

How does patricia
assert her agency in
breathless essay
sample



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Since the beginning of Hollywood film, we have always had an idea of the default roles that males and females play. In classic Hollywood cinema, males always carry the more masculine roles such as fighting, working, and stealing. On the other hand, women always received the more “softer” roles such as cooking, cleaning, and taking care of the kids. Even when it comes to romance, the women always tends to swoon and fall in love faster than the men. We would never expect the man to be the first one to say “I love you” and fall desperately in love with the woman.

However, that was classic Hollywood film, and times have changed. Now, we see women taking on the more masculine roles such as fighting, working and being independent. Even in terms of romance, we may see the man falling faster and harder in love than the woman. Sometimes, the woman will completely reject the man’s love for her for reasons such as independence. Women have come so far in cinema and we have to wonder: “Where did the revolution start?” The answer, most cinephiles and critics would agree, would be that the revolution started with Jean Luc Godard’s film, “Breathless”.

The leading lady that made this all happen is “Patricia” who is played by Jean Seberg. This character has revolutionized the typically prescribed gender roles and changed the way that women are typically perceived in cinema. The first time Patricia is seen by the audience is walking up and down the streets of the Champ de Elysee shouting “New York Herald Tribune”. Her job was to sell newspapers to the citizens of Paris, France. By having a job, we begin to see that Patricia is stating her agency as being an independent woman.

In her eyes, independence was the only way she could gain freedom and to be taken seriously as a citizen in society. This was uncommon for women in classic cinema to do. Women's jobs in the classic Hollywood cinema were to clean, cook and take care of the kids. No one expected women to work and bring home "the bacon". Patricia was actually strived to take care herself without any external help. This was no different when it came to romance. While Patricia was walking the streets selling newspapers, we see Michel approach her and declare his love for her. He asks Patricia to run away with him to Rome and she denied.

She stated that she was aspiring to become a journalist and she had to start school soon. This was very unusual because we had always seen the woman absolutely melt when the man tells her he loves her. Also, the woman wouldn't hesitate at the thought of running away together and living happily ever after. This was the first time we saw a woman claiming her independence instead of falling head of heels for the man. Patricia went against the classic Hollywood leading lady by putting independence above romance. This is seen again when Michel declares that he could not live without her.

Patricia simply states that she believes that he can and, therefore, we can infer that she could, also, live without him in her life. In contrast, in typical films, when the man and woman fall in love, it is as though they could not live a day without each other. In classic cinema, we expect to see the woman stand by her man and be forever faithful to the man that loves her. Patricia conquered this as well. After Michel steals a car, we see that the person that

turned him in was not a friend or some bystander, but it was the woman he loved. This was inconceivable.

Instead, of protecting the man at all costs, she actually stabbed him in the back and we can infer that she did this for this for the sake of her independence. Independence was also a key player in her intimate life.

When Michel asks her how many people she had slept with, she counted them out to be seven. This indicated that she slept with whoever she wanted and when she wanted. This was very uncommon for women in the 1950's. In that era, women tended to take the more proper and safe route. If there was a man that was willing to love the woman, then she would dedicate herself to him and remain monogamous.

So it is seen that she does what she wants to do and there is nothing more to it. So, we see that she places her independence and happiness above all else instead of what she do. For years, we have seen classic Hollywood beauties as a sexual object which is visually pleasing to the eye. They typically wear dresses, low cut tops, and have long flowing hair. That is how the feminine roles were viewed. However, Patricia serves as the anti-classical beauty: obviously beautiful, however, masculine in appearance. When we see Patricia in the beginning, she is wearing a “ New York Herald Tribune” shirt and pants.

Dressing in this way was easier and more comfortable than wearing a dress and high heels which made her perfectly happy. She also has a boyish haircut that freed her of the hassling routine of fixing and keeping up with it. This is similar to that of a man's daily routine with his hair. She also refused

to wear a bra underneath her clothes to gain a sense of equality. This was unheard of in the women of the 1950's. A proper lady would always wear a bra, have neatly combed hair, and a beautiful dress on which was expected by many film-goers. They expect a beautiful woman that presents herself as one.

Patricia is the symbol of rebellion against this expectation. Godard wanted to “go against the grain” and present a woman that dressed like a like and, to an extent, presented herself like a man. Patricia also handles situations in a different manner than most women. There is a scene in which Patricia states that she is pregnant. Her demeanor at that time was very unusual and resembled somewhat of a man's demeanor. Instead, being in a state of panic, she was eerily calm. It seemed as though she was not worried at all about how to handle the situation or about what to do for the future.

It almost seemed as though she thought to have an abortion. Typically, this would cause an emotional and confusing mess which would require the woman to lean upon the man for support and guidance. However, Patricia does the opposite. She is neither worried nor confused and needs no one's help in dealing with it. Throughout the movie, time and time again, Patricia asserts her agency in being independent. This is shown in everything: from her looks to her attitude and demeanor. Throughout many decades of films, women have been viewed as weak, powerless women that are always reliant upon men to save them or care for them.

Godard realized this and came up with an unconventionally powerful female character that asserts her independence. It was a very refreshing

modification on countless films where the female's role was stagnant and there was no flexibility to change. Women needed a different way of being portrayed and this film served that purpose. The character of Patricia tested the limits to how far you can take a character and served as the beginning of revolution where female roles were able to be explored and manipulated, and by doing so, eliminated prescribed gender roles.

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