fabulous costumes" especially after her first film failure *Under the Lash* (1921) where she portrays the character of a farmer's wife. The film is lost but we know that it was a dramatic role where she plays a struggling woman trying to avoid the advances of a charming Englishman while married to an abusive husband. Her failure in this role suggests that Swanson might not have been comfortable in portraying a woman who is driven by fear in marriage. Her later roles show marriage challenging in other ways. Jesse Lasky from Paramount told Swanson the film was not successful because "women didn't go to it, and women didn't go because you wore dull, grey, button up house dresses through most of it. Women refuse to accept you in homely clothes! We won't let that happen again" (Swanson 173). Years later when Swanson had become a star and crowds of women were waiting to meet her; she told her mother that "of all the cheering tonight, nothing had to do with my acting. It was all publicity. They are cheering me as an actress" (Swanson 254). Swanson understood that the crowds were there for what they needed from her personas, not to look at her acting as an art. She also commented that what they liked about her mostly was the way she dressed in films.

Swanson's self-examination as an actress reveals that she did not appreciate the roles she played as the modern woman in these socio-marriage films designed by DeMille to produce a star. She always looked forward to the time she could play more intriguing roles, ones that would

be different and challenging so that the world would see her real talent and she would get different fulfillment as an artist. The roles she really wanted to play were characters like Charlie Chaplin's Little Tramp and Peter Pan. She was never offered the parts. In *Sunset Boulevard* (1950), we see clips of Chaplin in the silent film *Norma Desmond* is watching, Swanson plays the role of Chaplin's Little Tramp which was filmed and included in her early film *Manhandled* (1924) while she was joking around on the set. She wanted roles that would help her cross over to different gender roles, beyond the modern woman in a specific era; perhaps she would be viewed differently today. Hollywood and DeMille kept Swanson very restricted on the roles she wanted to play. Many other actresses were performing male roles at the time. It is safe to argue that Swanson's exploitation as a star and the trend setter of the modern woman of luxury has stained the notion of her as a serious actress.

Swanson, like many other actors and actresses in Hollywood was supervised about making her appearances on film as seductive as possible and setting trends in film and in real life. She had met the self-promoting writer and socialite, Madame Elinor Glyn, the same woman who later promoted the "It" concept for Clara Bow. Glyn wrote scripts for Swanson and went to famous places to be seen together with her. Swanson in 1921 during her separation from her second husband said that

Madame Glyn does not believe in marriage for artists, since she claims that "marriage is good and art is good, but they do not appear to assimilate perfection." Her theory is that great artists must not be bound within the narrow walls of domesticity. (Shearer 77)

Marriage and domesticity were troublesome to many women during this time. For Glyn it was not a complicated choice: as a lesbian she was able to create a theory of success that had benefited her, but for women like Swanson who wanted everything heteronormative

relationships had to offer on family and children, artistic life in collaboration with private life had proved challenging. Swanson and many other stars in Hollywood were facing the dichotomy of marriage and work. She did marry many times and even though she portrayed lives of women who would do anything to receive a man's heart and attention, Swanson in real life faced responsibilities, such as being a mother that demanded she compromise her work. It appears that the men in her life were attracted to her money as well as her sexual image. Married six times, and having had many affairs while she was married, many times with married men, she acted in her own life as one of her heroines. She lived in a world of change where men's work in the home or outside the home did not include participating in shared responsibilities. Swanson understood that the modern woman must sacrifice family in order to stay true to her work, and she refused to give up her career. By the time she retired from Hollywood she had found other inventive ways of maintaining a financial, creative, independent life.

Swanson combined sophistication with sexuality while popular. Her experiences in Chicago at Essanay made her realize that the world of film needed to be invented not learned. From early on she insisted that sophisticated dramas were the roles that suited her personality best. She told a reporter that since she was a little girl she "was enormously self-confident. I always expected to be invited to everything and to be the center of things when I was invited" (Shearer 12). Ironically, the role that would most shape her star persona was that of Norma Desmond, which is a version of her older self after her success. The romantic comedies that she mostly acted in were dramatic in the ways that her acting connected the audience to a transformative threshold of marriages in danger and the potential gain women might have in establishing new awareness of pleasure and romance.

Swanson had found comfort in acting when she was hired by Triangle and was offered the script for *Smoke*. There she became educated on hairstyles and fashion: “When *Smoke* began production in 1917, Swanson was transformed into an atmosphere of elegance and refinement” (Shearer 38). For the first time she was photographed flatteringly. Allowed to choose her own wardrobe, she chose fancy, risqué dresses and “registered a remarkable impact on film.” Her part, that of a “recklessly loose woman moving about in society,” was substantially expanded, and the studio started a dedicated promotion campaign for their new star” (Shearer 38). While an image was created for Swanson as a star through her appearance, one important aspect of that image was to become a “model of consumption for everyone in the consumer society [... her] fashion to be copied, [her] fads followed” (Dyer 39). This was the time that the industry boomed, and Lillian Gish and Mary Pickford were already big stars. But unlike the types of moral dilemma roles they portrayed that made them famous, Swanson’s roles were presented as powerful and determined, liberated by luxuries and money and providing a new identity for women.

By 1918 Swanson was making enough money to change her life completely. She was part of “an era that promoted new ideals of womanhood” (Holliday 69). Hollywood’s construction of an image-conscious-culture through the stars and the audience created forums where women’s social roles were to be reevaluated. Swanson’s powerful association with luxury constructed a new meaning of feminine gender roles. Holliday suggests that if this meaning is to be examined “as a political act” we need to “assess whether it is a process available to ordinary people in their everyday lives” through spectatorship (8). Swanson’s popularity is based on her reputation as a star with a specific identity which provided her audience a stylistic ideological

opportunity. The social realities of her audience were not addressed in a realistic manner; instead, her films helped remove them from their social environment. Swanson's star image was used as a vehicle for "conventions it set up and how it developed them" (Dyer 62).

Swanson's ability to work and live a life style of luxury was a new concept to many women of that era whose opportunities for financial independence were few. Swanson's heroines do not have to work for their comforts, and the way she lived her own life promoted a fantasy of the same for other women. The three films discussed here showcase Swanson's attitude about her own persona on film as the comforts in her luxurious surroundings convey a message of the future for women audiences and promote a promise for independence and pleasure. These roles present relationship and identity troubles that are not settled inside the home; they are taken to a different dimension away from the domestic sphere and are settled through outside forces.

In 1919, DeMille and Swanson produced *Male and Female*. All their films were sensational, earning money worldwide. By the time all three films were shown Swanson had become the perfect fantasy of her time. She was appealing because of her performance and the feminine sexual imagination she created for her audiences, as well as the luxuries that were offered for the audience's appetite for wealth and fantasy. While DeMille promoted luxuries for the Swanson image and allowed her to choose her own jewels and outfits, he had a system where at the beginning of a day's shooting he showed the previous days takes so the actors could see themselves and judge their own performances. Swanson learned from this practice to look at her acting objectively: "I looked at them every day and soon learned to watch myself with total objectivity. [...] [E]verything in my performances had been spontaneous, intuitive." She had learned how to "control small gestures and expressions and started to build up ways to heighten a

moment or save a scene” (Swanson 105). Her movements became controlled in how she carried her body with confidence and showed off her shape as a sexual luxury.

Movies provided for the audience “the idea that one could remake oneself through the purchase of the correct clothes and cosmetics. [... They] created a celebration of the American’s ability—and right-- to consume goods and enjoy personal freedoms” (Mahar 147). Swanson’s personas on film had the ability to connect sexuality with materials which the audience through fantasy could pretend belonged to them:

Sexual images can be fetishistic simply in the sense of being a heightening of erotic/sensual surfaces (fur, leather, satin, etc. being “more like skin than skin”); at the same time it also links the woman to other images of power and wealth (e.g. fur, etc. as expensive fabrics; frequent linkage to Art, haute couture, leisure, etc.). She may thus be seen as an example of wealth (which the viewer in his fantasy possesses), or as being something that can be obtained through wealth. (Dyer 51)

DeMille’s and Swanson’s repertoire of flirting with morality was received well for the most part but where there is fame and power there is also rejection. Many critics thought DeMille’s movies “were the stuff of fantasy, but they were also instructive, providing lavish and intimate details of how the upper class lived” (Shearer 54).

Shearer states that Swanson had become the DeMille Mannequin--dressing in private and public as her film heroines, she often garbed in totally impractical costumes burdened with strings of beads, clusters of feathers, dangling bejeweled baubles and fringe, and long dragging trains. Sadly too she had grandly assumed airs of pretentious sophistication. (50)

Shearer seems to underestimate the power that Swanson's image held for women and what caused her popularity. He believes that it was only the material that women were longing for in their love for Swanson's movies. But her film roles of women who questioned values of marriage and intimacy provided a new consciousness of modernity and a feminine subjectivity. Her own life as a star also provided a significant agency in focusing on the anxieties caused by the patriarchal construction of male roles within marriage that women were not able to negotiate before. "I have decided that when I become a star, I will be every inch and every moment a star! Everybody from the gateman to the executive will know it" she had told a *New York Times* reporter in 1920 (Shearer 126). Audiences followed her life for inspiration, looking at her divorces as a new way of rejecting powerlessness in marriage and in their own relationships.

Costuming was one of DeMille's utmost important aspects of stars. "I want clothes that will make people gasp when they see" DeMille had said. "I don't want clothes anybody could possibly buy in the store" (Shearer 54). Ironically, Swanson's style of fashion created a connection with her audience; women saw in her characters fulfillments of fantasy goods within a system that treated women as "consumers of abundance envisioned as feminine" (Hansen 123). Her audience found similar interests in Swanson's behaviors on and off screen. They did not want to replicate her decisions in marriage; they knew the separation between them and her as a star, even though they referred to her by her first name and wanted to meet her. Mahar comments, "With regard to DeMille's [films], the tie-ins to fashionable stores helped to deflect attention away from the themes of extramarital sexuality and toward the transformative power of consumerism" (148).

By 1919 De Mille was considered one of the most important directors in Hollywood. At the end of the decade, he started filming a trilogy of modern sex dramas dealing with errant

husbands and wives. DeMille by 1918 was working under Jesse Lasky, for Paramount. He was known as the “industry’s most important trendsetter in the late 1910’s and early 1920s” using costumes for his heroines that were copied “by hordes of women and girls throughout the land” (Higashi 315). His trilogy of marriage films, *Old Wives for New* (1918), *Don’t Change Your Husband* (1919) and *Why Change Your Wife?* (1920) were considered movies about social concerns of sexual identity, family and the reformation of marriage as a personal sphere: “At issue was the nature of female sexuality in relation to the practice of consumption” (Higashi 320).

Lasky encouraged DeMille to create popular themes within these three films in order to generate a popular following. He knew that the “percentage of men in motion picture audiences began to decline in the 1910’s, whereas the number of women rose from 60 percent in 1920 to 83 percent in 1927” (Higashi 315). The first film of the trilogy, *Old Wives for New* was based on a novel and challenged many moral issues that were removed and handled with humor in the other two. The film also had gone through the scrutiny of censorship and therefore Lasky suggested a more commercial sentiment for the other two films. Controversial moral matters of loose sexual behaviors were to be “retreated from some of the offensive aspects” (Jacobs 90). While *Old Wives for New* does not star Swanson, it was considered the first to exhibit DeMille’s obsession with fashion and marriage. For many, these kinds of films were considered radical and revolutionary but in reality they established different types of stereotypes for women and their roles in marriage. For others, the “anxiety about women’s extravagant spending, represented in DeMille’s texts as a prerequisite for the pursuit of pleasure, was more than a concern about household budgets; it registered suspicion about female emotions and sexuality” (Higashi 321). What DeMille might have considered radical and revolutionary in his films at the time is today

considered a set up for a new stereotype of womanhood and femininity that leads to satisfactions of patriarchal systems. For Swanson, work and money were liberating aspects yet she felt restrained in her choice of roles as a talented actress.

Swanson was perfect for *Don't Change Your Husband* and *Why Change Your Wife?* because she had already displayed her own obsession with fashion and materialism as a way of power and sex control. In both films the female main character becomes transformed through materialism. New wardrobe gives them a new identity of the new woman and therefore a new attitude toward themselves as wives. Discourse in fan magazines had already become critical of Swanson as a star but her popularity continued. "Stars like Swanson assumed new personalities whenever they changed gowns" was a common sentiment (Higashi 321). Hansen argues that "the specific link between consumerism and film spectatorship is a curiously 'passive desiring subjectivity' as a desire defined by narcissism and fixation on appearances" (121). Swanson's appearances both public and on the screen had gained a meaning that became part of the structural development of American culture. Her popularity confirms that her performances destabilized rigid ideas about gender, sexual, and marital roles in society and provided "what audiences might tell themselves about their practices and the society they live in" (Anderson 83). Most importantly, the costumes many times directed audience and critic's attention to Swanson's talent as an actress. Her experience in comedy had provided for her "perfect timing in scenes" as she referred to them, to convey meaning with an emotional response. Her facial expressions and body language naturalized a new feminine identity in the way that it became accessible.

Swanson had worked with DeMille in *Male and Female* (1919) before the trilogy. This film had set out to redefine women's identity in relationship to class while promoting fashion and home luxuries. Before we meet Mary (Swanson) on the screen we see her through the

keyhole inside her room by a young boy servant who delivers the shoes outside the bedrooms. He first sees her lace and satin undergarments hanging by her bedside. Her materials are causing a sensual response from the young boy as we follow his interest in her through his eyes. The audience is set up in a state of voyeurism. In a Mulvey heterosexual position the audience begins to watch Mary in an emphasis on fetish luxuries around her. From the beginning of the film the “sexual imagery may be fetishistic simply in the sense of being a heightening of erotic/sensual surfaces (fur, leather, satin, etc.) while it also links the woman to other images of power and wealth” so that Mary is worth examining as she represents later a different kind of gaze for the female viewers (Dyer 52).

The next scene is about the ritualistic aspects of bathing Mary. The caption asks audiences, “Humanity is growing cleaner--but is it growing more artistic?” DeMille’s obsession with the luxuries of bathing and baths in general is displayed here as a choice of artistic temperament and not one of class or culture. The bath scene in the film where Mary will be submerged in rosewater for her morning bath is one of those artistic scenes founded in consumerism: “The spacious tiled bathroom with sunken tub and silk-curtain shower is a scene that was surely impressive for audiences still living in homes without bathtubs” (Higashi 304). Swanson’s body is treated as sacred. In such scenes where the set is crowded with expensive material around her, her acting is lost in the disturbance of luxury, and so the desire to watch Swanson perform is a mere confusion of pleasures.

The women who work for Lady Mary are still functioning within the same knowledge of home care and are caught within the paradox of independence and domestic work. The contradiction of women’s passion toward physical comforts is seen through the very scene, as Mary is treated not as a common woman but more like a saint or goddess. Her maids are

common women who can aspire to what Mary possesses, money and beauty, and so luxuries are to be viewed in connection to wealth. The maids cannot realistically have access to Mary's wealth, nor could many watching the film. Hansen includes that "the viewer's interaction with film is both conscious and unconscious [...] while assuming a major social function for women across class and ethnic boundaries" (121). But the presence of the maids indeed creates a different type of possibility for the audience; that through work, a woman can be exposed to things that she can desire. Higashi writes, "Women's access to fashion, home furnishings and automobiles became essential now that self-making was defined in terms of personality" (322). Lady Mary Loam is treated like royalty. Her bath is prepared for her as she enters a sunken bathtub infused with rose water. This scene was very risqué for Swanson and she asked DeMille to have guards around the movie set so that no one could see her enter the tub. The film "made history by simulating taking a bath in the nude [...] carefully filmed and revealing nothing" (Shearer 53). The emphasis in this scene, Basinger argues, is not in Swanson as "a mere sex object; she is being presented as the representative luxury bather for the entire audience, male and female" (211). Swanson does not appear as a sex object, but the question arises as to what extent does her suggestion of nudity present her as an object of desire. She is part of the scene. Her body is needed to complete the beautiful set of the luxurious bath.

Mary's spoiled life is followed throughout the first part of the film as she lies in her chaise like a pharaoh (a period to later enter in the subconscious of the film through story telling) and is served her morning toast which she finds too soft and rejects like a spoiled child. Her servant Crichton (Thomas Meighan), who is the main character in *The Admirable Crichton*, a play by Sir James M. Barrie, that the movie is loosely based on, tries to please her by offering her something else. We also see behind the scenes of the rich home inside the kitchen and the

way that the help live their lives. Tweeny, the maid (Lila Lee), has desires that are not very different from Mary's. She admires the ring Mary receives from her suitor Lord Brockelhurst and hopes that one day she will also receive one from Crichton. We see Tweeny admire Mary's silk shoes and then look at her own torn dirty shoes which she is ashamed of. This admiration could be seen as an opening of a horizon in a new feminine experience:

The woman's rights tradition was historically initiated by, and remains prejudiced toward, those who perceive themselves first and foremost as woman, "who can gloss over their class, racial, and other status identifications because those are culturally dominant and therefore relatively invisible.[...] Since feminism aims to alter power relationships between men and women, it meets resistance not only from male interest, and the self-interest of entrenched holders of power, but also from human leanings toward commitment, acculturation, or resignation of the established forms in which gender relations are enmeshed. (Cott 9)

Clearly the film suggests struggle between class structures but it does not promote a feminist view; instead, it develops further the idea that the feminine way of being is liberating. Looking at relationships based on a struggle between control and submission within a marriage, *Male and Female* emphasizes the attraction between Lady Mary Loam and Crichton, her servant, in reversed roles of power. It promotes the necessity of luxury for true happiness within marriage as it shows events that happen away from those luxuries where the characters become confused with their purpose in a capitalist system. DeMille's plan was to commodify marriage and to promote the luxuries that come with marriage in a world after the war, where all hope was

possible. De Mille followed what he believed people wanted. In Swanson, he saw not only the reflections of the times; he also saw the future of materialism fed through the images of Hollywood.

During the filming of *Male and Female*, DeMille was convinced that Swanson was the perfect woman to promote the new woman who demands more in order to claim refinement and sexuality in the ways she evaluates the necessities of life. The sexual attraction between Mary and Crichton happens during the absence of all materials when they become part of a group shipwrecked on an island. The audience can feel the contrast between her wealthy life before the wreck and after when they return. In many ways, it promotes the comfort of materials. After the financial success of the film, DeMille wanted Swanson to portray the new woman in “the new middle class and contemplate the impact of modernity on the family” through the modern woman’s attitude and expectations in marriage (Higashi 302). DeMille’s conviction was that modern film and the modern woman must become entertainment for the audience by creating a star whose roles are categorized by an image. That image was designed to be focused on physical properties of costumes more than the substance of character or plot.

When the aristocratic family find themselves stranded on the island, it is Crichton, the servant, who provides the knowledge for their survival. His primal senses know ways of survival. He teaches all of them that servitude is what is important. Yet when they all contribute to a service toward their survival, Crichton becomes more demanding in his needs and the women become more subservient. The women around him want to please him, serving him and preparing his meals according to his appetite for the day. Hansen argues that “as the cinema sought to align its appeal to women audiences [...] it did it with female spectatorship with a gendered hierarchy of vision [...] and came to inspire a more systematic appropriation of female

desire at work” (120). Like many films of its time, this one was designed to respond to the “historically unprecedented formation of women as an audience, both in terms of the logic of supply and demand and in terms of strategies designed to contain the threat this new female audience posed to the patriarchal organization of the public sphere” (Hansen 119). In the wilderness, Crichton demands that the women, even though they are his superiors in England, now serve him as a king because he has the survival instinct to save them all. When Lord Loam (Theodore Roberts) eats the figs that were picked for Crichton, Mary endangers herself and goes into the wild at night to get more. After Crichton finds her, his desire for her is materialized when he sees her helpless and in danger. Swanson’s performance is to portray weakness and need. She waits for him to save her from the wilderness. She is afraid and hides until he rescues her. Without materials and luxuries, Mary becomes weak and subservient, which emphasizes the need for material comfort which Swanson always portrays in her films. This film shows her transformation into weakness by emphasizing her loss of power without material wealth.

Crichton, while in England, had told Mary that “[n]ature decides who is master or servant given the right circumstance.” She was not pleased with his comment as she had just found out that her friend Lady Eileen came to tell her about the new love she has for her chauffeur. Mary gives her an example of birds in a cage. In order to have harmony, she says, the caged birds must be of the same kind; otherwise they will not survive each other. This metaphoric significance of the cage as marriage in relation to class suggests that marriage is not always a voluntary choice but it is predestined according to the rules of nature. This comment minimizes women’s rights efforts as it undermines the power of change towards equal rights and presents a dilemma between “types” within a capitalist system. Instead of genuine concerns about gender roles and political rights according to economic independence, the film appropriates DeMille’s interests in

“[m]iddle class modes of entertainment rather than middle-class modes of reform” (Mahar 13) Lady Mary has a need that is sexual in nature but wild in the sense that as a woman she allows sexual desire to take precedence over marriage, class, and material wealth, and by doing so the emphasis falls on a liberation that is attached to materialism.

The film also reaffirms the power of masculinity with suggestions about control and desire. Toward the end of the movie, a fantasy takes place in ancient Babylon initiated by Crichton telling a story. Swanson said that DeMille “called these events historic visions” (Swanson 122). After she went to look for the figs, Crichton finds her in the dark and kills the tiger that trapped her. She runs to him in fear. He holds her face up and says, “[T]he wonderful look of fear in your eyes almost makes me forget England.” The moment of rescue assures his masculinity as much as it redefines her need to be protected.

Anderson states that “[m]asculinity was a structural component of the American mass culture in the 1920s, one which helped to determine the subsequent development of star culture and fandom” (82) “Maybe you were a king in Babylon” she tells him and he responds, “If I was a king then you were a Christian slave.” In the fantasy, as a Christian slave, she refuses his seduction and because of her refusal he orders her death by sending her to the lions. This is the famous scene where Swanson enters a cage with a real lion. DeMille had thought the scene too dangerous but Swanson insisted on doing it. It was at the moment that Swanson enters the cage with the lion to film the scene that, Swanson said later, that “DeMille believed in her art and started calling her ‘young fellow’” (Swanson 120). This naming is sexist in the sense that it took physical and emotional strength and bravery on Swanson’s part for him to give her a masculine identification. For Swanson it was just part of her acting and her art to play the part in sheer terror. The film draws on “women’s fantasies of gender and class transcendence” as it reinforce

bodily masculinity as essential to the climate of seduction (Hansen 123). The fantasy we see placed in the Babylonian court is crucial as we see Mary lean on his lap, ready to hear the story.

In the story, her transformation into a vulnerable creature of pain suggests it is inevitable. In the wild without luxuries she is prey to danger. The dream of the past is based on the poetry by Ernest Henley which both Mary and Crichton like to read. Mary is upset at the ending of the story and Crichton holds her and tells her, “I loved you then [in the fantasy past] and I love you now,” but this confession of love is based on a superficial recognition of desire based on fantasy and fiction. Even though emotion is stirred in the imagination of the audience through the confession of love throughout time, this statement leaves the role of women in a shady place, where love, commitment, and self-preservation falter. Their class and economic differences are not a reality shared in the dream, but only on the deserted island; not in England, where their true identities were organized and categorized according to class and money structures. The story develops from their real lives to the temporary transformation to the wild life on the deserted island, the switching of power roles according to knowledge, and their characters that surface because of it. Lord Loam is not offended when Crichton tells him that he and Mary want to marry. The setup is ready for the wedding as Tweeny sees a ship passing by. That moment brings an end to their opportunity for marriage as they are rescued.

In the next scene, the characters have resumed their social stations in England. Mary's fall from her class was a foolish attempt at believing she could find happiness in a man whose power is only prominent outside an established economic order, in the outdoors primitive way of life. Studlar examines the ways in which film in the teens “constituted a patriarchal proving ground of normative masculinity in the character building mode, the retreat into a fictional past secured a place where [the characters] could continue their heroics [...] in a nostalgia for

wilderness adventure and the masculine primitive” (73). Class and culture is examined in contrast to life on the island which confirms for the audience that society civilizes women into middle class ladies. The relationship between the two characters is not recognition of desire based on love, yet it represents a different impression of how desire is mediated through the roles of power. Mary wants to marry Crichton even after their return to their old lives. But he decides not to marry her, separating the imaginary relation to the real world upon their return to England. By rejecting marriage he creates a separation between a constructed reality of institutional love and marriage and a relationship that could only exist in a different power relationship. Miriam Hansen wrote, “As cinema sought to align its appeal to women audiences with a prevailing patriarchal order of vision, it both recognized and absorbed discourses of experience that conflicted with the latter, thus reproducing the conditions for the articulation of female subjectivity along with the strategies for its containment” (123). These foregrounded memories, or histories of the past in the film, present a hope for the future, where materialism promises strength for middle-class women. Mary’s journey back into domestication happens with a different awareness. Her desire has unhinged actions earlier deemed unthinkable. But simultaneously, it reconfirms masculine superiority and class restrictions on marriage.

From the beginning of the film, we know that Tweeny is in love with Crichton. In the library scene, he reads the lines of the poem about the king and Christian slave and Tweeny tells him, “I would never be anyone’s slave.” She is unaware of the power structures in her society and that ironically, she is in servitude. She corrects herself as she caresses his shoes. He is standing on a ladder with the book open, and she is sitting at the floor looking up at him. “Unless maybe your slave, sir,” she says to him and he smiles. At the end of the film, he decides to marry Tweeny and leave the Loam’s residence. They are both going to America. We also get a glimpse,

in the last shot of the film of their happy lives on a farm. The promise of the new land suggests that in America the wealth that was owned by the Loams was to be challenged and gained with hard work given the promise of the immigrants who came to this country after the turn of the century. As Hansen writes, “The cinema to some extent absorbed the functions of the utopian imagination [...] fantasies of a better life mingled old hopes with more specific modern dreams, promises of abundance with scenarios of mobility and self-transformation” (112). This was perhaps the big invitation to the audience to pursue their own desires and possessions. They too could have access to the beautiful life that Mary and her family indulged in, but as Crichton turns his back on the wealth that Mary possesses, he gains a new power, not one of a servant to the woman he desired. Instead, he makes a patriarchal decision that Tweeny must follow.

Swanson was tired of the roles that made her popular. She knew the formula very well and realized early on that she was trapped in a type of casting, the one that made money for the company. She also knew that she was a fashion setter not a follower and she viewed her confidence as rebellion. Another film that takes on the challenge of the modern woman redressed and reassessed in marriage is *Why Change Your Wife?* The sensual self is what appeals to men and for the first time perhaps films like this one challenge the idea that a wife should not be like a mother but more like a lover to her husband. The change suggested in the title is in the change of attitude that the woman is responsible for in marriage. Swanson would not have agreed to this in her real life, yet she follows the script to that suggestion. If indeed there is a way to remain the sensual self while also becoming a loving "sweetheart," the suggestion is also that there is innocence in this sensual world. Opposingly, even if a woman has been married and is no longer a virgin, she must still practice marketing sexuality, which in this

film seems to be provided by an outside material influence. Swanson as Elizabeth, Mr. Gordon's wife, "feels the brunt of modernization" and must respond to the "exerted control over experience" (Hansen 125).

We see in the film Mr. Gordon (Thomas Meighan), who finds his wife boring in the way that she dresses and goes to buy her lingerie. The shop is run by an Asian Madame (Madame Sul-Te-Wan) who sells foreign great lace and silk sleepwear. This suggests that the modern woman needs to be connected to the exotic and sensual world of the unknown lands. The notion of sensuality and sexuality being bought by the husband asserts the masculine power over the traditional roles of feminine intimate space in female experience in marriage. Swanson shows that through her acting she can transform the image of the wife tied to the role of domesticity to one of luxury and new purpose by the way she redefines herself later in the film. She carries her body differently according to what she is wearing. At the garden scene we see Elizabeth alone. She walks around the garden, relaxed and not bothered by the activity of all the men around her. She is free and independent. It is through Swanson's acting ability that these transformations are easy to accept in the film. Her audience expects her to appear in luxurious outfits and once she does the audience is once again satisfied.

This behavior of a husband going to purchase sensual clothing for his wife seems awkward and strange in the film. Perhaps it is a modern way for men to behave. Here, the husband has entered into the sensual feminine world in order to control and aim its purpose for his own pleasures. Later, after Mr. Gordon has divorced Elizabeth and married the young model of the lingerie (Bebe Daniels), she too becomes boring and at times silly and annoying to him when she tries to be cute and childlike in order to get his attention. When Elizabeth goes to a store to choose her own clothing, the action is rebellious and intimate. She directs the seamstress

on how to construct her new look and identity. Through her new clothes, she will make different choices in life and treat herself as a sexually powerful woman, one who is desired. Fashion becomes an outlet for her modern sexuality. The film suggests that sensuality and sexuality will be used to win over marital commitment. And that happiness might be possible outside of marriage as long as women can embrace other identities through fashion.

Why Change Your Wife? presents that being a modern woman means keeping up with the competitive world of feminine sensuality in a masculine world of approval. A feminine self-image seems to be held by a certain kind of woman, one who does not want to be bothered by her husband's need but toys with his desires to make marriage more adventurous. The fact that Mr. Gordon suggests his wife wear different types of clothes but fails to create a better relationship between him and his wife suggests that feminine sexual imagination needs to be adjusted so that men enjoy married life more; it also shows that men and women are not allies in marriage. The commitment and the responsibility fall on the woman as the man need not make any changes or adjustments to stay desirable. Hansen writes, "The integration of the female address with the culture of consumption not only seems to have leveled generational differences among various types of address, but also caused a dialectic of domesticity and consumerism that propelled the transformation of public and private spheres to collapse" (121). Later in the film, Elizabeth chooses her own self-discovery as a new opportunity to establish new sexual relationships. Swanson's ability to transform the traditional wife into a modern unrecognizable woman is evident when Mr. Gordon sees her exposed back and does not recognize her. The identity transition is evident in the attitude that Swanson displays of disinterest in her old marriage and husband. She turns her back to him at the party, yet he is attracted to her attitude first and then recognizes that it is Elizabeth. In this scene, Swanson is not modeling clothing as

much as attitude: she looks in the mirror, then turns her head away, looks high in the sky and turns her profile to her company. Her hand is on her hip with a new confidence that new women of her time would be able to recognize as strength.

The film suggests that feminine sexual imagination is a reflection of self-discovery not in opposition to male desire, but instead a feminine self arises from the troubled times of marriage to allow women to become something new. According to the film, married men and women who find themselves in the absorption of the modern world and its changing needs cannot integrate while married. As a matter of fact, Elizabeth challenges the idea of what a wife's role should really be after she is divorced by finding liberation for an emancipated truer self through her expression of fashion. Hansen explained this idea by stating, "The styles of hetero-social modernity promoted with the new leisure culture changed the definition of female identity in relation to family, superimposing the values of motherhood and domesticity with the appeals of pleasure, glamour and eroticism" (117). It is not an ally relationship to the husband who does not face the same challenges of self-identity, yet he is affected by the choices new women are pursuing. The new goal seems to give her more pleasure about herself and ironically it pleases her husband as well.

The comfort and stability traditional marriage roles have been known to provide are here presented as boring and unbearable. Elizabeth makes breakfast for her husband and gets his clothes ready. He cannot even find his own tie, as if he lives in someone else's house. She appears to be satisfied with her ability to help him and prepare him for the outside world for the day, in more of a maternal caring way, instead of one of equality. Intimate interaction between married couples here, is maternal. The private world of the family before the modern woman was born, "identified as the domain of the idealized femininity, defined by domesticity and

motherhood, sexual purity and moral guardianship,” was no longer secured (Hansen 114).

The film sets up the binaries of certain types of women’s behavior, the maternal wife at home and the loose woman looking for a man. Swanson herself had to deal with this dichotomy by balancing her own private life as a mother and wife and a seductress on screen. Stereotypical in this analysis the film does two things; one, it suggests that the maternal relationship between man and wife does not provide desire nor sexual fulfillment. Second, loose women appear to be part of the new movement and are presented in films as the ones who adapt to change more easily because they are already aware of the limitations presented by stereotypes. Swanson herself had to cope with this stereotype in order to find happiness, financial and otherwise. DeMille is aware of the popularity of the modern woman who is out to have fun and uses films as a caution or a lesson on how a modern marriage can survive the challenge of new sexuality. “Fidelity to the marriage covenant,” he said to a reporter, “is to be gained only by showing wives how men may be, if not lifted entirely above sex, at least taught to hold it within bounds of moral law and decency” (Higashi 320).

But DeMille demonstrated in his films that compassionate marriage “was childless and sexually playful” (Higashi 321). None of Swanson’s roles provide a marriage where relationships are bound with the responsibilities of children and family life, yet the phenomenon with her audience identification “may be the aspect of placing of the audience in relation to a character as the ‘truth’ about a character’s personality and the feelings it evokes according to what the viewer takes to be as truth about the person of the star playing the part” (Dyer 125).

Liberation from marriage and reexamination of the roles seems to be in order here as the divorce becomes final between Elizabeth and Mr. Gordon. It is a marriage that challenges Elizabeth to reexamine her self-identity as a new woman. Single life seems unnatural to her until

she changes her appearance. Hansen tells us that the changes brought by the new world after the war “included massive integration of women into the work force and their active role in the emerging consumer economy and the breaking down of traditional family structures” (212). The film offers a choice for a woman to decide which type of woman she wants to be in the modern world. As an independent woman outside of marriage, she can find the ability to judge her own intuition as to how marriage should be and what her role should be in it. Like Swanson herself, sensuality and sexuality is no longer presented as a suspect endeavor. The divorced modern woman has sexual knowledge, has a past and has learned that her appearance is an extension of herself not a perversion of her marital self. This connection is accomplished after the return to her married life and her husband.

Swanson as the new woman helps her audience adjust themselves to new ways of living, as a matter of fact; she creates a new role for herself and for other women in the ways that she handles relationships in life. Swanson’s life helped her audience engage in different relations with other women as “Cinema most strikingly altered women’s participation in the world of public, commercial amusements.” As “the cinema was a place women would frequent on their own, as independent customers,” it brought a new community for women to share desires from stars on the screen (Hansen 119). Her audience knew enough about her private life to draw conclusions of how their star conducted her private love affairs, her money, and her business. The modern woman that Swanson creates through her personas eliminates the perception that family, home, and child in marriage take priority over woman's desires and creates new individual choices. These choices even though new, become public as women audiences are educated on how to dress differently, drink, and dance in public. Hansen writes, “The creation of such a spectator involved the stylistic elaboration of a consistent yet indirect mode of address

that granted the viewer access to the diegesis from a position of voyeuristic immunity and fetishistic distance” (121). In many ways, the roles she portrays on film break the rules of reality and seduces the viewer “into a narrative space on a stylistic level [that] corresponded to an increased de-realization of the theater space—the physical and the social space of the spectator” (Hansen 83). But more than stylistic choices, Swanson’s women provide a place of contemplation about gender identity and pleasure. Swanson’s popularity was based on women fans. They loved watching her change on the screen as much as they liked the idea that their star could think on her own in her private life.

When Elizabeth is taken to a new boutique by her aunt after her divorce, the excuse is to find a "new gown as a soothing remedy" but her response is "I hate clothes and men" while not showing any interest in the dresses modeled before her. But when she overhears other women talking about her appearance, she pays attention to her wardrobe. She did not change her ways for her husband but she does respond to criticism from women she did not even know. The confirmation that she needed to change her ways comes from the new modern women hanging out at beauty salons and fashion boutiques in public spaces. Hansen examines the way the public and private spheres of women’s lives had broken down because of materialism and consumerism as we see in this scene. Fashion brings these women together. Appearances connect them to criticize and confront each other in a private setting of the fitting rooms where they plan to prepare for the public world. “The hierarchy of public/male over private/female,” she writes, “had shaped relations between the sexes and had mapped the social life and culture institutions [...]. [But it] came to an erosion [because] as the new culture of consumption blurred class and ethnic divisions, it also affected the female and male sphere” (Hansen 116). Elizabeth looks in the mirror and sees herself the way the other women talked about her as unattractive and not self-

caring and so chooses to change it. The way Swanson changes Elizabeth's identity and the way she allows both her image of the star and the persona to be transformed into other sexual connotations of freedom, presented alternative appearances of a married woman giving into an alternative performance in the world.

Elizabeth throws many cracks at marriage while she is discovering her new self with comments like, "the more I see of men the more I love dogs" and "the good thing about marriage is alimony." Elizabeth becomes a new woman who can find a way to recreate intimate sensual space between husband and wife. She says, "I was a fool to think that a man wants his wife decent and modest." Later on when she orders her new clothes, she asks the tailor to make her dresses "sleeveless, backless and indecent." Even though the suggestion is sexually daring, the character has been established as sympathetic. Therefore the audience is forced to accept her.

The liberated new woman in the film is first seen through Sally, the new Mrs. Gordon (Bebe Daniels). She loves music, alcohol, and perfumes. She likes to dance, kiss, hug, and flirt with men. But toward the end of the film there is a different type of test, one that is not totally related to sexuality. Mr. Gordon falls and hits his head and becomes unconscious. Elizabeth takes him to her house and takes care of him until Sally, his new wife, arrives and wants to take him to the hospital. Elizabeth does not think it's a good idea but she cannot make any decisions for him. This section of the film is set up as a test of the true love given by the women. Even though Mr. Gordon is now the unavailable man, the forbidden one, Swanson's tenderness in her face convinces the audience that true love still exists between them even after the divorce. She holds his hand and caresses him with a maternal love just as she had in the beginning of the film. At the end of the story, Elizabeth wins his love as a new woman, one who is aware of her sexuality and her love for him. She takes care of a married man, her ex, and this behavior is

understood by her audience because they identify with her. This is perceived as a test of true love and endurance of marriage as he looks at her and realizes that she loves him. They marry again and this time they understand that romance can be part of a marriage. But the last section also gives a moral lesson only to the women audience, as there would have been more women watching films at the time than men. "Ladies remember that in order to still be your husband's sweetheart you have got to want to be his wife." This leaves the modern woman in a compromising position as it is Gordon's extramarital affair with another woman that causes the divorce. The film does not address these issues. Higashi writes, "Genteel middle class women, it appears, had become spirited new women, but even in a compassionate marriage they were still not equal to men" (314).

The film that followed, *Don't Change Your Husband*, suggests a command to wives as opposed to *Why Change Your Wife?* which suggested reasons to be listed. In *Don't Change*, Leila (Swanson) is dressed in high fashion, showing that she "has already been transformed into a new woman" (Higashi 320). Immediately the audience can recognize Swanson in the first scene as she looks into the camera and rolls her eyes in boredom that this marriage lacks action. Her husband's habits are too unbearable for happiness. So the marital reversal between this film and *Why Change Your Wife?* is almost comical in the sense that men and women audiences can laugh at the suggested behaviors of the husband. These two films focus on marriage, divorce, and fashion as signs of the times: "During the early decades of the twentieth century, the rate of divorce almost doubled while expenditures for personal grooming, clothing, furniture, automobiles, and recreation tripled" (Higashi 319). Even though this film is a response to many fans' demands through "indignant letters to DeMille and his clever writer, Jeanie Macpherson" to write a story from "the wives' standpoint, this film still celebrates many of the

material luxuries that a wealthy marriage can provide and still risk losing true love” (Shearer 57). But the film does suggest that “marital troubles” can be found through the loss of material things and be solved through certain material gains. His eating onions and forgetting their anniversary is a middle class disappointment, not so much a trouble that would begin to shatter a working class marriage.

Leila’s condition of boredom in the “dull grey years of matrimony--getting slightly on her nerves” is not an ordinary trouble, especially not for a working woman who needs to provide for her husband and home more than just her looks. Sitting away from her husband and playing solitaire while he reads the paper is the clue for loneliness, and so we wonder if this condition of the new married woman can be salvaged. Swanson’s films became the embodiment of “[a]ppealing to the women on the basis of particular intertexts and ideological discourses, with particular genres, stars and sentiments” (Hansen 119). Her own life and her own divorces and luxuries were behaviors her characters play. “Divorce should be made easy,” she told a reporter, “so the wife knowing she might lose her husband [...] would exert herself to hold him and the husband would go on paying attention to his wife, bringing her flowers and candy, taking her to theaters” (Higashi 318). The idea that an easy divorce would be beneficial to both sexes was a radical notion and Swanson practiced it well.

The characters in the film are frivolous and do not consider any consequences of their actions. Before we even meet the characters we are told that “Mr. and Mrs. Porter should not have looked for their marriage troubles with a telescope but with a microscope” already warning the audience that this situation is not to be taken seriously. Yet, there is truth to be discovered throughout the film in how women expect too much from their marriages that even though they are provided with more materials the institution still undermines their desires for excitement.

The beginning of the film immediately connects marriage and boredom for the new woman. Leila seems to be a continuation of the Mrs. Gordon in *Why Change Your Wife?* She has already created a home of decorations and she seems included in the décor of the home. She is in the center of the room, playing cards, while we do not see the husband because his face is behind the newspaper. The camera comes closer to her face as we see her look his way and wait for acknowledgment. The first thing she does is to complain about his feet on the stool where her needlework is. She then complains about his ashes falling off his cigar on the carpet. He is immersed in the news and does not notice any of her efforts to be beautiful. The setup is of the wealthy marriage; the plot is designed that the husband is the one who works and she does not. The wealth displayed in their home and on their dress suggests that marriage and promises can be lost and that the idea of happiness and security are reduced within the need for material wealth. They both retreat to their private realms within their home as if they are actors taking a break from their roles.

This set up provides for the audience what Dyer calls, “particular people in particular circumstances [...] and not moral or intellectual concepts. [...] It is the individualization of characters and the examination of interaction between the individual and his/her world” (90). Swanson’s women fans and audience would immediately recognize her as the center of the film and as the heroine. The identification between Swanson’s audience and the characters she portrayed on film could be analyzed as “bourgeois characterization on how the individual serves to mask the ideological role of the character” (Dyer 96).

Through Leila’s condition the audience is faced with a problem that might not belong to their class or financial status but it provides for them the idea that they are “identifying with a unique person [...] and so they ignore the fact that they are also identifying with a normative

figure” (Dyer 97). Swanson’s acting neutralizes the exotic wealthy, materialistic existence of the modern woman, in “normative” terms, so the audience is not aware that the ideology of the modern woman as a type is at work in her films because “ideology works better when we cannot see it working” (Dyer 97). Swanson’s acting provides both the combination of the typical character she mostly played, and the individual, her own life and style, which made her most popular and memorable. Holliday writes, “*Photoplay* had soon cashed in on the star system and ran articles on the private and behind the screen lives of the stars.[...] [A] star’s personal life became well-known and as important as the roles they played on screen” (319). Swanson in her autobiography many times reflects on her career with sadness and frustration: “At twenty six I felt myself a victim rather than a victor in the realm of pictures” (272).

Leila does not appear as a new woman who is independent of attention and who can manage to fill her own time with interests other than marital chores and appearances. Many times throughout the film we see the husband (Elliot Dexter) overwhelmed with work; all responsibilities of decision making falls on him in order to provide for a luxurious home and his wife’s lifestyle. The day of the anniversary dinner, which she planned, he is even unaware what the dinner is for. His secretary calls to tell Leila that he is in a meeting and that he will be late. This is the opportunity for Schuyler (Lew Cody), Mrs. Huckney’s (Sylvia Ashton) nephew, who was also invited to dinner, to begin a romantic approach toward Leila. Schuyler is a young modern man who does not work but seems well off financially. He dresses well and pays attention to Leila who is pretty and lonely and unsatisfied in her marriage. Swanson’s face shows sadness and her eyes do not look up at him. She does not pose but appears immobile to the possibility of an affair.

We also see from the first few minutes in the film, Leila is dressed beautifully; the background of their home is also dressed in luxury and comfort. As Higashi states, “The film conflates exotic visions of distant lands and employs disparate orientalist motifs in set and costume design. A Middle Eastern backdrop for social entertainment, the living room features ornately carved pilasters, tapestry, carpeting, and a potted palm” (310). This set up of the exotic situates Leila in a sensual world and so the modern need for sexual desire and attention becomes more evident. Higashi writes, “Orientalism signified not only luxury but also self-indulgence and depraved sensuality” (310).

But when Mr. Porter sits on his chair and covers his face in the newspaper, his attention and interest is not directed to the home or Leila. His cigar ashes fall to the carpet and she gets upset. She, as a home ornament, appears as neglected and unappreciated as the carpet. This modern married woman is lonely, lacks attention and love, and is childless--she seems forgotten. While the film confirms that the husband’s responsibilities to give joy to his wife have failed, it establishes a danger for her that is more serious than selfish gratification. She is in harm’s way of seduction and destruction of herself and her marriage. The intruder of their marriage is strong enough because he gives her the promise of love and so she gives in. When Schuyler enters the Porter’s home, his eyes fall on Leila’s feet. The camera begins to roll upward so we can see her whole attire. Her silk shoes, her long laced skirt, and her satin top--the last thing he looks at is her face. Her body is looked upon as an object of the home.

In this scene we follow a male gaze that connects her body and her attire as a commodity. Swanson’s ability as a star to create a seduction scene that is based on fashion and expensive taste for the audience is obvious here. We follow Schuyler’s eyes as he checks her out from head to toe. A transcendence takes place here as Swanson the star “transcends the type to which [she]

belongs [modern woman] and becomes utterly individual” (Dyer 99). Swanson is not reduced to a concept or an illusion of herself. Her audience went to see her films because they somehow identified or wanted to be a part of her lived life through her characters on the screen. Hansen argues that besides the industry’s attempt to induce audience consumerism and keep them shopping at stores, “on the level of reception it marks the dynamics by which cinematic pleasure and meaning increasingly came to depend upon the viewer’s identification with the position of a textually constructed spectator” (Hansen 84). The audience identifies with Leila even if their own lives do not resemble Leila’s. Swanson’s ability to portray roles that are left open to interpretation by her audience with the chance of identification opens up a space where myth and possibility collide.

While the party is going on, Leila plays the piano for her quests, and even though she is a new woman she appears as traditional of a hostess as one out of a finishing school. She organized the party, dresses in silk and satin, and shines like a queen. Swanson carries the image of the new woman all decked out before she is seduced. She immediately can tell what Schuyler’s intentions are. They drink from jade cups and flaunt the mysteries and wealth of the exotic East. Schuyler tells her that when two people drink from jade cups together their paths will cross in marriage. This is a straight advance on his part. Leila hears this and puts her cup down. This suggestion of future adventure appears dangerous to Leila, and she thinks that Schuyler has gone too far. Her eye movement shows distrust about what she is told, and even though her home contains materials that are from the Orient, including their butler, she is oblivious to their mysteries. Higashi states, “Orientalism remains at the core of the obsession with illicit sexuality” (310). The physical world of her fashion and the spiritual world of the East are muddled into a modern concern of money and sexuality. Schuyler is attracted to a type of

illicit sensuality and sexuality that at this point in the film seems passe—the Nazimova mysterious type, that no longer exists. Earlier we saw that Mr. Porter does not notice his wife. He forgot to buy her an anniversary gift and orders raw onions from their butler who serves them during dinner. Leila finds this behavior appalling. Their three quests, Mrs. Huckney, her nephew, and the pastor (Theodore Roberts) are three types of existing symbols of marriage. Mrs. Huckney is older, wiser, and independently wealthy; the nephew is looking for someone to seduce and practice his lines of promised love on. The pastor is an interesting character because he is the reminder of church and marriage, yet he is the only one who thought of buying Leila a gift, a necklace, and he also participates in Mr. Porter's lies to cover up his forgetfulness. In a sense, the pastor tries to save their marriage by lying. Mr. Porter takes the necklace from the bishop and gives it to Leila as his own gift. The card with the bishop's blessing is disregarded by Mr. Porter. Schuyler finds it and gives it to Leila later, breaking the secret between the bishop and Mr. Porter. By the end of the dinner Mr. Porter decides to go to sleep because he is tired, which we are told is a situation that has "baffled womanhood for centuries."

Films like this in many ways established a way of understanding marriage in America "through the profiles of American society through Hollywood" (Holliday 14). In the media, Swanson's own life was treated in the same entertaining ways as her film characters. Her audience was entertained by the tabloids and the news published about her affairs. Her marriages and divorces established a different reality for the women she played so their roles were accepted as real by her audience. She was a mother of three and later a grandmother. In one of the late interviews, she talked about how she could not find a man she could lean on. But by the time she met Joseph Kennedy (with whom she had a very long affair), she had already filmed in Paris (*Madame Sans-Genes*, 1925) and was married to Marquis Henri de La Falaise, who gave her the

title of Marquis de la Falaise. For Swanson every decision she made in her private life became public knowledge. She felt forced by the “strangers” she met to “live the romantic dreams they invested in every time they bought a ticket to one of her [my] pictures” Swanson said, (Swanson 113). This was the first time an American actress had filmed abroad and whose work was under translation. She valued her new title and her new fame as she realized when she came back to California that she had become even more beloved by her fans while she was away. Her marriage to the Marquis lasted for five years.

Swanson plays her roles well because she identifies with her characters; therefore, her talent is considered effortless. During the dinner scene, Swanson’s comical talent emerges as she handles Schuyler’s advances. She decorated the table with small doll figurines of brides and grooms which her husband removed from his view. Schuyler takes his little doll groom, knocks down the one in front of Leila, and places his next to Leila’s bride doll, suggesting that she should be married to him. Swanson gives him a look of distrust and annoyance for being rude and forward with her and then picks up the salt shaker and pours it over the doll figurine.

The next day Mr. Porter then gives her a check for a thousand dollars and an apology that “with the rush of the office he forgot--perhaps this will help.” She takes the check at the same time she has received a bouquet of flowers from Schuyler to thank her for the party. She lets her husband read the card with the flowers that suggests she go to Mrs. Huckney’s for a weekend. Mr. Porter thinks it’s a good idea. It was Mrs. Huckney, who by her age we assume represents old money and old traditions, who suggested to Leila that Mr. Porter “treats his wife like an old shoe... and that she should go away a bit so he can miss her.” Leila is enticed by the flowers

Schuyler sent her and the invitation and so decides to go. “This well-appointed establishment” of old money and ritualistic methods of marriage control suggests “questionable transactions involving the commodification of women” (Higashi 305).

The seduction takes place away from her home. The following part of the film begins away from the Porters’ home, at Mrs. Huckney’s where a big costume party is planned and Leila and Schuyler will be a pair. Schuyler throws rose petals on her while he looks neat and impressive in the ways he smokes and uses the ashtray and the way his shoes are shined – we are warned of “The dangers of Fancy Dress” as Leila checks him out. Mr. Porter receives a telegram from his wife that she is having a good time and decided to stay a bit longer. He decides to go get her. When he arrives she is very happy to see him as she had already compared her husband to Schuyler and found her situation around him fragile and vulnerable. Here the modern man seems more like an opportunist and a deceiving lover. Leila convinces Mr. Porter to stay for the party and they give him a costume to wear. He seems tired and bored and then decides to go to bed early.

Schuyler is moving in faster on Leila, seeing her disappointment in her husband. He is dressed as a king and tells her that if he were king he would give her “pleasure wealth and love--and the first would be pleasure.” While he tells her this, the film enters her fantasy and we can see her pleasure moment being in a huge swing. Leila is almost like a little girl swinging in high altitude--the wealth in fantasy is “pleasure”; “wealth” and “love” are titles under the scenes, as the last part of her fantasy she sees herself in the wild in a jungle setting where she is being fed the juice of grapes squeezed into her mouth by a Bacchus lover. She immediately gets up and we see her in the room sitting on an arm chair while Schuyler is kissing her arm--the room is full of smoke and incense burning as if in an opium den where hallucination is possible. Higashi writes,

“Such a turn of events raises disturbing moral issues about the nature of consumption as practiced by the woman exploiting the marriage market” (308). Schuyler’s obsession with his own materialism is consumed with images and practices of the Orient. He is “an effeminate voluptuary because orientalism remains at the core of his obsession with illicit sexuality” (Higashi 310).

Swanson in her own life did not always exercise this belief. In many of her relationships, her marriages became partnerships in business, while her affairs continued. In her films, marriage remains monogamous and heterosexual in its execution. This section of the film is supposed to be viewed as the illicit attraction which DeMille had prided himself on that he alone “was doing more to prevent divorce than any minister or anti-divorce league in the world” (Higashi 318). She gives into Schuyler and agrees to marry him. And so the illicit attraction is corrected by the marriage that follows it. The film does not scrutinize the morals of the new woman as if she is to fool around and leave her husband for another man because she is also going to marry the other man. There is also a warning in the film about women’s beauty and a husband who takes it for granted. “The Dangerous Alchemy of a pretty woman and a blind husband” becomes a prophecy in the film.

When Leila confesses to Porter that she is not happy with her marriage to him, “I love you, Leila,” he tells her, “but I won’t keep you a minute longer than you want to stay.” Leila tells him that “[a] woman wants something besides personal comfort” and then leaves. Something comes over Leila. Higashi tells us “she has slipped into orientalism [...] and is taking an un-American personality” (310). That “something” is questionable throughout the film. We see that Leila has lost herself in her persuasion that Schuyler is a better man than her husband. He tells her that “nothing on earth can keep you away from me--not even yourself!” She eventually tells

her husband that she is “desperately unhappy and wants [her] freedom.” With strength the modern woman chooses to express herself and declare an emotional state in her marriage as unhappy. This might suggest that the something refers to sexuality or even spirituality that her marriage does not have. But the decision to marry her seducer is an orchestrated scenario of a divorce and marriage to keep the morals of extramarital affairs in check. Swanson’s own relationships always demanded that she be emotionally strong. Swanson herself felt used and alone in these relationships. “I want a man who is mentally and physically stronger than I am. I would like someone to say, ‘Don’t worry,’ and take care of me just once. Someone with whom I can have mental intercourse on any subject. I’ve had everything in my life but that” (Swanson 173). Swanson felt torn between her own life and desires, the image she held for her audience, and her commitment to the company as a commodity. She was very aware that the more powerful she was becoming the more vulnerable she was. “If I failed” she said, “the failure would be mine alone, and they could all move on to something else” (Swanson 168). She knew the DeMille formula films were limited in the message they portrayed to audiences. She many times saw herself as a victim of a system that created a star to manipulate a political, economic system. After her three DeMille films she said she felt she “was becoming public property” (Swanson 134). She did not share these thoughts with anyone until later in her life when she reflected on her own life. “At twenty six I felt myself a victim rather than a victor in the realm of pictures” (Swanson 272).

The routine of divorce and marriage and then again a divorce and a return to the first marriage is an evident manipulation of plot in order to correct illicit behaviors. The new marriage is then staged in the film as Leila is sleeping with Schuyler who goes to kiss her, but his mouth smells of cigars and she pulls away. Film critics made comments that “it is extremely

difficult to build up a pleasing romance upon a foundation of divorce” as the film is geared toward a corrected morality by planning the failure of the second marriage and a return to the first (Higashi 316). During breakfast, Schuyler has his face in the newspaper while stirring a cookie in his coffee without even looking at Leila. She seems to be thinking of similarities to her ex-marriage but we are not told anything specific. Swanson displays the same disappointed face she shows in the first marriage. She looks down, she tries to get his attention, she offers him coffee, but nothing seems to amuse him enough to take his face away from the newspaper. The audience knows what she is thinking because we saw her in the same position before.

Mr. Porter must become modernized in order to gain his wife back. The modern man is also affected by divorce and his sexuality is presented in relation to his wealth. This material transformation is similar as in *Why Change Your Wife?*, but now the husband must become more attractive in order to win his wife back. He exercises, loses weight, and changes his bad habit of eating raw onions. Leila is not fortunate in her second marriage. Schuyler has an affair with a loose woman, Toodles (Julia Faye). She first appears in the second shot of the first scene in the film, where she is looking at herself in a mirror and kissing her image. She represents the woman who flirts and has no moral compass. She is self-indulgent and exploits the narcissistic existence of the material modern woman of the 1920s; she is a flapper having fun.

In the next scene, Leila is carrying gift boxes and trying to get on the trolley to go home. She seems uncomfortable and unaccustomed to carrying her own packages. As she sees Mr. Porter getting in his car, he recognizes her and offers her a ride home. She accepts. When they go to her house she receives a call that Schuyler will be busy at work and will not be home for dinner. She then invites Mr. Porter to come back to have dinner with her. He does. He brings her flowers and they both enjoy dinner together. She seems sad to see him have to leave. He acts like a

gentleman, the way he cuts his cigar and gives his arm to her to escort her to the dining room. He even refuses to eat raw onions that she ordered for him.

By the end of the film, the men have to fight for who is the rightful husband. The dual of the lovers. “DeMille associates romance with sportsmanship” as men must battle in duals and the women must settle money matters before they settle their relationships with men (Higashi 306). Leila gives some money to Toodles who came to their house to have Schuyler’s promise of giving her money fulfilled. Leila takes money from Schuyler for Toodles and tells her, “Don’t misunderstand that he owed you something and you’re paid--He promised me a few things too such as love and protection and he didn’t pay--let only one of us be cheated.” This is the lesson. The film ends with Leila’s new knowledge of herself in the world of unkept promises, and it does not undermine her role in her marriage as she has now learned the danger of becoming a spectacle of desire and used love instead to win back her husband.

Swanson by the end of her life realized the double standard of her success. She lived a life of luxury and promoted a desire for luxury in her own private life that her audience many times used as inspirational and a fantasy of wealth. A silent compromise existed between her and her audience that her rebellion through material independence was problematic as it supported the myth that supporting that success is possible regardless of limited talent or opportunities. She did try to keep a private self but it was many times impossible. She used her uniqueness demonstrated in a wealthy world of independence as ordinary but knew that she was exceptional as a star in the money she was making and the power of influence she witnessed when she looked at the number of fan letters she was receiving and the crowds that waited for her everywhere she went. Her fans called her by her first name and through her physical appearance allowed her roles to be accepted as new and moral. Swanson understood early on the significance

of her work as a social production of images and ideas. Her work displays narcissist public behaviors of the modern woman as opposed to the secluded homely heroine and therefore transmits conviction of character both on and off the screen.

As a representative of her time, she used her popularity to assert a positive influence while she made compromises in her personal and artistic expressions and later on in her life reaffirmed that such spectacles of sexuality even though they hold power they also encourage new battles of independent identity in the world. She also acknowledged the forces that her audience had placed upon her with their demands. In her biography she states that she no “longer cared about what people thought of her films, they either liked her work or not” (Swanson 189). She undermines her influence in the future of stars as if her own period was one of a kind. And in many ways, it was.

CHAPTER 4

THE FLAPPER'S CHASE: CLARA BOW'S SEXUAL AGENCY IN MODERN RELATIONSHIPS IN *IT* (1927): *GET YOUR MAN* (1927): AND *WINGS* (1927)

Before Clara Bow became the “it” girl she lived a life of sadness and misery. This title marks her in film history as someone the public saw as a happy-go-lucky actress whose attitude in the roles she played was very much connected to her real identity. In my examination of her life and career, I will look at Bow’s life through David Stenn’s biography to follow her personal struggles with her success. Lori Landay’s analysis of the flapper film and what it provided for the audience of the time is important in that Landay looks at the “female spectators’ experience as a particularly active subjective identification with the flapper because of her experiences of doing the same things as them” (Landay 234). Jeanine Basinger’s examination of Bow’s sexuality includes her definition of the flapper as “an escapist creation. The real thing might never have existed” (412). My analysis shows that Bow through her own life tried to live the fictional life she created on film. Also Richard Dyer argues that stars’ independence is never accurate as the images they portray: “in films they appear legitimate and [their lives either] promote this image or undermine it” (56). Paula Cohen’s connections to modern behaviors and film, as well as the historical perspectives of modern women in history discussed by Wendy Holliday will be included to show that Bow’s title of the “it” girl provided for audiences, as well as for her, a life of misconception of the modern woman during the jazz age. Feelings of modern sensibility of how a flapper was expected to behave were treated as innate to the characters she performed as well as the star persona she portrayed for the public. Bow herself suffered such generalizations of behavior and attitudes while she represented the flapper.

Clara Bow's personality played an important role in her embodiment of the flapper. Her humor and playfulness bring to the screen an accepted model of reacting with instinct on desire as the personas she plays control the outcome of the events. Bow's characters leave traditional moral codes behind and without real guidance she follows her instinct towards a man she desires which allows her to transform her life into a different kind of experience, one of adventure and challenge. She is unguided in her actions, and her promotion into a new life is found in her sexuality. My analysis of *It* (1927), *Get Your Man* (1927) and *Wings* (1927) will show how sexuality and seduction create agency for the characters that Bow portrays as well as for herself in a world where the freedom to be sexual has to be handled with a certain sensibility that does not offend mainstream public morals while it encourages young women to become active in the making of their futures.

Clara Bow changed the way courtship can be viewed in the modern world. While Swanson popularized the idea that happiness in relationships can be attained through material luxuries and became a role model of such consumptions by her performance on and off the screen, Bow created the possibility of new ways of desire and attraction by giving her audience a natural sexuality which she accomplished without much effort. She then influenced the female audience of her generation as she was influenced by stars in motion pictures who taught her the idea that dreams can happen. Bow's popularity reflects the changing modes of courtship. The chase that seems to replace the traditional courtship toward marriage is promising a different kind of marriage when accomplished, a marriage where sexuality, desire, and pleasure are enjoyable for both. Bow's roles present a new attitude toward courtship that is open to a transformative future.

Liberation of choice is hardly seen as independence here as the main character pursues a goal of marriage by using her sexuality, but marriage and relationships are mocked in comical ways to cover discrepancies of age, class, and character.

Clara Bow represented the working class girl in her films just as she was in real life. She did not portray the wealthy, well to do Gloria Swanson woman who is trying to convince her husband to return to her so that there can be a re-evaluated marital compromise within the modern family. Bow's roles are of the girl next door who can reach higher than the common working girl and succeed in getting the wealthy man's attention, and she does it by using energy that emerges as comedy but holds truth for many of her fans. Bow's roles present her as the aggressor in gaining attention from the man of her choice. Even though the tension of the chase created in her films is a product of a narcissistic attitude, it is difficult to view as a movement toward pleasing men. Bow appears comfortable and pleased with her own performance of the chase because she is in control.

Clara Bow made six films in 1927. Some of them were in production a month apart. The three discussed here were released a few months apart. First, *It* was released in February of 1927. It is *It* that seals Clara Bow's destiny in films as the embodiment of the flapper in the 1920s. With her reputation at its peak every film was a money maker for Paramount. *Wings* in August of 1927 and then *Get Your Man* in December of the same year. By the time production on *Wings* started, Bow had performed in thirty six films. *Wings* made history as the first film to receive the Academy Award for best picture in 1929. It was not intended to help Bow's career; she was included in the movie to attract the female audience because the film was considered muscular. As an aviation battle film reflecting on WWI, the production was focused on combat pilot experiences. *Get Your Man*, even though a Bow formula film, helped her meet the woman who

would help her deal with her fears of sound in film. Director Dorothy Arzner was at that time considered the only woman director in Hollywood. Bow was not thrilled about working with her because “Arzner would make one man less man around the set” (Stenn 126). Yet Arzner was fascinated by Bow’s “Innate artistry [...] with no formal training she possessed infallible instincts” (Stenn 126). Her talent was derived from emotion that only Bow could channel through her acting. Arzner knew that “the whole thing was emotional with Clara; she understood the emotional content of every scene” (Stenn 126). Clara Bow’s life was always fueled by controlled emotions.

Clara Bow survived her own birth by chance. Her mother Sarah had already lost two girls a few days after they were born. Sarah did not register Clara’s birth certificate until months later because she waited for her to die. It is sad to imagine Clara’s mother welcoming the birth of Clara only because doctors had told her that if she were to have another child it would kill her. When she was pregnant with Clara, she awaited her own death with a welcoming thought of escape. The only way for Sarah to leave her marriage to Robert Bow was through death, such was the emotional and physical poverty of their lives.

Clara was born on July 29th, 1905, in Brooklyn. The temperatures had risen to 115 degrees that summer and the stench around the neighborhood was suffocating, yet Bow made it. She always felt guilty for the rest of her life about almost having killed her mother at birth. Even though Bow went through hardships and beatings from both her mother and father, she remained faithful to them always. Sarah suffered a fall from a building and had epileptic fits for the rest of her life. In two of those fits she attempted to kill Clara. Yet, Bow took care of her mother and denied any homicidal illness that her mother had. One specific example of it occurred the day Bow decided to tell her that she was going for an audition. Her mother had decided that her

daughter would be better off dead than a whore in the movies. That night she tried to murder Clara in her sleep. Nonetheless, “Clara worshipped her mother, creating what one psychiatrist would call ‘very much a dream existence’ and placing Sarah on a pedestal at its center” (Stenn 10).

Her father, Robert, approved of the movies; he thought it would be a good way for the family to make money if his daughter were to get an acting job. He himself had a dream of becoming a singer that never materialized. He abandoned his family many times, months at a time, and his relationship with his wife was full of arguments, beatings, and insults. Bow preferred her grandfather as a parent, but he died while she was a young girl. David Stenn mentions how she slept next to her grandfather’s casket while he was laid out in the dining room and when she woke up she told everyone to keep quiet to not wake him. After her grandfather died, Bow spent most of her time taking care of her mother. Whenever Robert Bow would return home for a few days, Stenn writes that “family reunions created a destructive and violent dynamic, with Sarah goading her husband about his failure and Robert relieving his frustration by beating Clara” (11).

Bow did not find an escape even in school. She was poorly dressed, she had a slight speech impairment, and girls made fun of her so her only friends were boys. One of her childhood friends lived in her building when their apartment caught fire. He died in her arms. Later on she said that he was the only friend she had as a child. Another friend of hers said that “Clara adored movies and spent all her spare time attending them.” Bow said, “In this lonesome time, when I wasn’t much of nothin’ and didn’t have nobody, [there was one place] I could go and forget the misery of home and heartache of school. That was the motion pictures” (Stenn 12). She had also told her younger friend Johnny that one day she would be in the movies.

Her first inspiration came from an 8th grade teacher who encouraged her to perform in a school play. But by the time performance time came, she was pulled out of school and never returned. A seventh grade education was all she accomplished. She tried many jobs as she was asked to work by her family. She always spent a quarter to purchase her favorite magazine, *Motion Picture* and read about favorite stars like Mary Pickford and Wallace Reed. It was *Motion Picture* that announced the Fame and Fortune Contest, sponsored by Brewster Publications, a Brooklyn based company. The contest's first prize was a part in a motion picture. But in order to enter Bow had to submit a photo of herself. Behind her mother's back, Robert paid a cheap photographer for two portraits which she hated. She decided she was going to deliver the photos herself. The contest manager who took the photos from her wrote a note on them: "Called in person. Very pretty" (Stenn 16). The competition began for her when the finalists were asked to go to Brewster's house for try-outs. Bow felt ugly and unprepared. The other girls were well dressed and had makeup on. The decision came down to two finalists, Bow and another pretty blond. Bow later in her career spoke of the tests as her first lesson of how people act. For her, being yourself was true acting: "The trouble was, I thought, that they were all tryin' t' do it like somebody they'd seen on the screen, not the way they'd do it themselves" (Stenn 18). A week later Bow found out she had won. She was sixteen.

At the age of seventeen in 1921, Bow had her first part in a motion picture *Beyond the Rainbow*. Clara Bow entered the world of film in total naiveté and innocence of the business. Her first day on the set, she met four other actresses who did their own make up and wore pretty clothes. When she asked one of them to help her put make up on, they told her to learn on her own, like they had. The director found her ridiculous with makeup and thought of her as chubby. "Don't tell me she won the beauty contest!" he yelled, and Bow told him she won a talent not a

beauty contest and left crying. The next day she showed up without makeup. With her first screen test, the director was to see if she could cry on cue. "It was easy for me t' cry," Bow said later, "all I hadda do was think of home" (Stenn 21). Bow was still living at home with her mother Sarah. Her mother kept getting worse. Her attacks on Bow were many and she did not have any memory of them afterwards. Robert insisted his wife be put in an asylum where she was announced terminally insane. She was admitted in 1922 and died there in 1923. Bow's fears of her mother's attacks at night gave her insomnia that tormented her for the rest of her life along with the guilt that she felt she was responsible for her mother's death by ignoring her wishes and becoming an actress.

Bow came to Hollywood optimistic and grateful to have made it in life. She was always polite to other actors and people spoke of her good nature and sweet demeanor on the set and off. But it was her kindness that let her into trouble many times throughout her life. She gave people what they asked from her, money, support, or twenty-hour work days. She never said no, and by the time she discovered that her talents and energy were not endless it was a bit too late. She supported her father, her two aunts who were put in an institution, her cooks and chauffeurs, cousins, and anyone who asked for help. She wrote countless blank checks and many times found herself almost in bankruptcy; trusting people were doing the right thing by her. She found the fame and money in Hollywood exhilarating, and she promised herself she would enjoy every minute of it.

Her movies continued to be popular until 1931, and even though she was able to transfer into sound, she suffered too much exposure from the recording and did not handle the pressure well. She never received voice training as it would have taken over six months and Paramount did not want to waste any time. Besides, they knew that Clara Bow would be admired no matter

what she sounded like on screen. But sound had already broken some of the romantic notions of fans' fantasies about her. They now knew her Brooklyn accent and high pitched voice. *The Wild Party*, 1929, was her first introduction to discomfort and misery on the set. She made nine films with sound even though she suffered "Mike Fright" a term that originated from radio performers who froze before they went on air. She had repeated breakdowns on set and Paramount was getting tired of her. She left Hollywood in 1931 and returned a year later to complete *Call Her Savage* in 1932 and *Hoopla* in 1933. She never made another film after that. Her seclusion from Hollywood and the spotlight left her in the shadows of many serious documentations of the silent era. In 1964, Kevin Brownlow's *The Parade's Gone By*, a major documentation of the silent film era, did not include Clara Bow as one of the most important actresses. Louise Brooks, whose idol was Bow, was "outraged [...] Clara made three films which will never be surpassed: *Dancing Mothers*, *Mantrap* and *It*" she reported (Stenn 281).

Her acting career was as brutal as much as it was exhilarating. Bow was not paid as well as other actresses in Hollywood. Because she never paid attention to contracts, Paramount made decisions that were more financially beneficial to the company and paid more attention to her popularity and fame than her own well-being. With a seventh-grade education and a free spirit, Clara Bow became a vehicle of success for many people within Paramount. Her acting was natural and she was authentic in how she made eye contact with the camera and how she moved quickly so the camera always feels as if it's chasing her. To many, that was hardly acting. She was just being herself, they thought. Her energetic personality and her happy demeanor became her trademark as an actress in comedy. It became her escape from a life of poverty and torment. By 1925, Bud Schulberg, who was solely responsible at Paramount for the making of stars, had put Bow under a contract that would allow him to rent her out to other film companies

and he would receive “as much as 500 percent profit for her services” (Stenn 54).

Bow was paid \$750 a week, while he made \$3,000 a week. By 1925, Bow had made fourteen movies in twelve months. She was not the first flapper on film, but her appearance provided something for the audience that made her loved despite the fact that many of her roles were controversial in the way her sexuality was used. She adds innocence and playfulness to the characters she plays, so that the actions performed are not seen as immoral. Her ways of approaching the man she wants becomes a joyful game and her manners are sweet and sometimes childish, but never “proper” because “from the beginning she looked too hot to handle” (Basinger 413). Even in *Wings*, she still represents the girl next door who is not afraid to be independent and daring, joining the war effort to follow the man she loved. So what did Clara Bow add to the flapper image that made audiences love her?

Bow was prescribed a type of identity that she did not really understand at first. The title of the “it” girl was applied to her like a destiny, but ironically, because she was already acting out the role before it was created. She brought natural elements to sexuality and an approach to romance and love that many women were not allowed to express freely. The jazz age produced the flapper for whom according to Lori Landay, “dancing, along with drinking, smoking and unladylike comportment were the primary signifiers” (232). She also argues that for flappers it was the body movement, as in a dance, that created a certain attitude that expressed emotion. Many actresses such as Louise Brooks and Colleen Moore during the jazz era were trained dancers through reputable studios. Bow was not trained to dance, but her directors said that she was dancing even while standing. The flapper moved in ways that women did not move before and their modern femininity confirmed the assertion that relationships in the world would never be the same. The flapper exposed part of her body in her dress as well as parts of her desire for

independence and change. She was not “a siren or a vamp or a femme fatale. She wasn’t innocent, and she wasn’t maternal. She was a naughty grown-up girl who wanted to play with boys, to cause trouble, to be mischievous” (Basinger 412). Yet Bow manages to turn misbehaving situations on screen into comfortable pleasurable events to be watched by her audience.

Her popularity was spreading and people knew her name as well as her typed roles. There were two important people in Hollywood who put a stamp on Clara Bow’s roles as a symbol of sex in an era that was preoccupied with the subject. First, Elinor Glyn with her typesetting of the “it girl,” and then Scott Fitzgerald who said that “Clara Bow is the quintessence of what the term ‘flapper’ signifies as a definite description: pretty impudent, superbly assured, act worldly wise, briefly-clad and hard-berled as possible” (Stenn 87). Bow, who was sensitive and alert to her connection with her audience, was able to create a persona that was needed at that time. Stenn writes, “A titillated public assumed Clara’s screen persona was identical to herself, and though nothing could have been further from the truth, she did not discourage the misinterpretation. Lacking an identity of her own, Clara tailored herself to her persona [...] if that’s who was wanted, then that was who she would be” (68). It took a few more films and a few more years of Hollywood for Paramount to begin to worry about her contract that did not include a “morals clause” as her sexuality was becoming totally under her control and no longer theirs. “Clara brought sex into America’s backyard” and so her appearance and personality had become synonymous with sexual behavior which would later cost her her privacy and her mind (Stenn 43). She made forty six movies from 1922 to 1929, and she could not separate her fame and work from her private life.

By the time she became the 'it' girl, the one who personified the attitude of the 1920s and the jazz age, Bow already knew and had worked with Colleen Moore, who was the first to popularize the flapper in *Flaming Youth* (1923), by the bobbed hair, rouged face, rolled silk stockings, raised hemlines, smoking, drinking, dancing, and throwing parties, who advocated free love, and "enjoyed makin' whoopee"; Bow later became the sexier incarnation of Moore. They worked together on *Painted People* (1924). When the director ordered close-ups of Moore and Bow, Moore objected that close-ups should only be of the main star. Bow then told Moore, that she "was miscast." She said, "I wanna play your part" and two days later quit. Three years later, Bow would be the main star under the same director Clarence Badger, in *It*.

Bow always wanted to have a married life and children. She married Rex Bell, the rancher/actor/politician, in 1931, who took her away from Hollywood and into the desert. She enjoyed the peace for a while but then lost interest in that life and decided to go back to Hollywood to continue making movies. By 1932, Bell was given political opportunities and moved his family closer to Hollywood. Bow decided to go back and make a few films without a demanding contract this time. In 1932, she was able to negotiate her own prospects, choose her own roles, and take control of her career for the first time. *Call Her Savage* was her first film as an independent actress. *Variety* claimed that "Bow's greatly improved acting technique is an added element of strength." But Stenn argues that it was not her acting "but her role that had improved" (Stenn 242). A year later, in 1933, she acted in *Hoopla*, her last film. She worked in radio for a short while and after her separation from her husband moved to Los Angeles in 1950 to find salvation in seclusion.

Bow had two children while married to Rex, but her unhappiness was increasingly hindering her relationships with them. She had considered herself retired from the world of films and

expected that marriage would be her ultimate happiness, yet “it was not the movie career but marriage and motherhood which exacerbated Clara’s schizophrenic condition” (Stenn 263). Doctors had suspected that “Clara surmounted her illness during stardom, which allowed for artistic expression, but was undone by domesticity, which suppressed it” (Stenn 264). In a 1928 interview, she told *Variety* that “the world expects Clara Bow t’be divorced a short time after marriage, but I take marriage seriously. I wanna think about it before doing it, and when I do marry, I wanna make a success of it” (Stenn 138). In 1931 she was married. She never divorced Bell even though they were separated in 1950. He died in 1962. Bow died in 1965.

But Bow’s satisfaction came from her work. Her heartache came from a life that she felt was too exposed for scrutiny by reporters who used their imaginative corrupted views of her lifestyle and success and from Paramount studio that used her as a vehicle to money making and did not think of her as a real artist. Bow was promised a drama role for many years but neither her audience nor the studios were interested in seeing her differently than as the happy heroine. She always hoped to switch over to dramatic roles but it never happened. It caused a sense of loss for her as work was no longer satisfying to her by 1928. Stenn notes, “Confinement to formula comedies robbed Clara of the only fulfilling area in her life: her work” (138). Her talent on the screen was obvious but her ability to make an audience happy in profitable care-free roles meant that the studio would not allow her to let go of that persona while it still made money. While film companies were exploiting the idea that women can get what they want by using their sexuality, the stereotype attached to Bow using promotions of her own life in films, from her disastrous relationships becomes predictable transgressive popularity that drove her into

exclusion later on in her career. *Photoplay* published comments many times in attempts to connect the screen roles Bow played to her real life as too decadent, indecent, and at the end, unforgivable. By 1931 she lived in constant fear of judgment.

Through *It*, many women would find mannerisms and new forms communication to bridge the physical world with commitment and marriage. This belief of B. P. Schulberg and Elinor Glyn, a big Hollywood socialite and British authoress, led them to choose Bow as the girl who possessed the natural “it” quality, and cast her while convincing audiences that Clara’s presence on the screen was her real self. Glyn had just published novel *It* which had become a sensation. Paramount purchased the rights and asked Glyn to endorse Clara Bow as the “it” girl. Glyn considered herself an expert in ways of sexuality and spoke about it with sophistication making sexuality the talk of the 1920s. “Madame Glyn” as she decided to call herself, had become “the last word in matters of taste and refinement” (Stenn 80). Glyn through her snobby attitude believed that the world of royalty had come to an end when motion pictures arrived. Turning stars into royalty was her goal. She had also worked very closely with Gloria Swanson. Clara Bow was a different story though. She did not like pretentious people and did not hit it off with Glyn. She would refer to Glyn as a s...head, and when word got to Glyn she stopped coaching Bow. She did manage to convince Bow to get rid of the gum chewing on the set. But, ironically, it is Clara Bow who has helped Glyn remain in history through the success of *It*.

In the film *It* (Clarence Badger, 1927), Clara Bow is Betty Lou Spence, a working girl in a huge department store who comes from a tenement neighborhood. This public space is a reminder of how the private world cannot hold an investment in the future unless the woman’s position in courtship becomes negotiable. She has many dreams of living a different life. The modernity of her determination to provide for herself suggests a new freedom of self-fulfillment.

The sales girls seem to possess a certain kind of look of service behind the counter. They all are dressed very neatly and take pride in the way they advertise the products that are on the counters for sale. They present stockings and other feminine attire to women shoppers. The department store is a happy place, with lights and many people walking around the aisles, but it is also a place of challenge for the New Woman.

Behind the counter Betty Lou is not lost in the materials sold there. While looking at two young men passing by, the other girls say that one of the men is Cyrus Waltham (Antonio Moreno) their new boss, who just inherited the business from his father. When both men walk through the aisles, it is Betty Lou who notices Cyrus first. The attraction to him is the fact that the other girls told her that he is the new boss. She glances over him in a dreamy look and says, "Sweet Santa Claus, give me him!" The other girls make fun of her for her impossible desire. At this moment her desire to be noticed by Cyrus becomes a challenge which she plans to develop and turn into an adventure. Bow's character will design her own life story by creating a desire she controls. Her awareness of the new possibilities of love and sexual attraction are treated as gifts to her as she speaks to Santa the minute she sees Cyrus. Like a little girl asking for a gift, her sexual desire is treated gently for the audience to find a comedic element in it and perhaps not be aware of the political implications of such treatment of her desired subject. Cyrus at the moment has become objectified while Betty Lou is the sexy aggressor.

The other man walking around the store with Cyrus is Monty (William Austin), his friend, who has come to tell Cyrus about a new story that was just published talking about how some people have "it." Looking around the shop, the camera becomes Monty's eyes and goes from girl to girl behind the counters, playing a game of who might have the "it" until Monty spots Betty. He is poking at Cyrus to look at her on their way to the elevator but Cyrus does not

look back. There is a brief moment when Cyrus leans on the counter and holds down with his elbow lingerie that Betty Lou is trying to fold. She pulls at it, smiling, waiting for him to turn and look at her but he does not. The viewer does have an inclination as to what "it" refers to when we discover that Betty Lou is picked out by Cyrus's friend Monty, a man who appears very refined in his mannerisms, who identifies her as the woman who possesses "it." She wins Monty over with her eye movements; she blinks, she smiles, and creates an energy of happiness around her, but most of all she is sexual in her ways of teasing. We see a close up of her big beautiful eyes and lips. She moves almost in circles, her body is almost elastic in its movements.

At the end of their shift, everyone is running out of the department store and into the street. Betty Lou sees Monty and Cyrus talking at the bottom of the stairs and purposely bumps into him and drops her wallet which he picks up and gives back without looking at her. She stands there a few minutes to hear his plans of going to the Ritz that evening. She later uses that information to get closer to him. The audience is already familiar with Bow's beauty and sexuality as they have seen her in other films. It knows how the camera will follow her face, legs, and movement to show her transformation of the flapper from "wholesome" and low key to high spirited, energetic, and sexy. By looking at Bow's looks, it knows that she can succeed in her pursuit of Cyrus.

Outside the department store, Betty Lou is waiting for the trolley to come when Monty is about to get into his car and notices her. He goes over and offers to take her home. "I'll let you," she says, "if you come with my ride" and they both get on the upper deck-of the trolley while she is laughing at him for being pushed by the crowd. Her playful way of inviting Monty to go with her shows that she has managed to convince him to follow her lead. She now knows that he will

take her where she wants to go. She gets a date with Monty first who wants to take her to the Club and without hesitation she asks if they can go to the Ritz instead. Still with her plan to see Cyrus in mind, she manages to get the opportunity.

We know she lives with a friend, Molly (Priscilla Bonner), who has a young child whom Betty helps support as the unwed mother cannot find a job. This scenario tests the moral ground of many women at the time as it connects Betty Lou to the common woman who would find an illegitimate child the product of a moral sin. Betty Lou's character is saved by her ability to be sensitive to a friend in need who cannot work because of the child and her moral decline. Betty Lou supports them. In this sense, her pursuit of Cyrus does not appear selfish or perverted; instead, it seems almost noble and necessary as part of the "poor girl who dreams to marry a prince" plot.

The evening of the date arrives and Betty is getting ready to go to the Ritz with Monty. She knows she will meet Cyrus there. She puts on an old dress and her friend helps her tear off the sleeves, cut the back, and lower the cut in the cleavage area. She tears off parts of her dress which is "the woman's revenge on fashion, an active wrecking of the feminine fashion symbol" (Basinger 136). She decorates the dress with flowers around her waist and is having so much fun doing the changes to her only dress. She laughs and smiles and tears the dress around her chest and lowers the cut to show more skin. She asks Molly to help her cut the sleeves off, and while she seems concerned and almost shocked at the request, her friend does it. Then she puts a sheer scarf around her head and neck, looks in the mirror, and blows a kiss in the air. Molly also approves. Molly appears trapped with a child in a very dark apartment. The only shining light coming through is Betty. She jumps on the counter seats, jokes, and swings her legs, almost like a child, except that she is too sexy to be looked as a child. As Basinger states, "The movie does

not miss the opportunity to show her off--letting her cut apart her cheap dress to make an eye catching outfit to wear [...] and taking time to show her slowly dressing [...] standing around in her silk stockings and lace teddy” (436). Looking at Betty Lou shine in her excitement to become sexy for the dinner date, the audience is distracted from the moral issue at hand of Molly who represents a warning of what might happen to women who have used their sexuality without marriage. The transformation of her dress transforms her into a New Woman who claims her sexuality. She already possessed the ingredients of modernism by being single and working. Now the audience is a witness to the change and the possibility as we stay with her while the camera follows the execution of her plan. We see a devotion to a plan empowered by sexuality.

While at dinner, Betty Lou gets noticed by Cyrus and the other two women at his table, Adele (Jaqueline Gadson), who expects to marry him, but to whom he has not proposed yet, and her mother Mrs. Van Norman (Julia Gordon). Both ladies appear rich, and we have seen them earlier getting ready for the dinner in an extravagant home, being helped by their maid to get ready for the evening. At the Ritz, Betty Lou appears underdressed and too loud, so the waiter asks Monty if he would like a quiet table in the corner, suggesting that Betty Lou looks like a lady of the evening. Betty Lou looks around immediately and notices Cyrus, so she disapproves of the table the waiter suggests and moves to another in the middle of the dining room. Everyone in the dining room looks at her and Monty. Betty Lou cannot order her meal because it is in French and so she lets Monty order for her. She asks Monty who the women are with Cyrus and finds out that Adele will probably marry Cyrus one day. Betty Lou’s face changes and becomes concerned as her game plan must become more aggressive. She has center stage, as she looks at her gift from Santa. But it is her naughty behavior that will guarantee the connection to him. A good girl with a plan to seduce is not seen as a temptress but as a game planner for the audience.

The game to seduce him becomes personal for the audience. Landay emphasizes that the audience “went to see films for the experience” but we can argue that through experience comes knowledge and through Bow’s characters women at that time see a new possibility of behaving toward courtship, one where the woman has a choice of whom to seduce, making sexuality a powerful weapon against the old objectified notions of women as objects of desire. Here, the roles are turned.

Betty Lou keeps looking at their table while they are discussing the *It* book and the definition. Cyrus does not seem interested. Then Madame Glyn herself walks into the room and so they decide to ask her. Cyrus notices Betty Lou and he now decides that some people do possess the “it.” The camera here follows Bow’s natural beauty and comfort of looking straight at Cyrus without any hesitation or shyness. Bow’s attractiveness confirms that women must be in control of their attire to manipulate sexuality as they see fit. Her shoulders are exposed after the alteration of her dress; the back is low cut, and so is the front. Her hair is short and exposes her neck that turns and looks in any direction she desires. She stares straight at him, suggests something with her eyes, and he cannot look away. Trapped into her suggestive sexual attractiveness, he now appears influenced by modernity that relies on the power of women’s sexuality.

Betty Lou sees them leaving after they are done with dinner and runs off to make a phone call. The customers in the restaurant are all looking at her exiting. She sits and waits for Monty to meet with Cyrus in the hallway and approaches them. She says hello and makes a bet with Cyrus. He is pleased to talk to her, and because she is outside the work place, she appears different to him. As a matter of fact, he does not know that she works for him. “I bet next time you see me you won’t recognize me,” she tells him. And he feels offended. If that happens, he

says, you will win the bet and you can name your price. The next day at the store, Betty Lou is facing a problem with a displeased customer. Cyrus enters the discussion and asks that the sales girl be sent to his office. Betty Lou puts her make up on, touches her lips, and goes upstairs to his office. He yells at her without even looking at her, sitting on his office chair with his back to her. When he turns and sees her, he smiles and tells her she won the bet. She tells him that it was not a real bet. Once again, the phone rings and it's Adele asking Cyrus to dinner. Betty Lou changes her plan and tells Cyrus that they should go to the beach and have fun. He agrees. Her suggestions of having fun are excited and in her smile and eye movement we can see that this is a new situation for Cyrus whose life is traditional outside of his relationship to Betty Lou. They go to Coney Island.

While they are at the carnival, we see Betty Lou having fun in many of the rides. She falls, her legs go up, her stockings show, but she does not care, she only laughs. Betty Lou gives him instructions. "Hold me tight, Mr. Waltham," and the amusement ride is a "laughing, spinning skirt-lifting descent [...] the body, suspending the physical laws that normally restrict its movement, breaking the social codes that normally regulate its conduct" (Landay 240). As we see Betty Lou acting like a child having fun, her sexuality becomes a different type of seduction. There is a complex connection between her movements as a performance and an expression of freedom. Her happiness does not arrive in a "ladyhood" manner but in a childish innocent event controlled by her in the end. Landay comments, "The effect of this inversion in *It* is to break down the class barriers between the working girl and her boss as they are both subject to the assault on the body; they are both caught in the physical realm that includes but does not stop at the erotic" (240).

When she is returned home, Betty Lou envisions a different life for herself. She is happy. Sitting in Cyrus's car, holding her winning teddy bear from the evening, she looks up to the sky when he asks her if she is happy and he leans over and kisses her. She slaps his face and calls him a minute man--the kind that thinks he knows a woman within a minute and kisses her. She runs upstairs to the apartment and goes straight to the window to look at him from above. She sees him touch his face then get in his car and leave. Betty Lou remains in control of the situation. Landay writes, "It is a fairytale story in which Betty Lou's female power is ultimately absolute, and she is a salient example of a female trickster whose social practices of romance in everyday life conflate femininity and trickery" (243). The feminine power that Betty Lou practices in the film is also conditional. It does challenge the rules of seduction and the aggressor but she still has to comply with the freedom of her sexuality while staying within the moral codes of her society.

Molly is in trouble as Betty Lou is her only provider. We see that the child can be taken away from its mother and put into a home without the mother's consent. The women who come to take the baby are representative of the old tradition of marital rules of child bearing. They ask the mother if she has a job and she starts crying and calls for help. Betty Lou sees Molly screaming for help from the window when she arrives with Monty. She runs upstairs and tells the two women from the home to leave. Betty Lou lies and says that the child is hers and that she does have a job. Then they ask her if she has a husband and she answers, "None of your business." The commotion has brought over a journalist (Gary Cooper), who is asked to write the story. Monty seems disappointed in hearing that the baby belongs to Betty Lou. He comes back to ask Betty Lou if it is true and she confirms it before he leaves. Both single and living alone is already a troublesome situation for the audience, but Betty Lou's good action of protecting her

friend entraps her in the impossibility of being moral and being helpful to another woman. The decisions of the New Woman seem impossible here and can only provide solutions through lies.

The next day the headlines discuss the welfare of the child and the mother. At the same time as Monty enters Cyrus's office to tell him about Betty Lou having a baby, the welfare ladies walk into his office to confirm that Betty Lou actually has a job and works there. Cyrus is very upset and immediately concludes Betty Lou is a fallen woman. He decides to avoid her from then on. When he gives promotion checks to the sales girls that morning, he treats her like everyone else. She decides to stay behind in his office to ask if he is still upset with her because she slapped him. He says no and continues to work. She then pushes things away from his desk and sits on it. She leans over and takes his hand admiring his ring. "I like diamonds," she tells him and smiles. He tells her that he is crazy about her. Then he suggests that he can get her all the diamonds she wants and that he would take care of her. The promise to "take care of her" is in exchange to a sexual relationship. He wants to keep his future marriage clear of any inconveniences on moral grounds, yet his suggestion is immoral. She realizes this and instead of holding him personally responsible, she categorizes him as all other men who want to have the traditional marriages and the fun with a single sexy young woman. This suggestion of the "kept woman" makes Betty Lou upset. She leaves his office and goes home totally disappointed in the thought "that all men think alike."

Betty decides to stay friends with Monty when he visits her apartment and brings her flowers. He comes to apologize about having told Cyrus that she has a baby. She laughs and tells him that this is not her baby. Betty Lou's ability to create a fictional story about having a child is also assisted by her ability to perform it so that is believed, and that gives her power to create any future she can enter and live in. Monty understands that this is a good moral cause that she lied

about. When Monty tells her that he is going on a yacht trip with Cyrus, she decides that she wants to go with him and that she needs clothes that he will buy her. Monty seems overwhelmed with her plan of making Cyrus propose to her only so that she can deny him. Her game of courtship is evident in manipulating the old traditional roles of marriage as she has realized that she is in control of her choices. We come to understand her plan as risky, yet somehow we trust that her charm will help manipulate the outcome. But she regrets all this after she succeeds in refusing Cyrus and her game backfires. She seems uncertain for the first time of what to do next, and that having control of the chase did not give her the satisfaction she wanted.

They are all on the yacht when the truth of her story about her not having a child comes out. Cyrus ignores her and tells Monty that he is upset that he brought her. Adele is there with other friends and very annoyed with Betty Lou. They all sit on deck as Betty Lou plays the ukulele and sings. Adele tells Cyrus that she thinks Betty Lou lacks in reserve. But Cyrus says she has plenty in reserve, acknowledging Betty Lou's sexuality and indirectly insulting Adelle. It also suggests that the modern woman who is happy and in love is indeed reserving sexuality for her true love. The film's speculative vision of the modern woman's future is to be transcending a new role of pleasure and seduction.

After Cyrus finds out that the child is not Betty Lou's, he decides to ask her to marry him. But her plan had been to make him want her and then deny him, so she says no. She seems upset how quickly he thinks her guilty and does not ask her about it himself. She laughs at him and walks away. She is upset but she chooses to forgive him without telling him and continues to approach him later when she goes to the yacht trip with Monty. While in the boat she seems comfortable and happy. Her happiness is what distracts Cyrus the most. The accident of the boat is symbolic as it knocks both Betty Lou and Adele into the sea. There the women are forced to

look at each other and face a life or death situation that does not include men. Betty Lou swims to Adele to save her from drowning, but Adele panics and refuses help. Some women would survive the changes of events in the modern world and others would need help within a community of others. Betty Lou punches Adele and knocks her out in order to bring her to a safe boat. This is a very symbolic moment in the story as we see the modern woman being brave, athletic, and unapologetic. It is also important to notice that the modern woman here becomes a leader in helping other women move forward in their own desires. When she again reunites with Cyrus after rescuing Adele, he is even more smitten with her and she is ready to take him back. She is indeed free the way he had envisioned her. The roles of motherhood and childhood out of wedlock are questioned here as Betty's "it" becomes questionable with the idea that promiscuity is no longer sexy for a single woman with child. And if "it" belongs to women, it must be controlled until the right man comes along. At the end of the film, Betty Lou hides on the anchor while Cyrus is in the water swimming to find her. He rises to meet her and they kiss in front of the boat's name, "Itolia," between them. When they stand, they block out all but the IT of the name, confirming what the term refers to.

It exposes sexuality as a positive sixth sense that the New Woman can use to her advantage. Yet, we are also let to believe that Betty Lou might be virginal in the sense that she has fun with her sexual self but will never "go too far" or suffer the possible consequences of her behavior. The film displaces those onto her roommate. *It* asserts that sexuality is not defined by beauty or class, at least not in this film, as Betty is working class as opposed to Cyrus's girlfriend who comes from money. Unless of course we look at Betty Lou's sexuality as some sort of primitive sensual instinct that men cannot resist and is in response to Cyrus's class. She is happy to desire and love and enjoy her body without reservation.

Betty Lou does not wonder about her appearance. She is conscious of fashion and knows how to manipulate it. She also knows that class and money do not have to be connected. She knows that even after changing her dress into a more appealing one, everyone will still notice her body. For her, the desire to be accepted appears like a game that means taking chances on a new life. Leaving the old world behind, Betty Lou can create a new image for herself as well as a new vision for the female audience at the time. Young women are no longer passive objects of desire, which Bow shows in her athleticism. She is quick; she is bright, absolutely charming, and hopeful. The audience can follow her fast walk or running; she never moves slowly. She runs up and down stairs, swims expertly in a choppy ocean, and possesses a knock-out punch. These movements connected female viewers in a metaphysical way with a different woman, one with a plan, as opposed to one who is trapped behind the counter at the shop. She plans a different marriage for herself. Her ticket there, her charm and sexualized beauty, she creates for herself through a transformative power of dress. But it is the attitude toward change that is most apparent in her behavior. This was a new impact on audiences. The sexual "It" named a liberated attitude about sexuality, not something that can be bought. Instead, it needed to be developed through practice of chase, attraction, and self confidence in feminine sexual appeal.

It is a romantic comedy, so it does not measure to a heteronormative community of a specific social standard. As comedies exaggerate social norms, *It* appears to be setting up a standard of its own. In that respect, the idea of "it" is new and modern and suggests a different way for women to look at themselves in relation to pleasure, sexuality, and the marriage game. It does not need anything in response in order to be fulfilled. Men's approval or confirmation is not needed. As a matter of fact, the audience might wonder whether this kind of existence is possible to maintain after marriage. Perhaps the desire is to be fulfilled by a man who wants to possess

the "it" in Betty by offering her marriage. Yet this bodily display of sex appeal changes the assumption that marriage had been functioning on, one of low temperament, obedience, and commitment. This film does not offer a solution to a different kind of marriage for women, but it does open up the conversation of what happens to women who are aware that they possess "it" after they marry. *Variety* called *It* "one of those pretty little Cinderella stories where the poor shop girl marries the wealthy owner of the big department store in which she works" (Jacobs 204). But *It* does more. Bow's acting demands the viewers acknowledge the power of sexuality and the conflicted relationships of power that are not supported in the political realms of the modern world but still confirms an autonomy for the new woman in the future of a new cultural representation.

When *Wings* was in production, Bow was already very popular with her audience. The studio used her name before anyone else's because of that popularity. *Wings* was a very expensive film and it took months to finish. Bow only appeared for a few scenes while they were filming in San Antonio, Texas, and then went on to film *It*. *Wings* was released six months after *It* was released. Bow's role for most of the film does not display a sexual nature. She is Mary Preston, the girl next door, who is shy and secretly in love with Jack (Charles Rogers) her childhood friend. This was a common premise of her roles as she needs to find a way to attract the men of her desire. The girl next door characters also allow her audience to see a new possibility for attraction and true love. Jack treats her as a buddy. He does not think of her as a sexual being. His dreams are apparent from the first scene in the film when he is lying on the ground looking at the sky hoping one day he will be a pilot. At the same time, we see Mary hanging clothes next door when she realizes that Jack is in his backyard working on his car. She becomes excited, climbs the fence, and gets under the car with him.

The separation of their dreams immediately suggests a struggle for them. Mary does not appear unhappy about her life; instead, she appears very content. Her clothes are baggie and she carries her body like a tomboy. She stands like he does in front of the car; she imitates his body posture and does not take herself or him seriously. She joins in with Jack's excitement about creating his sport's car, helps him name it "Shooting Star," and paints a shooting star on it. This naming becomes prophetic as we see the story develop and Jack is called to war duty. The tomboy role is one that is associated to the flapper of the time, but with the absence of sexuality the tomboy is not taken seriously as a future partner in love.

Mary also has a wish to be the girl that Jack says good bye to before he leaves and follows the ritual, as we see in the film, of taking the girl's photo with him for encouragement to survive the war and return home. This tradition of commitment through the images of photography and dedication behind the photo becomes symbolic throughout the film after we meet David (Richard Arlen). He is the richest man in town and so he can have the woman that Jack wants, Sylvia (Jobyna Ralston). Sylvia does not appear superficial or after his money; instead, she appears homey and motherly. Very different from Mary, she represents wealth, charm, and status. She loves David and is upset that he too has been called to duty. Jack decides to take Sylvia for a ride with his now finished sports car. When Mary sees him with her, she becomes very sad. The film does not develop into a battle relationship between Mary and Sylvia as they are both innocent of each other's intentions. The battle is placed between Jack and David when they leave and meet again during air training. The two men's relationship is staged in a battle field, in the physical threats of war, and in the emotional secrets of love of the same woman. Sylvia tells David that Jack came to say good bye to her while she was writing behind her photo for her lock. He thought the photo was for him and he took it, thanking her for her

love. The rest of his stay abroad he is under the illusion that Sylvia loves him. Sylvia has told David what had happened and how she felt sorry for him. So the secret remains for the rest of the film that David knows something about Jack and will not tell him so he will not hurt his feelings. This suggests that the young men who came back from the war were in need of emotional protection.

The most important aspect of the film is the relationship between David and Jack during the war. The battle scenes are long and the audience loved the sound effects. There were sound tracks attached to the scenes. There are moments of fear and glory as the planes dip and rise and the enemy is defeated. The fights and flights are very realistic and the audience can actually feel like they are flying through the camera. The most interesting aspect of the film is the humanitarian gain that is observed between the soldiers. Besides the homoerotic relationship between the two men, the film brings to attention that women can be a part of the war and leave home alone for the first time. Mary becomes involved in the war. She joins as an ambulance driver. She delivers medicine to the sick. The interaction between Jack and Mary becomes a cosmic one as they are both away from home and their interactions happen in a public place. She is no longer the girl next door. She has become a traveler who has gone overseas to join a cause that is more honorable than gaining the love of the boy next door, yet that remains her goal.

While Jack is on leave to Paris, Mary tries to find him. The chase that Bow has made popular through many of her films is in this film one of concern and not of sexual desire until Mary sees him with a loose woman who is drunk with him at the Folies Bergere Club. We see Bow in uniform and even through the transition from the tomboy look of the early film to the uniform is not great; it still sexualizes Bow's facial expressions of sad eyes and concerned look. She does not look into the camera. She looks around when she enters the club where all the

soldiers are having fun before they return to duty. In this scene we can see women drinking with men, smoking, getting drunk, and acting very promiscuous. Mary sees Jack with a woman and he is very drunk. The woman is laughing with him until she realizes that Mary is standing behind him staring at her. Jack is too drunk to recognize Mary as she is trying to tell him that he needs to report to the base or he will be court martialed.

Mary goes to the lady's room and starts crying when the room attendant, an older woman, who seems to recognize the emotional trouble that Mary is in, tells her that she needs to get out of her uniform and dress as a pretty woman. She takes Mary to the back of the room and offers her a selection of dresses that the dancing girls wear. She picks one for her, a shiny tight dress, with very low cleavage. Mary dresses and then kisses the woman who has helped her. The film offers for the first time in its story line a powerful visual attractiveness that Bow's body displays in its transformation from a soldier to a sexual sensation. With a borrowed dress, Mary goes back into the club trying to convince Jack to go with her. It is not the dress that makes Bow sexy in these scenes, as it is the way she can carry her exposed body through the crowds of men in order to get to the one she has chosen. The chase is again one of calculation but the film provides a cause that is honorable on her part. And unlike her other roles this one is not made of "silliness and sexiness." Her sexuality is used as a dignified vehicle to a good cause.

Jack is trying to decide if he wants to go away with the woman he has been drinking with or Mary. He spots Mary and says that even her eyes have bubbles, making her part of his drunken illusion, and goes with her to a hotel room. He is still too drunk to recognize her and passes out on the bed. She decides to let him sleep and leaves a letter next to him so that he will know to report in the morning. She goes behind a screen to change back into her uniform when two military policemen walk into the room and see Mary topless for a brief second before she

covers herself quickly. They immediately assume that she had spent the night with Jack. This moment in the film could be assumed as the moment the audience, especially the male, was waiting for as it is one of its kind where Bow shows off her naked back even for a split second.

The most important scenes in the film are the great fighting scenes where both David and Jack are flying planes. At the end there is news that David has been captured by the Germans and killed. Jack is very upset and the next day goes back into another battle. David is alive and in hiding, and he gets into a German plane to try to get back to the base. Jack in his fur, does his best to shoot it down. When the plane crashes, they take out David very hurt and dying. The Sargent tells Jack that there is not enough time to get help. David asks Jack to stay with him. Jack holds him, cries, kisses him, and tells him that their relationship has been the most important one for him. "I knew it all the time," David says. David dies in Jack's arms.

Guilty and distraught, Jack goes home to a hero's welcoming parade. Jack has to go ask for forgiveness from David's parents (Julia Gordon, Henry Walthall). They are both sitting by their window watching the parade when Jack comes in to see them. In his pocket, he has David's little teddy bear that his mother had kept since he was a child and gave him to take with him. She tells him that it was not his fault because it was war. He leaves crying. He goes home and finds Mary in the yard. She is more reserved as he holds her hand and kisses it. He then says, "Mary, there is something I need to tell you. There was a girl and I forgot myself [...] and then [...] I don't who she was [...] I don't ever want to know." Mary smiles and looks up at the sky. We, the audience, are supposed to think he meant Mary when they met in Paris. She tells him that she too had seen the war, and she could not blame anyone for anything that happened. "What happens from now is all that matters," she says. Then they kiss under a shooting star. The future where

men and women will share similar experiences before marriage is a cultural difference that was brought on by the war and in many ways the revolutions about feminine power and masculine transformations through traumatic emotional experiences ushered relationships into a different future.

At the end of 1927, Bow's *Get Your Man*, the title suggests choice, again suggests sexual adventure as a way to build a relationship that happens by plan and by a woman's chase. This film connects family history, arranged marriages, and wealth to the challenges presented to them by an American modern woman. Dorothy Arzner directed the film and created a relationship with Bow that would later become essential in her transition into talkies with *Wild Party* in 1929. Judith Mayne explains that Arzner addressed Bow's fear of the microphone by a device "of what is reputed to be the first fishpole microphone to allow Bow the flexibility of placement and her movements on the set more natural" (48). Arzner became known for her collaboration with women stars but also for "her ability to take over difficult projects and carry them through to completion" (55). Bow had become that difficult project with *Get Your Man* but Arzner took time rehearsing scenes and waiting until the shot was perfect.

The plot begins with the introduction of a wealthy British man, Robert Albin as a young boy, who is allowed to kiss an infant in a servant's arms, named Simone, who will be his future wife. There is reference to this scene throughout the film as the betrothal ceremony. The next scene is of Robert and his friend washing a dog when his father tells him that he must give Simone the family pearls which are being restrung in Paris, so he should go get them. His father's comment is that Simone "will make a fine wife--imagine an innocent girl in an age where there are none." Innocence is referred to here as the opposite of planning and of self-reflection which we will see later once the American free-spirited girl, Nancy (Bow) is

introduced in the film. Simone is to represent the old order of traditional marriage arranged by the families. Later on, we will see that Simone (Josephine Dunn) is not that innocent and that she had promised her heart to Henry, a man no one knows anything about. Before Robert leaves for Paris, he asks his older governess what she would like him to bring her. Her answer is “Night of Temptation” perfume, suggestive of the desires for material goods and sensuality the time the movie is made that even a governess now feels free to make known to a young man. The perfume was a real perfume by Coco Chanel who was truly modern, “traversing the boundaries between lady and mistress” as one commentator put it, allowing working women to find new self-confidence as with smoking and dancing.

Feminism of the 1920s caused a destruction of the old order so that young men and women could become modern in their decisions about love and marriage. The film suggests that a person like Nancy can exist in the world as a new powerful force. In the second section of the film, which takes place in Paris, Robert (Charles Rogers) is enjoying shopping and walking the streets. Nancy Worthington, an American, from New York, comes speeding around the corner and stands in front of a building as we see the name on the awning, “Woman’s Exchange or Divorce Court,” and walks straight into his taxi. The humor in the name of the building is to make a connection between women’s exchanges and that the second part to those exchanges is a divorce. This is Nancy’s first “unchaperoned day in Paris” and the start of how the film will follow her radical attempts to get closer to Robert. The mention of a chaperone is symbolic here of the old order where young women were not allowed to walk the streets alone. Bow enters the film excited and sexy. She is dressed modern with a short dress and a noticeable hat. She is curious and excited in every step that she takes; she seems hyper and almost hops when she walks. Nancy meets Robert as she enters his taxi but does not make notice of him, nor does she

seem apologetic and goes on with her day afterwards. They both appear to be in the same places at the same time, suggestive of similar desires, ideas, and actions. They meet again in a perfume shop where Robert is purchasing the perfume for his governess when he sees her. She looks surprised to see him and then leaves the shop. In the next scene, Nancy is at the wax museum where she is enthused by all the movements of the figures. She seems innocent to the audience when she asks one of the mechanical statues for directions and laughs when she realizes he is not real. Innocence, the film suggests, is how a woman deals with values of intimacy although Bow's acting technique portrays that what the individual woman discovers and learns from mistakes is something more than innocence. She is playful and laughs at her own silliness.

As Nancy continues to entertain herself in the museum, she stares at the Joan of Arc and then a murder scene. She leans forward to pay closer attention to the body when she realizes that the man next to her is not wax but Robert. They shake hands and she tells him, "It must be Fate," and laughs. He asks to show her around and they walk around the museum together. She becomes more playful than before and laughs more, this time not to the camera but to Robert who becomes the focus of her attention. She then says, "They can't fool me anymore, I know a dummy when I see one" and hits an older woman who also turns out to be real and is very annoyed. Many moments the film suggests a clash between class mannerisms as well as cultural differences in how an American girl would behave and how she would be perceived in Europe. Nancy's explorations alone suggest the temporal possibility that a young modern woman may be actually opening up new possibilities of public behavior or another way of living that even though fun to watch could cause an anxiety to the older generation at that time and excitement and fantasy for the New Woman audience. No matter what, Nancy is determined to have fun and shows no consciousness of possible danger. Nancy decides to crash her car on Robert's house

gate. Her purpose was to find sympathy and acceptance by his family. She is successful and is also invited by his father to stay for the weekend. But it is after she meets Simone that her plan of attraction changes to include Simone and create a union between the two that is characteristic of Arzner's work.

In the next scene, following the car crash, Nancy and Simone sit outside in a garden with Robert's father (Josef Swickard) and Simone's father (Harvey Clark). The fathers explain the plan for marriage between Robert and Simone and ask Nancy if she would like to see the photos of their childhood ceremony. She says she would and when he is inside the house, Robert walks in to say he is not sure he wants to go outside and see Simone. He tells his father, "What would you say if I told you I couldn't go through with the marriage?" His father becomes stern and says, "This marriage is your solemn duty as an Albin." Robert is caught into a family situation that has been destined for him. Perhaps the difference between planning and fate, as Nancy told him earlier, is that love happens by chance, and in order for chance to happen one must take chances. But it is the collaboration between Simone and Nancy that helps the plot develop. From the moment that Nancy meets Simone, her chase becomes a determined plan designed by both women. The moment they are alone in the study and Nancy sees Simone crying while writing the note to the man she loves, her affection turns toward Simone and wants to help her achieve her desire. Arzner's talent as a director was to emphasize in female desire as a way of connecting women. The fact that both Nancy and Simone have shared secrets about their desires puts them in "center stage as the active agents of desire" (Mayne 112). A distinctive feature of Arzner's work was "female/female relationships that emerge at key moments and occasion particularly striking visual and narrative formations. [...] [M]en may well be the objects of desire [...] but it is the female/female interaction that is necessary to the plot" (Mayne 113).

Robert looks out the window and sees Nancy talking and laughing with Simone. “Who is that girl?” he asks. The father’s response is interesting when he says that she is “A Charming American girl who barely escaped with her life in a motor crash at our gate--she is recuperating here.” At this point in the film we do not know how the accident happened but later we can assume that it was planned by Nancy. Nancy’s decision to crash a car at Robert’s gate is an action of acknowledgment that she is to succeed in her desires, no matter what. She knows at whose house she is and has already collected enough information about Robert and Simone before he comes out to meet them. In a romantic comedy, this plan of hers to enter his private world and find out more about him is comical, but at the same time she is stalking him and plans an aggressive attack on his plan of marriage to Simone.

The moment they meet outside and she does not acknowledge the fact that they met earlier and had enjoyed each other’s company forces him to not disclose the information to anyone either. She knows that she can now continue with her fictional plan and include him in it with his silent consent. Nancy jokingly asks Simone to put Robert back in circulation and get her man, Nancy smiles and agrees. Nancy puts her hand out. “How do you do?” she asks Robert when he meets them in the garden and he seems surprised and pleased. The father asks Robert to say hello to Simone and says that he may kiss her. He leans over and kisses Simone on the forehead. “Now isn’t that sweet?” Nancy comments. She sees Robert’s discomfort and asks Simone to go get her scarf from inside. As soon as Simone leaves them alone, he falls to his knees and kisses Nancy’s hand. “Your seventeen year engagement is slipping your mind,” she tells him to see how he responds. And so she puts the hook on his desire by saying, “Besides, my fiancé wouldn’t approve.” He looks concerned and looks away when we see Nancy switch her

ring to another finger and turn it over so that it appears as an engagement ring. “Would you break your engagement if I break mine?” he asks Nancy. She does not answer him.

“Who is this fiancé of yours?” Robert asks. “His name is Cushion,” she answers, “Tommy Cushion.” She, to come up with a name, looks at the cushions on the sofa and names him Mr. Cushion. She decides that he will be her cushion in the situation. The other man who waits and loves her. His name has a literal meaning of finding a cushion in the idea that she is wanted and that she too has made a promise she would need to break. At this moment, they are both in unwanted relationships according to Robert’s understanding. Individual desires are articulated in constructing new cultural productions with new political relevance. Bow’s natural beauty and comedic manner helps push these new ideas forward without the suspicion that these actions might be politically radical in entertaining new sensibilities of courtship that lead to relationships of empowerment between men and women.

When the father returns outside, he asks Nancy to stay for the wedding. “We must be desolate if you left,” he comments. “I shouldn’t” she says. “But I’ll do my best to get permission” and limps away into the house. By now the audience knows that Nancy does not need permission and she has been acting out her own desires in her own accord. They have now offered her a room in their mansion and she is very comfortable walking around. We never see her get permission and we are not sure to whom she is referring. Unlike Robert and Simone, not only is she American and appears to travel alone, but she does not have a history we know of. She is a girl who is out to have fun. She has a plan on how to get the attention of Robert and all the other men in the family. Her next move is to gain Simone’s trust or at least to get close to Simone and calculate her approach to her.

Simone represents the old tradition where women were not allowed to choose their own partner and their destiny was decided by their fathers. When Nancy enters the house, she finds Simone alone writing a note, crying. She asks her what is wrong, wipes her tears, and reads the note Simone has written to Henry. "Do you love him?" Nancy asks her. "With my whole heart and soul," Simone answers. Then Nancy gets very excited and tells Simone to "Turn Robert back into circulation--and get your man!" Simone appears very different from Nancy. She has long hair and dresses very old fashioned, so her immediate response to Nancy's suggestion is fear. "Father would shut me up in the nearest convent," she tells Nancy. Nancy, who is more modern in her decisions and her actions, takes it upon herself to make it happen. "Something has to be done about this," she says, "and I'm going to do it!" It is up to the modern woman to make the changes. The second plan of action is now in full force as Nancy needs to work on many different angles within her strategy, but this plan is complex culturally and sexually as the film addresses serious matters of suggestive rape.

Robert asks to show Nancy their art gallery but she says that she promised the Marquis, Simone's father, to show it to her. Nancy gives her hand to Robert to kiss but he does not. She looks as if she is rethinking her strategy. She walks away with Simone arm in arm. For the first time in the film, we see them bonded within a secret of their true desires, except Nancy has not told her the truth of how she feels about Robert. She has withheld that information in order to execute her plan for the benefit of both. There is a distinct kind of relationship between Nancy and Simone which were in Arzner's films, "encounters between women that suggest the possibilities of other kinds of desires" (Mayne 112). Nancy goes to her own room and is thinking of what to do next in order to have Robert propose to her so that Simone can also have

the man she truly loves. Her plan satisfies both her desire as well as Simone's. She has already flirted with the Marquis and is hoping that she can manipulate his reaction to Simone's marriage.

The Marquis goes out under Nancy's window and begins to play the flute. Robert is also hiding in the bushes. She sees him and acts very amused by the Marquis playing for her under her balcony. She cuts a rose, kisses it, and throws it to the Marquis. Robert is upset and leaves. He does not understand why Nancy would want to marry the Marquis. "When I see the Marquis I think of battle axes," Robert tells her. She knows that she has turned his passion into sport, and she is the referee who knows the rules. He tries to find faults in her plans to flirt with the Marquis and tries to deter her from continuing her supposed affair with him. "What about your Mr. Cushion?" he asks her. "Oh, I'll break the engagement. He will understand" she replies. Bow's double engagements to Victor Fleming and Gary Cooper at the same time had become common knowledge to her audience, making this reference biographical. Her own life at the time was part of a fantasy with her audience just like her films were.

Dyer says that "a star image is made of media texts that can be grouped together as promotion, publicity, films and criticism" (60). In Bow's life, her star image in "the importance of her publicity, in its apparent or actual escape from the image that Hollywood is trying to promote, it seems more authentic, yet they are moments in the star's image's career as part of the cinematic machine ... and contribute to the shaping of public opinion about a star" (Dyer 63). Bow's popularity contributed to her own image as a fantasy materialized. Her audience believed it knew facts about her private life as if they were part of every character she played. This misconception made life difficult for Bow to live outside her work as her personal choices became negative reminders for her audience about promiscuity.

The next day, the Marquis takes Nancy for a walk in the gardens and says, “A little French rose for an American beauty.” She takes the rose and we can see her eyes rolling, thinking, planning her next move. She tells him, “Why, that sounds almost like a proposal, Marquis” and smiles and encourages just that. He falls on his knees and asks her to marry him. “I really think I’m going to say yes,” she tells him and smiles. Her next move is right on target. “If we get married, I would have to break that silly engagement between Simone and Robert. I want our daughter to have a love match like ours.” Here we see Nancy minimizing the old traditional ways of marrying; yet, she is not sincere about how their match can happen in the modern world. She goes further with the Marquis; she touches his face, caresses his collar, and manipulates him through his desire for her. Her mannerisms of sexual energy promise change and true danger.

Next, as they are all in the sitting room, Simone is playing the piano. Both fathers call the children’s attention. “We have a very important announcement to make,” they claim. “The Marquis and I have decided to end the betrothal wedding and let you follow the dictates of your own hearts.” Robert looks at Nancy and with eye contact he asks her if she had something to do with it. She nods yes and smiles at him because he had not caught on all along and was upset instead. The Marquis then announces that Nancy has accepted his proposal for marriage. Simone hugs her, and Robert looks like he is about to cry and leaves the room. She tries to communicate to him with the shaking of her head that she does not want this but he has left. At midnight, she decides to write him a note saying that she was planning to cancel her engagement to the Marquis in the morning. She is about to put the note under his door when she sees him coming to her room to do the same thing. “For you, love is just another engagement to break—well, you will never get a chance to break one with me!” Robert tells her and walks back into his room and

closes the door. Robert here becomes the voice of knowledge about Bow's real relationships outside of films where she was engaged to two men at the same time and then had to decide which one to break.

She appears panicked. She walks into her room and picks up his note that he left there: "This is the end--you have killed my faith in women forever. I am leaving for Africa to shoot lions. I hope I never come back." This note has many connotations in relation to faith in women and the loss of faith; the mentioning of forever is significant as the modern woman does not believe in forever. It is also suggestive that he might not be in tune with the modern woman at all. The man who appears to have total control is not the young man. It is apparent by the end of the film that it is the father who was the wise one and it is he who allows the fictional plan constructed by Nancy to go on. Even so, it is Nancy who uses her imagination to produce a place where desires can materialize. She exercises a new system that either Bow or Nancy the character, or the audience, might have realized is at the brink of political change.

She comes up with her final desperate attempt. Robert is packing when she decides to ask him to come and close a window that keeps opening with the wind because she is cold. He tells her he will call a servant to do that for her. She acts childish and in need of his help and asks in a shy way, "Come on, you can't close a tiny window for me?" He enters her room, and she immediately locks the door. He begins pacing. She then throws chairs around, jumps on the bed, and starts jumping up and down. Her noise wakes up everyone in the house.

He tells her to stop and she begins to cry and jumps off the bed and into his arms. He holds her tight when everyone in the house walks into the room. We see her smiling while he is holding her, proving that the crying was an act. The others seem shocked. She sits on the bed and says, "Oh, I'm so ashamed!" She covers herself and then starts crying. She is suggesting he tried

to rape her. Sexual implications confirm the scene's problematic implications have been used to redeem Nancy's humble position as heroine of the film. Robert is shocked. The Marquis covers his mouth in amazement. The suggestion has been made. Nancy is acting as if she were raped by Robert. Robert tries to explain to his father but is told to keep silent. Nancy tells the Marquis, "Of course you could not marry me now."

She then returns the ring to the Marquis and walks up to Robert, telling him to keep silent. Bow's comical acting disguises the traditional taboos of rape and lying as we see that Nancy uses the secure desire of a sexual nature to dominate men. The Marquis forgives Nancy after Simone convinces him that she is young, which creates an ethical problem. What appeared to be a rape at first is now Nancy's fault. The film begs that the audience rethink the first comment about Nancy, which is that she is for the first time unchaperoned. The moral uncertainty in the beginning of the film was disguised through Bow's acting and thus removed from caution and traditional order. Therefore, her dangerous accusation of rape cannot be viewed as morally questionable. Here she is playing both sides of the coin, using her sexuality and patriarchal beliefs about the honor of women to win the game. There is irony connected to her decision to accuse him of rape in order to gain his father's approval for marriage.

She is about to walk into the Marquis' arms when Robert's father says that this is an Albin honor at stake and that Robert must now marry her. He then tells Robert to go to his room and that they will discuss it in the morning. Honor between masculine traditions and ways of repairing it through marriage is prominent in the film as the father uses it to ensure that even the future will provide a safety for men's honor. After everyone leaves, the father asks her, "Young lady was it your idea to marry my son when you came here?" She nods yes in fear. He laughs and says he knew it all along. He then leans over and gives her a kiss on the cheek and leaves

the room. She walks outside in the hall and a few minutes later Robert also comes out. They walk towards each other, kiss, and then go back to their rooms. The film's ending controls the audience's fantasy that both Nancy and Robert will not have sex before they are married. The action becomes a redeeming factor for Nancy's use of sexuality and questionable behavior in succeeding in her chase.

Bow early on in her career had been in relationships that for her were sometimes serious and many times confusing. She had learned from her mother's troubles that sex was a matter of power for survival not for pleasure. Bow's mother had used her own life as an example and raised her to "regard sex as combat and deploy her wiles accordingly"(Stenn 262). It took Bow many years of trouble with men who sued her, blackmailed her, and exploited her in order to separate a real relationship from her mother's tricks for survival. One might say she never succeeded as the marriage and home she turned to for security failed to give it to her. Bow's promiscuity and many affairs exposed a part of the jazz age that for many, even her own devoted fans, was not acceptable. This had to cause further pain. The fans who would say to her "we don't want to see you suffer. You stand for happiness to us. Keep on laughing and dancing" were the same fans who later on believed all the publicity about her misconduct with other men (Stenn 163). The truth was that Bow went against her better judgment and broke her own rules of contact. When the truth was publicized by the media to show her as the real "It" girl and made real connections to her fictional persona, she was denounced by her audience.

Many of Bow's roles, including the role she consumed in her own life, the one of the financially independent modern woman, were presented as existing only to chase a man with a new freedom. Even though the outcome was many times controlled by the history of powerful patriarchal forces, her personification of the new aggressive and carefree working-class woman

held a promise for heterosexual relationships that had never been considered before. Bow's own life took the blows of the emotionally depleted life that demanded she work hard and become exploited within the new economic, cultural, and artistic systems. She lived a life that was never short of trials, emotional and physical. Bow's sexual personas on film helped confuse the aspects of cultural definitions of good and bad behaviors. She presented the notions that sexuality belongs to women, no matter what their class or background. She provided a function for modern woman through sexual expression and helped liberate her spirit. Her influence on her audience was great because she portrays young women as a powerful social force. Her relationships to her audience were real relationships that affected her life and confidence. She identified with them as much as they identified with her. The focus is not on consumption of goods but how one can use goods that already exist, and by being active in public spaces away from home and maternal duties women can have fun and make the world a better place.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION: SILENT LIBERATIONS AND SUGGESTED FUTURES

The modern woman had many faces on screen as her roles in society were changing during the early modern movement. Here I have examined the independent woman who uses her sexuality in order to reform existing patriarchal forces in self-identity and relationships. In the early part of the 20th century, silent film provided for many women the possibility of a new existence and practices in their private lives as well as in public. These roles could feel awkward in real life and look awkward on film. The actresses I chose for my dissertation had the opportunity to construct those images of women and show what independence meant to them. They also provided fantasy worlds which were not only escapes for movie goers but also tutorials about dressing, acting, and relating within the new world. Relationships were challenged as the old world was fading and new promises emerging for women.

Even though they entered the film industry through different times and different backgrounds, they unanimously claimed roles in this crucial period of social transformation. This dissertation analyzes the specific characteristics that became public for the audience of their time as their film personas were connected to their lifestyle and temperament. My inclusion of their biographies shows how their expectations of themselves as artists were never really fulfilled. They did gain success and money but here is an unfulfilled part in their lives that they seem to have compromised. Their own lives became symbols of courage for many women who viewed their work and followed their private lives through fan magazines. And even though the characters they were assigned to play in many films were expected and predictable, their own appearance and interpretation within their acting made it new each time.

Silent film stars became part of the star system and gained access to power, money, and audiences in the way they emphasized emotions, reactions, and actions within relationships that affected the way women lived their lives. Alla Nazimova, Gloria Swanson, and Clara Bow provided different images to their audience but the affects were similar in the way they embraced the power they felt from being financially and sexually powerful. Following Richard Dyer's theory of stardom and the way stars differed from characters in books or actors in theater, their popularity became widespread because they became models for all different classes of women and suggested a sense of reality on film that differed from any other medium before that.

Dyer says that

Because we are dealing with stars, and not fictional characters, the specific details of the of what happens in the plot of the film may matter less than the personality that the film as a whole reveals--the star phenomenon emphasizes the kind of person the star is rather than the specific circumstances of particular roles. (57)

Many of these roles were designed and assigned as a temporary kind of type and were not promised to last. Hollywood did play a big role in designing "types" of images, but the real women were the ones to make themselves vehicles of the needed messages of their times. The roles were of the very young and many of the films ended with the traditional return of the woman to the patriarchal system as it were. Nazimova's roles of women are fictional in the sense that they are corrupt from too much liberation and they need to be terminated. Swanson's roles were of the married woman who wanted to be liberated yet always returns to her original position in marriage with more knowledge. Bow plays the young woman who creates a chase of the flapper and while in control seduces the man of her desire with the promise of marriage to follow. Many of these films challenged the ways women were to think and behave, were not

specifically defined as good or bad behavior because they were not really to be taken too seriously. Instead, it was the actress herself as a star that was the most important element of each film. The popularity of the star was the most influential in how the audience viewed the roles they played. Their appearance made money and attracted audiences, and many times their roles suggested where women should be in life but not how to get there.

Hollywood provided for film actresses a distinct appearance repeated through many films that audiences could not separate from the real women who played them. In part, my analysis validates a process that existed in the star system that promoted a certain personality as it created types of characteristics that star actresses were to fulfill. This process utilized the actresses' talent in order to promote and establish a balance between the real self and their personas as one and the same. Nazimova's life as an immigrant Jew travelling with the theater gave her the knowledge that she possessed the exotic persona that she displayed in her films as a queer expression that produced a lesbian following. Swanson became the model of modern American materialism as she promoted the new industries of film and fashion and lived a life of luxury. Bow was the young flapper, the girl next door, who had entered the public world and discovered that she possessed sexuality that could be used to obtain a better marital position in the world providing hope of change for her audience.

Many film theorists have argued that most silent stars were very young when they entered the film industry. Therefore, they were pliable to any kind of role given to them. Because these actresses were young when they entered the star system, they were also to play roles that reflected the young ways of the independent woman's thinking and acting. With the exception of Nazimova who entered film at thirty four, many of the new stars were in their teens. Hollywood promoted these types of images according to a certain strength that each actress

possessed before they even created the popular image. My analysis includes the biographies of the three actresses I include here as well as the historic and political movements of their times that became forces that shaped the artistic talents and the mechanisms for popular expression.

One thing remains true about all the actresses I include here. All three had become dissatisfied with the star system and all of them tried or wanted parts that would show off their talent the most, but Hollywood was not easily convinced to erase or push aside the personalities they had created for them which were very profitable. Their desire to perform parts that were not prescribed by Hollywood directors were always denied, with the exception of Nazimova, who produced and directed her own productions while working closely with the writer, or was the writer, the other two lacked that freedom. Both Swanson and Bow waited for different roles for most of their careers. They both somehow felt that the roles they had played were not true to their talent. Swanson wanted to prove to her audience and perhaps to herself that she had talents beyond her wardrobe. Crossing genders and returning to some sort of comedic actions would prove her true talent, in roles such as Peter Pan, which she was never cast for. Crossing those gender boundaries would prove that she was talented and that her persona in many of her other films were a creation of Hollywood, and in her case, specifically DeMille's depiction of her.

Bow waited for a dramatic role all her career, until she could no longer endure the pressures of Hollywood, overworked and many times underpaid compared to other actresses of her time. Many times she was convinced that she was so natural on screen that she was not really acting and that she was only being herself, as if that in itself did not require much effort or talent. She undermined her own abilities as an actress and saw her place in Hollywood as a job. She had hoped that one day she would switch over to more dramatic roles like Swanson was able to do.

In many ways, I argue that these actresses were aware of the uncertainties of the real self and superficially of the public self. They accepted the fact that the notion of the star self was to present and perform various roles that were “socially defined modes of behavior that our culture [made] available” (Dyer 21). Their performances confirmed the existence of new behaviors that were to become dominant in the social order around them as they themselves with their own lives represented those changes, financially, and within their own relationships. Nazimova was well aware of the role she created in Hollywood of the modern woman who is experimental with her powerful position and continued the role in her private life. She knew that she would continue to make movies that were not always accepted by the masses but that would reflect artistic feminine expression. Her collaboration with other women in Hollywood marks the beginning of the independent film making spirit that followed. Swanson became an icon of super stars as she played the role of royalty who promoted luxuries in marriage that were not required before. Her sexuality is used in parts of seduction in her films that need to be controlled and acknowledged. Bow played roles of the young woman in need of financial and liberating change. She provided that image for her audience while at the same time enjoying the role of rising in wealth in her life. Her own sexuality and relationships were always under the scrutiny of the public. All three were aware of the trap that Hollywood had designed and all of them realized that the types they were to play one day would be outdated.

Long narrative films of the silent film era reinforced the collective experience of women and brought together the dominant forces of changes in self-expression, self-identity, and political power relations in society. Silent film erased the distinction between the inner and outer selves so that a fully human character could emerge. As Cohen writes, “Film was revolutionary in emphasizing the surface of things, not as a source of duplicitous, fragmented, or coded

meaning, but as a site of complete and unambiguous meaning, a place where to see was to know” (134). And if the stars believed, or were made to believe, by Hollywood and by the response of the audience that their presence “projected an aura” that they felt should be shared, “the star system [gave them an image] that was not about heroes and heroines but about role models and friends” (Cohen 135).

Cohen argues against critics of the star system who believe that acting was not at the root of popularity, or the opposing idea, “that stars merely projected their real characters onto the screen, cutting through the flimsy packaging of the role by the unique forcefulness and distinctiveness of their personalities.” Her argument supports that “[t]hese stars prominent to emerge during the silent period were possessed of an unusual plasticity of character and that they followed the cues of public response to shape themselves along the lines that the public wanted” (140). The question that my research explores is whether the actresses’ lives and performances provided an expression that was a combination of many existing possibilities during their lifetime. To believe that the social, private, economic, cultural, and physical self was present at all times on the screen, but that the idea of acting was not part of the process of the star emergence, is to dismiss the power of the art that these actresses embodied in their performances. To also dismiss that these women were motivated by personal characteristics and personalities that were fueled by their own histories is not a complete analysis of the phenomenon of their stardom. One essential part of the analysis of the star system is to examine the ways in which these popular star actresses saw themselves. The personal background that fueled their passion for independence, their determination to establish roles that proved their modern sentiment and ability to

manipulate gender roles, and their emergence as role models must be examined in the details of their movies and in their performance of the star image as a common accessible role for modern women to imitate.

All three actresses suffered a background history that left them vulnerable to destiny, yet they managed to become even stronger in the way they envisioned their own futures in film. Acting for all three becomes a way to create an escape, a relationship with their audience that is powerful and sends a message to the stars even today. First they escape hardships, then develop a career that demands they become a powerful image for other women. They became approachable and they listened to what their audience thought and wanted of them. Cohen supports that the studio helped: “The development of personal information on the stars was, like the movies themselves, a gradual movement to narrative form” (Cohen 140). The actresses were very aware of what their audience saw in them and they also realized what it meant for their private lives in order for them to fulfil that wish or that design of persona. As the film narratives became more complex and women writers were involved in creating scripts that were reflective of the actresses’ “personalities,” their ability to use interpretation was also on the rise. The “type actress” that Dyer refers to was able to work within the perimeters of real self and persona in order to connect to her audience. Cohen writes, “Given the fact that stars began to be produced as individuals through their films, the public’s desire to know their private lives must be set in its proper context” (140). These actresses were composing and creating the narratives of their own lives as they were composing their images and personas on screen. They recreated real selves out of their past and present combined through acting.

All three actresses I chose here have contributed different strategies of productions of the popular self in demonstrating images of reform that modified performative personas in the process of constructing the new woman in her daily relationships. As the stars took the platform of creation on film, they became a mingle of personal, private, public, and fictional self that they often could not distinguish for themselves. As we look at them today, however, through historical and cultural distances, we can still see the artistic ability to convey messages that publicly transformed art and acting for other women as well as educated their audience about the challenges of their time.

Nazimova came to film with an understanding of audience and acting. She was trained and educated in how to deal and compose a public self. She also knew how to hide and conserve a private self for her dramatization and presentation through her acting. There she presented the real suffering of self. She plays roles that the modern woman must confront and confirm as changing, especially in marriage. Playing Chekov's and Ibsen's women, she embodied the modern woman who faces troubling choices. All of her three films selected here present a persona of a woman whose past haunts her into the future and in order to change the future she must be liberated through her denouncement of the patriarchal moral order. This provides her sole opportunity to change the events of her life through death. She faces the symbolic patriarchal order through the power of the father, challenges his superiority, and does not offer him any redemption. She is powerful and beautiful, awkward in many situations, and aware of a dangerous life she must overcome. Her performances are serious and metaphoric as she reenacts already established roles and gives them a new life and a new meaning. Her dramatic acting, plus

her experimental artistic expressions of femininity created a foundation that is even today considered an attitude of the artistic combined with the strange that challenges gender ideas and left an impact on her audience that a powerful woman is not malleable or male constructed.

Swanson creates the appearance of pleasure through materials. Her own life was full of dreams of how to create a life of wealth and comfort. Always looking for the support her characters looked for, and which she did not have from the men in her life, she becomes the objectified sexual beauty that men created in her. Her roles of seduction by men who only saw her body and her clothing, is ironic in her own life. Her presentation of marriage in danger through the need of consumerisms and materialism become the key elements of reconstructing the order of marriage. In the three films I selected for my analysis her popularity was at its highest point. She was attractive, she was wealthy, and she had glamour. But Swanson's desire to present herself as a true artist and not as someone that was constructed by Hollywood became a lifelong battle. She believed that playing parts that crossed gender barriers would provide for her the acceptance and recognition of her colleagues and her audience. Instead, she became a type to be remembered as a model of DeMille's creation. Her roles of the married woman presented for the audience of the time and for today the modern woman reentering her marriage with an awareness of herself as a sexual being who can renegotiate the roles of marriage with a husband as a partner. The dangers of modern marriage included the role of a woman as a sexual being and as a partner with the ability to exit the marriage without children or need of money. Swanson portrays the role of the wife as a decoration in many of her roles but underneath this spoiled image lies a powerful propelling image of the modern woman forward to the control of their own lives, financially and sexually. She was very popular because of the way she lived her own life of luxury and because her roles were always in favor of the woman in marriage.

Bow represents a different kind of modern woman in her films. Even in *Wings* where the subject matter is more complicated and connected to dramatic historical truths, her role still presents the unmarried young innocent woman who can play with ideas as dangerous as travelling across the oceans to go find the man she loves. Her courage is inspired by a man, yet her behaviors are very modern and tantalizing to many of her female viewers of the time. Her roles of chasing love are true to some extent to her real life. Bow came to Hollywood unaware of her own abilities as an actress and by the time she became the “It” girl she had learned that life can be as deceiving as it is in movies. She worked under contract and was lent out to many other companies and produced more movies per year than any other actress of her time. She was overworked and in dissolution by the time she left Hollywood. Her struggles with fear of the public and anxiety remained with her until the end of her life. Her personal relationships were reported in the press as if she were a flapper in real life who could not help her sexual instincts and wanted to have fun but the fun was true good acting as she was struggling emotionally and no one in the industry understood nor cared about the psychological burdens roles like that put on her.

Bow valued her relationship with her audience more than any other relationship. Her whole identity was based on whether they liked her or not. When her audience turned against her affairs with a married man, she felt that she had betrayed them. Bow’s insecurities and mental breakdown became catalysts for her withdrawal from public life. Yet her acting prefigures an optimistic future for relationships for the modern woman. “Feminist scholarship in cinema studies and history has not fully appreciated the significance of the complex and contradictory flapper film for the study of the construction of femininity in the jazz age” says Landay, yet it does create an alternative reality for the modern woman to oppose the previous traditional culture

of how relationships were to work in romance and marriage (225). Bow exceeds erotic limitations as she toys on the screen with the subject of objectification.

Nazimova, Swanson, and Bow have been presented here within a complex structure of analysis. Including their biographies and making connections to their acting and the historic importance of women in silent film through the process of star image making has been presented as a platform for further study. I hope that through this dissertation scholarship can keep looking at what made these women famous stars, what their impact was on other women, and how they were able to project their own troubled and changing lives into modernism through artistic expression that connects them to present audiences. They offered to their audience what was needed during the time of their success: a look into the future. Today they offer for audiences a reflection of themselves as part of the past during its transition into today. Their legacy today appears to be made of broken pieces of their past private lives and fragments of the personas they created on film. By making connections between their art, the created star personas they played in public, and the real women they were, we can perhaps understand better how they juggled relationships and how they functioned within their public world and their private lives. Their effects and influences came in different times, with different audiences and needs. Their messages were different but their influence remains powerful.

Works Cited

Films

Camille. Directed by Ray C. Smallwood. Screenplay by June Mathis, Metro Pictures, 1921.

Don't Change Your Husband. Directed by Cecil B. DeMille. Screenplay by Sada Cowan,
Paramount Pictures, 1919.

Get Your Man. Directed by Dorothy Arzner. Screenplay by Agnes Brand Leahy, Paramount
Pictures, 1927.

It. Directed by Clarence Badger and Josef von Sternberg. Screenplay by Elinor Glyn, Famous
Players-Lasky Corporation-Paramount Pictures, 1927.

Male and Female. Directed by Cecil B. DeMille. Screenplay by Jeanie Mac Pherson,
Paramount Pictures, 1919.

The Red Lantern. Directed by Albert Capellani. Screenplay by Albert Capellani and June Mathis,
Metro Pictures, 1919.

Salome. Directed by Charles Bryant. Screenplay by Natacha Rambova, Nazimova Productions,
1922.

Why Change Your Wife? Directed by Cecil B. DeMille. Screenplay by William C. DeMille, Olga
Printzlau and Sada Cowan, Paramount Pictures, 1921.

Wings. Directed by William A. Wellman. Screenplay by John Monk Saunders and Hope Loring,
Paramount Pictures, 1927.

Secondary Sources

Anderson, Mark-Lynn. *Twilight of Idols: Hollywood and the Human Sciences in 1920s
America*. Los Angeles, UP, 2011.

Andrew, Dudley. *Film Theories*. Oxford, Oxford UP, 1976.

- Bachman, Gregg and Thomas J. Slater, editors. *American Silent Film: Discovering Marginalized Voices*. Southern Illinois, UP, 2002.
- Basinger, Jeanine. *Silent Stars*, New York, Knopf, 1999.
- Bean, Jennifer and Diane Negra, ed. *A Feminist Reader in Early Cinema*. London, Duke, 2002.
- Butler, Ivan. *Silent Magic*. New York, Ungar, 1988.
- Butler, Judith. *Gender Trouble*. New York, Routledge, 1990.
- Chaudhuri, Shohini. *Feminist Film Theories*. London, Routledge, 2009.
- Cohen, Paula. *Silent Film and the Triumph of the American Myth*. Oxford, Oxford UP, 2001.
- Copjec, Joan. "The Orthopsychic Subject: Film Theory and the Reception of Lacan," in *Feminism and Film*. Edited by Ann Kaplan. Oxford, UP, 2000, 287-306.
- De Lauretis, Teresa. *Alice Doesn't: Feminisms, Semiotics, Cinema*. Bloomington, Indiana UP, 1984.
- Douglas, Ann. *Terrible Honesty: Mongrel Manhattan in the 1920s*. New York, The Noonday Press, 1995.
- Dumenil, Lynn. *Modern Temper: American Culture and Society in the 1920s*. New York, Hill and Wang, 1995.
- Dyer, Richard. *Stars*. London, British Film Institute, 1979.
- Enstad, Nan. *Ladies of Labor, Girls of Adventure: Working Women, Popular Culture, and Labor Politics at the Turn of the Twentieth Century*. New York, Columbia UP, 1999.
- Foucault, Michel. *The History of Sexuality: An Introduction*. 1978. New York, Vintage, 1990.
- Gaines, Jane and Charlotte Herzog, ed. *Fabrications: Costume and the Female Body*. New York, Routledge, 1990.

- Hallett, Hillary. *Go West, Young Women!* Berkeley, UP, 2013.
- Hansen, Miriam. *Babel and Babylon: Spectatorship in American Silent Film*. Cambridge, Harvard UP, 1991.
- . —. "Pleasure, Ambivalence, Identification: Valentino and Female Spectatorship." *Feminism and Film*. Editor Ann Kaplan. Oxford Press. 2000, 226-252.
- Hasty, Amelie. *Cupboards of Curiosity: Women, Recollection and Film History*. London, Duke, 2007.
- Holliday, Wendy. *Hollywood's Modern Women: Screenwriting, Work Culture and Feminism, 1910-1940*. 1995. New York University, PhD Dissertation.
- Jacobs, Lea. *The Decline of Sentiment: American Film in the 1920s*. Berkeley, UP, 2008.
- Johnston, Claire. "Dorothy Arzner: Critical Strategies." In *Feminism and Film*. Edited by Ann Kaplan. Oxford Press, 2000, 139-150.
- Kaplan, E. Ann, Edited by, *Feminism & Film*, Oxford, UP, 2000.
- Lambert, Gavin. *Nazimova: A Biography*. New York, Knopf, 1997.
- Landay, Lori. "The Flapper Film: Comedy, Dance, and Jazz Age-Kinaesthetics" In *A Feminist Reader in Early Cinema*. 2002, 221-248.
- Lant, Antonia with Ingrid Periz, comp. & ed. *Red Velvet Seat: Women's Writing on the First Fifty Years of Cinema*. London, Verso, 2006.
- Lewerenz, Spencer. *Behind the Screen: Hollywood Insiders of Faith, Film and Culture*. Michigan, Baker Books, 2005.
- Mahar, Karen W. *Women Filmmakers in Early Hollywood*. Baltimore, John Hopkins UP, 2006.

- Mann, William J. *Tinseltown: Murder, Morphine and Madness at the Dawn of Hollywood*. New York, Harper, 2014.
- ___ . ___. *Behind the Screen: How Gays and Lesbians Shaped Hollywood 1910-1969*. New York, Viking, 2001.
- Mayne, Judith. "Lesbian Looks: Dorothy Arzner and Female Authorship." In *Feminism and Film*. 159-180.
- ___ . ___. *Directed by Dorothy Arzner*. Bloomington and Indianapolis, Indiana UP, 1994.
- Mellencamp, Patricia. *A Fine Romance: Five Ages of Film Feminism*. Philadelphia, Temple UP, 1995.
- Modleski, Tania. *Feminism Without Women: Culture and Criticism in a "Postfeminist" Age*. New York, Routledge, 1991.
- Mulvey, Laura. "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema." In *Feminism and Film*. 34-48.
- Ramanathan, Geetha. *Feminist Auteurs: Reading Women's Films*. London, WallFlower, 2006.
- Schatz, Thomas. *The Genius of the System*. New York, Pantheon Books, 1988.
- Shearer, Michael Stephen. *Gloria Swanson: The Ultimate Star*. New York, St. Martin's Press, 2013.
- Shields, David S. *Still: American Silent Motion Picture Photography*. Chicago, UP, 2013.
- Slide, Anthony. *The Silent Feminists*, London, Scarecrow Press, 1996.
- Stacey, Jackie. *Star Gazing: Hollywood Cinema and Female Spectatorship*. London, Routledge, 1994.
- Stenn, David. *Clara Bow: Runnin' Wild*. New York, Cooper Square, 1988.

Studlar, Gaylyn. "Masochism and the Perverse Pleasures of Cinema." In *Feminism and Film*, 203-225.

—. —. *This Mad Masquerade: Stardom and Masculinity in the Jazz Age*. New York, Columbia UP, 1996.

Swanson, Gloria. *Swanson on Swanson: An Autobiography*. New York, Pocket Books, 1980.

Traister, Rebecca. *All the Single Ladies: Unmarried Women and the Rise of an Independent Nation*. New York, Simon & Schuster, 2016.

White, Patricia. "Nazimova's Veils: *Salome* at the Intersections of Film History" In *A Feminist Reader in Early Cinema*. 2002, 60-87.