

## Mirror Image: A Study of the Power Politics of Mimetic Desire and Cinematic Confinement in *Chloe* (2009)

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### ABSTRACT

This study aims to analyze the power politics in the narrative of the film *Chloe* as addressed by the mirrored desire perceived in the film and to illustrate how this mimesis is communicated through the imagery of confinement that dominates the presence of the female protagonists. René Girard's mimetic theory of triangular desire and scapegoat mechanism and Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar's conceptual image of a mad woman in the mirror are employed as the frameworks on which the analyses are based. The results reveal four paradigms of triangular desire, the last of which confirms the male hegemony that underlies the film's narrative and that, subsequently, undermines the message of women's empowerment suggested by the film's emphasis on the female characters and their supposed bonding. The feeling of entrapment of the female protagonists is revealed through the ways in which they are framed cinematically and metaphorically. The desire to break free from this inhibition is realized through the image of a mad double who rebels against such male constructs as family, work and sex, and whose presence entails such anarchical chaos that she must be dispensed with so that the patriarchal order can be restored. This affirms the stronghold that patriarchy has over both the female psyche and the general public conscience. The findings also support the adaptability of literary frameworks in a cinematic investigation.

### INTRODUCTION

The study of literature, although very much alive in today's academia, has increasingly been associated with disciplines from different academic fields in order to respond and cater to the demands of fast-pacing, multi-tasking techno-readers and media consumers. Film study is one field that has been widely appropriated into the instruction of literature courses and programs: "Literature and Film" by University of Newcastle, Australia, "Film and Literature" by Athabasca University, Canada, and "English Literature and Film Studies" by University of Worcester, U.K., to give but a few current examples. Apart from an obvious observation that many literary works have been reincarnated as cinematic adaptations, thus facilitating the process of 'reading' the books themselves, many literary theories such as critical frameworks related to colonialism, post-colonialism, post-modernism and gender studies are also exceptionally adaptable to the study and analysis of films, thus providing useful tools for academic discussions where the subject of the study of literature and film is concerned.

This, however, is not to say that the two fields of study are identical or even much similar. They are indeed

vastly different in their respective aesthetic and technical approaches. The aim of this projection is merely to point to the applicability of literary criticism in a field that members of a younger generation may find more approachable. Its pedagogical, academic and practical implications are immense. Studies have been conducted to demonstrate the benefits of integrating motion pictures into literature courses. For example, Snowden (2010) discussed the use of Angela Carter's *The Bloody Chamber* and its 1984 cinematic adaptation, *The Company of Wolves*, in a classroom context and concluded that this practice allowed the possibility of a deeper understanding of feminism and feminist politics which challenged the more common contention that Carter's work was antifeminist. Beaupre (2011) applied transformative learning to a Chinese literature and film course and provided practical evidence of how this approach facilitated changes to the practice, process and overall delivery of the course focusing on practical instructional approaches to promote the students' awareness, sense of connection, intuitive thinking and reflective development. Chen (2012) studied the effects of integrating literature and film into a college EFL class and found that the experimental group that read,

watched a film and discussed a novel performed better in reading comprehension tests than the control group that was exposed only to the ELT textbook. Bubeníček (2013) studied the intermedia transpositions between literature and film based on three interpretational perspectives – intertextual, intermedia and cultural-social – in selected literary works and their cinematic adaptations both in English and in Czech, and found that the adaptations did not reduce the interest in the aesthetic nature and the malleability of the new texts and that the three perspectives contributed to a better understanding of the relations between literature and film. Perry (2018) assessed the film production in a literature and media course at the tertiary education level and found that the process reinforced the students' 21<sup>st</sup> century skills of decision-making, problem-solving and public speaking. In addition, films have been implemented in other fields of study as an effective tool for interdisciplinary applications such as in medicine (Datta, 2009; Baños & Bosch, 2015), mathematics (Chabrán & Kozek, 2016) and management (Tyler, Anderson, & Michael Tyler, 2009).

As many educators have shown, the use of literary tools to analyze popular media could enable the users to understand their choice of media more insightfully and, in turn, encourage them to pick up a book and 'read' it in ways they have never done, and never known how to, before. The present study aims to encourage this and to demonstrate how a film can be 'read' using literary methods through an analysis of Atom Egoyan's film *Chloe* based on René Girard's critical theory of mimesis and Gilbert and Gubar's feminist literary approaches.

*Chloe* is a film directed by Atom Egoyan and first released in 2009. The film explores the imitative nature of desire and translates it into images of confinement that speak for the physical and psychological entrapment of the main female characters. Taking a cue from the multiple nominations and the 2010 Best Picture Editing Award to *Chloe*'s film editor Susan Shipton by Directors Guild of Canada (Note 1), this study proposes to investigate how desire is mirrored in the relationships of the main characters and to illustrate how the mirrored desire is communicated through the imagery of confinement in the film. The investigation of the characters' relationships borrows René Girard's mimetic models of triangular desire as a tracking device (Girard, 1965; Williams, 1996; Palaver, 2013), and the illustration of the filmic communication of the mirrored desire and confinement follows Gilbert and Gubar's interpretation of "a madwoman in the mirror" as a conceptual imperative. (Gilbert & Gubar, 1984) The following section reviews information on Girard's concepts of mimesis, triangular desire and scapegoat mechanism as well as selected studies using these concepts, Gilbert and Gubar's projection of "a madwoman in the mirror" and a synopsis of the film *Chloe*.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Mimesis, Triangular Desire and Scapegoat Mechanism

To René Girard, desire is neither autonomous nor spontaneous; it is imitative and indicative of the power politics

between the subject and the model/mediator whose object of desire has been appropriated by the subject. Jealousy, envy, rivalry and hatred are often the results of this mimetic situation. With the involvement of acts of imitation, acquisition and appropriation, the romantic concept of an independent and extemporaneous desire is, therefore, illusory. (Williams, 1996: 2) This concept of 'mimesis' or 'mimetic desire' provides a threshold into Girard's thematic investigation of the origin of archaic religion through 'the scapegoat mechanism' which features mimetic, subsequently collective, violence towards the scapegoat victim who is sacrificed to restore peace and order to the community, hence elevating the victim's status into a 'sacred' rescuer. Girard pursues in this line of argument to project that Christianity, with its nonviolent God, its perspective of the biblical victim (Jesus Christ) and its renunciation of mimetic rivalry and violence, helps protect man from the consequences of mimesis. (Palaver, 2013: 9-11) The present study, however, intends to focus mainly on the imitating nature of desire and its perverse outcome as a result of rivalry and jealousy according to Girard's direction in his first influential book *Deceit, Desire and the Novel: Self and Other in Literary Structure* (Girard, 1965). The literature review, therefore, aims to illustrate the paradigms of 'triangular desire' that Girard introduces in his books and to provide selected examples of studies that have made use of these paradigms.

In *Deceit, Desire, and the Novel: Self and Other in Literary Structure*, Girard (1965) introduces "a systematic metaphor" (Girard, 1965: 2) of triangular desire to depict "the imitative nature of desire" (Girard, 1965: 14) which features three players: the subject, the model/mediator and the object of desire. Two triangular templates are presented to differentiate the spiritual distance of mediation: external mediation and internal mediation. (Girard, 1965: 9) External mediation occurs when the model and the subject occupy different social spheres with no possibility of contact. The subject's desire for the object is aroused by the model's already existing desire for the same object and mediated by the subject's reverence for the model/mediator. In Girard's words, "the mediator's prestige is imparted to the object of desire and confers upon it an illusory value." (Girard, 1965: 17) On the other hand, internal mediation occurs when the distance between the subject and the model is reduced and their respective spheres are then allowed to meet. In coveting the model's object of desire, the subject becomes a rival of the model, who is impelled to mirror the rivalry in order to maintain possession of the object. While the subject of external mediation expresses admiration for his model openly, the subject of internal mediation hides it. The reverence and malice culminate in what Girard terms "hatred." (Girard, 1965: 10) Jealousy, envy and hatred are, then, the staple of triangular emotions, and violence consequently follows. Internal mediation is used by Girard to explain collective violence, such as a mob, as a result of a political chaos or a social upheaval due to a temporary suspension of social inequality. In Girard's words, "internal mediation triumphs in a universe where the differences between men are gradually erased." (Girard, 1965: 14)

Based on the phenomena of mimesis, Girard furthers his theoretical projection in *Violence and the Sacred* (Girard, 1977) where he explains the nature of the 'sacred' in archaic societies through 'the scapegoat mechanism' which is the mimetic snowballing of a community against a victim in an attempt to resolve a crisis. The victim is regarded as both a responsible party for the crisis and a potential cure for it. His death, therefore, is rendered 'sacred' by this duality of perceptions. The scapegoat mechanism is presented to be a central element of myths, religions, political power as well as ancient medical, theatrical, philosophical and anthropological practices. Sacred rites, such as ritual sacrifices, are born out of attempts to keep the ultimate resolution of violence at a minimum. Similarly, when a good person is designated to undertake a perilous mission for the greater good of a community, the person becomes the community's surrogate victim.

Girard's mimetic framework has been adapted and expanded to illustrate sociocultural and aesthetic phenomena and applications both in books and in films. In *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire*, Sedgwick (2015), adapting Girard's concept of triangular desire, proposes a model of Homosocial Triangle to represent male relationships. In a Homosocial Triangle, a woman is presented either as an object desired by two men whose rivalry becomes so intense that it eventually obliterates the object of desire and focuses only on the two male rivals (the subject and the model) or as a decoy for two men to express their desire for each other. Homosociality, therefore, is perceived as a continuum of male relationships with potential directions towards homoeroticism and homosexuality.

In *Mimetic Theory and Film*, several scholars (Dumouchel, Goodhart, Bubbio, van Oort, Dunn & Jane in Bubbio & Fleming, 2019) contribute to the development of a genre-specific mimetic analysis based on a Girardian aesthetic through their analyses of films such as *The Act of Killing*, *Ex Machina*, *Star Wars*, *Macbeth*, *Throne of Blood*, *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, and *Adventure Time*.

Research studies in different fields; for instance, literature, film and business management, have made use of Girard's mimetic theory for both theoretical and practical investigations. In "Objects of Desire: Mimetic Theory in Middle-earth," Goodling (2019) explores Tolkien's understanding and portrayal of power in the novels *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings* using Girard's concept of mimetic desire and drawing examples from relationships among central characters such as Bilbo and Frodo and key objects such as the One Ring and the Arkenstone. The renunciation of mimetic rivalry by turning away from the object of desire is revealed to be a significant attribute of Tolkien's heroes.

In "Triangulating the Male Homosocial Continuum: A Case Study of *Kinsey* (2004)," Padgate (2019) investigates the relationships of the three main characters of the film *Kinsey* (2004) using Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's Homosocial Triangle to illustrate the ever shifting sexuality and power placement in the film. The results confirms Sedgwick's idea of male homosociality as a continuum, proposes that the continuum supports the shifting gender representation,

as in the case of the female protagonist who displays several attributes that are traditionally masculine, and shows that the Homosocial Triangle, constantly revolving and adjusting, never fails to depict the rivalry and desire of the three involved parties, who interact relatively predictably within the science of triangular desire.

Finally, in "Leadership Lessons of Triangular Desire from René Girard," Harter (2013) explains the mechanism of mimetic desire and its consequent pitfalls of displaced desire, obsession and self-destruction. He then quotes four possible remedies suggested by Girard: restore authentic and lateral desire, restore one's desire for transcendence, identify and purge oneself as a scapegoat, and go back in time to original conditions of innocence. With an emphasis on self-knowledge as a result of these remedies, Harter points out that leadership, which is characterized by its interpersonal influence that could lead to displaced desire and, ultimately, dysfunctional organizational cultures, could benefit from verifying Girard's diagnosis and prescriptions.

In this study the concept of triangular desire is used to track the dynamic of sexual desires driven by the three main characters in the film *Chloe*: Catherine, David and Chloe, and the scapegoat mechanism is used to explain the violent consequence of the actions of these characters.

### A Madwoman in the Mirror

In *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination*, Gilbert and Gubar (1984: 36-92) explain how the literal and figurative confinement within maternal female bodies, domestic spaces and patriarchal expectations results in the 'dis-ease' and yearning for spiritual escapes depicted through rebellious acts of madness and monstrosity of the 'dark doubles' of angelic heroines in literary works; as the cruel Queen/Stepmother is a dark double of the innocent Snow White, and the mad wife in the attic of Thornfield Hall is an emotionally liberated version of the more repressed Jane Eyre. In the same way that the Queen's self-evaluation is dictated, and maddened, by the male voice of the looking glass in *Snow White*, the mad wife's existence in *Jane Eyre* is contained, and incensed, by the male presence in the attic of Thornfield Hall; the two victims attacked by the 'mad wife' are both male. The tension between the feeling of social and spatial confinement and the raging desire to escape creates "the psychic split between the lady who submits to male dicta and the lunatic who rebels." (Gilbert & Gubar, 1984: 86)

Referring to Mary Elizabeth Coleridge's "The Other Side of the Mirror," Gilbert and Gubar (1984: 77) express a woman's fear to see reflected in a mirror a monster that "she really is rather than the angel she has pretended to be." Female ailments of anorexia, agoraphobia and claustrophobia are symptomatic of a woman's spatial anxieties as a result of being a prisoner of her own gender. The mad double – the monster woman – is "simply a woman who seeks the power of self-articulation," (Gilbert & Gubar, 1984: 79) and, by so doing, revises the self-definition imposed on her by the patriarchal culture. "A mad woman in the mirror" is a conceptual image of female phobia both of man-inflicted "dis-ease" and of her insufficient self.

This study borrows Gilbert and Gubar's idea of "a mad woman in the mirror" as a point of reference to reflect on the psychological entrapment of the female protagonists in *Chloe*.

### *Chloe* (2009)

The storyline of *Chloe* follows a chance encounter of two women, Catherine and Chloe, who become professionally and personally involved when Catherine, the older woman and a respectable gynecologist, hires Chloe, a call girl, to romantically approach her husband, David, whom she suspects of having an affair with a student. Chloe reports back with details of her sexual ventures with David in enclosed places. Having been somewhat emotionally and sexually estranged in her own marital bed, Catherine's desire is enflamed by Chloe's intimate accounts of her encounters with David. She eventually takes on Chloe's evident sexual interest in her and acts out the desire in a hotel room. Catherine then arranges to face David with empirical evidence of his infidelity – Chloe – by inviting them both to see her at a café. It then becomes clear from his mannerism that David has no recollection of having met Chloe, and Catherine realizes that Chloe has been making up stories about David and herself to gain access into Catherine's life. Chloe immediately walks out leaving the couple to handle the reality of the situation by themselves. While David and Catherine are reconciling, Chloe goes to their house and seduces their teenage son, Michael. Catherine comes home and finds them in her bed. During a physical struggle with Catherine, Chloe falls through a large glass window on the upper floor of the house. She manages to grip the window frame but decides to let go and drops to her death.

Since the narrative of the film involves a sexual encounter between the two main female characters, the film has been called a "lesbian" film (Weitzman, 2010; Lindop, 2015; Epstein & Gillett, 2017). This study, however, attempts to provide an alternative approach to read the film and to explore and expose the ruling paradigm beyond the homosexual display that unfortunately seems to be a general label for this film.

### OBJECTIVES AND METHODS

This study proposes to investigate how desire is mirrored in the relationships of the main characters in the film *Chloe* (2009) and to explain how the mirrored desire is communicated through the imagery of confinement in this film. Girard's concept of mimetic desire is employed in the analysis of the mirrored relationship of the film's protagonists and the violent climax of the film's narrative, and Gilbert and Gubar's idea of 'a madwoman in the mirror' provides the groundwork for the analysis of the imagery of confinement in the film. In tackling these objectives, it is hoped that underlying psychological and social implications, which have largely been overshadowed by the film's eroticism, can be revealed.

### RESULTS

The results of the study are discussed in two sections. The first section "Desire Mirrored" responds to the study's first objective: to investigate how desire is mirrored in the relationships of the main characters in the film *Chloe* (2009). The second section "Desire Confined" responds to the study's second objective: to explain how the mirrored desire is communicated through the imagery of confinement in the film.

#### Desire Mirrored

[Desire] can always be portrayed by a simple straight line which joins subject and object ... but it is not essential. The mediator is there, above that line, radiating toward both the subject and the object. The spatial metaphor which expresses this triple relationship is obviously the triangle. The object changes with each adventure but the triangle remains. (Girard, 1965: 2)

Based on Girard's concept of triangular desire, the relationships of the main characters in *Chloe* can be triangulated and discussed in the order of the film's narrative as follows.

From the beginning of the film, Catherine plays a central role around which the narrative revolves. She plays hostess to the ill-fated birthday party which her husband, for whom the party is secretly and elegantly organized, fails to attend. As a successful gynecologist, Catherine has a private practice overlooking a busy city street and overflowing with female patients who come to seek her professional advice and service. A newspaper clipping framed and enshrined on a wall of the clinic shows a picture of a modern, happy family with two professional parents – Catherine and her husband, David – and their only son, Michael. Catherine meets Chloe, an escort, by chance after an unsettling discovery that David, a college professor, missed his surprise birthday party because he was spending time with a young female student. At their first encounter, Chloe is clearly drawn to Catherine, an attraction that Catherine instantly dismisses. However, Catherine later hires Chloe to approach her husband to validate her infidelity hypothesis, and Chloe promptly agrees to do the job. At this point in the narrative, the three main characters of the film are actively involved with one another. The following diagram represents their triangular involvement.

Figure 1 shows the triangular relationships of Catherine, David and Chloe after Chloe has been hired to flirt with David. Catherine serves as a model from which Chloe's affection/affectation for David is imitated. Since their sta-

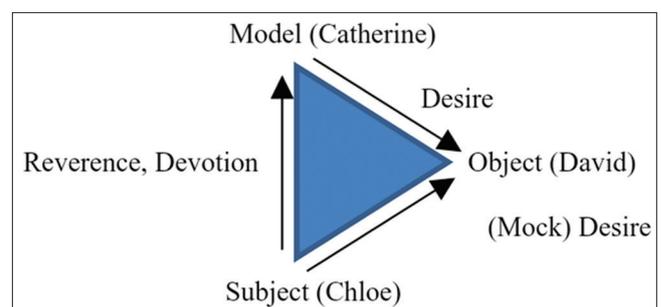


Figure 1. External mediation with catherine as model

tus at this stage is a professional one in which Catherine is Chloe's 'employer,' the mediation is external with Catherine serving as the model, Chloe as the subject, and David as the object of desire. It is evident from the narrative, which can be conceptually accounted for according to this diagram, that Chloe's so-called 'desire' for David is far from spontaneous and can never be labeled autonomous since it is mirrored from a model she is devoted to.

As the film progresses, Chloe manufactures fantastic tales of her erotic adventures with David in the seclusion of a botanical conservatory, which arouse in Catherine a yearning for physical intimacy that has been missing from her marital life. She starts to fantasize about those sensualities which both pain and pleasure her and delays the termination of Chloe's employment. Inadvertently, Chloe is taking over as the designer of desire, and Catherine becomes subjected to this desire she simultaneously admires and hates. This triangular interplay is portrayed in the next diagram.

Figure 2 depicts the metaphorical shift of power from Catherine to Chloe. By submitting herself to the sexual fantasies fed by Chloe, Catherine loses her autonomy as a model. Ironically, Chloe now becomes the model by which Catherine measures her erotic impulses. David remains the object of desire, but the importance of his status is slipping into the shadows of the mimetic desire between Catherine and Chloe. When Catherine fantasizes about physical intimacies with David, it is through the graphic, and imaginary, descriptions of David provided by Chloe, not of the husband she knows.

When David says he likes the scent Catherine is wearing, the residue of the perfume from Chloe, Catherine believes that it is Chloe towards whom his compliment is projected. She becomes agitated and rushes out to seek Chloe and to ask her to reenact the erotic engagement that she said she had had with David in a hotel room. A sexual relation between Catherine and Chloe follows. David is left unaware of his 'imaginary' affair with Chloe and suspicious of the now real affair of his wife. The triangle of desire rotates at this point as the intimacy between Catherine and Chloe develops, putting the real and the imagined desire side by side, as shown in Figure 3.

Figure 3 shows the internal struggle of the subject, Catherine, to obtain the act of desire performed by Chloe. Catherine's emotional turmoil mirrors, thus rivalling, the desire she imagines David has for Chloe. Consequently, and ironically, David becomes Catherine's model of the desire he never has for Chloe. At this juncture of irony, Chloe is both receiving and deprived of the desire from the others since that from David has always been imaginary and that from Catherine is only the mirror image of the desire she projects for her husband.

This internal mediation starts the snowballing of the triangular upheaval as social inequality is temporarily suspended. Girard describes a conflict of this nature as a result of "a universe where the differences between men are gradually erased." (Girard, 1965: 14) Violence, according to Girard, is a predictable consequence of internal mediation.

When it becomes clear for Chloe, after several failed attempts to solidify her romantic attachment with the older

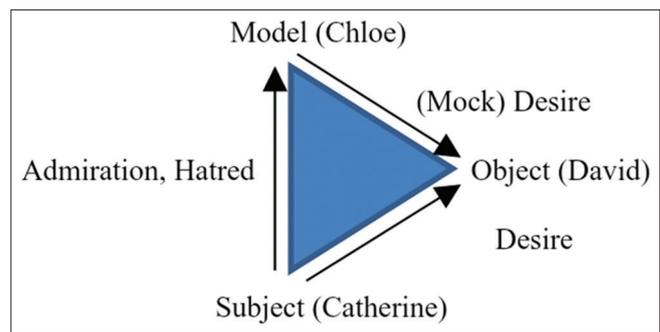


Figure 2. External mediation with chloe as model

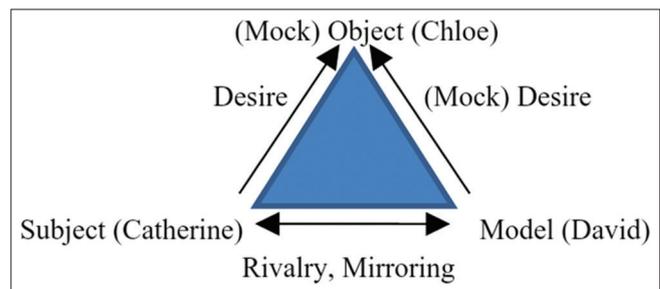


Figure 3. Internal mediation with david as model

woman, that Catherine's real passion is for her husband, Chloe reinvents an access point into Catherine's life through her sensitive teenage son, Michael, using the skills she has been professionally honing, sex. Meanwhile, Catherine confronts David and finds out that she has been lured into a trap of infidelity set by Chloe. David is confounded but willing to forgive his wife for this passing delusion. The husband and wife then make up and promise to fix their communication, which up to this point has been lacking in both quantity and quality. In this turn of events, the triangle of desire rotates once again to reveal the illusion of desire, power and rivalry set into motion by Chloe and endorsed by Catherine. By unmasking the mock desire prescribed to David and the role of a mock object of desire played by Chloe, the narrative reveals the real nature of the triangular relationship where Catherine is the object desired by her husband whose status, literal and figurative, cannot be rivalled by Chloe's. The triangle with David as the model imitated by the subject, Chole, is, therefore, externally mediated, as shown in Figure 4.

Figure 4 reflects the true representation of the triangular relationships of the three main characters. David serves as the distant model whose position is ranked secure by his status as Catherine's husband and by her desire for him. Although he has been named an active actor in Chole's narrative, in actuality he has been almost entirely absent throughout. His role is, therefore, essential yet distant. As the one possessing the object of desire (Catherine), David is the model envied and copied by the subject (Chloe) whose desire for Catherine is acceptable only through the mediation of her husband. Despite the promise of a triangular rebellion, the status quo is, in the end, kept intact.

As this last triangle of desire shows, the true relationships of the three main characters in *Chloe* are externally

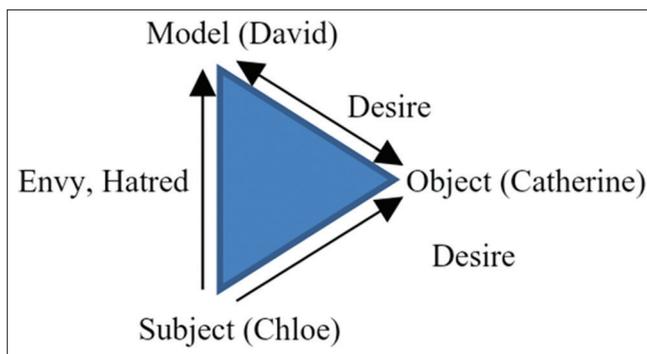


Figure 4. External mediation with David as model

mediated by David, the revered patriarch of the narrative, the model with whom Chloe measures her competition and accomplishment, and the voice of judgment overriding Catherine's decisions and actions. David, like the King in *Snow White*, is the patriarchal conscience that governs the women's self-evaluations even when he is physically absent and imaginary. He rules sometimes as the model, sometimes as the object of desire, but never serves as the subject. Catherine, on the other hand, is constrained by the propriety of her gender and respectability of her social status and, as a result, dependent on the mediation of a model to communicate her desire. She expresses this desire vicariously through her 'dark double,' Chloe (as in Figure 2), and even puts it into action (as in Figure 3). Chloe, a professional escort, never shy of expressing or acting out her desire, is the mirror image of the 'good' woman, Catherine.

In conclusion, the triangular relationships in the film *Chloe* feature both internal and external mediations. When the three main characters first come into one another's orbits, the triangle is externally mediated by the professional employment between Catherine, the model, and Chloe, the subject. David initially serves as the object of desire to whom Catherine's affection and Chloe's affectation are directed. As Catherine becomes more and more besotted by the fantasies of passion Chloe is generating about David, she finds herself wanting to emulate Chloe's youthful attraction, hence becoming subject to Chloe's model, admiring and hating it at the same time. The triangle is now externally mediated by the model of Chloe's fantasies. When the fantasies are acted out by Catherine and Chloe, David becomes the model from which Catherine copies her erotic drive. The existing marital intimacy between David and Catherine makes this mediation internal. It also marks the very first time the triangular relationships become personal for all three characters, thus affecting all of them realistically. In the end, when the mist of deceit and misunderstanding is lifted, the triangular status reverts to its true form, with Chloe always aspiring to mimic David's secure place as a model in firm possession of his wife and object of desire, Catherine.

### Desire Confined

For it is, after all, through the violence of the double that the female author enacts her own raging desire to escape male houses and male texts, while at the same time it is

through the double's violence that this anxious author articulates for herself the costly destructiveness of anger repressed until it can no longer be contained. (Gilbert & Gubar, 1984: 85)

This section responds to the study's second objective: to explain how the mirrored desire is communicated through the imagery of confinement in the film.

As the sole model/mediator of the eventual triangular desire (Figure 4), David is technically exempted from the emotional strangulation experienced by the subject (Chloe) and the object of desire (Catherine). The analysis of the visual and emotional confinement in the film, therefore, focuses on the two female protagonists whose self-perceptions are influenced and judged by the domineering males around them.

Metaphorically speaking, Catherine occupies no space where she is free from judgments associated with her husband. Although she is the 'lady' (Note 2) of the house, her domestic success is ruled by the presence of her husband. When she hosts a birthday party for him, his absence results in the letdown of the party and accentuates her own failure to coordinate his arrival. When she is at work, the news clipping featuring a model two-income family – Catherine's – framed on a wall of her brightly-lit clinic is a constant reminder of her domestic obligations as a perfect housewife while taking on the role of a modern, professional woman. Her 'professional' domain, in addition, is constantly intruded and her practice interrupted by personal engagements – Michael, her son, uses his mother's clinic as a spot for laundry pickup and photocopy service, and Chloe barges in whenever she feels she needs to unload her emotional turmoil. David's work, on the other hand, is his alone. His work takes him away from home to meet eager students and mingle with daring young females while lecturing about Don Giovanni's sexual conquests in a dark auditorium. Catherine's gynecological practice, in a way catering to the consequences of the male philandering discussed in her husband's lecture, is a strictly female business. When David is at home, he spends time in his glass-paneled study, observed at a distance by his wife. When Catherine is at home, she spends much time spying on her husband in his study and on her son in his bedroom. The lack of genuine communication submits her to the passive role of an observer even in the domestic domain that once put her in the newspaper for modern parenting.

In dealing with the physical space that should exclusively be her own – her body, Catherine yields such control over to male dicta and shows reservations about taking a positive view of her appearances. She unties her bun following a male acquaintance's assertion that men prefer women with their hair down. She sees David's compliment for her smile as rhetorical and for her perfume as suggestive of his attachment to another woman who wears the same scent. Catherine, moreover, despairs over the harsh reality of aging. She admires David's physical maturity as he ages: "You become more beautiful every year. Every... every gray hair, every line, everything that happens to you makes you so much more desirable," but takes a negative view of the same process in herself: "... and I feel like if you were to blow on me, I'd vanish. I'd disappear. I felt so invisible and so

old.” (Wilson, 2019) The lack of intimacy at home subjects Catherine to a nagging sense of insecurity, and she sees her marital distance as a justification of this view on devalued self-worth.

The psychological dependence on patriarchal determinacy limits Catherine’s freedom of self-judgment and results in emotional suffocation, depicted visually as images of confinement on the screen. She is invariably shown behind walls and windows, experiencing the outer world indirectly through the panels and panes of enclosed private, professional and social spaces – home, office, hotel, restaurant, etc. – that are symbolic of male ideological constructs – marriage, economy, sexuality, recreation – and retreating into even smaller trapped spaces where real actions take place – bedroom, hotel room, closet, toilet cubicle. In so doing, Catherine, the modern-day professional female affirms Jane Austen’s projection of the “two-inches wide of ivory,” a description Austen employed for her own literary work admitting as well as insisting on the limitations of her novels as realistic reflections of her life and connections in the nineteenth century: “the little bit (two inches wide) of ivory on which I work with so fine a brush, as produces little effect after much labor.” (Mosel, 1984)

As the camera is deliberate in capturing Catherine in close-up shots and almost constantly with a partition or a window in front of her gaze and physique, she is cinematically stuck, frame after frame, behind solid lines that separate her from everything else. Her private and professional spheres become visually indistinguishable, and later on thematically inseparable, as she is repeatedly locked in frames that are visually suffocating. If these shots are understood to speak for the limited freedom of expression and the relentlessly repressed emotion as part of the conformity to masculine norms, Catherine is, in other words, “a prisoner of her own gender.” (Gilbert & Gubar, 1984: 79) Not surprisingly, the good, dutiful wife and mother confined within her maternal female body, domestic space and patriarchal expectations finally snaps. She expresses her “claustrophobic rage” (Gilbert & Gubar, 1984: 85) by enacting an escape through her “maddened, rebellious, witchlike” (Gilbert & Gubar, 1984: 38) double, Chloe. This manifestation is, in the words of Gilbert and Gubar (1984: 86) “the psychic split between the lady who submits to male dicta and the lunatic who rebels.”

Young, bold, alluring and independent, Chloe represents the female image Catherine can no longer embody. As an escort, a profession secretly recognized but never openly acknowledged even in the patriarchal circle that constitutes its target clientele, Chloe makes a living out of her sexuality exuded through the display of narcissism and masochism, explained by Catherine Mackinnon (as cited in Sedgwick, 2015: 7) as follows: “Narcissism insures that woman identifies with that image of herself that man holds up. ... Masochism means that pleasure in violation becomes her sensuality.” Through this doubling, Catherine retrieves the lost narcissistic sensation and experiences the ironic masochistic pleasure. Her desire is articulated through her association and relation with Chloe. In other words, she vicariously recaptures the sense of youth and beauty through a social

and sexual violation, which, in turn, exhilarates and liberates her. Chloe becomes Catherine’s mirror image reflecting the desire, deceit and delusion of the fact and fantasy that are going on in her psyche.

Simultaneously, however, this rebellion shames her. Patriarchal prejudices prescribe black-and-white labels for women: “if they do not behave like angels they must be monsters,” (Gilbert & Gubar, 1984: 53) and a monster is what Catherine sees reflected in the innumerable glass panes and mirrors that shadow her every move. Like the cruel Queen’s magic looking glass in *Snow White*, the images of confinement in *Chloe* provide enclosures into which the two female protagonists, mutually conflicting and conforming, are locked. As their identification becomes interrelated, sexually as well as figuratively, Catherine soon sees Chloe as a reflection of herself, “The vision of a woman, wild / With more than womanly despair.” (Coleridge, 2019) (Note 3)

According to Gilbert and Gubar (1984: 85), “it is through the double’s violence that a female author articulates for herself the costly destructiveness of anger repressed until it can no longer be contained.” Chloe’s violent death towards the end of the film could, therefore, be seen as an ultimate outburst of the suppressed frustrations of female struggles. On a larger scheme, this violence could be interpreted according to Girard’s ‘scapegoat mechanism’ as a ritual sacrifice necessary for the resumption of social peace and harmony that, in this case, has been temporarily lost to the rebellious spirit of feminine rage. Based on this view, Chloe serves as a sacrificial scapegoat whose death resolves the conflict and crisis of the narrative. On the one hand, her willful death through a broken windowpane frees her from the contraption of social conventions dictated by patriarchy and visualized by the images of confinement of her repressed half, Catherine. On the other hand, as Girard suggests, the death of a scapegoat brings about social reconciliation. In this case, it returns Catherine to the arms of her husband and runs her even further into the familiar setting of domesticity. The last scene of the film shows Catherine once again hosting a party at her house. This time it is a graduation party for her son, and the men in her life – the husband and the son – are there claiming both the territory and the female. The image of confinement is, therefore, reprised. The narrative has come full circle with no empowering value added for the remaining female protagonist. Chloe is reduced into a silver hairpin that her mother had given to her and that she, earlier in the story, gave to Catherine who is now wearing it, possibly to remind herself of the danger and futility of an unbridled desire.

Despite the visual cue in the final scene that suggests a message of female bonding and, possibly, spiritual convergence between the two female protagonists – one woman’s heirloom adopted by the other – *Chloe* submits to the ideology of a male text. Like *Snow White*, who lives happily ever after with her prince since the departure of the cruel Queen, or *Jane Eyre*, who returns to marry her former employer after the death of his crazy wife, Catherine runs back to her man and, subsequently, to the male order that is the imperative of both comfort and confinement.

To summarize, this section discusses the emotional suppression as a result of female submission to and dependence on the patriarchal order as experienced by Catherine. The analysis then proposes that this suppression is presented visually through images of confinement exhibited in the sets and shots of enclosed spaces that surround, then frame, Catherine cinematically and metaphorically. To escape from this sense of entrapment, Catherine unleashes her double, Chloe, whose unconventional profession and outlook make her ‘the madwoman’ in Catherine’s ‘mirror.’ In the end, however, the narrative resumes its patriarchal stance by prescribing Chloe’s death as a scapegoat sacrifice in exchange for the restored male order and returning Catherine, tamed and shaken, to the solid walls of her house and the firm embrace of her husband.

## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The analysis of the desire and confinement manifested in the film *Chloe* has been conducted in order to understand the power placement of the narrative as addressed by the mirrored desire in the film and to explore the reasons underlying the violent climax of the film’s narrative based on René Girard’s mimetic theory of triangular desire and scapegoat mechanism. In addition, the study has attempted to understand the integration of literary and cinematic media in expressing emotional confinement through the visual presentations of the film based on Gilbert and Gubar’s conceptual image of ‘a madwoman in the mirror.’

The results show aspects that are both similar to and different from those in previous studies. For example, despite the promise of modern-day mobility and freedom that allow women to enjoy more visibility in professional settings, the female characters in the film are very much confined to the patriarchal expectations that cause “dis-ease” and limit their spiritual independence as much as their nineteenth-century counterparts in literary works such as *Jane Eyre* and *Snow White*. (Gilbert & Gubar, 1984) In addition, while purging oneself as a scapegoat (as in Chloe’s willful death) could remedy a dysfunctional organization as suggested by Girard (1977) and adopted by Harter (2013), the result of the restored peace and order only confirms the authority of the status quo; in this case, of male hegemony which constituted the cause of the ‘dis-ease’ in the first place. Renouncing mimetic rivalry as Frodo does in *The Lord of the Rings* (Goodling, 2019) could disrupt the pattern of mimicry and prevent the unpleasant outcome of mob violence. The only detraction is that an act of this nature is heroically epic (as in Frodo’s renunciation of the ring) and biblical (as in Jesus Christ’s refusal to mimic violence), but not always humanly inclined.

The triangular relationships in the film feature both internal and external mediations. Four paradigms of triangular desire represent the mirrored desire in the film: First, a paradigm of external mediation with Catherine as the model; second, a paradigm of external mediation with Chloe as the model; third, a paradigm of internal mediation with David as the model, and finally, a paradigm of external mediation with David as the model. It is striking how the male protagonist

gradually reveals his dominance first over the women and then over the narrative as a whole, in spite of the film being generally seen as heavy on the female characters’ actions. With the focus constantly on the female protagonists – Catherine and then Chloe – it seems ironic that when the power politics among the three key characters has been investigated, it is David who is shown to have always been truly desired (by Catherine) and revered (by Chloe) as he mediates the triangular desire externally from a secure tower of patriarchy, a stronghold that entertains no surprise nor irony in gender issues. Girard’s mimetic theory has proved, in this study, to be an efficient tool to reveal the tensions of imbalanced desire and unravel the short-lived delusion of female bonding as a means to negotiate male hegemony.

Female submission, moreover, has been discussed in terms of its revelation through the imagery of confinement attached to both female characters in the ways in which they are framed within various sets and settings. Chloe, rebellious and free, is revealed as Catherine’s mad double whose mimetic desire has brought conflict and confusion to the social structure – the harmony of the male order – and who must eventually be sacrificed in order for the social/male-driven harmony to return. Gilbert and Gubar’s idea of ‘a woman in the mirror’ helps to reflect the psychological struggles of the women both in and in front of the mirror. Girard’s suggestion of a sacrificial ritual of a scapegoat as a social mechanism to pacify a mob is adopted to interpret Chloe’s death as conforming not so much to her own will as to the will of a society ruled by the power that her gender can never share.

Finally, as indicated in previous studies on various literature and film courses, combining literary approaches with film studies could help promote the sense of connection and intuitive thinking (Beaupre, 2011) and reinforce the 21<sup>st</sup> century skills of problem-solving (Perry, 2018) by allowing new insights into the reading of literary works through cinematic stimuli and, in turn, making reinterpretations of cinematic elements possible through literary directives. The patriarchal stronghold revealed in the analysis of the power politics implicated in the narrative of the film *Chloe* through the implementations of literary frameworks proposed by Girard and Gilbert and Gubar, contrary to the film’s imposed label of lesbianism, suggests that effective tools for literary criticism can prove useful in a cross-disciplinary study of literature and film and complement the reading of cinematic cues and presentations.

## END NOTES

1. *Chloe* was nominated by Directors Guild of Canada for the 2010 awards for Best Feature Film, Best Direction, Best Production Design, Best Picture Editing, and Best Sound Editing, and won the last two. (*Chloe* (film), 2019)
2. Sedgwick (2015: 8), echoing Robin Lakoff’s analysis of the term “lady” as derogative to women (Bucholtz, 2004: 77), cautions against women’s automatic identification with the role of “lady”: “... to be born female is to be defined entirely in relation to the role of “lady,” a role that does take its shape and meaning from a sexuality of which she is not the subject but the object.”

3. The concept of mirroring also influenced the set and costume designs in *Chloe*. Throughout the film, glass and mirror are used for “reflection and refraction.” (Chloe (film), 2019) As Catherine’s double, Chloe wears clothes that reflect this mirroring intent as well as her own emotional unrest – layered fabrics and decorations. Her costumes also echo external settings and, later on, Catherine’s clothing.

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