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MALE SEXUALITY IN THE FILMS OF MARTIN SCORSESE

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THESIS.

Sexuality in the Films of Martin Scorsese.

TUTOR: PAUL O'BRIEN.

INTRODUCTION.

The 1970's were a difficult period in American society, as the political unrest of the 1960's grew into mass uncertainty, and disbelief in the the American Dream. An uncertainty highlighted by the Vietnam war and the Watergate scandal. The 1960's saw many of America's influential leaders being assassinated; the Kennedys, Martin Luther King, and Malcolm X, and America entered the 1970's mentally and economically damaged. This economic crisis and uncertainty in its own power was paralleled by the film studios, who didn't recover financially for some years following great losses at the beginning of the decade. In the studio's struggle for recovery however, a new and more novice generation of film makers were tried out, including Robert Altman, Brian de Palma, Steven Spielberg, Francis Ford Coppola and Martin Scorsese. These film makers possessed a much greater knowledge of the history of their craft than their predecessors; e.g; Peter Bogndanovich came from a background in film criticism, and Scorsese, like many of his peers, from film school, and a subsequent spell teaching film at N.Y.U., his alma mater. All this meant that not only were Scorsese and his peers aware of the conventions in the Hollywood tradition, but were also aware of the international trends in cinema, notably the French New Wave and Italian Neorealism.

In his book on contemporary film, *A Cinema of Loneliness*, Robert Phillips Kolker argued that there emerged notably in the early 1970's, a trend presenting a view of the world exposing a sense of pessimism and a

loss of innocence in American Society. For his discussion he concentrated mainly on the work of Altman, Coppola, Spielberg, Arthur Penn, Stanley Kubrick and Martin Scorsese. Of this group Scorsese has remained the most relentless and consistent in his study of crises in the human heterosexual relationship, repeatedly making movies with male central and major characters who have difficulty in expressing heterosexual love. In this, as Kolker points out, he is in tune with the contemporary trend in American film coming somewhere cinematically between Altman's dramas and the male-bonding studies of Coppola's The Godfather films. His characters however can enjoy relationships with other characters of the same sex, e.g; Charlie and Johnny in The Colour of Money, or Henry, Tommy, and Jimmy in Good Fellas. Scorsese has also depicted characters who cannot relate to anyone, not even on the basic level of friendship; Travis in Taxi Driver, Jake in Raging Bull, or Rupert in The King of Comedy.

Two recent features by Scorsese also play on the same theme, but in contrasting ways - Paul in After Hours and Christ in The Last Temptation of Christ. Paul, an amiable but bored computer operator winds up from going on a date to being unable to get home while chased by an angry mob of near strangers. Jesus is a man evaluating his place in the world, his attitude towards people in general. Scorsese's Christ figure is human, and despite going through with the Passion, is torn by guilt along the way and is offered the last temptation of the film's title while on the cross; of happily married bliss with Mary Magdalene and also with Mary and Martha, instead of the Crucifixion.

Scorsese's Catholic upbringing probably goes some way to explain his interest in the difficulties in heterosexual bonding. In Freud's studies of male sexuality, the male infant must, in order to develop into a heterosexual adult, remove his desire for the mother as a result of threat of castration from the father and transfer his desire to another female; the Other.

The Oedipal complex is a universally prevalent trait in male sexuality, but takes on a curiously symbolic connotation within the texts of Christianity and Catholicism. Jesus as discussed in Biblical sources and also by Kazantakis and Scorsese, was begotten of a single male parent; God, and brought into a world physically by Mary, a virgin, thereby avoiding the normal process of intercourse and subsequent process of sexual identification for the infant. Perhaps this fact of Jesus' divine paternal origin and his having a virgin mother, would weaken the common bondage to Oedipal and castration complexes, and therefore make him for Scorsese a sympathetic character. Certainly the entire Last Temptation project turned out to be something of a labour of love for Scorsese and is admittedly a film very close to his heart.

However Jesus is hardly an ideal role model for the Catholic male seeking a heterosexual relationship. Jesus spent his adult life avoiding sexual relationships (one cannot say what his adolescence involved as it is not dealt with in the New Testament) and eventually disowned his mother, albeit humanely, in his bid to break all his maternal ties, which he felt were soul-destroying. As I will argue later, there is a definite implication in the Bible, and also in both Kazantakis and

Scorsese's fictional account of the life of Christ, that Jesus could not attain salvation and simultaneously enjoy a sexual relationship with a woman. In other words, for Catholics and believers, consummated heterosexual relationships will hinder a man's attempts to find and live with God. If one breaks this into a simple analogy that a man (catholic) should pursue God (a male figure) and in the process must avoid sexual relations with women, one sees the theme which Scorsese had drawn on and reworked separately throughout his career. As will be shown, Scorsese's male characters always have difficulties in establishing and/or maintaining heterosexual relationships, and frequently find comfort with members of the same sex.

Another trait that is prevalent in the Scorsesian male character is an obsession with work. This may take the form of a 'quest' as in the case of Travis Bickle's attempts to cleanse New York of its 'scum', or Christ seeking Salvation, or it may take the form of an actual profession. New York, New York's Jimmy Doyle is a professional musician, Jake La Motta is a paid heavyweight boxer and Lionel Dobie is a commercially successful painter, but all have a much deeper commitment to their work than to any heterosexual relationships they may have. Victor J. Seidler points out in Rediscovering Masculinity, that male sexuality is 'defined externally' and often manifests itself in work or in providing/breadwinning situations. This struggle for self-fulfilment through achievement stems from a sense of remoteness which originates with the male infant denying love for the mother.

Work, for the male, is not just a means to make money, but a necessity to prove and justify his existence. Seidler makes the notable point that the male without work can almost 'cease to exist at all'. This idea is summed up by Jimmy Doyle, who yells at Francine, asking if he should throw away his saxophone, which is his livelihood and life, when she asks him to spend more time with her.

Likewise, Lionel Dobie intimates that he would have to give up his painting in order to be a better person for Paulette. Both characters here suggest that work is more than just a profession to them; it is almost a part of their anatomy, of their being, and the removal of their work to accomodate a loved one would result in their character and self esteem being greatly diminished.

Having looked at these two elements of masculinity I would like to discuss the sexuality of the male central characters in the work of Scorsese. For the sake of convenience, I have divided this discussion into three chapters, which deal with films with central characters who bear a similarity to each other within the context of this essay.

I

Although it is correct to say that Scorsese deals with difficulties or crises in relationships predominantly from a male point of view, he has in Taxi Driver, Raging Bull, King of Comedy, and the Last Temptation of Christ given the audience a male central character, who through self motivation has exhibited an attempt to discover his destiny and his true place in the world. This thematic concern is evident in other Scorsese movies, including Mean Streets and The Colour of Money, but with these four films, the central characters invite an extreme degree of isolation from the outside world to an extent not seen in Scorsese's other work. Travis Bickle lives alone, and only has one true concerted meeting with another person, his date with Betsy. That however falls through, and other than his association with Iris (which cannot be seen as anything other than an obsession) has no serious or personal dealings with other people. Jake le Motta, Raging Bull's central character ends up, through his irrational behavioural patterns, losing his wife Vickie, and perhaps more tragically for him, the companionship of his brother, Joey. The King of Comedy which is linked very closely thematically to Taxi Driver, also has a male central character whose irrational behaviour distances him from healthy relationships, whether on a friendly or more serious level. Like Jake, Rupert is consumed with ambition. Instead of wanting to be a boxing champ, he wants to be the 'King' of stand-up comics. This deeply-felt conviction is realised only when Rupert, like Travis, resorts to compromising and illegal acts to achieve his goal. Both acts - the rescuing of Iris (and consequent killing of Sport, the mafioso

client and the caretaker). and the kidnapping of Jerry by Rupert and Marsha, are committed partially, if not wholly because of perverted obsessions with women. Rupert firmly believes that he and Rita were made for each other, Travis attempts Pallantine's assassination (and subsequently the bloodbath involving Iris) after being rejected by Betsy; the 'angel' he once spoke of so caringly, now condemned to hell.

Taxi Driver remains the most of intense of Scorsese's entire oeuvre. More so than in any other Scorsese film is the psychology of a protagonist intimately expressed. 'Expressed' is the operative word, as the character of Travis is accentuated by expressionistic visuals and the drowning score by Bernard Herrmann (a frequent collaborator with Hitchcock, Taxi Driver being his last score). The opening credit sequence, which is practically repeated in the closing credit sequence, shows Travis' cab emerging from the smokey atmosphere of a Manhattan streetway, with Travis' eyes reflected in anxious mood in the rearview mirror. This with the red tints (recalling the bar room scenes in Mean Streets) immediately sets a pretext of violence and an association of violence with the 'taxi driver' of the film's title.

Travis Bickle is a solitary and singleminded character; 'God's lonely man' in his own words, and his remoteness from the people and the real world is referred to constantly throughout the film. As Travis talks of Betsy for the first time, his point of view while driving by her office in his cab is filmed in slow motion, in an almost waltz-like fashion, suggesting the grand romance Travis imagines will be their's. However, his over-heated notion is dismissed for the viewer (not Travis)

when we are allowed to watch Betsy at her workplace. We are presented with a perfectly ordinary, albeit attractive, woman, engaged in idle conversation with her colleague, Tom (who notices Travis has been staring for some time at Betsy from his cab across the street). When Travis meets Betsy for lunch we are given further insight into Travis' lack for understanding reality. Having wooed Betsy with his perceptive opinions and thoughts about her and Tom (cliques about loneliness no doubt rehearsed to perfection given Travis's personality) she offers him, by way of a compliment, a quote from Kris Kristofferson song; "He's a prophet, he's a pusher, partly truth, partly fiction; a walking contradiction". Travis characteristically fails to note the charm or wit in this apparent summation of himself, commenting that he is no "pusher". Betsy and we as an audience discover how unaware Travis is of dating etiquette when he brings Betsy to a porn movie.

Betsy is furious with Travis and herself for believing in him as she did and leaves hurriedly. Scorsese though, uses a much more subtle but effective device to suggest Travis' inability to establish or maintain relationships with a member of the opposite sex, when, while Travis contacts Betsy by telephone by way of explaining away the porn theatre incident and the subsequent lack of contact between himself and Betsy, Scorsese allows the camera to track away from Travis and peer down the vacant hallway. This is a purely visual device and serves to distance Travis from us as an audience and further suggest the remoteness of the character.

Although Travis' association with Iris, the child prostitute, is of major importance to the film's plot, it is not relevant to the subject of this thesis, as the Travis/Betsy relationship. Iris, like Travis, is living in an unreal world of her own where she exists, duped by drugs and infatuated with the man who loves her, Sport, who conveniently happens to operate as her pimp also. Travis' obsession with saving Iris is ultimately only an excuse to wreak death and violence in the city and as other writers have pointed out, is enacting a crazed urban Ethan Edwards character. In John Ford's film The Searchers, Ethan Edwards (John Wayne) goes on a mission to rescue a young woman, Debbie (Natalie Wood) kidnapped by an Indian tribe and believed to be sleeping with her captors. Edwards, like Travis, regards himself as a patriarchal moralist to the soiled girl's behaviour. Incidentally, J.R. refers to this in the film Who's That Knocking at My Door. Travis' practices with guns in front of the mirror, where he taunts an imaginary opponent with the lines; "You talkin' to me?/I'm the only one here" underlines Travis' state of mind. Not only is he alone ("The only one") but is aware that he is, that he embodies like the western heroes of old (Ethan Edwards being a prime example) the sense of duty and obligation to do what is right. In Travis' case this duty shifts from establishing a relationship with Betsy, to cleaning out if not all, at least some of the 'scum and filth' out of New York.

Scorsese continued his study of the obsessive nature of loners with his biographical picture of Jake le Motta in Raging Bull (1980). Jake, the central character (played again by Robert de Niro) is, like Travis, very self-motivated and single-minded. However, Jake lacks the degree of

articulation that Travis possesses in trying to discover his true self. Travis talks himself through his actions and records feelings in a diary, whereas Jake has a very limited range of modes of self-expression; violence being the predominant one, and fear which for the film's part comes across mainly as neurotic jealousy. Stylistically, the film is markedly different from Taxi Driver, but Scorsese, with the same cinematographer Michael Chapman, is consistent in his trying to accentuate narrative using specific camera shots and movements. The film was shot in black and white, something to do with Scorsese's then concern over the problem with colour fading (but still has much to do stylistically with the comparatively colourful Mean Streets). Names of characters, locations and respective dates are littered throughout the narrative in documentary style, just as the introductory character vignettes in Mean Streets came with the respective name tags - i.e; "Tony", "Michael", etc. There is slow motion shooting in Raging Bull, as in Mean Streets and later in Taxi Driver, emphasising the point of view of the central character at a given time. In Raging Bull these slow motion sequences deal almost entirely with the situation where Jake is regarding his second wife Vickie (there are of course other sequences involving slow motion films which panders to the aesthetic appeal of Scorsesian cinema, e.g; the opening credit sequence of La Motta in the ring accompanied by the classical soundtrack).

Although Jake has great difficulty in communicating with Vickie and it is through scenes involving her that the audience senses the sexual frustration and insecurity in Jake's character, we first get a measurable insight into Jake's psyche in the first scene with Irma, his

first wife. Jake's animalistic behaviour - roaring at his wife over breakfast ("Bring it over here!") and overturning the kitchen table point to an aggression towards people (note Jake verbally abusing a neighbour from the diningroom window) outside of the ring as well as in. Despite the hostility being two-way - in that Irma is aggressive towards Jake also, especially when she argues with him when he and Joey decide to go out one evening without their wives - we still feel that this is justified in a working class Bronx neighbourhood with an insensitive heavyweight boxer, such as Jake is, as a husband. This aggression from Jake towards people (and by the same token the general lack of understanding or sympathy for people) is highlighted when Jake, while sparring with Joey, proceeds to beat him around the ring mercilessly. This is particularly disturbing as the audience had been led to believe that Jake can relate to his brother, as when they are with their wives at Jake's home in an earlier scene (Jake sides with Joey when he tells his wife to leave the room while they talk shop). Joey is closer though to Jake's heart than Vickie to Jake's mentality, and of course, has complete empathy with Jake's first love - boxing. This homophilic preference over heterosexual love is a recurring motif in the films of Scorsese, and in Jake's case, it serves to underline his difficulty maintaining a sexual relationship with a woman as opposed to the easier task of maintaining a friendship with a member of the same sex. Jake, like Travis, finds redemption. Unlike Travis though, who acts upon the world, but by learning the error of his ways after both Joey and Vickie respectively leave him, tired as they are of his acts of random violence and accusations of infidelity ("you fuck my wife/you fuck my brother"). Jake, by the film's conclusion, is indeed a 'champ', not of boxing, but

of himself. Unlike Travis, whose redemption is arguable and is debatable whether he may go on the warpath again; Jake, it is felt, has come to a real understanding of himself and is not likely to repeat those mistakes. This is further suggested by the biblical quote at the closing credit sequence;

"So for the second time (the pharisees) summoned the man who had been blind and said;

"Speak the truth before God. We know this fellow is a sinner."

"Whether or not he is a sinner. I do not know" the man replied, "All I know is this; once I was blind and now I can see"

John IX 24 - 26

New English Bible.

The resolution in Scorsese's following film The King of Comedy isn't quite so clearly stated. Like Taxi Driver which is thematically very resonant, Rupert concludes as a media celebrity after committing a crime; kidnapping Jerry Langford and holding him hostage to gain access to a 'spot' on Langford's television show. Rupert, like Travis, exists in his own world, very much removed from reality, perhaps even more so than Travis. One can read Taxi Driver as a black comedy, which would help explain the dubious conclusion (note the humour in the scene with Andy, the gun salesman, trying to sell Travis nitrous oxide, or Travis' brief repartee with the secret service man) and The King of Comedy is even more 'black' and satirical a film.

De Niro creates yet another single-minded and ambitious character with Rupert, but unlike the uncouth animal that Jake is, Rupert is an idiot; grinning and smirking his way through painfully embarrassing situations en route to realising his ambition - to be a great stand-up comedian like his idol Jerry Langford. Scorsese uses dialogue much more than visuals to illustrate Rupert's character (although there is the Scorsesian slow motion shooting when Rupert sees Jerry for the first time in the film, exiting the television centre, suggesting the character's perverted perception of his idol). The viewer can feel that Scorsese made few alterations with Paul Zimmerman's screenplay, and unlike any of Scorsese's previous films, it could quite easily be adapted for stage performance. This is also suggested by the comparatively 'flat' style of the film; no dramatic lighting, little of the typical camera booms or long tracking shots. Scorsese employs the system of shot-reverse-shot, perhaps to emphasise that television is the medium which Langford is a champion of, and consequently is the medium under question in the film. It is also appropriate that Rupert as a budding comic entertainer, lets the "foibles" (which Jerry comments on as part of his existence) of his character be known through dialogue (or in Rupert's case, often his monologues). A difficulty exists however with discussing Rupert's inability to communicate with Rita, the only character in the film with whom he seeks a serious heterosexual relationship. This difficulty is that, as far as Rupert is concerned, both he and Rita are getting along fine: Rita is the 'queen' to his 'King', but this rosy relationship exists only in Rupert's fantasies and it becomes difficult at times to separate the real from the unreal in the film.

When Rupert first meets Rita at the bar, we gather that they were at high school together; Rita calling Rupert "Mr Romance" at her receiving a rose as a gift suggests that Rupert was, even then, an idiot when it came to girls. Rupert however, succeeds in getting Rita to come on a date to a Chinese restaurant. Here, he holds an idiotic and affected conversation with Rita, discussing his prized autograph book, with his own autograph being, in his opinion, the most valued (he promptly tears out the aforementioned page and hands it to Rita as a token of his affection). A customer seated behind Rupert is seen impersonating his arm-waving mannerisms, suggesting that Rupert and his 'act' with Rita, is but a laughable caricature. The next major scene involving Rita with Rupert shows them being married on Jerry Langford's show - affirming Rupert's bloated illusions and fantasies; especially where Rita is concerned. One doubts Rupert's love for Rita when he invites her to Langford's country home for the weekend, knowing they're uninvited, and knowing that Rita will have to bear the brunt of this humiliation. In the final scene with Rita, when a triumphant Rupert enters the bar where she works to prove that he finally got his 'spot' on 'The Jerry Langford Show', her reaction is one of genuine surprise, and perhaps even admiration, but Scorsese doesn't allow the scene to continue so that we can see whether bizarre as it might be, Rupert finally wins the girl or not. His fantasies and illusions have become so prevalent in the film's text, the Rupert/Rita relationship is simply no longer an issue for consideration; Rupert is, because of his character, simply 'beyond' such relationships.

Indeed, because of his character, Rupert is beyond any relationship; reality is something that he does not comprehend. This isn't true though of his friendship with Marsha, who is as much infatuated with Langford as Rupert is. However, I am only interested in discussing Rupert's, as the central character's interactions with 'normal' people - i.e; people who are not out of touch with reality as Rupert and Marsha obviously are. It is a lack of talent for comedy, stemming directly from Rupert's fantasy life (Rupert is convinced that his material is 'good' as he explains to Jerry in the opening sequence in the back of Jerry's chauffeured limousine) which prevents Rupert from having a relationship (professional) he so desires with Jerry. Rupert not only wants to be the best in comedy, but, judging from his fantasies about Jerry, also wants to be Langford's best friend. It is this same insistent belief in his own brilliance as a comedian that tells Rupert to practically stake-out the Langford offices and pester his secretary, Ms. Long, continually to see 'Jerry' as Rupert casually refers to him. It is obvious that Rupert is so immersed in his own world and so preoccupied with his ambition (as Travis is in his hellish universe which craves redemption) that he cannot and it is assumed will not enjoy a relationship whether platonic, sexual, or otherwise. Scorsese lightens such a depressing message by putting it into a filmic context of black comedy satire, and it may have been made partly to release tension after the Hinkley Reagan assassination attempt (Hinkley was apparently 'inspired' in his bid to kill the then president Reagan and King of Comedy has obvious similarities albeit more ridiculous, with Taxi Driver) and even perhaps for the arduous and critically acclaimed Raging Bull both for Scorsese and de Niro, a demanding project.

The Last Temptation of Christ, based on the book by Nicos Kazantzakis, of the same title, was a project that Scorsese tried to realise for years. The reasons for this delay were mainly a severe lack of interest from Hollywood backers and assorted objections from religious organisations, due to the supposedly blasphemous nature of the book. However, Scorsese finally got the film off the ground, with William Dafoe in the lead as Jesus, and the film was released in 1988. In the Scorsese/Kazantzakis reworking of the Christ figure from the Gospels, emphasis is put on the human (or more correctly, the material) aspect as opposed to the divine part of Jesus. In this way, Christ is able to question his identity and personal relationships to others just as though he were truly a man. Despite the central character of The Last Temptation being the 'Messiah', there are still common threads between him and the typical Scorsese/Schrader obsessive (Paul Schrader, a frequent collaborator with Scorsese wrote the screenplays for Taxi Driver, Raging Bull and The Last Temptation of Christ).

There are only three people with whom Christ has recurring dealings on a personal level: Judas Iscariot, Magdalene and his mother, Mary. His disciples form something of a foil to the revolutionary Judas, being nothing more than a background collective in the narrative. Within this group, Christ essentially has to ally himself with Judas in order to attain salvation, but by the same token must disown his mother as a stranger and remove all feelings for attraction for his childhood friend Magdalene, treating her with a sort of objective respect: not heterosexual love. It is this last relationship which is of most relevance in this study and also becomes the basis in the film for the

last temptation in question. It is implied that Magdalene turned to prostitution after being refused by Christ, whom she deeply loved but now bitterly scorns, and Christ, learning that he is to blame for her now sullied existence goes to her room in Magdala to seek forgiveness. Those familiar with Scorsese can see an alliance with other central characters here, notably Travis Bickle wanting to save Iris from her life of prostitution for his own redemption. Rupert wishes to rescue Rita from her dreary life as a bar girl and even Lionel Dobie wishes, initially, to save Paulette from her less worthy suitors and finally wishes to save the unnamed wine girl from a meek existence at the end of Life Lessons.

In a sense, the most personally disturbing aspect of The Last Temptation is not so much the graphic representation of this temptation, but that Christ actually resists it. It is disturbing due to the fact that there seems no plausible reason why Christ should have to resist such loving relationships (Satan provides Christ with images of heterosexual life with the Magdalene, and then Martha and Mary providing all three with children) in order to save mankind. There is a deliberate implication which is misled considerably because Scorsese is dealing with the Son of God, that a man must abandon heterosexual love in order to reach 'heaven' alongside God, the 'true' father. This is not misogyny but would at any event create difficulty between the sexes in the question of relationships; a difficulty not unlike the ones which J.R. in Who's That Knocking At My Door and Charlie in Mean Streets try to comprehend.

II

The protagonists of the films just dealt with - Travis, Jake, Rupert and Christ, are of all Scorsese's central characters the most fervent and determined to realise their individual ambitions/identities irrespective of outside influences, whether involving platonic or more sexual levels of relationships. This is not to say that in no other Scorsese film is the central or major character devoid of self-motivation or initiative; for instance, Vincent or Eddie in The Colour of Money or Paul's attempts to initially break out of his tedious lifestyle and ultimately to escape the mob and get home in After Hours. However despite the zealous drive of the Scorsesian character, there is a longing, and indeed a necessity, to communicate with other people. However there is frequently a great difficulty in achieving this with a member of the opposite sex. This of course can be said of Travis or Jake, but unlike these protagonists, the characters I wish to discuss here are capable of expressing care and often great affection for members of the same sex.

Scorsese's first feature Who's That Knocking at My Door (1969) contains many of the themes that would recur again and again in Scorsese's career. The central character, J.R. would appear again as Charlie in Mean Streets with which it is very closely linked thematically. J.R., as the hero of this autobiographical tale (the setting is Scorsese's own childhood neighbourhood) embarks on a relationship with a young white woman, simply referred to as 'the girl'

throughout the film, whom he meets on the State Island Ferry. J.R. starts a conversation with the girl, about the movie The Searchers, seeing a photo of John Wayne's character Ethan Edwards in the magazine that the girl is reading. This apparently innocent conversation if analysed can point to the character of J.R. In The Searchers, Edwards, like Travis Bickle, goes on a mission to rescue a girl, Debbie (Natalie Wood) who was kidnapped and now living with an indian tribe. As there are intimations that Debbie has slept with her kidnappers, Edwards regards Debbie in a very low light. With J.R. there is a similar attitude towards 'debased' women, which will be seen when the girl admits to having being raped by a former boyfriend. This is in fact a Catholic-instilled notion that there are only two kinds of women; Madonnas and Magdalenes, or virgins and whores. J.R.'s reaction to her confession is one of consternation. He accuses her of lying ("How can I believe that story?") and infuriates the girl so much with his selfish and irrational outburst that she leaves. It is the same Catholic Madonna/Whore notion which earlier seems to prevent J.R. from having sex with 'the girl' in his mother's apartment. When the girl inquires what's stopping J.R. from having sex with her after they had been getting along so well, he is unable to give an answer. Scorsese allows a statue of the Virgin Mary to be reflected in the mirror, suggesting that it is the religious affirmation that only whores engage in sex. This is complemented by the fact that J.R. has no such hang ups about sex when visiting the neighbourhood prostitutes.

Dividing these scenes involving J.R. and the girl, which is in fact only one of the major concerns of the film (but entirely relevant for

discussion here) there are scenes showing how J.R. co-exists with his neighbourhood pals; Joey and Gaga. There are scenes of random violence which will recur in Mean Streets and high-spirited fun with his male friends at various parties, held usually in run-down tenement apartments. The last of these parties shown in the film has J.R. throwing the girls (which Gaga had arranged to bring along) out of the apartment, and the ensuing laughter from the three men suggests the frivolity for them of such relationships. However, when J.R. decides to return to the girl and propose marriage, we find that, once again, he is incapable of understanding women on a serious level. J.R. forgives the girl for being a slut before proposing marriage, to which the girl not surprisingly refuses. J.R. aided by his drunken state, becomes volatile, telling her that nobody else is going to marry her because she is a 'whore'. The girl asks J.R. to leave and return 'home'. J.R. goes to his spiritual 'home' though; the church, where he can meditate on the apparently disorderly nature of woman. The church, with its limited and self-defeating dicta, is the ideal home for J.R. and his limited and self-defeating ideas about women.

Charlie, the central character of Mean Streets has similarly over-zealous notions about how one should live one's life, and how one should regard women. As in Who's That Knocking At My Door, there is interaction between the central character and members of the same sex, but in Mean Streets these relationships are more pronounced. Indeed, Mean Streets is a film dealing mainly with men, and how they relate to one another. The opening sequence which introduces us to the main characters, Charlie, Tony, Michael, and Johnny Boy, serve the purpose of underlining the

characters but also, with the absence of female characters, suggests that this is a man's world (or at least, a man's film). There are only two women dealt with seriously in Mean Streets. Teresa and Diane, who are, significantly, both connected to Charlie in terms of plot, and as J.R. in Who's That Knocking At My Door. It is through scenes involving these two women that one sees Charlie's attitude to sexual relationships.

The main love-scene between Charlie and Teresa neatly summarises Charlie's character when it comes to sex. As they make love, Charlie's arms stretch out in a mock-crucifixion pose, subtly underscoring the prevalent religious trait in Charlie's personality. Again, Charlie raises his fingers in a gun pose and shoots Teresa; a joke perhaps, on Charlie's part, but still a foreboding gesture (a real gun shot is heard on the soundtrack) signalling not only the eventual shooting of Charlie and Teresa (and Johnny Boy by Michael's hired assassin, Shorty, played by Scorsese himself), but pointing to the near impossibility or 'death' of heterosexual relationships as far as Charlie is concerned. This notion is made more concrete when Charlie relates to Teresa a dream he had about her. In this dream they make love, and Charlie ejaculates, except he comes with blood. This macabre tale must surely raise questions over Charlie's relations with women. It would seem from this that perhaps it is a deeply rooted Catholic notion in Charlie that women are either virgins or whores; Teresa being non-virginal is a whore, dragging Charlie to damnation. Charlie himself further suggests this when Teresa asks him why he doesn't love her, replying "because you're a cunt"

Throughout this film, a voiceover on the soundtrack dictates Charlie's hidden thoughts to the audience, and this is frequently intercut with Scorsese's own voice, replacing Harvey Keitel's. This suggestion of a hidden conscience, an overlooker, is complemented by what is for Charlie, a near incarnation of the church as an institution; Charlie's uncle Giovanni. It is he who advises Charlie to forget about Teresa, who being epileptic, is, in Giovanni's words, 'sick in the head', and also not to associate himself with her cousin, Johnny Boy, who will simply get Charlie into trouble (which is eventually what happens). When Charlie sees Diane, the black cabaret dancer, he is immediately struck by her physical attractiveness, and decides to arrange a date with her. However, there is still that nagging conscience, the one which drives J.R. out of a potentially lasting relationship with the Girl. This time, it is not the issue of Diane being virginal or not, but her race ("She's really good-looking but she's black") which prevents Charlie from seeing her. Charlie simply doesn't want to offend his uncle Giovanni, or anyone else for that matter, and his seeing a black girl would undoubtedly cause trouble. Johnny Boy sums up Charlie in the line "Charlie likes everybody, everybody likes Charlie, a fucking politician", and indeed Charlie tries to please everyone, but pledges allegiance to the male section of the community over the women in his life. Charlie spends more time with Johnny Boy than Teresa (who is after all, just a 'cunt', literally) and his friends at Tony's bar where he frequents, and nips an affair with Diane in the bud, lest he cause grievance with his friends and Giovanni. Charlie is aware of the restrictive lifestyle he leads with his obligations to Giovanni and Michael always looming over his head, but feels that he is living the

correct way. "Saint" Charlie (as Joey, the pool player dubs him) feels that he must do his penance not in the church, but on the mean streets of the title, resisting the temptations of 'cunts' (Charlie is in fact trying to end his relationship with Teresa) and black dancers, helping out his dangerous friend Johnny Boy. In an earlier scene, when Johnny Boy first enters Tony's bar. Charlie comments, "Thanks a lot, lord, we talk about penance and this (Johnny Boy) walks through the door; well we play by your rules". Charlie may think he is playing by the rules of Providence but isn't; he's playing by the rules of Giovanni and the rest of his male peers; the people who matter most in his life.

The Colour of Money (1986) is stylistically and contextually very much removed from Mean Streets. It is, arguably, a much less interesting film, lacking the gripping camera shots and the literally explosive text of Mean Streets. However, in terms of characters, The Colour of Money contains some resemblance to the Charlie/Johnny Boy relationship, if only insofar as one character Eddie/Charlie, tries to set an example and teach a younger, or perhaps, more impulsive character Vincent/Johnny Boy, an alternative way to exist. The Colour of Money is loosely structured as a sequel to Robert Rossen's The Hustler (1961) and follows its central character, "Fast" Eddie Felson and his life some twenty years on. The Hustler essentially deals with a young pool player, Paul Newman's Eddie, and how he learns that money is what makes all great gamblers tick; not, as he exhibits, a passion for playing and an equal passion for winning. The Colour Of Money finds the mature Eddie taking a young and talented pool player, Vincent, under his wing, and tries simultaneously to corrupt his love of poolplaying and winning to an

understanding of dealing and making money. Vincent's girlfriend Carmen, tags along also ('tag' is perhaps a little too demeaning, as she is closer to understanding Eddie's philosophy than Vincent is; at least, initially).

If gambling is Eddie's profession, then he is simply a consummate professional. Eddie is, like Travis, an obsessive character, and can rarely see beyond his ideology. Unlike those characters though, he develops a healthy and productive relationship (if only within the limits of professionalism) with Vincent. It is his professional attitude though, which keeps him and girlfriend Janette apart, though there is a reconciliation of sorts at the film's end. That same attitude causes Eddie to rebuff Carmen, whom he feels is too solicitous (taking a shower and leaving the door ajar in Eddie's presence and Vincent's absence) and reminding her that their relationship is business, not personal. Naturally there isn't the same drama here as when Charlie in Mean Streets contemplates the fires of hell in Church, but one can see how, as with J.R., a male central character in a Scorsese film can limit attitudes towards women specifically within their personal ideological tenets. For example, Eddie can justifiably whisper sweet nothings and literally caress Carmen in a bar, as he does when setting up an elaborate hustle with Vincent, because it's part of a con; it's 'business'.

Scorsese's most recent feature, Good Fellas an adaption of the Nicholas Pileggi book of Wiseguy, and following the real life exploits of hood turned witness protection programme candidate, Henry Hill, is a

near epic incorporating many of Scorsese's pet topics and cinematic devices. It is closest both thematically and visually to Mean Streets but at times goes beyond this with, for example, the location and date tags which accompany key events in the narrative ("East New York", "Brooklyn 1955"; "Idlewild Airport 1963"), recalling the dual documentary/realist and fictional stance of Raging Bull. Also the emphasis on Italian food and cooking throughout the film, with Scorsese's own mother, Catherine, playing Tommy's mother, recalls Italianamerican (1974), Scorsese's intimate portrait of his parents and focus on his mother's recipe for spaghetti sauce. Like Mean Streets, Good Fellas mainly concerns itself with the interaction of males - in particular Henry, Jimmy 'the Gent' Conway (De Niro's first role for Scorsese since King of Comedy), Tommy and to a lesser degree, Paul 'Paulie' Vario. As a film about gangsters Good Fellas is not surprisingly, extremely violent, and much of this violence involves, for the film's part, Henry, Jimmy, and Tommy. This would suggest that Scorsese is more interested in portraying how these men live, not necessarily the women in their lives. For the film's part, Jimmy is never seen in the direct company of a woman, and Tommy rarely so either. Henry's marriage to Karen is well documented, but is still secondary to the portrayal of the relationship between Henry, Jimmy and Tommy. However, there are still isolated and comparatively innocuous incidents which show a similar attitude towards the opposite sex. As in Mean Streets, the very absence of women from the film suggests the unimportance of heterosexual relationships for these local hoods. For example, in the restaurant sequence where Tommy is entertaining Henry and his friends with a story about police brutality, the line "Hey Ring,

what're you doing here? I thought I told you to go fuck your mother" brings reels of laughter. The line note only underscores a lack of affection for women in this film, but recalls similar vulgarity from Raging Bull which featured Joe Pesci also. When Henry takes Karen to the Copacabana, the stand up comedian begins his routine with one-liners such as "Take my wife - please!" and again, as with Tommy's 'funny' remark, subtly implies a prevalent misogyny in the Italian-American Philosophy. When Henry begins to deal in Cocaine, he has a girl Sandy to mix up his packages, and all Henry has to do for her to fulfil her duties is, in his own words "Tell Sandy I love her". Significantly, it is a girl, Lois, who is responsible for Henry finally being brought to justice (as a girl had earlier - a sister of the victim of the Tampa Zoo incident, bringing to prison, among others, Henry, Jimmy, and Paulie). Henry would earlier comment on Lois' casual attitude towards her contribution to the fateful cocaine deal with Philadelphia, "Unbelievable, every fucking girl in my life", expressing his disbelief in a woman's ability to carry out anything successfully.

Henry, like Jake, has a violent marriage with Karen. Scorsese introduces us to their wedding ceremony with an extreme close-up of a glass being broken under the heel in a customary wedding fashion, which is again a subtle foreboding of the difficult course of their marriage, which will eventually end in separation. Also, like Jake, Henry is capable of showing great affection for his wife, and is also very protective; note his savage warning to Bruce, Karen's one-time friend and now harrasser, to stay away from his wife. Despite this however, Henry is too preoccupied with being a gangster to accept a life of

domesticity with Karen; despite her being a much stronger and intelligent woman than her 'new' friends, clearly illustrated by the inclusion of a hostess party, filled with ridiculous young Italian American women. Henry has no qualms about having a girlfriend, Janice, whom he sets up in a plush apartment. In his own words, "Friday nights at the Copacabana were for girlfriends, Saturdays were for wives". Karen finds out about Henry's mistress and orders him to go to his "ready-made whores", recalling Tommy's earlier line to his mother, when she asks him why he doesn't find himself a nice girl; he replies; "I get a nice girl almost every night". Funny, perhaps, but still one wonders if such men as Harry and Tommy can visualise women as anything other than sex objects and/or accomplices in crime.

When Henry reverses roles with Karen on their bedroom floor, after she had just threatened to shoot him in the face because of his infidelity with Janice, the scene becomes the most sexually charged in the film; Henry kneeling between his wife's uncovered legs threatening now to shoot her in the face with the same gun, creating, just as Charlie does when he 'shoots' Teresa with his finger in Mean Streets a metaphor for the impossibility or 'death' of heterosexual love between Henry and Karen. It is interesting to remember that Karen is played by Lorraine Bracco, wife to Harvey Keitel, who plays the aforementioned Charlie in Mean Streets. This notion of the impossibility or death in heterosexual relationships is furthered somewhat when Karen admits to being "turned on" when Henry gives her a gun to hide after attacking Bruce, as Karen would later hide a similar weapon in her crotch at the final police raid in her and Henry's home.

III

So far I have discussed male central and major characters who experience tremendous difficulty in establishing or maintaining, and more to the point, understanding heterosexual relationships with a member of the opposite sex. In the case of Travis, Jake, Rupert, and Christ, this difficulty is taken to an extent of an understanding of all relationships, though there still exists a greater strain where women are concerned. The next four films I wish to discuss still bear the same thematic concerns though they are not quite categorically similar. Alice Doesn't Live Here Anymore has been labelled as a woman's film, due to its dealing with sexual politics and having a female central character. The same may be said of New York, New York which is a musical melodrama, has Francine Evans (Lisa Minelli) as its central character. Both these films however, contain strongly defined male characters (especially Jimmy Doyle in New York, New York) so it is possible to discuss the films with these characters in mind. Scorsese's short film Life Lessons, his contribution to the collaborative project New York Stories (along with Woody Allen's Oedipus Wrecks and Francis Ford Coppola's Life Without Zoe) is an analysis of the breakdown of a heterosexual relationship, but given its resolution, this sets it apart from Scorsese's other cinematic love affairs. Although Lionel fails to maintain his relationship with Paulette, it is implied that he will embark on a new relationship with another young woman by the film's conclusion, therefore ending on a comparatively optimistic note.

Finally, Scorsese's 1986 comedy 'noir' After Hours, is thematically divergent from other films but still deals, if only in part, with a prospective heterosexual romance, but goes further to undermine even casual relationships with both sexes which the hero Paul Hackett forms during the film's screwball Kafkaesque plot.

Alice Doesn't Live Here Anymore deals with the emotional journey of Alice Hyatt through three heterosexual relationships; a marriage which ends when her husband Donald is killed in an accident; an unhappy affair with a violent married man Ben (Harvey Keitel) and finally another chance for happiness with a divorced farmer David. In retrospect, having seen how often Scorsese deals with the male character in conflicting relationships, it becomes possible to see how Alice could be a complimentary feature to three shorts; each dealing with a relationship with the same Alice from the point of view of Donald, Ben and David respectively. This is mainly possible because Scorsese does not attempt (or if he does, he fails) to probe the character of Alice, as he would do so successfully with Travis, Christ, or 'Fast' Eddie Felson, to cite some examples. The three male counterparts to Alice are not dealt with through a lesser degree of characterisation: they are simply on screen for a shorter amount of time. The sheer speed with which Alice goes through three important relationships inside this average feature length film, is masked considerably due to the labels 'melodrama' and even 'comedy', but there is still an intimation of the difficulties, even (as with Ben) the near impossibility of happiness not only for Alice, but for her male partners.

Scorsese continued his analysis of the heterosexual relationship and subsequent marriage in New York, New York, focusing on the characters Francine Evans and Jimmy Doyle. Alice and New York, New York are separated by the feature length Taxi Driver (Italianamerican also separates the two features but its documentary study of his parents makes it contextually divergent in this study) which had a peculiar 'damaging' effect on both films. Firstly one sees how mediocre a film like Alice Doesn't Live Here Anymore is when followed by the intense Taxi Driver, and Scorsese has admitted that with the 'unexpected' success of Taxi Driver (it won the Palme D'Or at Cannes in 1976) no subject would be good enough for his next feature. As a result New York, New York was an overly ambitious, albeit interesting project, still managing to create a fascinating and very watchable portrait of an intense relationship between two creative and professional people. Again, as in Alice, the central character is a woman, Francine, but given the length of the film, its overblown quality, and the near constant presence of De Niro's Jimmy, the holder of central character (and consequently the focal point of Scorsese's intentions) isn't so much of an issue.

The relationship between Francine and Jimmy is established and maintained initially very much on Jimmy's terms. He is the first one of this couple introduced to us and we are allowed to watch him chat up various girls in his wise-cracking style; Francine being the girl with whom he is most persistent. Jimmy, like the pal he is with, is simply looking for sex; being caught up in the joie de vivre of the V.J. Day celebrations. Other than this sequence, however, Jimmy is not presented

as a lady's man, or when married to Francine is never unfaithful. As Jimmy explains the following morning in a taxi cab, there are only three things of importance in his life; firstly his music, then money, and thirdly, sex. His relationship with Francine will take precedence over money, but nothing will take the place of music in Jimmy's life. It is this seriousness in Jimmy's character which is the cause of most of the difficulties which arise in his and Francine's relationship. Like Alice Hyatt, Francine doesn't motivate herself into action so much as act through a response or reaction to Jimmy's actions; as with Donald, Ben or David, Jimmy forces his wife/partner to make decisions in her life. It is a completely impulsive action on Jimmy's part that brings him and Francine to a Justice of the Peace to get married; there is no previous discussion with Francine about this plan. Francine returns to New York to have their baby because Jimmy insists that she remain on the road touring with him; something which would be bound to have a damaging effect on their child.

Jimmy is presented as a very violent character; a cultured 'previous-life' to De Niro's follow-up character for Scorsese, that of Jake La Motta. In one disturbing scene, in Jimmy's car, he tells the now heavily pregnant Francine that she looks "disgusting". An argument ensues, Jimmy yelling at Francine "You had that baby" and beating her with his fists. The difference between a scene like this and a similar domestic argument in Raging Bull is that Scorsese would allow the audience to watch Jake and Vickie objectively, to pass their own judgement on Jake's brutality, whereas in New York, New York (with this scene in particular), the violence is excused under the context of

melodrama; their argument ends when Francine suddenly goes into labour and Jimmy turns about-face becoming very concerned. There are, as with Good Fellas, small instances of violence which serve to underscore Jimmy's character and relation to Francine. When they arrive at the Justice of the Peace to get married, Jimmy accidentally breaks a pane of glass while knocking on the office door, suggesting - as with the glass-breaking wedding custom in Good Fellas - the violence to come in their marriage. Jimmy's need to be alone is something he doesn't comprehend and argues to Francine that she cannot understand this either. He is equally reluctant to let Francine join him while he is at work on his music, when for instance, at the Harlem Club, seeing her approach the stage to join him to sing, Jimmy suddenly stands up and increases the tempo so that Francine will be unable to jam with him and his fellow musicians. Jimmy is too enigmatic a character for us and for Francine also. He is introduced as a Romeo at the film's beginning, but then claims that sex comes after music and money in that order in his life. He is violent and yet very caring (filling his car with flowers for Francine by way of apology for a previous row) and is never, for the film's part, unfaithful.

In two scenes, Francine sees Jimmy after a long absence by reflection in the mirror (firstly after he had been touring while she remained in New York, and secondly, at her film premiere party when they simply haven't been seeing each other) suggesting that, perhaps, Francine, and us as the audience, never knew Jimmy as a person, but as an image, an ideal. Francine is much less idealistic in her aims and succeeds in a career more commercial in nature than high-brow jazz,

which Jimmy wishes to succeed in. In this respect, Jimmy is in essence exactly like Jake; an ideal or ambition pushes him away from successful heterosexual relationships. Jimmy has his music, Jake his boxing. Jake realises that because of his comparatively small hands, he will never beat "Joe Louis"; Jimmy realises that no matter how often he practices with his black friend Cecil Powell (Clarence Clemons) he will never be, because of his colour, a great jazzier. This feeling may be the cause of Jimmy's impulsive and agitated personality; the force which persistently separates him from happiness with Francine.

Like New York, New York, Life Lessons deals with a creative couple; however the central character here, Lionel, is an artist of the calibre which Jimmy wishes to attain, while his female counterpart, Paulette, would appear to be less talented and sure of her own worth as an artist than Francine is. This creates a difficulty in the relationship as far as Paulette is concerned in that she has been receiving Life Lessons from a man much more talented and famous than she could ever hope to be, and she is obviously aware of that strain. One wonders why Lionel would employ so meagre a talent in the first place, but by the film's conclusion, a previous possibility becomes fact - Lionel simply needs to be near an attractive woman in order to create the necessary conflict within himself to work. This notion is established early on as Lionel begins to paint in earnest after Paulette returns to his loft to live for a while. Prior to this he was unable to work, was drinking, and as the metaphor involving paint squirting from a tube which Lionel walks on, and hitting a vent pipe would suggest; a man simply not in control of his art.

Lionel has, by his own admission, been married four times (before Paulette was born, in his estimation) so it is clear that he simply has difficulties in maintaining a heterosexual relationship. Lionel, however, is an obsessive character, and has at present no successful relationships, whether sexual or platonic. He admits to Paulette that he hasn't had a 'knockabout friend' since 1968, while she admits to having "lots of friends". Lionel can only engage in reverie as when at the opening of a painting exhibition he recalls how he drew pictures of men and women copulating for the military, while Paulette leaves with Reuben, a 'Ladykiller', to really have sex. Lionel, shown in close up, is obviously disturbed by this, but when he returns home, begins to paint furiously while his 'student' makes love upstairs. In one sequence, Scorsese focuses on Lionel sitting down, wearing only his evening wear trousers, and his body (significantly tougher and more weatherbeaten than the younger Reuben's) is splattered with paint, suggesting in visual terms that Lionel is indeed 'wounded' by the lack of love in his life, but struggles for victory, not in relationships, but in his painting. In this aspect, Lionel is like Jimmy Doyle and Jake La Motta in that he gains enthusiasm and perhaps inspiration for his profession - painting - through direct emotional conflict with a member of the opposite sex. The difference however with Lionel is that he seems much less aware of Paulette's own need to exist than Jimmy or Jake are of Francine or Vickie's.

There is, as I mentioned earlier, the notion that Paulette could be anybody else to Lionel, so long as she is attractive physically, so as to elicit the necessary conflicting feelings in Lionel that enable

him to paint. Physical attractiveness would appear to be the main requirement to become a student of Lionel Dobie, as when, at the film's conclusion, Lionel offers the wine girl the opportunity to replace Paulette, who has left him, after observing her face, neck, breasts, hands, etc (these various close-ups of the girl establish Lionel's line of thought). The soundtrack at the end of Life Lessons masks the girl's reply when Lionel asks what her name is; her identity is of little importance to Lionel (significantly we never learn Paulette's surname; she is "just Paulette", as she tells inquirers at the first exhibition opening in the narrative). Lionel is not so much removed from the mentality of Travis or Rupert either; he is isolated in his ivory tower loft from the rest of Manhattan, only interacting with people at Art (professional not social/personal) events, and physically articulates himself in actions fuelled by a warped perception of human relationships. Lionel's inability to deal with a person not directly involved in his creative thought process is symbolised by a conversation with his agent at the film's beginning. They talk, with the agent enclosed in the wire mesh structure of the elevator box, his agent unable to literally get through to Lionel. Significantly, Lionel having desire in such situations to avoid communication sends the agent back down to the streets below in the elevator. Like Jimmy, Lionel needs time to be alone, and only requires relationships to change his painting. He feels that painting and heterosexual relations simply don't mix; to be a "nice person" for Paulette he would have to stop, to give up art. Something of this attitude must come through in his painting also; an admirer excitedly comments to Lionel: "I look at your stuff and I just want to divorce my wife". Lionel, as is assumed at the film's

conclusion, will continue relationships with women, but will never enjoy one that is successful or lasting because, just as with J.R., Charlie, and Eddie, a self-defeating and limited ideology will hinder his growth as a man capable of enjoying a relationship with the opposite sex.

Scorsese's comedy After Hours (1986) is something of an anomaly in the context of this study, in that this is a fast-paced commercial picture, with a screenplay charged with crises in a similar fashion to the tempo of Back To The Future. There is no enduring difficult relationship between the protagonist Paul Hackett and a member of the opposites sex, as in Scorsese's other features. There is instead a Kafkaesque plot involving a string of bizarre events, which happen one by one to Paul on a single night out in Manhattan. Significantly, Paul's ordeal is set into motion when he arranges a date with Marcy (Rosanna Arquette, who plays Paulette in the forthcoming Life Lessons): an implication, albeit fantastic, that establishing or trying to establish a heterosexual relationship in a Scorsese film invites trouble of some sort to the hero. This date with Marcy, is anything but comfortable as is his later conversation with June, the Sixties music fan, whom he meets, as with Marcy, in a diner. It is however a woman who 'saves' Paul from the angry mob in the film's closing minutes, by covering him in plaster, thereby disguising him as a sculpture, not unlike the works which Marcy's sadomasochistic roommate creates in their loft. This act, though initially welcomed by the frightened Paul, soon imprisons him, literally, as he cannot extricate himself from the plasterwork. Here he falls prey to two art-thieves who steal the Paul 'sculpture', not

realising that they are removing an encased human, not just a work of art.

Fate, not a person, is what ultimately 'saves' Paul from his Manhattan ordeal; he (the sculpture) falls out the back of the thief's trucks (the fall breaking the hold of the plaster) and Paul finds himself in front of his office building, as the main gates open for a new day at work. What Scorsese seems to be doing with After Hours is undermining the validity of all relationships for Paul with both sexes; from his date with Marcy to his friendship with Tom, the bartender. Again, as with Alice Doesn't Live Here Anymore, New York, New York, and The King of Comedy, the pessimistic message of the film is played down within the genre label - in this case, comedy.

CONCLUSION

One can see the struggle that a Scorsesian male character goes through with heterosexual relationships. However, Scorsese's characters are rarely weak, with the possible exception of J.R. from Who's That Knocking on My Door and Charlie from Mean Streets. They try to ascertain their identities in the world, even at the expense of their happiness in relationships. A lot of effort is exerted by his characters to uphold a sense of machismo and their masculinity. The work ethic discussed in the introductory chapter is something which helps Travis, Jimmy Doyle, Jake, Rupert, Eddie Felson, Christ, Lionel Dobie and Henry Hill to sustain their masculinity and existence. It is important to remember that Scorsese's characters are always definitely heterosexual, and the issue of homosexuality is tersely avoided. Affection for males from males is usually of a jocular and friendly nature, best expressed by the Jake/Joey relationship in Raging Bull: Jake, more than any other Scorsesian character, is the most persistent in affirming his heterosexuality mainly through comments.

These include the lines to Joey, who, while mock-boxing, throws a weak punch, and is accused by Jake of being a "faggot" - "throw punches like you take it up the ass" - thereby equating weakness or non-machismo with effeminacy or homosexuality. Jake goes further than this by equating beauty with effeminacy; an upcoming fight with a young "pretty" boxer results in the line from Jake, "I don't know whether to fuck him or fight him" to much laughter from his male hangers on. In that Jake

would appear almost fanatically concerned with his sexuality is not to be questioned, and this is true of Scorsese's other major male characters, though never quite so deliberately stated.

Despite this affirming of one's sexuality there is still an underlying notion that a Scorsesian male character might have more homosexual tendencies than they would admit to. Once again, it is Jake who expresses this sexual conflict more strongly than any other Scorsesian male character. In one scene Jake puts off love-making with Vickie, as he wants to be prepared for the upcoming fight. Jake's actions imply contest boxing, as far as he is concerned, is a sexual act, and he shouldn't be "foolin" around (his own summation of lovemaking) with Vickie lest his fighting performance be weakened. There is an implication here that perhaps Jake is genuinely uncertain as to whether he wants to "fuck" or "fight" his opponents.

Michael Bliss, in his study on Scorsese and Michael Cimino, notes the importance that bad language is given in their films and in contemporary American film in general. Phrases such as "Fuck You", "Asshole", or "I'll get his ass" are now commonplace in American film, and delivered as insults, predominantly by men towards men, translate literally into quite different sentences, expressing desires of a homosexual nature. Phrases such as these allow a male heterosexual to, at least inwardly or unconsciously, acknowledge his own capacities for homophilic and homosexual tendencies while maintaining a masculine and heterosexual identity to the outside world. Also, the expletive "Fuck" is not only a term of abuse but slang for the sex act, and so its use in

dialogue subtly suggests a distasteful element in sex, and by the same token, heterosexual relationships.

Scorsese has undeniably lessened the forcefulness of his thematic concerns as his career has progressed, moving from the early auteur works of Who Knocking on My Door, Mean Streets, and Taxi Driver to Raging Bull - arguably Scorsese's finest work - to the more commercially popular works such as Life Lessons and Good Fellas. He is currently at work on a new version of the Classical Hollywood film, Cape Fear, which deals with the relationship between two males on board a ship. With this in mind, one sees the theme of male-bonding has not lost its interest for Scorsese. Since his debut in 1969 with Who's That Knocking on My Door, the result has been a collection of male characters struggling for a more successful realisation of their heterosexuality, though barely if not failing altogether to realise this through their relationships.

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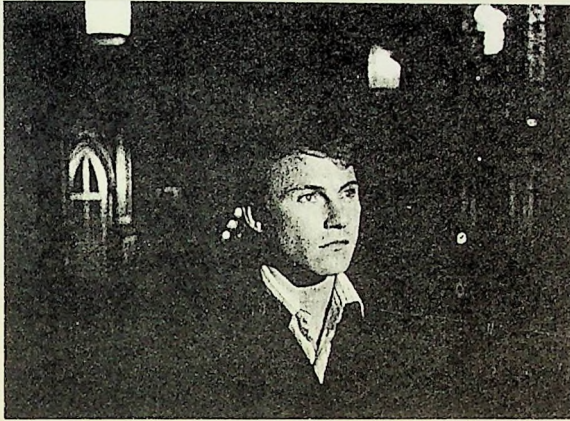
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Who's That Knocking at My Door

J.R. and the Girl. "Who else is going to marry you, you whore?"



Harvey Keitel as J.R. (above) and Charlie (below) in Church; both characters' spiritual home.

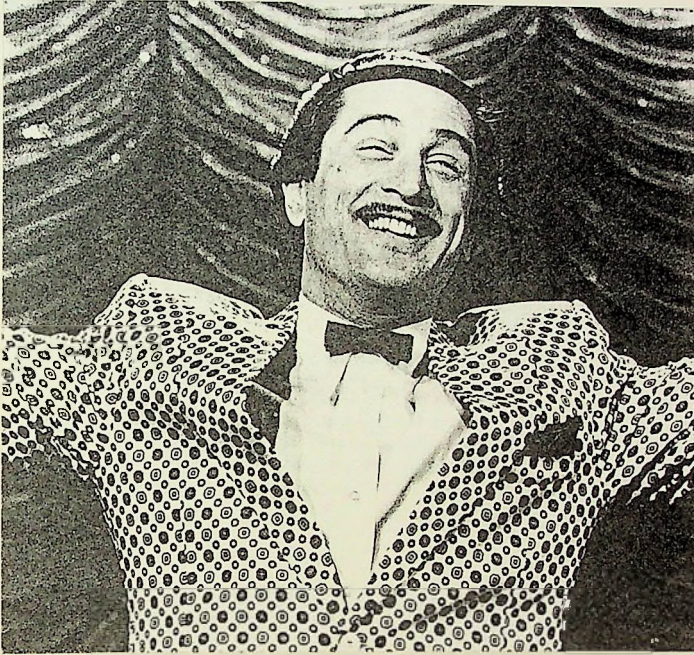




A fine romance Travis and Betsy in Taxi Driver



Brotherly love Jake (Robert de Niro) and Joey (Joe Pesci) in
Raging Bull



De Niro as the King of Comedy, Rupert Pupkin.



Christ (Willem Dafoe) with 'his' children in The Last Temptation of
Christ.



The pressures of work Francine and Jimmy in New York, New York
(above). Lionel and Paulette in Life Lessons, (below).





Martin Scorsese with Ray Liotta (Henry) and Robert de Niro (Jimmy) on
the set of Good Fellas.

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