

Chicago film analysis

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Rob Marshall's *Chicago* is a film about dangerous women. Set in the roaring 20's, few things could be thought more shocking and scandalous at the time than a woman wielding a gun. At that time, a woman's place was in the kitchen or the laundry room, not a smoky jazz club and certainly not the state penitentiary. *Chicago* presents us with not one but two of “Chicago's own killer dillers, those scintillating sinners” Roxie Hart, and Velma Kelly.

Throughout the film, these two ladies are pitted against each other in a quest for fame, and an unquenchable desire to keep one's name in the papers. The fact that they were both murderers only helped them gain valuable notoriety. *Chicago* is a film about ambition, the fickle nature of fame, the story of two women who stepped completely out of their pre-assigned boundaries and the consequences that entailed. Shot in period style, the world of *Chicago* is one of smoke and shadows.

In *Chicago* the world is literally a stage, brought to life by Roxie's vivid fantasies. Much of the light comes from stage lighting, such as spotlights and footlights. Even during a musical number set in a prison, the scantily clad singing and dancing murderesses are just barely illuminated with spotlights, their faces cast in shadow. Excepting scenes set in court, the atmosphere of the film is that of a seedy, 1920's nightclub filled with gangsters, jazzmen, and loose women.

Light, or lack thereof plays an important role in the film. When Roxie has her big musical number, she fantasizes about being a huge star and literally having her name in lights. Every step she takes is illuminated. When characters are in court, they seem to sweat, the intensity of the bright spotlights being a little too much for their liking. In between Velma and Roxie

in prison, the light is often dim and obscure, making one wonder what the women have up their sleeves.