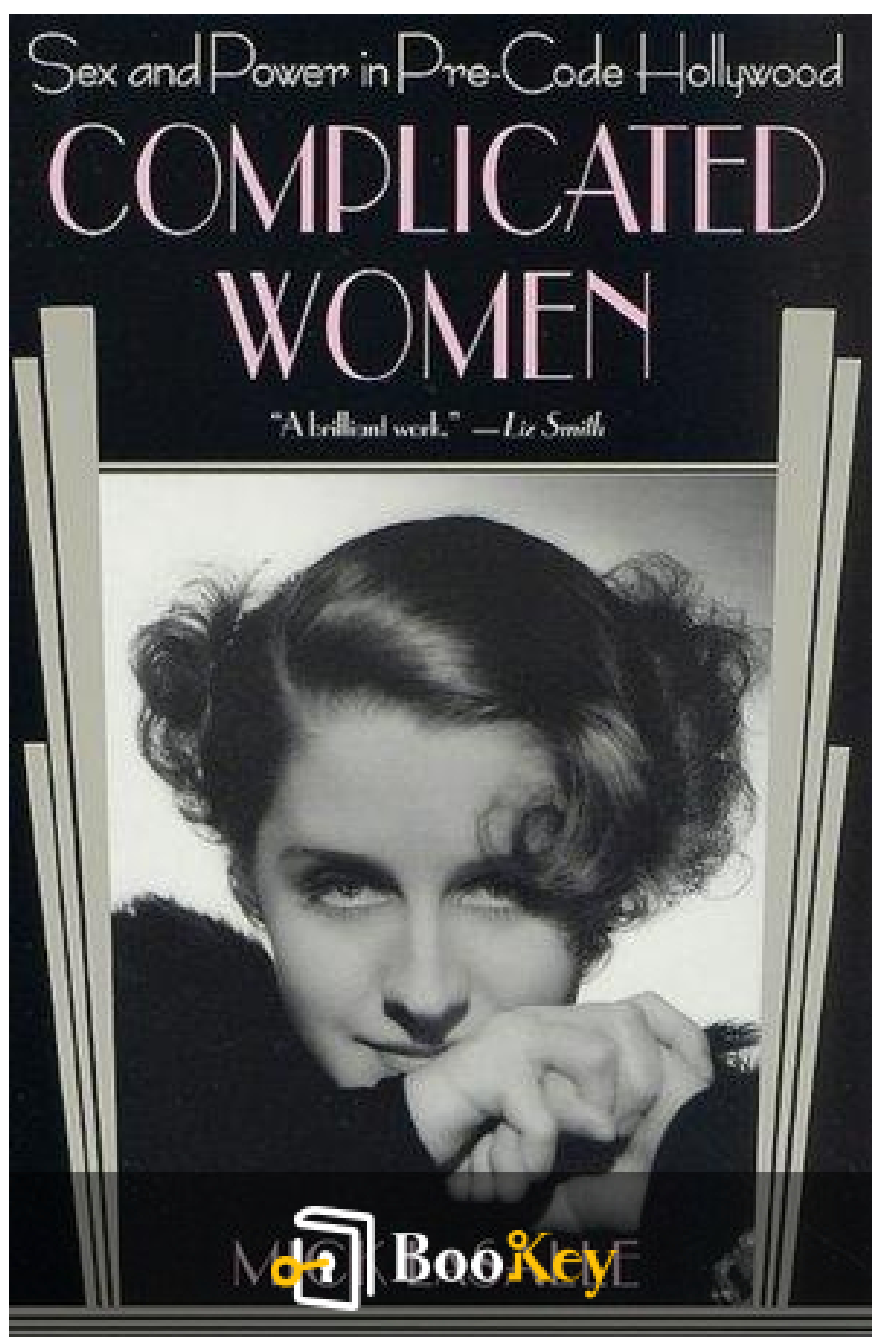


Complicated Women PDF (Limited Copy)

Mick Lasalle



More Free Book



Scan to Download

Complicated Women Summary

Exploring the Complexities of Women in Film History.

Written by Books OneHub

More Free Book



Scan to Download

About the book

In "Complicated Women: Sex and Power in Pre-Code Hollywood," Mick LaSalle invites readers into the dazzling yet tumultuous world of early cinema, where complex female characters shattered societal norms and redefined femininity. Set against the backdrop of the 1920s and 30s, LaSalle explores the lives and careers of daring actresses who navigated the strictures of a male-dominated industry, embodying both empowerment and vulnerability. Through compelling narratives and in-depth analyses, the author unveils how these women, armed with both talent and tenacity, challenged the status quo, making their mark during a pivotal moment in Hollywood history. Dive into this enthralling exploration of gender, power, and the intricacies of human desire, and discover how the legacy of these "complicated women" continues to resonate in today's cinematic landscape.

More Free Book



Scan to Download

About the author

Mick LaSalle is a renowned film critic and author, celebrated for his insightful commentary and in-depth analysis of cinema, particularly in relation to the representation of women in film history. Serving as the chief film critic for the San Francisco Chronicle for over two decades, LaSalle has cultivated a reputation for his articulate prose and sharp critique, influencing both film aficionados and casual viewers alike. With a focus on how the portrayal of complex female characters has evolved over time, LaSalle delves into the artistry and implications of women's roles in Hollywood, making significant contributions to the discourse surrounding gender in film. His passion for film is matched by a commitment to exploring the intricate narratives that define women's roles, as demonstrated in his acclaimed book "Complicated Women."

More Free Book



Scan to Download



Try Bookey App to read 1000+ summary of world best books

Unlock **1000+** Titles, **80+** Topics

New titles added every week



Insights of world best books



Free Trial with Bookey



Summary Content List

chapter 1: THE INGENUE GETS A LIFE

chapter 2: LIKE A VIRGIN

chapter 3: I SAID, “YES”

chapter 4: NOT TOO YOUNG AND NOT TOO NICE

chapter 5: “I’M IN AN ORGY, WALLOWING”

chapter 6: SHOPGIRLS AND SEX VULTURES

chapter 7: GETTING AWAY WITH MURDER

chapter 8: THE GHASTLY JOB OF LIVING TOGETHER

chapter 9: THE CENSORS STRIKE BACK

chapter 10: THE GREAT GARBO AND NORMA WHO?

chapter 11: GARBO’S GRANDDAUGHTERS

chapter 12: NORMA IN THE NEW MILLENNIUM

More Free Book



Scan to Download

chapter 1 Summary: THE INGENUE GETS A LIFE

At the close of the silent film era, actresses like Joan Crawford and Norma Shearer were lighting up the screen in vibrant ways, with Shearer uniquely poised to thrive in the new sound era. The film “The Divorcee” (1930) marked a pivotal moment in her career, showcasing a woman who boldly navigated infidelity and self-discovery, thus ushering in the pre-Code era of Hollywood. This period was characterized by strong female characters and risqué themes—essentially rewriting the narrative arc previously constrained by silent film conventions.

1. Norma Shearer, through her choice of roles and daring performances, became a symbol of modern womanhood. Unlike her contemporaries, who conformed to the era's expectations, Shearer boldly showcased her ambition and depth, reflecting the changing societal attitudes toward women. She understood the pulse of public sentiment and continually redefined her career, reminiscent of how Madonna navigated the music industry decades later. Her dynamic personality, grit, and unwillingness to shy away from ambitious pursuits earned her respect and admiration, even as she faced early rejections in her career.

2. The early twentieth century signaled a shift for women in America, stemming from societal upheaval and a push for independence. The advent of the automobile transformed courtship, allowing for greater interaction



between men and women outside traditional confines. Notably, figures like H. L. Mencken coined the term “flapper,” a representation of liberated young women embarking on lives filled with greater earnesty and sexual independence. The realities of post-war experiences catalyzed significant changes in women’s sexual and social freedoms; statistics indicated a marked rise in premarital sexual experiences among women.

3. In this environment, the top actresses of the silent film era—including Mary Pickford and Gloria Swanson—played characters that often represented an idealized version of femininity. Women were largely cast as virtuous ingenues or flawed figures grappling with society's moral implications. However, Shearer sought to transcend these portrayals. She entered Hollywood as an extra determined to carve out a significant acting career, striving against the odds following early critiques from luminaries like D. W. Griffith, who cast doubt on her star potential.

4. Shearer’s arrival in Hollywood was shaped by both personal ambition and a series of transformative experiences. Despite financial struggles at home, her pursuit of acting led her to overcome obstacles through hard work and persistence. By 1923, she was a leading lady, impressing audiences and industry insiders alike with her compelling screen presence. Behind her ascent was the mentorship of Monta Bell, who uniquely captured her complexity and emotional depth in films, allowing Shearer to engage with the layered narratives of womanhood.



5. Through films like “Lady of the Night” (1925) and “Upstage” (1926), Shearer demonstrated her ability to embody multifaceted women—both revealing and concealing their intrinsic complexities. The dual roles and moral ambivalence depicted in these films set Shearer apart from her contemporaries, as she embraced the emerging identity of a new woman. Director Monta Bell’s appreciation for Shearer’s talent allowed her to explore deeper emotional narratives, crafting portrayals that left an indelible mark on her career.

6. Shearer’s collaboration with Bell culminated in films characterized by a dedication to revealing the intricate layers of women’s identities. In challenging the pre-existing norms surrounding femininity, Shearer’s work became emblematic of the changing landscape of cinema—a reflection of the period's growing acceptance of female complexity. Significantly, her performances began to resonate with audiences as she shifted into the talkie era, embracing a society grappling with feminist progress and sexual liberation.

7. The transition to sound marked a transformative chapter for Shearer, as her nuanced performances began to redefine the archetype of the leading lady. Armed with a playful wit and an exploration of social issues, she found herself at the forefront of a cinematic revolution, presenting characters that were not just virtuous woman but multifaceted individuals. Her journey



illustrates the rising potential for female narratives in Hollywood, forever altering perceptions of gender, morality, and sexuality on the big screen.

Through her relentless ambition and the strategic choice of disruptive roles, Norma Shearer emerged as a trailblazer during Hollywood's pre-Code era, paving the way for a more diverse exploration of women's experiences in film, ultimately impacting the trajectory of female representation in cinema for generations to come.

More Free Book



Scan to Download

Critical Thinking

Key Point: Embracing Complexity and Authenticity

Critical Interpretation: Norma Shearer's bold choice to portray complex female characters inspires you to embrace your own multi-dimensional identity. In a world that often tries to pigeonhole you into simplistic roles or expectations, Shearer's journey reminds you of the power and strength that come from being true to yourself and exploring the many facets of your personality. Just like Shearer, you can defy societal norms and express your ambitions and vulnerabilities authentically, paving your own path in life.

More Free Book



Scan to Download

chapter 2 Summary: LIKE A VIRGIN

Greta Garbo's cinematic presence has captivated audiences and critics since her debut in 1926, presenting a beauty that transcended mere physicality, eliciting questions about her otherworldly allure. Garbo's face became her defining feature, rendering her body secondary; her beauty, especially when framed in film, exuded an ethereal quality that seemed to challenge viewers' perceptions of themselves and the nature of beauty. Unlike many actresses of her time, Garbo's screen presence was unique—captivating and complex, transforming her appearances into a singular experience, especially in the theatrical settings of the silent film era.

1. Spiritual Undertones and Love's Implications: Garbo's persona deeply intertwined spirituality with love and desire. Her films introduced religious elements, like prayer and communion, showcasing a portrayal of passionate love that elevated romance to divine status. Critics responded with mixed feelings; while some were enchanted, others dismissed the elevated seriousness of her roles, often finding them exaggerated or absurd.

2. The Evolution of the Vamp Archetype Initially thrust into vamp roles, Garbo's characters embodied the seductive yet destructive archetype of the “vamp,” a femme fatale who thrived on captivating men while often leading them to ruin. However, Garbo subverted this stereotype by depicting vamps as victims of their passions rather than malevolent beings intent on



destruction. This unique portrayal shifted the narrative from one-dimensional villainy to nuanced emotional turmoil.

3. Challenges Facing a New Star: Grete Garbo's rise was characterized by personal challenges and external pressures. Despite her critical acclaim, she struggled with her typecasting and expressed discomfort with her vamp roles. Striking against the studio system, she fought to expand her range, insisting on diverse and more constructive roles that deviated from the harmful archetype of the vamp.

4. Transformation into a Complex Heroine: Responding to her demands, MGM crafted a new type of character for Garbo—one that blended elements of the vamp with a virtuous aspect, symbolizing both strength and vulnerability. Her subsequent roles, particularly in adaptations of classic literature, portrayed her as a fully realized woman, capable of profound love and sacrifice, transcending previous clichés associated with vamps.

5. Literary and Cinematic Influences: The imaginary surrounding Garbo was steeped in literary references to vamps and femme fatales throughout history. These archetypes were often linked to themes of seduction with a hint of doom, culminating in a cinematic portrayal that mirrored their tragic fates. The evolving depiction of women in the film industry reflected, and sometimes reinforced, societal fears and fantasies about female power and independence.



6. Legacy of the Divine Garbo: Ultimately, Garbo's transformation from a vamp to a complex screen heroine illustrates a broader shift in Hollywood narrative roles for women during the early twentieth century. Her films explored themes of love, sacrifice, and redemption, positioning her as a cinematic soul whose presence could harmonize the erotic and the spiritual. This duality not only secured her legend in film history but also allowed audiences to engage with profound questions about femininity, sexuality, and the divine.

Garbo's influence endures, highlighting the intricate relationships between identity, narrative in cinema, and societal constructs of beauty and femininity. Her ability to embody complex roles while challenging industry standards underscores a tumultuous yet transformative era in Hollywood's history, leaving an indelible mark on film and cultural perceptions of women.



Critical Thinking

Key Point: Embrace Complexity in Your Own Identity

Critical Interpretation: Greta Garbo's evolution from a simple 'vamp' to a multifaceted heroine serves as a powerful reminder that embracing the complexity of your identity is vital. Like Garbo, you can challenge societal norms and redefine how you want to be perceived. Instead of allowing labels to confine you, consider your own strengths and vulnerabilities as essential parts of a larger narrative that is uniquely yours. This can inspire you to demand more from your own story, seeking roles in life that reflect your depth and richness rather than settling for oversimplified stereotypes that society may expect of you. Through this lens, you can cultivate a sense of empowerment, encouraging yourself to take on challenges that allow for growth and transformation in your personal and professional life.

More Free Book



Scan to Download

chapter 3: I SAID, “YES”

In the third chapter of "Complicated Women," Mick LaSalle delves into the evolution of actress Norma Shearer and her transformation within the film industry during a time of significant social change. One of the central themes of Shearer's career trajectory lies in her bold choices and the enduring impact of her roles on the cinematic landscape, particularly when addressing themes of morality, desire, and female agency.

1. The Quest for Authenticity: Shearer's desire to play complex, morally ambiguous characters stemmed from her own understanding of the shifting societal norms of the late 1920s. Initially constrained by the public's perception of her as merely an ingenue, Shearer fought for parts that would allow her to portray an edgier, more defiant side of womanhood. This desire was epitomized in her determination to play Mary Dugan, a character who challenges traditional moral boundaries and embraces her own desires unapologetically.

2. Complex Female Characters: In movies like "The Trial of Mary

Install Bookey App to Unlock Full Text and Audio

Free Trial with Bookey



Why Bookey is must have App for Book Lovers



30min Content

The deeper and clearer interpretation we provide, the better grasp of each title you have.



Text and Audio format

Absorb knowledge even in fragmented time.



Quiz

Check whether you have mastered what you just learned.



And more

Multiple Voices & fonts, Mind Map, Quotes, IdeaClips...

Free Trial with Bookey



chapter 4 Summary: NOT TOO YOUNG AND NOT TOO NICE

In the early days of talkies, a notable transformation occurred in Hollywood that mirrored broader societal shifts. The emergence of a talented group of actresses in the late 1920s and early 1930s marked a significant milestone in film history. This generation, characterized by their youth and distinctive artistic outlook, was profoundly influenced by the social landscapes shaped by events like World War I and the rise of modernity.

1. A Shift in Generational Consciousness: Much like rock bands of the 1960s, a wave of actresses crystallized around this time, many born close to each other and reflecting a shared generational identity. This newfound confidence stemmed from the freedoms fought for by earlier suffragists, who had paved the way for these young women to embrace life boldly—smoking, drinking, and enjoying cultural changes.

2. Emergence of the "Modern Woman": The early talkies allowed for frank discussions of social issues and relationships, as censorship began to relax in the late 1920s. This was when the idea of the "loose woman," often depicted as a fallen heroine, emerged prominently in film narratives. Actresses like Greta Garbo and Joan Crawford rose to fame by portraying complex female characters that brought forth themes of illicit relationships and women's emancipation.



3. Hollywood's Response to the Great Depression: The onset of the Great Depression changed the landscape of entertainment. With a growing need to attract audiences, studios produced films that leaned heavily into themes of sensuality and explicit content. This demand opened doors for many actresses who would rise to prominence during this era, including Barbara Stanwyck and Bette Davis, all of whom exhibited a newfound courage and screen presence typically absent in earlier cinematic depictions of women.

4. The Illusive Nature of Virtue: Films during this pre-Code period often depicted women's moral complexities, suggesting that traditional notions of virtue could no longer be easily defined. These cinematic stories where women navigated their desires against societal norms resonated with many viewers, reflecting a deep-seated yearning for freedom and authenticity.

5. Prostitutes and Their Narratives: A significant trend emerged around the portrayal of prostitutes in films, shifting from mere titillation to nuanced explorations of women's lives. The sympathetic depiction of these characters suggested deeper social commentaries that transcended their immediate circumstances, emphasizing resilience and the challenges women faced within patriarchal constraints.



6. Iconic Performances and Archetypes: Creative performances from actresses like Marlene Dietrich and Norma Shearer showcased a variety of archetypes—from the liberated artist's model to complex characters that sidestepped traditional narratives of shame or judgment. In many instances, love acted as a redeeming element for these characters, even amidst their moral dilemmas.

7. The Enduring Legacy of Pre-Code Cinema: As pre-Code films began to dwindle with the introduction of stricter censorship, the narratives crafted during this time laid the groundwork for future portrayals of complex female characters. With sensational and nuanced trends, the era glimpsed women with agency—an exhilarating yet often fraught landscape that challenged accepted norms.

In summary, the late 1920s and early 1930s was a watershed moment for women in Hollywood. This period not only showcased their burgeoning power in the film industry but also mirrored larger societal transformations regarding gender roles, sexual freedom, and the complexity of modern womanhood, paving the way for future generations of actresses to explore similar themes on screen. Through these rich narratives, pre-Code films critically examined the evolving definitions of morality and the role of women in both society and cinema.



Critical Thinking

Key Point: Emergence of the 'Modern Woman'

Critical Interpretation: Imagine feeling the wave of liberation that defined a generation of women in the late 1920s and early 1930s, a time when the celluloid dreams of artists like Greta Garbo and Joan Crawford opened the door to self-expression and independence. You, too, can embody that 'Modern Woman' spirit in your life, embracing your complexities and refusing to be boxed in by traditional expectations. Just as these trailblazing actresses tackled themes of desire and emancipation on screen, find the courage to share your truths and explore your passions unapologetically. This moment in history reminds you that personal authenticity, like the narratives of those captivating silver-screen icons, can challenge norms, inspire change, and encourage others to live boldly and freely.



chapter 5 Summary: “I’M IN AN ORGY, WALLOWING”

The chapter explores the provocative on-screen presence and cultural impact of actress Norma Shearer during the early 1930s, emphasizing her role in redefining female sexuality in cinema against the backdrop of social change. It begins with anecdotes from Clark Gable about Shearer’s boldness in approaching her roles, particularly enjoying her portrayal of sexual freedom in films like **A Free Soul** and **Strangers May Kiss**, where Shearer’s characters embrace their desires unapologetically.

This chapter articulates the following key principles:

1. **Revolutionary Femininity:** Shearer embodies a new type of femininity for her time, characterized by sexual autonomy. In **Strangers May Kiss**, for instance, Shearer's character embarks on a two-year sexual adventure in Europe, reveling in her experiences without the fear of societal judgment that would typically confine women. Unlike contemporary actresses, Shearer's roles feature women who embrace their sexuality freely, paving the way for future representations of women in cinema.
2. **Pre-Code Cinematic Expression:** The early 1930s marked a period of pre-Code films that challenged existing moral frameworks. The themes in Shearer’s films illustrated a blend of experimental joy and feminist



undertones, where characters sought self-discovery through relationships with men. Her films subtly comment on women's societal expectations while calling out male hypocrisy regarding women's sexual agency.

3. Critical and Cultural Impact: Shearer's films did not only entertain; they ignited debate within Hollywood and beyond. For instance, internal memos criticized **Strangers May Kiss** for its perceived moral ambiguity, marking the start of a cultural war over the depiction of women. The depth of public scrutiny and the mixed reviews reflected a society grappling with changing norms regarding female behavior.

4. Norma Shearer's Duality: While Shearer portrayed sexual liberation, she maintained a guarded personal life, utilizing her public persona to explore fantasies that her real-world self could not. Her performances often oscillated between reserved and uninhibited, showcasing her complex relationship with public perception and her craft as an actress.

5. Legacy of Complexity: Films like **Private Lives** and **Strange Interlude** represent Shearer's versatility, where she transcends archetypal female roles to explore deeper emotional and psychological landscapes. These performances reveal her unique blend of comedic sophistication and poignant tragedy, a range rarely seen in both contemporary and succeeding films.



Shearer's legacy, as illustrated throughout this chapter, reflects more than her filmography; it captures a pivotal moment in cinema where the exploration of female sexuality became intertwined with evolving social mores. Her work resonated with the zeitgeist of the era, paving the way for a more candid exploration of women's complexities on screen. This chapter underscores how Shearer not only entertained audiences but also contributed to the broader discourse on gender and morality, a legacy that continues to influence modern portrayals of women in film.

More Free Book



Scan to Download

chapter 6: SHOPGIRLS AND SEX VULTURES

In 1932, a notable shift occurred in Hollywood as women emerged in more complex roles, signaling the arrival of the new woman. This transformation was in stark contrast to the established personas of earlier actresses, such as Garbo and Shearer, showcasing a richer tapestry of female characters. Bette Davis, Katharine Hepburn, Kay Francis, Joan Blondell, and others became significant figures, reshaping the cinematic landscape increasingly to reflect adult themes and risqué narratives. Notably, Joan Crawford achieved major stardom, successfully transitioning from lesser roles to share the screen with icons like Garbo in "Grand Hotel." However, Crawford's early career was marked by struggle as she grappled with self-presentation and crafting an authentic performance, often mired in an artificiality that viewers found difficult to connect with.

1. The Evolution of Female Characters:

The era saw the emergence of actresses portraying nuanced and often transgressive characters. Ann Harding's role in "The Animal Kingdom" and Jean Harlow's comedic allure in "Red Dust" represented a growing

Install Bookey App to Unlock Full Text and Audio

Free Trial with Bookey



App Store
Editors' Choice



22k 5 star review

Positive feedback

Sara Scholz

tes after each book summary
understanding but also make the
and engaging. Bookey has
ding for me.

Fantastic!!!



I'm amazed by the variety of books and languages
Bookey supports. It's not just an app, it's a gateway
to global knowledge. Plus, earning points for charity
is a big plus!

Masood El Toure

Fi



Ab
bo
to
my

José Botín

ding habit
o's design
ual growth

Love it!



Bookey offers me time to go through the
important parts of a book. It also gives me enough
idea whether or not I should purchase the whole
book version or not! It is easy to use!

Wonnie Tappkx

Time saver!



Bookey is my go-to app for
summaries are concise, ins
curated. It's like having acc
right at my fingertips!

Awesome app!



I love audiobooks but don't always have time to listen
to the entire book! bookey allows me to get a summary
of the highlights of the book I'm interested in!!! What a
great concept !!!highly recommended!

Rahul Malviya

Beautiful App



This app is a lifesaver for book lovers with
busy schedules. The summaries are spot
on, and the mind maps help reinforce wh
I've learned. Highly recommend!

Alex Walk

Free Trial with Bookey



chapter 7 Summary: GETTING AWAY WITH MURDER

In chapter 7 of "Complicated Women" by Mick Lasalle, the focus is on the portrayal of women as complex characters in pre-Code Hollywood films, particularly those who engage in morally ambiguous behavior such as murder and crime. The narrative highlights several key films and actresses of the era, illustrating how their roles challenged societal norms and contributed to a more nuanced view of female characters.

1. The chapter opens with a discussion of several murderesses in pre-Code films, often depicted with a sense of justified vengeance rather than evil intent. For example, films like "The Firebird" (1934) and "A Man's Castle" (1933) feature women who kill out of desperation or self-defense, defying the traditional film trope of the demure woman. Marjorie Rambeau's character kills a blackmailer, and Ruth Chatterton's character commits murder for personal revenge. These women are depicted as victims of circumstance, suggesting a social commentary on women's plight during the Great Depression.

2. Miriam Hopkins' performance in "The Story of Temple Drake" stands out as an exceptional portrayal of a woman grappling with her own complex emotions. Her character, a Southern belle, experiences trauma and shame after being raped but ultimately takes violent action against her assailant. The film captures her psychological turmoil and the internal conflict rather



than portraying her simply as a victim or a villain. In this nuanced depiction, the audience witnesses the character's struggle with identity and morality.

3. The chapter contrasts more lighthearted portrayals of women who commit murder in films like "Midnight Mary" and "Mandalay." Loretta Young's character remains cool and detached as she faces trial for murder, while Kay Francis' character retaliates against betrayal with poison, showcasing a blend of humor and darkness. These comedic approaches to serious actions reflect the era's tendency to blur moral lines in storytelling.

4. Crime in pre-Code films is often normalized and portrayed as a means of survival, particularly for women navigating a male-dominated world. Many female characters resort to illegal means to escape poverty or abuse, with the narrative sympathizing with their plight rather than condemning their actions. Bette Davis' character in "Fog Over Frisco" and Barbara Stanwyck's role as an ex-convict demonstrate characters driven to crime out of necessity rather than innate malice.

5. Female characters frequently manipulate their sexuality for financial gain. The chapter outlines the motif of gold diggers, emphasizing the lengths to which women would go to secure financial stability in a world fraught with economic hardship. Mae West epitomizes this theme, embodying a certain brand of empowered femininity and playfully engaging in sexual politics while navigating the film industry at a time when women's roles were



evolving.

6. This era's musicals, as discussed, often provided an outlet for creative expression and liberation, juxtaposed against the restrictions that followed the implementation of the Production Code. Musical numbers utilized themes of youthful exuberance, love, and rebellion, reflecting an era of optimism and freedom. The energy and vitality of pre-Code musicals serve to highlight the cultural shifts occurring just before the industry became bound by stricter censorship.

7. Finally, the chapter reflects on the transitional nature of cinema at the time, with characters traversing a range of moral complexities. The exploration of femininity included elements of humor, irony, and cynicism—qualities exemplified by actresses like Dietrich, who maintained a sense of self-awareness and detachment in their performances. The chapter concludes with a note on how these films allowed women a voice and a sense of agency, challenging existing stereotypes and norms while highlighting the social dynamics of their time.

Through these narratives and character studies, Lasalle paints a rich tapestry of the complexities of women in pre-Code films, showcasing their multifaceted personalities and the socio-economic factors influencing their decisions. This chapter ultimately invites readers to reconsider the significance of these portrayals and their implications within the context of



gender and societal expectations in early Hollywood.

More Free Book



Scan to Download

chapter 8 Summary: THE GHASTLY JOB OF LIVING TOGETHER

Chapter 8 of "Complicated Women" by Mick LaSalle delves into the complexities of women's representation in pre-Code Hollywood, highlighting both progress and the eventual curtailing of that progress with the advent of the Hays Code. The chapter emphasizes the depth of storytelling and character development in pre-Code films, particularly regarding women's issues, which starkly contrasts with the formulas established after the Hays Code took effect.

1. The depth of representation: Pre-Code films explored women's stories with nuance and seriousness, tackling taboo subjects like abortion and the complexities of marital relationships. For instance, "Men in White" (1934) centers around a nurse's tragic experience with a back-alley abortion, and although the terminology of "abortion" is never explicitly stated, the film tackles the issue head-on without passing moral judgment on the woman's choices.

2. Evolving narratives of marriage: Hollywood's approach to marriage was also transformative during this era. Pre-Code films questioned the institution, portraying marriage as a partnership filled with tension and negotiation rather than a mere end goal. Ann Harding starred in several such films, including "East Lynne" and "The Animal Kingdom," which present



marriage in a more realistic light, showing that deep emotional connections, intellectual compatibility, and shared values are essential.

3. The impact of censorship: The establishment of the Hays Code in 1934 stifled the candid exploration of complex female stories, leading to a formulaic representation where women were often relegated to the role of returning to their cheating spouses, perpetuating the notion of female subservience. In contrast, pre-Code films like "When Ladies Meet" presented women who took stands against infidelity, with Harding's character refusing to take back her unworthy husband, showcasing a more empowered and contemporary woman.

4. Women as multifaceted characters: The pre-Code era featured women diligently balancing personal desires and societal expectations, often portraying them as adventurous and complex individuals. Films highlighted women's appetites for life and love, defying conventional narratives that segmented women into purely virtuous roles.

5. Professional women on screen: The portrayal of women in professional roles was another significant aspect of pre-Code cinema. Kay Francis, for instance, played various successful female characters, including doctors who faced personal and societal challenges. This representation presented women as deserving of both personal and professional fulfillment, challenging the restrictive norms of post-Code cinema.



6. The complexities of female desire: Pre-Code films navigated the intricacies of female sexuality and independence, as illustrated through characters engaging in affairs, experiencing passionate love, and exploring their sexual appetites without the blame typically placed on women in later films.

In summary, Chapter 8 of "Complicated Women" elucidates how pre-Code Hollywood provided a platform for richer, more authentic portrayals of women. By engaging with serious subjects and allowing women agency in their narratives, these films fostered characters who were both nuanced and relatable. The subsequent enforcement of the Hays Code, however, significantly altered this trajectory, reinforcing traditional roles that limited female representations in cinema for decades to come. The chapter argues for the artistic and cultural losses that were incurred in the name of censorship, reflecting on what could have been if these stories had continued to flourish.

More Free Book



Scan to Download

chapter 9: THE CENSORS STRIKE BACK

In Chapter 9 of "Complicated Women" by Mick LaSalle, the narrative delves into the oppressive effects of the Production Code on women in films from the 1930s to the early 1960s. The Production Code Administration, spearheaded by Joseph Breen, championed a strict moral framework that dictated the portrayal of women and their choices, limiting their narratives to often bleak outcomes.

1. Main Goals of Censorship: Contrary to perceptions of censorship as simple suppression of lewdness, the true focus was on controlling ideas. The Production Code enforced a stringent belief that crime, sex outside marriage, and other "immoral" actions must be explicitly punished in film narratives. This approach, particularly stringent for female characters, ensured that any exploration of female agency resulted in dire consequences.

2. Diminished Female Agency: Under the Code, women were relegated to archetypes that enforced a moralistic viewpoint. Characters could regain their virginity but faced severe repercussions for any sexual agency they

Install Bookey App to Unlock Full Text and Audio

Free Trial with Bookey



Read, Share, Empower

Finish Your Reading Challenge, Donate Books to African Children.

The Concept



This book donation activity is rolling out together with Books For Africa. We release this project because we share the same belief as BFA: For many children in Africa, the gift of books truly is a gift of hope.

The Rule



Earn 100 points



Redeem a book



Donate to Africa

Your learning not only brings knowledge but also allows you to earn points for charitable causes! For every 100 points you earn, a book will be donated to Africa.

Free Trial with Bookey



chapter 10 Summary: THE GREAT GARBO AND NORMA WHO?

In the narrative detailing the careers of Greta Garbo and Norma Shearer, significant contrasts emerge, particularly in the twilight of their film careers and the cultural perceptions surrounding them. Both actresses faced challenges with the enforcement of the Hollywood Production Code, which shaped their roles and ultimately influenced their legacies.

1. Decline and Retirement: By the early 1940s, both Garbo and Shearer had exited the film industry, albeit under different circumstances. Garbo, at the age of thirty-six, grappled with a lack of projects from MGM, compounded by the effects of World War II on the European market, which had traditionally buoyed her popularity. A potential return in 1949 faltered due to funding issues, and her inherent insecurity left her permanently away from the silver screen. In contrast, Shearer, while experiencing less turbulence at MGM, made unwise choices in declining solid roles, opting instead for unremarkable sex farces, culminating in an embarrassing role in "Her Cardboard Lover" before marrying a younger man.

2. Post-Career Perceptions: In the decades following their departures from cinema, Garbo benefitted from a favorable retrospective view, her best films indeed eclipsing her lesser works. Conversely, Shearer struggled with being remembered for her least favorable roles, such as the aforementioned



films made under the Code. While Garbo's artistry adapted somewhat to the restrictions of the Code, preserving her cinematic essence, Shearer's later roles often felt void of the depth and dynamism that once characterized her pre-Code performances.

3. The Impact of the Production Code: Although Garbo's films, which revolved around themes of sin and redemption, appeared compatible with the Code, it was still a crucial factor in the evolution of her roles. As Hollywood shifted priorities toward costume dramas to navigate the restrictions of contemporary narratives, Garbo's affinity for such tales aligned with her natural gravitas. However, the sanitizing effect of the Code stifled the emotional authenticity in her later works. For instance, in "Anna Karenina," the romance felt muted and joyless due to strict editing and censorship. This trend foreshadowed an inevitable cooling in audience response to Garbo's increasingly reserved performances.

4. The Evolution of Roles: For Shearer, the Code's restrictions resulted in a marked decline in her character's agency. Her portrayal of intelligent, rebellious women gave way to more traditional, restrained roles that often minimized the fierce independence that initially defined her performances. While she still exhibited complexity, notably in her films like "The Barretts of Wimpole Street," the subsequent pressure to conform to societal norms stifled the vibrancy of her earlier portrayals.



5. Critical Re-evaluation: The trajectory of Garbo's legacy took a positive turn with retrospectives and the increasing availability of her films, culminating in a resurgence of critical acclaim by the 1990s. In sharp contrast, Shearer faced harsher scrutiny, often labeled as a byproduct of Hollywood's nostalgia rather than a pioneer of female representation. However, as the context of her work began to be reevaluated, particularly much later through the lens of feminism and the evolving understanding of women's roles in cinema, Shearer also started gaining recognition for her contributions.

6. Legacy and Recognition: Garbo ultimately became immortalized as an enduring icon thanks to her impactful performances, drawing crowds even long after her departure from the screen. Shearer, though, despite beginning with substantial acclaim, saw a diluted legacy until recent years, where renewed interest in her films has sparked discussions about her significance. The critical narrative has evolved from dismissal to re-evaluation, prompting a longing for a rediscovery of her works akin to that achieved by other legendary female stars of her era.

In summary, the trajectories of Garbo and Shearer offer a poignant exploration of the complexities surrounding female stardom in Hollywood, the impact of cultural values, and the eventual quest for recognition in their legacies. Their careers, while shaped in the same industry, took divergent paths, revealing much about the interplay between artistry and societal



expectations.



Scan to Download

chapter 11 Summary: GARBO'S GRANDDAUGHTERS

The conclusion of Garbo's illustrious career in the early 1940s marked a significant transition within American cinema, leading to the disappearance of her archetypal heroine, only to be succeeded by a more sinister yet alluring figure—the femme fatale of film noir. This genre came to epitomize the resurgence of the archetypal vamp, featuring women who were not only sleek and sexy but also embodying a dark determination to ensnare and ultimately ruin the men in their lives.

Film noir became particularly noteworthy for its ability to thrive despite the restrictions of the Production Code, which mandated that evil must be punished. In a striking irony, noir films managed to adhere to this directive while simultaneously weaving themes of nihilism and despair—a genre marked by punishment that embraced all moral shades, from good to evil and everything in between.

Despite their captivating performances, the portrayal of women in film noir was also steeped in misogyny reminiscent of the nineteenth-century femme fatale. These characters, far from seeking genuine love, weaponized their sexuality to lead men towards their demise. Notable examples include Jane Greer, Yvonne De Carlo, and Barbara Stanwyck, who infused their roles with depth, often portraying women shaped by their circumstances rather than as mere embodiments of evil. However, this regression in character



representation prompted a critical acknowledgment that these portrayals represented a significant step backward in the dimensions of female roles in cinema.

As societal values evolved in the 1960s, film noir diminished in popularity, paralleling the decline of the vamp archetype of the mid-twenties. This decline correlated with an era characterized by burgeoning sexual freedom, rendering depictions of inherently evil sexual women largely obsolete. However, the link between sexual desire and mortality reemerged in the 1980s, particularly amid the fear surrounding AIDS. This resurgence led to a renewed fascination with femme fatales in cinema, exemplified by the provocative image cultivated by Madonna, who echoed the femme fatale imagery but lacked the complexity of earlier icons like Garbo or Theda Bara.

Madonna's cultural significance during the AIDS era was both impactful and controversial. While she drew inspiration from Marilyn Monroe, her artistic endeavors conveyed a much darker and self-aware sensibility. Through provocative imagery—such as in her "Like a Prayer" video—Madonna combined themes of sexuality and spirituality but fell short of the enigmatic depth that typified Garbo's portrayals.

The 1980s and 1990s heralded new iterations of the femme fatale through various cinematic lenses, including filmmakers like John Dahl, whose works featured complex female characters that retained echoes of the traditional



vamp. However, performances like Sharon Stone's iconic portrayal in "Basic Instinct" shifted the depiction of female sexuality towards a raw and calculating nature, reinforcing the notion of women as both magnetically attractive yet dangerously lethal.

Throughout the late 20th century, actresses such as Jessica Lange, Jennifer Jason Leigh, and Theresa Russell embraced and expanded upon Garbo's legacy with their portrayals of deeply flawed women navigating through psychological extremes tied to illicit sexuality. Yet, while these characters often combined themes of sex, death, and moral ambiguity, the critical element of romance largely evaded modern narratives.

The divorce of romance from sexuality—a direct consequence of the Production Code—has permeated contemporary storytelling. In present cinema, romantic relationships are frequently reduced to fleeting montages or simplistic formulas tied to external violence, often lacking the substantive depth observed in earlier portrayals. Only a handful of actresses, like Meg Ryan and Julia Roberts, have steadfastly occupied the romantic lead roles, yet their portrayals often evoke nostalgia rather than cultivate genuine emotional connections.

In juxtaposing the captivating allure of early screen heroines with the modern landscape, it is posited that while echoes of the Harlow-type sexuality remain visible in contemporary actresses, the Garbo-esque



synthesis of passion, depth, and spirituality is conspicuously absent. This absence raises profound questions about the cultural narratives we propagate and the breadth of emotional complexity inherent in our portrayals of women. Garbo's unique presence in film reflects an era that, while often idealized, had the moral complexity and depth missing from much of today's cinematic environment, suggesting that the landscape has shifted to an extent where the depth represented by Garbo is unlikely to find resonance once again in modern storytelling.

More Free Book



Scan to Download

chapter 12: NORMA IN THE NEW MILLENNIUM

In the twelfth chapter of "Complicated Women," Mick LaSalle delves into the evolution of female character representation in cinema from the pre-Code era through the latter part of the twentieth century, focusing particularly on the legacy of actress Norma Shearer. Five key characteristics define Shearer's roles, highlighting her personal integrity, vibrant life force, intelligence, sexual ardor, and an active sex life. These attributes were emblematic of a cinematic woman who could embrace her complexities and authenticity.

However, with the enforcement of the Hays Code, the portrayal of women underwent significant restrictions. The Code prohibited the depiction of independent, single women engaging in adult love affairs without the accompanying narrative of misery or shame. This shift stifled the kind of sex dramas in which Shearer had thrived, pushing them into obscurity for decades. When the Code was ultimately lifted in 1968, audiences had changed; societal shifts had altered interests, potentially leading to a decreased appetite for women's narratives in cinema.

Install Bookey App to Unlock Full Text and Audio

Free Trial with Bookey



World's best ideas unlock your potential

Free Trial with Bookey



Scan to download



Best Quotes from *Complicated Women* by Mick Lasalle with Page Numbers

chapter 1 | Quotes from pages 15-31

1. "She understood public taste as well or better than did Thalberg, at least when it came to her own career."
2. "The mass migration of the population from rural areas to the big cities ... was allowing women, for the first time, to get jobs and support themselves."
3. "They have an amazing combination of wisdom and youthfulness, of humor and ability, of innocence and self-reliance..."
4. "The flapper has forgotten how to be simple; she seldom blushes; it is impossible to shock her."
5. "The fantasy is tied up with the idea of a complicated woman's depth and dignity."
6. "She had a fire inside that could not be concealed, that she did not want to conceal."
7. "The only way I could bring the tears was to think about something horrible happening to me."
8. "Only their circumstances are different—very different."
9. "What Shearer was becoming ... was a kind of Platonic ideal of young American womanhood—not an example of perfection but rather a 'perfect example.'"
10. "With a fearless and ever-increasing audacity, she would take the good woman to a place that only bad women ... had seen: the bedroom."

chapter 2 | Quotes from pages 32-48

More Free Book



Scan to Download

1. She was beautiful. She was really beautiful. She was really really really ...
Descriptions have never done her justice.
2. It was a way that made viewers suspect their whole lives had been a farce.
3. Her beauty was a function of the screen.
4. It was a face with a riddle to it.
5. Spirituality, an aspect of all beauty, is inseparable from Greta Garbo.
6. Passion is passion. Ecstasy is ecstasy, and love is religion.
7. The high stakes were and are an essential part of Garbo's appeal.
8. Garbo was, at heart, dead serious. She was a true believer.
9. This connection between the alluring and the otherworldly should come as no surprise.
10. It's as if there was something so otherworldly about Garbo's beauty that it had to be balanced and accounted for in her movies.

chapter 3 | Quotes from pages 49-65

1. 'I really wanted to play a bad girl. I begged and begged two months for a chance to be declass  .'
2. 'It would be easy to pretend to you, but I won't do it.'
3. 'By not cheating, Mr. Galway.'
4. 'There is more than one way of being a good woman.'
5. 'If the world permits the husband to philander, why not the wife?'
6. 'You're the only man in the world my door is closed to!'
7. 'What is a wife but a good mistress?'
8. 'Whatever she got from these roles, professionally or personally, she gave something



back.'

9. 'She understood and made the public understand the passion of the reckless women she played.'

10. 'The movies had grown up, and, for a while at least, nothing could stop them.'

More Free Book



Scan to Download



Download Bookey App to enjoy

1 Million+ Quotes

1000+ Book Summaries

Free Trial Available!

Scan to Download



Free Trial with Bookey



chapter 4 | Quotes from pages 66-83

1. "The modern girl is like Lindbergh, built for speed. We have tremendous vitality of body and complete emancipation of mind. None of the old taboos ... mean a damn to us. We don't care."
2. "The world had changed in a way that each of us can only hope will not happen in our own lifetimes."
3. "Things started heating up in late 1929, early 1930. With talkies entrenched, the studios were on the lookout for new talent."
4. "Actresses who were first became last, while those on the bottom and middle moved to the top."
5. "Beginning with the talkies, and especially following *The Divorcee*, illicit sex became the movies' favorite subject, and at the beginning of the era, the fallen woman was the movies' favorite character."
6. "Women needed money. What else could a poor girl do but trade what she had for what she needed?"
7. "Get over it. Goodness and chastity are no longer synonymous. Celibacy is not the same as virtue."
8. "Like *The Trial of Mary Dugan*, the prostitute movies were almost invariably on the woman's side, consciously and unconsciously. They depicted strong, appealing women of easy virtue and made honest women of them."
9. "In a world that had turned upside down, movies began to resonate with the complicated lives of women, reflecting deep changes in society with a surprising tenderness."



10. "It wasn't poverty that made Shearer do it ... It was lust. As we'll soon see, Norma did it because she felt like it."

chapter 5 | Quotes from pages 84-100

1. "I'm in an orgy, wallowing, and I love it!"
2. "Women aren't human things to you. They're either wives or sweethearts."
3. "A man shouldn't need it."
4. "I feel that the morals of yesterday are no more; they are as dead as the day they were lived."
5. "A woman of today is good, or she is bad according to the way she does a thing—and not because of the thing itself."
6. "What I heard about you in Paris... He didn't believe the stories, he says, until he heard them 'six or seven hundred times.'"
7. "You think women should all be shoved into a coop like hens."
8. "Men of action are better in action. They don't talk well..."
9. "She knows it."
10. "There's not a particle of you I don't know, remember, and want."

chapter 6 | Quotes from pages 101-119

1. "No one decided to make Joan Crawford a star; Joan Crawford became a star because Joan Crawford decided to become a star."
2. "What's inside—the character stuff—has a way of coming out."
3. "The flip side of cynicism is hope, and Crawford knew how to convey the hope of a



woman in need of rescue."

4. "That Crawford herself shared those fantasies, with complete solemnity and no irony, was the bond between her and her audience."

5. "When Harlow complained about her roles and said she wanted out of her contract, she was willing to risk it."

6. "I want to live while I'm alive."

7. "Her body wasn't all she had. It was just all she had to sell."

8. "The truth of Blondell's reaction, her wild grief and sense of betrayal, underlies and gives dimension to the melodrama that follows."

9. "No matter that in a Crawford movie it was axiomatic that all a woman had to sell was her body."

10. "She is the more mature and womanly, and her ability to transcend sentimentality allows her to see and appreciate her surroundings."

More Free Book



Scan to Download



Download Bookey App to enjoy

1 Million+ Quotes

1000+ Book Summaries

Free Trial Available!

Scan to Download



Free Trial with Bookey



chapter 7 | Quotes from pages 120-137

1. "What a life. She is orphaned. She grows up on the street."
2. "Other murderesses were more lighthearted."
3. "But if they were really imaginative, they made careers of crime."
4. "With the world stacked in a man's favor, anything a woman did was justified."
5. "Survival required compromise, even for a good girl, so why not compromise all the way and live on velvet?"
6. "The pity is that, after the Code, one of the screen's great beauties never got to play as seductive a role again."
7. "There's no pity for the working woman."
8. "What about your girl? She's gonna do all right."
9. "To see West is to come away energized, as if touched by the wand of some weird and wonderful mother goddess."
10. "In such moments, Dietrich is both wonderfully comic and wonderfully hip."

chapter 8 | Quotes from pages 138-156

1. The loss was real and profound.
2. Movies provided a rich variety of socially responsive women's pictures.
3. Abortion may have been taboo, but stories about marriage were fairly common.
4. The ghastly job of living together.
5. The hard edge was replaced by sentiment; the frank expression, by propaganda.
6. Nothing else will pull a man and a woman through the ghastly job of living together.
7. You're not worth a minute of one anxious hour that either one of us has given you.



8. After the Code, crime films, adventures, gangster films, war movies, and comedies all continued to get produced, with some adjustments.
9. The film suggests that a marriage is not so much about lust as it is about a partnership of the mind and heart.
10. The best she can do is slip out a message, like a captive in a totalitarian land.

chapter 9 | Quotes from pages 157-176

1. 'They believed in the impossible. They believed they could close the barn door after the horse had run away, and that the horse would somehow be there in the morning.'
2. 'Christina relishes her ambiguity. "I have no intention to, Chancellor," she answers. "I shall die a bachelor."'
3. 'Queen Christina ranks as one of cinema's close calls. It is also the era's most sophisticated examination of gender and identity, and Garbo's masterpiece.'
4. 'By showing Christina's sexuality as earthy to begin with, by placing her in a world of everyday human emotion and passion, Garbo held out the possibility of transcendence to every member of her audience.'
5. 'The film presents Christina's decision to leave the throne as a victory of the self.'
6. 'Breen was driven. He wanted to save America from the movies and movies from the Jews.'
7. 'The Production Code ensured a miserable fate—or at least a rueful, chastened one—for any woman who stepped out of line.'
8. 'Always with Garbo, if love is in the room, so is God.'
9. 'He wanted to cut everything from the point where Christina and Antonio are first in



the room at the inn— all the way to the scene, three days later, in which Christina memorizes the room.'

10. 'The sight of a great woman knuckling under is too galling, even when we know we should dismiss it.'

More Free Book



Scan to Download



Download Bookey App to enjoy

1 Million+ Quotes

1000+ Book Summaries

Free Trial Available!

Scan to Download



Free Trial with Bookey



chapter 10 | Quotes from pages 177-189

1. “Perhaps it’s better I live in your heart, where the world can’t see me. If I am dead, there’ll be no stain on our love.”
2. “Make no mistake, monsieur. Whatever I do, it’s nothing for you. It’s all for Armand.”
3. “It has the shape and form of life, but don’t be fooled by the upright posture. It’s dead.”
4. “Her instincts were not wrong. Anna could have been a great role for her.”
5. “If we remove these and any such references, I must challenge anyone to demonstrate to me how the picture of Anna Karenina can be made at all.”
6. “The expression on Shearer’s face as she takes her last ride is remarkable. She has the look of someone who has retreated to some inner space of total horror and total acceptance.”
7. “Independence, sophistication, adventure—those were the most consistent elements of Shearer’s screen image.”
8. “For about twenty years following her retirement, Shearer got a free ride from critics.”
9. “The film was an enormous critical success, and it made a substantial profit at the box office.”
10. “Shearer was dismissed. But then West’s pre-Codes had been shown on television repeatedly. Shearer’s had not.”

chapter 11 | Quotes from pages 190-198



1. Evil must be punished? Fine. In noirs, everyone was punished—good, evil, dark, light, and every shade of gray.
2. A cold-blooded and often depraved cinema that gives us sex with no humanity, feeling, or tenderness is Joseph Breen's most fitting legacy.
3. Like the Production Code itself, Garbo was a product of a religion-conscious culture that was only secular on the surface.
4. Yet however arresting and entertaining Greer and other film noir actresses may have been, it's hard to think of their roles—throw-backs to the woman-hating imagination of the nineteenth century—as anything but a step backward.
5. Romance and sex were intertwined. It was the Code that wrenched them apart, and the divorce remains in effect today.
6. The basic premise at the heart of romantic films, that one person can be the doorway into everything wonderful, is something modern audiences have a hard time buying.
7. There are countless other examples, but love, once the movies' favorite topic, is condensed into a sex interlude.
8. Her best film, one of the most fascinating of the nineties, was *The Rapture* (1991), in which she played an information operator with a sordid private life.
9. In modern films, the fascinating and complicated process of two people falling in love is of so little interest to filmmakers that it is commonly tossed off in a montage.
10. To realize that we live in a culture in which Garbo would have no place



is akin to realizing that one's era isn't worthy of a benediction.

chapter 12 | Quotes from pages 199-208

1. The kind of woman she first brought to the screen in the pre-Code days—partly by accident of timing, partly by luck, and yet largely by design—turned out to be very like the late twentieth century's vision of American womanhood.
2. These films didn't just disappear. They disappeared for decades.
3. Still, filmmakers had freedom by the sixties and seventies to tell women's stories, and out of that freedom good things came.
4. The last scene of *An Unmarried Woman* was particularly satisfying.
5. Through Stowe's passion, we understood Cora's—that this is a woman who has coasted through a sheltered existence vaguely dissatisfied.
6. Actresses of the new millennium have to contend with a Hollywood in which there is little interest in women's narratives.
7. The examples of Shearer might serve as a lesson: the last thing a vibrant actress needs is to start taking herself seriously.
8. As was the case with Shearer, the less Moore wore, the more powerful she became.
9. Costume dramas inevitably reflect the period of their creation.
10. It's to stop time, hold the best of it in your hand.

More Free Book



Scan to Download



Download Bookey App to enjoy

1 Million+ Quotes

1000+ Book Summaries

Free Trial Available!

Scan to Download



Free Trial with Bookey



Complicated Women Discussion Questions

chapter 1 | THE INGENUE GETS A LIFE | Q&A

1.Question:

What significant change in film did Norma Shearer embrace that marked the beginning of the pre-Code era?

Norma Shearer embraced the arrival of sound in cinema as a turning point in her career and for the film industry. In her film 'The Divorcee' (1930), she portrayed a liberated character who boldly reacted to her husband's infidelity by engaging in a sexual encounter with his best friend. This shift not only showcased a more complex female character but also reflected a societal change towards women's roles and narratives in film during the pre-Code era.

2.Question:

How did Shearer's image differ from other prominent actresses in her time according to the chapter?

Norma Shearer's image evolved as a complex portrayal of the emerging modern woman, contrasting with the simpler, more one-dimensional portrayals popular among other stars. While actresses like Mary Pickford and Gloria Swanson represented idealized versions of femininity or glamour, Shearer was depicted as a nuanced character capable of expressing deeper emotional and moral complexities. Her characters often grappled with societal expectations while also embodying ambition and independence, which aligned her with the evolving image of women in society.

3.Question:

More Free Book



Scan to Download

Discuss the importance of Shearer's collaboration with director Monta Bell as explained in this chapter.

The collaboration between Norma Shearer and Monta Bell was pivotal for both Shearer's career and the representation of women in film. Bell's expertise allowed her to explore deeper emotional landscapes and portray complex characters, as seen in films like 'Lady of the Night' and 'Upstage.' His direction enabled Shearer to deliver performances that emphasized her strength, resilience, and moral ambiguity, reflecting the nuanced struggles of women in a changing society. Bell's focus on unguarded moments of vulnerability in Shearer's characters contributed to a more realistic depiction of womanhood, laying the groundwork for her later success and the audience's appreciation for her artistry.

4.Question:

What does the chapter suggest about the societal changes regarding women's roles and expectations during the early 20th century?

The chapter outlines a significant shift in women's roles and expectations at the turn of the 20th century, spurred by social, economic, and cultural changes. The arrival of the 1920s brought about new freedoms and opportunities for women, including the right to vote and greater participation in the workforce. This era also saw the emergence of the 'flapper' archetype—women who defied traditional norms regarding sexuality and independence. Shearer's career trajectory exemplifies this transformation, as she navigated and influenced the evolving representation of women in film,



moving away from the Victorian ideal of purity towards a more liberated identity that acknowledged complex desires and ambitions.

5.Question:

How did the early experiences and background of Norma Shearer shape her ambitions in Hollywood, as depicted in the chapter?

Norma Shearer's early experiences significantly influenced her ambitious nature and determination to succeed in Hollywood. Coming from a comfortable upper-middle-class background, Shearer was instilled with a sense of self-worth and confidence, but her family faced setbacks after her father's financial failures. This transition fueled her drive to succeed in show business. Shearer faced early rejections and skepticism from industry leaders, such as D. W. Griffith and Florenz Ziegfeld, which only strengthened her resolve. Her perseverance and ability to adapt, combined with her understanding of public taste, ultimately positioned her as a key player in the film industry, driving her to redefine the roles available to women on screen.

chapter 2 | LIKE A VIRGIN | Q&A

1.Question:

What was Greta Garbo's impact on audiences and critics when she first appeared on screen?

Greta Garbo's impact was profound; she captivated audiences with her unique beauty and ethereal presence, making viewers question their understanding of beauty itself.

More Free Book



Scan to Download

Critics struggled to articulate her allure, describing it as 'beyond beautiful' and transcending typical perceptions of attractiveness. Her face on screen evoked a powerful emotional response, leading audiences to feel a sense of awe and wonder, as they were witnessing something extraordinary. This phenomenon created a collective breath-holding experience in theaters, where viewers were spellbound by her close-up

2.Question:

How did Garbo's roles as a 'vamp' differ from the traditional portrayal of femme fatales in earlier cinema?

Garbo's portrayal as a vamp signified a departure from the conventional evil female archetype. Rather than embodying a malicious character intent on causing men's downfall, her interpretation presented a more nuanced character driven by her own desires and vulnerabilities. In films like 'The Temptress' and 'Flesh and the Devil,' Garbo's vamps were depicted as complex figures, torn between their instincts and the effects of their beauty, often portrayed as victims of their own impulses rather than purely evil seductresses.

3.Question:

What themes are prevalent in Garbo's films and how do they reflect societal attitudes towards women in the 1920s?

The themes present in Garbo's films often focus on passion, sacrifice, and the dichotomy between love and societal morality. These films presented female characters who grappled with their desires, reflecting the shifting attitudes of the 1920s towards women's independence and sexuality. While



Garbo's characters frequently engaged in premarital or extramarital relationships, the narrative often emphasized redemptive love, aligning romantic fulfillment with spiritual salvation. This intersection of sexuality and Christian allegory in her films illustrated an era navigating newly liberated social codes while grappling with traditional values.

4.Question:

What was Garbo's stance on playing 'vamp' roles, and how did it influence her career trajectory at MGM?

Garbo expressed her dissatisfaction with being typecast as a vamp, asserting her desire to portray more virtuous roles. Her frustrations led to conflicts with MGM, where she staged a strike against the studio demanding no more vamp roles and increased pay. Ultimately, this confrontation resulted in Garbo obtaining creative control over future roles, allowing her to evolve into the 'virtuous vamp' trope, embodying strong female characters that maintained an aura of allure while being portrayed as capable of profound love and sacrifice.

5.Question:

In what ways did Garbo's films utilize Christian imagery and how did it enhance her roles?

Garbo's films often employed Christian imagery to create a deeper narrative layer that combined themes of sexuality and spirituality. This imagery appears consistently, from communion scenes to sacrificial undertones, suggesting that passionate love could transcend mortal existence and carry



spiritual significance. Critics observed that Garbo's characters often mirrored biblical figures, which framed her storylines as modern allegories of redemption and divine love. This strategy deepened her on-screen persona, elevating her from a mere seductress to a complex character whose romantic pursuits had consequences akin to matters of faith and morality.

chapter 3 | I SAID, “YES” | Q&A

1.Question:

What were the main themes of 'The Trial of Mary Dugan' as portrayed through Norma Shearer's character?

The main themes of 'The Trial of Mary Dugan' revolve around moral ambiguity, the exploration of a woman's sexuality, and societal judgment. Norma Shearer's character, Mary Dugan, is introduced as a chorus girl with a history of relationships and living in sin with a married man. The film challenges the audience's perceptions of decency and self-respect, particularly through courtroom dynamics that question Mary's morality. Mary's emotional evolution reflects deeper societal issues regarding women's autonomy and the shifting moral landscape of the late 1920s, effectively positioning her not simply as a victim but as a woman asserting her identity amidst scandal.

2.Question:

How did Norma Shearer's portrayal in 'The Trial of Mary Dugan' herald a shift in female representation in film?

Norma Shearer's portrayal in 'The Trial of Mary Dugan' marked a significant shift in female representation in films from innocent ingenues to complex women who



embraced their sexuality. This film allowed Shearer to break from her previous roles and represent a woman with flaws and desires that existed outside traditional morality. The film's marketing leveraged Shearer's newfound image as a 'bad girl,' which attracted audiences looking for depth in female characters. Unlike the cinematic portrayals of previous years that punished women for their sexual agency, Mary Dugan's acquittal symbolizes a new acceptance of the morally ambiguous heroine, thereby reflecting the changing attitudes toward female sexuality during the pre-Code era.

3.Question:

What role did publicity play in shaping Shearer's image during this era, particularly with 'The Trial of Mary Dugan'?

Publicity played a critical role in shaping Norma Shearer's image during this time, especially regarding her performance in 'The Trial of Mary Dugan.' Fan magazines and marketing emphasized her transition from an innocent ingenue to a woman exploring 'naughty' roles, which was significant for attracting audiences eager for more progressive themes. The publicity surrounding her audition and subsequent casting showcased her determination to break free from typecasting, allowing her to cultivate a public persona that both acknowledged her past roles and celebrated her growth as an actress capable of complex emotional narratives. Through this carefully crafted image, Shearer was able to garner greater acceptance for women's more liberated representations on screen.

4.Question:

More Free Book



Scan to Download

What were the implications of Shearer's decision to reject the image of a 'virtuous woman' in favor of more complicated roles?

The implications of Shearer's decision to reject the image of a 'virtuous woman' in favor of more complicated roles were considerable, both for her career and for film industry standards. By daring to embody characters that were flawed, sexually liberated, and morally complex, Shearer helped to pave the way for a new type of female protagonist in cinema. This shift allowed Hollywood to explore themes of female independence and sexual agency, which resonated with changing societal norms. Shearer's performances became a platform for women's rights to exist beyond traditional archetypes, promoting the idea that women could express their desires and be seen as multifaceted individuals rather than merely as moral examples or romantic ideals.

5.Question:

How did societal shifts regarding women and sexuality in the late 1920s influence the narrative of 'The Divorcee'?

Societal shifts regarding women and sexuality in the late 1920s had a profound influence on the narrative of 'The Divorcee.' The film depicted a modern woman, Jerry, who actively seeks her happiness and sexual fulfillment in a time when such representations were becoming increasingly relevant due to the changing dynamics of marriage and gender roles, influenced in part by greater sexual freedom and availability of contraception. The narrative challenged traditional views of marriage by



showcasing infidelity and emotional complexity without punishment or redemption arcs typically expected in previous films. This reflected broader conversations in society regarding women's rights and sexual liberation, positioning 'The Divorcee' as not merely entertainment but as a commentary on the real-life experiences of women navigating these new societal landscapes.

More Free Book



Scan to Download



Why Bookey is must have App for Book Lovers



30min Content

The deeper and clearer interpretation we provide, the better grasp of each title you have.



Text and Audio format

Absorb knowledge even in fragmented time.



Quiz

Check whether you have mastered what you just learned.



And more

Multiple Voices & fonts, Mind Map, Quotes, IdeaClips...

Free Trial with Bookey



chapter 4 | NOT TOO YOUNG AND NOT TOO NICE | Q&A

1.Question:

What is the significance of the generation of actresses that emerged during the late twenties and early thirties according to LaSalle?

Mick LaSalle emphasizes that this generation of actresses was pivotal in shaping modern female representation in film. They emerged during a time of significant social change and cultural evolution, analogous to the rise of rock bands in the 1960s. LaSalle points out that these actresses, many of whom were quite young, embodied a confidence and a sense of freedom rooted in the sociopolitical movements of their time, particularly women's suffrage and the effects of the Great Depression. Their roles often reflected a new attitude towards women—one that embraced sexuality and independence, deviating from the more traditional portrayals seen in earlier cinema.

2.Question:

How did the pre-Code films reflect societal attitudes towards women, especially regarding themes of sexuality and freedom?

Pre-Code films, as discussed by LaSalle, explored themes surrounding women's sexuality and freedom in a bold manner. These films portrayed female characters who were often unapologetically sexual, engaging in illicit relationships and embodying 'loose women' archetypes. The films reflected a societal shift in which women were beginning to assert their independence and sexual agency. However, despite the often scandalous subject matter, many female characters were depicted sympathetically, showcasing their strength and resilience, thereby challenging the traditional moral standards of the time.

3.Question:

More Free Book



Scan to Download

What role did the economic context, particularly the Great Depression, play in the production and themes of these early sound films, according to the text?

The economic pressures of the Great Depression profoundly influenced Hollywood, as studios sought to entice audiences back to theaters amid rising unemployment and financial hardship. To attract viewers, filmmakers produced more explicit and sexually charged content. LaSalle notes that the industry responded to cultural changes by creating films that featured sexy storylines and empowered female characters. This period allowed actresses to explore roles that resonated with the struggles and aspirations of a society grappling with economic challenges, leading to an explosion of diverse female narratives on screen.

4.Question:

What did LaSalle imply about the evolution of leading female characters from silent films to talkies?

LaSalle suggests that there was a marked evolution in the portrayal of female characters with the advent of talkies. Before the transition to sound, actresses like Garbo and Gish depicted more traditional, restrained characters.

However, with the rise of talkies, actresses began to portray more complex, assertive, and provocative characters who often defied societal conventions. This shift represented a breaking away from the limitations of silent film acting styles, allowing actresses to explore more nuanced emotional depths, particularly in terms of sexuality and independence.

5.Question:

More Free Book



Scan to Download

How did the portrayal of actresses like Greta Garbo, Joan Crawford, and Constance Bennett illustrate the societal changes regarding women's roles during the pre-Code era?

Garbo, Crawford, and Bennett served as exemplars of the transformative representation of women during the pre-Code era. Their roles frequently illustrated the 'good bad girl' archetype, wherein female characters displayed both virtue and moral ambiguity. LaSalle emphasizes that these actresses played sexually liberated women who navigated their relationships with men on their own terms. For instance, Garbo's characters often illustrated a seductive power coupled with vulnerability, while Crawford embodied ambition and resilience. These portrayals aligned with the evolving societal attitudes that celebrated women's autonomy, reflecting a freedom previously unseen in earlier films.

chapter 5 | “I’M IN AN ORGY, WALLOWING” | Q&A

1.Question:

What was Clark Gable's reaction to Norma Shearer's performance in 'A Free Soul'?

Clark Gable expressed his surprise and confusion regarding Norma Shearer's choice to not wear underwear during her scenes, questioning whether it was for realism. This reaction highlighted his befuddlement at the contradiction between Shearer's public persona as a sophisticated actress and the boldness of her on-screen character.

2.Question:

More Free Book



Scan to Download

How did Norma Shearer's films in the early 1930s challenge societal norms regarding female sexuality?

In the early 1930s, particularly with films like 'Strangers May Kiss' and 'A Free Soul', Norma Shearer portrayed women who defied traditional sexual mores. These films depicted women as sexually liberated and unashamed of their desires, a stark contrast to later Cinema where sexually adventurous women were often characterized as deranged or immoral. For instance, in 'Strangers May Kiss', Shearer's character engages in a two-year sexual odyssey through Europe, celebrating her freedom rather than adhering to the constraints of romantic failure.

3.Question:

What themes were present in Shearer's film 'Strangers May Kiss' and how did they reflect societal attitudes towards women?

'Strangers May Kiss' tackled themes of sexual liberation and women's independence. Shearer's character embarks on a journey to explore her sexuality after being jilted, framing her actions as a social experiment rather than sheer promiscuity. This reflects a growing recognition of female sexual agency during the pre-Code era, as the film positions women as individuals capable of independent thought and desire, challenging the traditional roles of women as mere wives or sweethearts.

4.Question:

What were the implications of the internal memo against 'Strangers May Kiss' by the Studio Relations Committee?

More Free Book



Scan to Download

The internal memo illustrating revulsion towards 'Strangers May Kiss' signifies a tension between evolving societal views and the conservative standards upheld by film studios at that time. The comment on the film being a 'reflection of the initiatory stages of the degeneration of a people' demonstrates how challenging women's sexual freedom was viewed as a threat to moral integrity, foreshadowing the impending censorship that would sweep across film after the introduction of the Hays Code.

5.Question:

How did Norma Shearer's roles contribute to changing perceptions of women's sexuality in Hollywood?

Norma Shearer's performances in 'A Free Soul' and similar films set a precedent for the portrayal of women as assertive and sexually liberated in Hollywood cinema. By playing characters that engaged in sexual relationships openly and without shame, Shearer went against the grain of the expected modesty for women, thus paving the way for a broader acceptance of female desire and autonomy in film that reverberated in subsequent decades, influencing portrayals of women in films like 'Sex and the City'.

chapter 6 | SHOPGIRLS AND SEX VULTURES | Q&A

1.Question:

What major changes occurred in women's portrayals in films during the pre-Code era of the early 1930s?

More Free Book



Scan to Download

In the early 1930s, specifically 1932, there was a significant transformation in how women were portrayed in films. This era saw the emergence of the 'new woman' who was more independent and sexually liberated, as evidenced by actresses like Greta Garbo, Bette Davis, and Jean Harlow. Garbo's quote, "I want to be alone," reflects a desire for independence, while characters portrayed by Harlow often embodied a more open and carefree attitude toward sexuality and relationships. Women were often depicted in roles that emphasized both their sexual allure and their strength, such as Harlow's character in 'Red Dust' who was a combination of humor, toughness, and sensuality. Moreover, films began including themes of women reclaiming their agency in a male-dominated society, moving away from traditional portrayals of women as passive or dependent.

2.Question:

How did Joan Crawford's career evolve in 1932, and what factors contributed to her rise in the film industry?

Joan Crawford's career saw a notable upturn in 1932, transforming her from a lesser-known actress to a prominent star. This shift occurred primarily due to her performances in films like 'Grand Hotel' and 'Possessed.' Factors contributing to this rise included her dedication to mastering her craft; she was described as watching her more successful contemporaries closely and emulating their techniques. Additionally, Crawford's earlier struggles with competition, especially against stars like Norma Shearer, fueled her ambition to prove her worth in Hollywood. Her roles exhibited her capability to connect with audiences on a deeper level, portraying characters with both



vulnerability and strength. This connection allowed her to resonate with viewers, making her a box-office equal to stars like Garbo.

3.Question:

How was Jean Harlow's on-screen persona different from her real-life personality, and what cultural significance did she hold during the 1930s?

Jean Harlow's on-screen persona of the 'sex vulture' was vastly different from her true personality. Her roles often depicted her as an overtly sexual and confident woman, such as in 'Red-Headed Woman,' a character adept at using her sexuality to manipulate men. In contrast, off-screen, Harlow was described as modest and somewhat shy, reinforcing the conflict between her public image and private self. Culturally, Harlow represented a new type of female character that celebrated uncomplicated, unabashed sexuality. Her appeal during the 1930s was significant as she challenged traditional norms regarding women's portrayals, making her one of the era's most beloved stars. Additionally, her ability to weave humor and vulnerability into her roles made her relatable and endearing to audiences, marking a shift in how women were represented in cinema.

4.Question:

What role did urban settings play in the character development of women in pre-Code films, as indicated in this chapter?

Urban settings were crucial in shaping the character development of women in pre-Code films, as they allowed for complex narratives around themes of



independence and ambition. Actresses like Ann Dvorak embodied the urban experience, portraying women who were savvy, assertive, and aware of their societal positions. Films set in cities often contrasted the lives of women from various backgrounds, providing a backdrop for discussions on socioeconomic issues, gender roles, and the struggles of women. The city became a symbol of opportunity, danger, and moral ambiguity, enabling filmmakers to explore the multifaceted nature of women's experiences. Dvorak's roles in films like 'Scarface' and 'Three On a Match' utilized urban settings to reflect the struggles and aspirations of women seeking agency in a rapidly evolving society.

5.Question:

What were the main thematic elements depicted in the roles of women in films like 'Possessed' and 'Red-Headed Woman' during the pre-Code era?

Themes in films like 'Possessed' and 'Red-Headed Woman' during the pre-Code era included sexual freedom, ambition, and the complexities of female identity. 'Possessed,' featuring Joan Crawford, highlighted the desperation and aspirations of a working-class woman striving for emotional and financial security. The film showcased themes of lust, sacrifice, and the tension between societal expectations and personal desires. Similarly, 'Red-Headed Woman' portrayed Harlow as a comical yet manipulative female character who leveraged her sexuality to gain power over men. This film emphasized the evolving role of women in society, where traditional



boundaries were being challenged. Both films encapsulated a blend of sexuality and moral ambiguity, allowing female characters to navigate complex social landscapes while pursuing their ambitions.

More Free Book



Scan to Download



Positive feedback

Sara Scholz

tes after each book summary
understanding but also make the
and engaging. Bookey has
ding for me.

Fantastic!!!



I'm amazed by the variety of books and languages
Bookey supports. It's not just an app, it's a gateway
to global knowledge. Plus, earning points for charity
is a big plus!

Masood El Toure

Fi



Ab
bo
to
my

José Botín

ding habit
o's design
ual growth

Love it!



Bookey offers me time to go through the
important parts of a book. It also gives me enough
idea whether or not I should purchase the whole
book version or not! It is easy to use!

Wonnie Tappkx

Time saver!



Bookey is my go-to app for
summaries are concise, ins
curated. It's like having acc
right at my fingertips!

Awesome app!



I love audiobooks but don't always have time to listen
to the entire book! bookey allows me to get a summary
of the highlights of the book I'm interested in!!! What a
great concept !!!highly recommended!

Rahul Malviya

Beautiful App



This app is a lifesaver for book lovers with
busy schedules. The summaries are spot
on, and the mind maps help reinforce wh
I've learned. Highly recommend!

Alex Walk

Free Trial with Bookey



chapter 7 | GETTING AWAY WITH MURDER | Q&A

1.Question:

What themes are explored through the portrayals of female murderers in pre-Code films?

The portrayals of female murderers in pre-Code films explore themes of female empowerment, sexuality, and societal constraints. These characters are often depicted as victims of circumstances, forced into crime by societal pressures, financial desperation, or personal betrayal. The feminist undertones suggest that societal norms and male-dominated structures push women to extremes, leading to acts of violence as a means of survival. Characters like Miriam Hopkins in "The Story of Temple Drake" and Loretta Young in "Midnight Mary" illustrate how women navigate complex moral landscapes, showcasing their flawed humanity and challenging traditional gender roles.

2.Question:

How did movies reflect the social circumstances of women during the Great Depression?

Throughout the Great Depression, films reflected the social circumstances of women by illustrating their struggles for financial stability and independence. Characters often turned to crime or immoral means to escape poverty, highlighting the harsh realities of a male-dominated society. The films frequently depicted women as resourceful yet morally ambiguous characters, navigating through a world where their options were severely limited. This representation acknowledged women's intelligence and agency while also critiquing societal standards that forced them into desperate situations, as seen in characters like Barbara Stanwyck in "Ladies They Talk About" and Loretta



Young in "Born to Be Bad".

3.Question:

In what ways did the transition from pre-Code to post-Code influence women's representation in films?

The transition from pre-Code to post-Code significantly changed women's representation in films by imposing strict moral guidelines that limited the complexity and depth of female characters. Under the Hays Code, films were required to depict crime as being punished, which meant that the earlier portrayals of morally ambiguous female characters involved in crime or sexual agency had to be sanitized. This resulted in a shift towards more virtuous and one-dimensional representations of women, where they often became secondary to male narratives and were depicted as pure, innocent figures. The nuanced portrayals of women that could express flawed humanity were largely stifled, leading to a more cardboard representation of female roles in cinema.

4.Question:

What role did humor and irony play in the portrayal of female characters in pre-Code musicals?

Humor and irony played a crucial role in the portrayal of female characters in pre-Code musicals, as these elements allowed for playful exploration of themes like sexuality and female agency. Female characters often engaged in witty banter and humorous situations that acknowledged their desires and the absurdities of societal norms. The juxtaposition of lighthearted musical



numbers with darker themes reflected a societal tension that resonated with audiences. Musicals such as "Gold Diggers of 1933" and "Wonder Bar" utilized humor to subvert expectations and present women as dynamic figures capable of both seduction and empowerment, contrasting sharply with the more serious, moralistic tones prevalent in post-Code cinema.

5.Question:

Can you summarize the significance of Mae West's contributions to pre-Code cinema?

Mae West's contributions to pre-Code cinema were significant as she embodied a blend of sexuality, humor, and self-empowerment that challenged societal norms for women. Her films, such as "She Done Him Wrong" and "I'm No Angel," featured characters who were unapologetically sexual and confident, subverting traditional portrayals of women by celebrating their desires. West's performances combined wit and innuendo with bold depictions of female sexuality, making her a controversial yet iconic figure who brought attention to women's autonomy in a time of rigid social mores. West's unique style and approach not only captivated audiences but also catalyzed scrutiny and eventual regulation of female representation in film, paving the way for future discussions on gender and sexuality in cinema.

chapter 8 | THE GHASTLY JOB OF LIVING TOGETHER | Q&A

1.Question:

More Free Book



Scan to Download

What characterized the approach to women's issues in Hollywood films during the pre-Code era, as described in this chapter?

During the pre-Code era, Hollywood films tackled women's issues with a level of artistry and seriousness that was largely absent after the introduction of the Production Code. Films addressed subjects such as marriage, independence, and complex emotional struggles, often from a woman's perspective, and did so in a way that avoided moral judgment. For example, in 'Men in White', a film that dealt with abortion, the narrative presented the female lead's experience without condemning her choices, highlighting an empathetic representation of women's struggles during this time.

2.Question:

How did the introduction of the Production Code impact the representation of women in Hollywood films?

The arrival of the Production Code drastically changed the landscape of film storytelling regarding women's issues. Post-Code, films began to reflect more conservative viewpoints, often requiring female characters to endure moral consequences for their actions, especially in stories involving infidelity or independence. As a result, social dramas that previously presented women's perspectives were replaced largely by narratives that reinforced traditional values, portraying women as needing to return to subservient roles after moments of rebellion or infidelity.

3.Question:

What are some examples of films and actresses mentioned in the chapter



that highlighted women's struggles and complex emotional narratives? The chapter highlights several films and actresses that exemplified the pre-Code approach to women's issues. 'Men in White' features a nurse dealing with the repercussions of a back-alley abortion, while Ann Harding's performances in films like 'East Lynne' and 'The Animal Kingdom' showcase women confronting marital dissatisfaction and emotional complexities. Harding's portrayal of women who assert their independence or explore their personal feelings contrasts sharply with post-Code portrayals, emphasizing how the narratives were altered by the censors.

4.Question:

Discuss the significance of the film 'The Thin Man' in relation to marriage based on the chapter's content.

'The Thin Man' is significant in its portrayal of marriage as a partnership of equals, differing from the more traditional and problematic representations in post-Code films. The relationship between Nick and Nora Charles is characterized by mutual respect, humor, and intelligence, a refreshing depiction amidst the backdrop of wretched marriages seen in other films. The film suggests that a successful marriage can be achieved when both partners engage as equal participants, which stands in stark contrast to the situations seen in many films released after the introduction of the Production Code.

5.Question:

What themes does the chapter suggest are prevalent in pre-Code films



regarding women's identities and societal roles?

The chapter suggests that pre-Code films often explored themes of female independence, sexual agency, and questioning societal norms regarding marriage and motherhood. Women in these films were portrayed as complex individuals with desires and ambitions outside of traditional roles. For instance, characters discussed the implications of living together without marriage, infidelity, and partnership in a way that validated women's experiences, showcasing the pre-Code era's willingness to engage with adult themes while allowing women to express their struggles without moralistic restraint.

chapter 9 | THE CENSORS STRIKE BACK | Q&A

1.Question:

What was the primary goal of the Production Code as discussed in this chapter?

The primary goal of the Production Code was to censor ideas rather than merely lewdness or nudity. The censors were particularly focused on the messages that films transmitted, ensuring that crime was punished and that moral standards were upheld in the portrayal of relationships and personal conduct, especially regarding women.

2.Question:

How did the Production Code affect the depiction of female characters in films?

Under the Production Code, female characters often found themselves regaining their virginity, and any form of sexual transgression, including things like adultery or premarital sex, resulted in dire consequences. Women became depicted as protectors of



marriage, and their autonomy was severely restricted, portraying a life that often ended in punishment or deep regret for those who defied social norms.

3.Question:

Who was Joseph Breen, and why was he significant in the context of film censorship?

Joseph Breen was the head of the Studio Relations Committee and played a critical role in the enforcement of the Production Code. He was a true believer in the censorship ideals, pushing for strict adherence to moral standards in films. Breen's influence shaped Hollywood's output from the mid-1930s to the early 1950s, as he had significant power to approve or deny film scripts based on their content. Without his involvement, the likelihood of the Code being enforced effectively would have diminished.

4.Question:

What happened to the film 'Queen Christina' in relation to the Production Code?

'Queen Christina' was notably scrutinized by Joseph Breen, who tried to cut pivotal scenes that contradicted the morals defined by the Production Code. The film presented themes of bisexuality and a strong female lead exploring her identity, which Breen aimed to suppress. However, despite his strong objections, the film was passed with minimal cuts, illustrating the tension between artistic expression and censorship in that era.

5.Question:

More Free Book



Scan to Download

How did the censorship from the Production Code impact the careers of actresses in Hollywood?

The advent of the Production Code resulted in a significant decline in the careers of many actresses who thrived in the pre-Code environment. With censorship promoting restrictive and puritanical portrayals, actresses lost their edge and could no longer engage in complex or nuanced roles that were reflective of modernity and female autonomy. This decline led to many actresses becoming less relevant or even defunct, as they could no longer adapt to the sanitized narratives that Hollywood imposed.

More Free Book



Scan to Download



Read, Share, Empower

Finish Your Reading Challenge, Donate Books to African Children.

The Concept



This book donation activity is rolling out together with Books For Africa. We release this project because we share the same belief as BFA: For many children in Africa, the gift of books truly is a gift of hope.

The Rule



Earn 100 points



Redeem a book



Donate to Africa

Your learning not only brings knowledge but also allows you to earn points for charitable causes! For every 100 points you earn, a book will be donated to Africa.

Free Trial with Bookey



chapter 10 | THE GREAT GARBO AND NORMA WHO? | Q&A

1.Question:

What were some reasons for Greta Garbo and Norma Shearer's decline in the film industry during the early 1940s?

Greta Garbo faced a decline in her career due to the cut-off of the European market resulting from World War II, which diminished her strong popularity in Europe. MGM was uncertain about producing new Garbo films without this market, leading to a lack of opportunities for her. After the war, she considered a comeback in 1949 but ultimately withdrew from the industry due to financial backing issues and her own insecurities. Norma Shearer, on the other hand, saw her career take a downturn after she turned down a significant role in 'Mrs. Miniver', which could have revitalized her career. She instead opted for back-to-back sex farces that were ill-suited for the changing tastes of the audience, culminating in her last film, 'Her Cardboard Lover', which was poorly received. Both actresses ended their careers in projects that did not reflect their earlier successes.

2.Question:

How did censorship and the Production Code affect the films of Garbo and Shearer?

The Production Code significantly limited the types of stories that could be told in films during the era, particularly those that involved honest portrayals of sexuality and women's experiences. Garbo's films, while they maintained a level of quality, had to navigate the restrictions imposed by the Code. This often forced a shift towards costume dramas that could sidestep contemporary morality issues. For example, in



'Anna Karenina', key elements related to infidelity and the physical intimacy between characters were removed, rendering the film's romance artificially devoid of passion and jeopardizing Garbo's typical allure. Shearer's films suffered similarly; attempts to portray her characters with independence and complexity were often constrained, leading to 'Marie Antoinette' being a clash of sentimentalism versus the harsh realities faced by the character, ultimately undermining her film's effectiveness.

3.Question:

What was the significance of Garbo's performance in 'Camille' compared to her other works?

Garbo's performance in 'Camille' stands out as her ultimate cinematic statement, demonstrating both emotional depth and technical prowess. Critics hailed it as one of the most beautiful performances of her generation, showcasing her ability to convey psychological complexity through her character, Marguerite Gautier. The film allows Garbo to embody a woman who reconciles her rebellious nature with the virtues of love and sacrifice, diverging from her typical roles. This film not only aligned with Breen's Code demands of sin and punishment but also allowed her to explore profound themes of redemption and true love. Garbo's ability to deliver a layered performance that remains captivating through multiple viewings reflects her artistic growth and solidified her legacy in film history.

4.Question:

What portrayal of womanhood is evident in the films of Greta Garbo and Norma Shearer, particularly in their later careers?



The portrayal of womanhood in Garbo and Shearer's work presents complexities shaped by both their performances and the societal constraints imposed by the Production Code. Garbo's characters often embody the 'vamp' archetype—a woman capable of seduction but ultimately transformed through love; this is evident in her later roles, where redemption becomes a central theme—illustrating a tension between desire and morality. In contrast, Shearer's characters, especially after her time, began to exhibit a more symbolic struggle against patriarchal authority, as seen in roles that required her to rebel against oppressive figures. However, with the constraints of the Production Code, Shearer's characters were often stripped of their complexity, resulting in portrayals that leaned toward the sentimental rather than bold independence. Yet both actresses attempted to navigate these roles in ways that suggested a subtler form of resistance against male-dominated narratives.

5.Question:

How did the legacies of Garbo and Shearer evolve post-retirement and how are they perceived today?

Greta Garbo's legacy has evolved positively over the years, transitioning from initial critical skepticism to a reverence for her contributions to cinema. By the mid-20th century, retrospectives and biographies began celebrating her as an iconic figure, with an acknowledgment of her unique talents. As of her death in 1990, her films became widely available, cementing her status as a cinema legend. In contrast, Norma Shearer's legacy faced harsher



criticism, especially following her retirement. For decades, she was viewed through a lens of disdain, often labeled as lacking talent compared to her counterparts. However, recent years have seen a resurgence of interest in Shearer as her films become more accessible, allowing new generations to appreciate her work. Critics now recognize her pioneering roles and the complexities of her performances, inviting a reevaluation of her career as an important chapter in film history.

chapter 11 | GARBO'S GRANDDAUGHTERS | Q&A

1.Question:

What is the significance of the 'Garbo-type heroine' in American films, and how does the author characterize her disappearance in the early forties?

The 'Garbo-type heroine,' exemplified by stars like Greta Garbo herself, represents a strong, complex female character that had a profound impact on cinema during the silent and early sound eras. With Garbo's career winding down in the early forties, the author suggests that this particular type of heroine faded from American films, possibly due to the restrictive influences of the Production Code, which emphasized moral standards and often relegated complex female characters to simplistic roles. The 'Garbo-type' was known for embodying a deep emotional and spiritual complexity that was lost in subsequent portrayals of women in film, particularly as the emphasis shifted to more overtly sexualized and one-dimensional characters.

2.Question:

How does the film noir genre reshape the portrayal of female characters, as



described by the author?

The author posits that with the advent of film noir in the 1940s, there was a resurgence of the 'evil female' archetype, akin to the femme fatale of earlier cinema, but reinterpreted to align with the noir aesthetic. These film noir heroines were depicted as vamps who frequently ensnared men, leading them towards destruction. Unlike the Garbo heroine, who often conveyed complexity and depth, film noir women were typically portrayed through a lens of misogyny, seen as morally ambiguous and existentially flawed. The author notes that while these roles were compelling and visually striking, they represented a troubling step backward in the treatment of female characters in cinema.

3.Question:

What parallels does the author draw between the revival of femme fatales in the 1980s and the cultural context surrounding AIDS?

The author draws a correlation between the resurgence of film noir and the depiction of femme fatales in the 1980s with the advent of the AIDS crisis. This period saw a cultural paranoia regarding sexuality, particularly concerning promiscuity and its fatal consequences, mirroring the link between sex and death that defined earlier noir films. During this time, actresses like Madonna, who embodied a modern take on the femme fatale, gained immense popularity, reflecting society's anxieties over sexuality, pleasure, and mortality. The narrative suggests that this return of sexual danger in cinema was a byproduct of the heightened awareness of the risks



associated with sexual escapades during the AIDS crisis.

4.Question:

How does the author compare the portrayals of sex and romance in modern films to those of the past, particularly with regard to the Production Code?

The author argues that the Production Code, which dictated moral standards and suppressed overt portrayals of sexuality, significantly influenced the development of romantic plotlines in films. Prior to the Code's influence, romance and sex were intertwined, enriching character depth and narrative complexity. In contrast, modern films often present a detached view of romance, substituting genuine emotional connections with montage sequences that gloss over the development of relationships. The author notes that established stars like Meg Ryan and Julia Roberts have become exceptions, but overall, romantic films have become rarer, often relegated to comedic or nostalgic frameworks that fail to capture the intensity and nuances of love found in earlier cinema.

5.Question:

What does the author suggest about the potential for a contemporary 'Garbo' in today's film landscape?

The author expresses skepticism regarding the existence of a modern 'Garbo,' arguing that contemporary cinematic culture lacks the moral complexity and spiritual depth that characterized Garbo's era. They reflect on how the cinematic environment that once fostered such profound female



characters has largely been replaced by superficial portrayals. If a contemporary Garbo were to exist today, the author implies that she would struggle to find a suitable platform in American cinema and might be better off pursuing her career in Europe, where meaningful roles for women may still exist. This assessment highlights a perceived decline in the richness of female roles in film, suggesting that today's actresses do not engage with the same level of thematic substance and artistic integrity that marked Garbo's filmography.

chapter 12 | NORMA IN THE NEW MILLENNIUM | Q&A

1.Question:

What are the five characteristics that held firm for Norma Shearer throughout her pre-Code films?

The five characteristics that held firm for Norma Shearer throughout her pre-Code films include: 1) Personal integrity - Shearer's characters consistently displayed a sense of honesty and moral principles. 2) An intense and driven life force - Shearer played women who were passionate and motivated in their pursuits. 3) Intelligence - The characters she portrayed often exhibited a high level of intellect. 4) Sexual ardor - Shearer's roles frequently explored themes of desire and sexual vitality. 5) A sex life - Her films often depicted women with complex, adult sexual experiences, demonstrating a multifaceted understanding of women's emotions and desires.

2.Question:

How did the introduction of the Hays Code affect the portrayal of women in films,



particularly in relation to Norma Shearer's roles?

With the imposition of the Hays Code, it became impossible to depict a single woman with integrity who could have an adult love affair without it being portrayed as shameful or disastrous. Films like those featuring Shearer, which often centered around a woman's point of view in a sexual context, were directly impacted; many of them disappeared or faded from cinematic memory. The portrayal of women who embraced their sexuality and agency was severely restricted, fundamentally altering the narratives that could be told in Hollywood.

3.Question:

What film is identified as a significant modern counterpart to Shearer's work, and what themes do both films share?

Paul Mazursky's "An Unmarried Woman" is highlighted as a significant modern counterpart to Shearer's work, particularly to her film "The Divorcee." Both films navigate the complexities of adult love, sexuality, and personal growth. They feature women who seek to redefine their identities and assert their agency amidst societal changes. In "An Unmarried Woman," the protagonist undergoes a journey of self-discovery following her husband's infidelity, paralleling the explorative themes of independence and sexual self-awareness found in Shearer's films.

4.Question:

How does the chapter relate the legacy of Norma Shearer to modern actresses?



The chapter draws connections between Shearer and several modern actresses, highlighting how the virtues she embodied—such as intelligence, passion, and personal integrity—are evident in contemporary performers. Actresses like Sally Field, Holly Hunter, and Susan Sarandon exhibit qualities reminiscent of Shearer's strong and complex female characters. The text suggests that while modern actresses may not consciously emulate Shearer, they reflect aspects of her legacy in their portrayals of women who are outwardly focused and face external challenges, as opposed to introspective struggles.

5.Question:

In what ways does the chapter suggest that the historical context of film production has influenced the depiction of women on screen?

The chapter argues that the context of film production and societal attitudes has directly influenced how women are portrayed on screen. For instance, during the Hays Code era, women were restricted in their depiction, leading to narratives that often minimized their complexity and agency. In contrast, with the lifting of censorship in 1968, although there was initial freedom to tell women's stories, cultural shifts—including more women joining the workforce—altered audience interests and the industry's focus. Moreover, as filmmakers began to adapt classic literature into films, these stories were infused with contemporary sensibilities, allowing for stronger female characters but still constrained by market dynamics that undervalue women's narratives.





World's best ideas unlock your potential

Free Trial with Bookey



Scan to download

