

ISSN 0976-8165

# The Criterion

An International Journal in English

August 2015 Vol. 6, Issue-4



6th Year of Open Access

Editor-In-Chief  
Dr. Vishwanath Bite

[www.the-criterion.com](http://www.the-criterion.com)

About Us: <http://www.the-criterion.com/about/>

Archive: <http://www.the-criterion.com/archive/>

Contact Us: <http://www.the-criterion.com/contact/>

Editorial Board: <http://www.the-criterion.com/editorial-board/>

Submission: <http://www.the-criterion.com/submission/>

FAQ: <http://www.the-criterion.com/fa/>



ISSN 2278-9529

Galaxy: International Multidisciplinary Research Journal

[www.galaxyimrj.com](http://www.galaxyimrj.com)

## Not So Pretty Woman: A Re-look at *Pretty Woman*

**Hamna Mariyam**

Assistant Professor (FIP Vacancy),  
Farook College.

### Abstract:

There are so many products in the market that with the advent of industrialization and mass production, have a greater access to more number of people. Some of these products might carry certain ideological beliefs and these percolate into different layers of the society, not adhering to the erstwhile trickledown effect. On the contrary, it spreads almost uniformly, like osmosis, in the direction of the gradient. Visual medium is also such an industrialized mass production unit that can subconsciously fashion, alter and reinforce the belief systems of scores of people. The product under my consideration is a romantic movie of the nineties that has found place in the top fifty gross profit making films. However, my essay has really slammed the movie for using draperies of medieval times; fairy tales, chivalry, girl in distress and likewise to give life to a modern rendering of an old fairy tale. Moreover, the gendered reading of the movie sustains the anti-feminist comment on Hollywood, where only men rule.

**Keywords: Gender, Feminism, Movie, *Pretty Woman*, Hollywood, Julia Roberts, Vivian Ward, Richard Gere, Edward Lewis**

Pretty woman, walking down the street  
Pretty woman, the kind I like to meet  
Pretty woman  
I don't believe you, you're not the truth  
No one could look as good as you  
Mercy

It has been twenty five years since Roy Orbison's this 1964 song inspired the title for *Pretty Woman*, the widely acclaimed romantic classic. There has been a splurge of romantic as well as romantic comedy movies since then. Most of them had an alignment to the Cinderella complex. Cinderella is world renowned for the fantastic tale of a rags to riches girl that enamored the psyche of many. This story has inspired many movies like *Ever After*, *A Cinderella Story*, *Ella Enchanted* and many more. Nevertheless it is most fitting to analyze *Pretty Woman* placing it in the same context of the Cinderella mania, when it is celebrating its silver jubilee.

*Pretty Woman* released in 1990 and directed by Garry Marshall, stars Julia Roberts as Vivian Ward playing a hooker and Richard Gere as Edward Lewis in the suit of a lucrative businessman. Edward meets Vivian at the red-light area near Hollywood Boulevard and finally they check into his penthouse at Beverley Hills Hotel. The plot gets intensified when Edward proposes to Vivian a business where she spends time with him in his room as well as in business activities in return for big wages. This contract is passed and there is a lot of making out and business activities therein. Finally, the duo undergoes huge transformations in their respective demeanors. Edward, the one who was scared of heights and commitments, living only in the world of business, breaking companies is converted by Vivian into a sensitive person who starts

to work with Morse, his rival to construct something instead of breaking companies and relationships. These incidents might have instilled in him this passion for Vivian, wherein he hunts for her in her squalor, forgets all his fright for heights, climbs her balcony and kisses her. On similar lines, Vivian gets an external makeover from her revealing sex worker clothes to the Gucci and Prada of Rodeo Drive and a rich man by her side. She bids goodbye to her co-worker and friend, Kitty and her profession in pursuit for further education and a respectable living which is when the charming Edward climbs the balcony.

This plot scintillated many, but *Pretty Woman* would not have been the same if Walt Disney Studios did not take up the picture. The movie was to be a realistic rendering of the grim world of the prostitutes. However, this was heavily rewritten interposing it with romance, humour and spectacle which in turn led to the loss of the perspective with which the original script was written. The film fails to show the real world of the prostitutes, brushing it lightly away, so that the knight in the shining armour can rescue the princess in distress. It neatly forgets about the women being abused physically, the drug parlours and other intoxications, the venereal diseases and finally death which erases one's entire existence from this world. This chick flick is thus committing a grave mistake to two groups, the women community and the community of sex workers.

It wrongs the women community in many ways. One way is by assigning roles to both the genders. On the one hand, Edward is the representative of the masculine world of business, being ruthless and charming at the same time, associated with the glitzy upper society. On the other hand, Vivian is just a body, a beautiful woman who was and continues to be the source of sexual gratification for the first group. She clearly fits the Victorian realm with her theory of avoidance of kissing on the mouth in business thus making it impersonal, transforming into a woman of cocktail parties, thoroughly kempt on her dinner knives and forks and crying while watching her first opera wearing an expensive necklace around her neck which Edward gifted her. Thus this Cinderella story is about a prostitute being a lady by being the mistress or wife of a rich man.

Narrative wise also the movie reserves extended importance to Edward. It is his story which starts with his break up with his girlfriend and ends with him having a new partner. It is his transformation that the movie is centered on. There is a slight external transformation of Vivian, but the script is Edward centric. It is the basic norm followed by every romantic movie which assigns a role of a beautiful, submissive showpiece to the women who dances to the tunes of men. Laura Kinsale in *The Androgynous Reader* reiterates that no viewer/reader wants to be the heroine in the romantic comedy, but wants to be in her place, along with the hero. 'The reader is seldom the heroine in the sense meant by the term reader identification. There is always a sense of analytical distance' (Kinsale, *Dangerous Men and Adventurous Women: Romance Writers on the Appeal of the Romance*, 31). 'People are looking at me' says Vivian, whom Edward corrects, 'They're not looking at you. They're looking at me.' Similarly at Rodeo Drive the salesman was greatly interested in Edward than Vivian because he is the holder of the plastic money, but Vivian can be replaced by any other woman enjoying his bounty.

Thus, when Edward at the balcony climbing scene says he is rescuing the princess, Vivian replies by saying that she has rescued him right back. The director has relied on this rendition aggressively to assert that this movie traverses equal lines and that both the

protagonists are equally benefitted. However, I choose to disagree. That dialogue is forcefully fit to bring a façade of justice to the women folk, after two hours of evident injustice.

If looked at through the prism of psychoanalysis using Lacan and Zizek, the movie is a classic example of cultural fetishisation. It reinforces our alignment towards fetishisation at different levels. The primary fetishes are the prostitutes and the world of body selling itself. This is continued in the hotel also where there is just a commodity fetishisation and no love. Vivian and Edward act as fetishes for each other and thus helping themselves to fill in the vacuum of a greater loss in themselves, reading it through the realm of psychoanalysis. In Vivian's case, the typical Freudian loss is of the phallus and Edward's could be hypothetically assumed as more of a desire than a loss; a yearning for a submissive object that pleases him with conversations and body. Hence though he returns the necklace, he keeps for himself the other object in his kitty, truly imbibing Barney, the hotel manager's words, 'it must be difficult to let go off something so beautiful'

This movie thus does not paint a realistic picture and is just a reverie that is hard to materialize which Vivian knows just one time, which constitutes probably the only realistic dialogue in the entire length of the movie

'Vivian: Tell me one person who it's worked out for.

Kit: What, you want me to name someone? You want like a name? Oh, God, the pressure of a name... I got it. Cindafuckin'rella'.

Precisely, the movie sums up everything that I have argued in its final dialogue. 'Welcome to Hollywood! What's your dream? Everybody comes here; this is Hollywood, land of dreams. Some dreams come true, some don't; but keep on dreamin' - this is Hollywood. Always time to dream, so keep on dreamin'.'

### **Works Cited:**

Kinsale, Laura. "The Androgynous Reader." *Dangerous Men and Adventurous Women: Romance Writers on the Appeal of the Romance*. Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania, 1992. 31-45. Print.

Stringer, Rebecca. *Feminism at the Movies: Understanding Gender in Contemporary Popular Cinema*. Ed. Hilary Radner. New York: Routledge, 2011. Print.