

Erin Brockovich

Dir: Steven Soderbergh, USA, 2000

A review by Matthew Nelson, University of Wisconsin-Madison, USA

When a film opens with the title "based on a true story," a sinking feeling of gloom comes over me. Will this be yet another typical triumph over adversity, human-interest flick, cranked out by the Hollywood machine to force-feed an increasingly lazy mass audience interested only in star power and happy endings? The lack of original story lines and plot conventions has turned the American motion picture industry into a creator of shallow popular interest films bested in their absurdity and lack of depth only by made-for-TV movies. While it has been said that our greatest stories come from real life, the griminess of the modern world rarely fits into the tightly regulated limitations surrounding mainstream American screenwriting. Details that do not fit within the formula of a marketable "true story" film, which must attempt to appeal to a large audience base of diverse people, are edited out in favor of more pleasing elements, such as a love story, gripping court room confession, or death bed recovery.

With this admittedly jaded viewpoint, I went into *Erin Brockovich* hoping for the best (a rather vacant, feel-good movie, forgotten before I had pulled out of the multi-plex parking garage), but expected far worse. To my pleasant surprise, it turned out to be neither. Director Steven Soderbergh (of *Sex, Lies and Videotape* fame) manages to pull off an amazingly interesting film, with snappy writing, fine casting, and plenty of that feel good energy, that does not fall into sugary sentimentalism. Although the film's end comes as no surprise, the strong message of female resourcefulness and the power of the person (man or woman) manages to avoid becoming heavy-handed rhetorical moralizing, or sappy "You Go, Girl!" empowerment.

The David and Goliath tale follows the true story of the title character, a twice-divorced mother of three, who took on a powerful California gas and electric conglomerate that had been knowingly poisoning a small, blue-collar town for years, and covering up the evidence. Her brassy attitude and coquettish appearance are captured perfectly by the film's star (and star power), Julia Roberts. She seems to become the role, taking it on as her own personal *Evita*, (the advertisements even proclaimed, "Julia Roberts IS *Erin Brockovich*"). Roberts, who has had her greatest successes in films when she played the loud-mouth and lovable, sexy but sweet, girl next door, takes on the challenge of playing the complex Brockovich with amazing ease. Using the natural resources of her ample cleavage, and loads of her trademark red hair, Roberts flows through the part, wrapping the audience around her finger, and endearing her character with sharp one-liners and radiant smiles. However, her looks, while undeniably sexy and used to perfection, do not take away from her acting.

Roberts has had difficulty in the past showing range in serious films due to ill-fitting, melodramatic roles, but with *Brockovich*, she is able to use her natural charm as a bolster, rather than a crutch for, her dramatic talents. Roberts soars to a new level of dramatic

achievement, coupled with Soderbergh's fine portrayal of a working class world (similar in many respects to the work of Mike Leigh) dependent on making every dollar count. In an equally fine supporting role as a rough around the edges Los Angeles attorney, veteran actor Albert Finney shares a delightful chemistry with Roberts. Their interactions are wonderfully complex moments between two people working for a common cause. Soderbergh does not try to justify their partnership with misplaced sexual attraction or a protective father-daughter relationship. He bases their friendship on earned trust and mutual respect, not often found in on-screen interactions between older men and younger women. The love interest, finely played by Aaron Eckhart, does appear, but does not dominate or distract from the main story line of the film. In fact, Robert's relationship to Eckhart's character gets somewhat left by the wayside, in one of the films few shortcomings.

As the film progresses, the conclusion becomes rather obvious, yet not disappointing. As can be predicted, the stone that tiny Brockovich hurls ends up taking down the giant corporate machine and a happy ending resolves the picture. The task was not easily won, however, and the hardships were presented without the use of tired clichés. Rather than resorting to these trite tactics in order to spice up the dramatic tension and raise the emotional build, the film uses the gritty truths of the story to keep the action moving forward. Soderbergh manages to avoid all the pitfalls that plague typical triumph over tragedy stories, and produce a pleasingly positioned, yet powerfully stated production.

In the American cultural conscience, this idea still resonates deeply with people who like to see the "little guy" win out against the bigger foe. Needing little more than this to make a good story, the championing of the underdog has become a mainstay in American popular cinema. To make a good movie, however, there needs to be much more. *Erin Brockovich* has a good story, filled with dramatic ups and downs. In addition, the film takes the extra step and creates complex characters with depth and a range that goes beyond that of many carbon copy movies these days. Julia Roberts portrays a working class woman without sentimentalizing, and uses her sexuality without falling into the vamp/tramp dichotomy. Like *Norma Rae* and *Silkwood*, *Erin Brockovich* shows the strength it takes for a woman to stand up for a cause and be noticed in a man's world. That Brockovich (and Roberts) would come out a winner could be seen from the very beginning, but the process, rather than the result, became the most important thing.

The House of Mirth

Dir: Terrence Davies, USA, 2000

A review by Ian Haydn Smith, Westminster University, London, UK

Terrence Davies' *The House of Mirth* is a moving adaptation of Edith Wharton's bleak novel. A caustic account of the repressive, enclosed environment of turn-of-the-century New York society, it recounts the downfall of one woman who attempted to live by her own rules, unaware of how brittle reputations in her world actually were.

Lily Bart is one of New York's most eligible socialites. Beautiful, charming and fully aware of her popularity amongst both bachelors and married men, she enjoys the privileges of her position whilst secretly indulging in gambling and associating with a man whose insubstantial income would make him an unsuitable husband. However, her popularity wanes when she is accused of liaisons with a married man and is discovered to have had dubious business dealings. As a result she is denied future financial security by her family and cast out of society by her peers. Disgraced, with no money to her name, Lily is forced to seek employment and accommodation in the Slums of New York.

Terrence Davies' film excels in contrasting the development of Lily's character against the New York society she inhabits. As Lily discovers more of the world she has been a part of for so long, the more superficial this world appears to be. Davies captures Wharton's brooding mix of tragedy and farce, exposing and ridiculing the Europhile, class-ridden society whilst presenting the full-blooded horror of Lily's predicament and her agonising fall from grace.

Unlike Isabel Archer in *The Portrait of a Lady*, Lily does not start out an innocent adrift in the world. Although blissfully unaware of the danger she courts, she feels her privileged place in New York society and the circle of people she counts as her friends, are enough to protect her under any circumstances. Through Lily's eyes this society is shown in all its hypocrisy, with any transgression of its supposed code of morality acceptable, provided that discretion is always employed. Lily's only fault was the indiscreet way in which she conducted both her business dealings and personal life. As a result, her closest friends become her most bitter rivals in order to extricate themselves from any harm her behaviour may have had on their reputation.

Although destined to be compared with both Martin Scorsese's *The Age of Innocence* and Jane Campion's *The Portrait of a Lady*, Terrence Davies' approach to *The House of Mirth* is a far less flamboyant. Though each film is successful in articulating the themes of their respective sources, always steering clear of the more banal elements of "heritage" cinema, Davies' adaptation appears more conventional. Shying away from the visual pyrotechnics of the other films, Davies relies solely upon his own subtle, fluid direction, the exceptional performances he elicits from his eclectic cast and Remi Adefarasin's stunning cinematography, to steer his way through the events that cause Lily's fall from grace.

Although told in linear form, covering the years 1905-7, Davies divides his film into segments with the use of a series of tableaux, reflecting Lily's place in the society she inhabits. Though not as prominent as the "painterly" images used in *Barry Lyndon* or more recently, *Breaking the Waves*, Davies' images focus on Lily's increasing state of exclusion and loneliness. Beginning with a seemingly perfect picture of Lily with her friends amid the opulent surroundings of a country estate, the images transform, finally showing her alone, in the pitiful surroundings of poverty row. Moving from the luminescence of a Sargent painting to the much darker world of Vermeer, these tableaux reinforce the hopelessness of Lily's situation.

Only when Lily accepts Bertha and George Dorset's invitation to travel with them in the Mediterranean does Davies feel enough at ease to loosen his grip on the narrative. Though less outrageous than Jane Campion's film-within-a-film representation of Isabel's Grand Tour of Europe, Davies' expressive handling of Lily's vacation is a beautiful reminder of his immense ability to communicate through images alone (though we are thankfully excused from enduring a *longue* on a carpet that caused such a storm in *The Long Day Closes*). A five-minute journey through the empty rooms and landscape of Lily's country home, showing the season change and a colder, harsher environment settling in, it is the pivotal moment in the film, where Lily's place in society becomes irreversibly changed. Accompanying this shift in her fortunes, Davies uses an obviously fake image of the Mediterranean to emphasise the falsity of both Bertha's friendship and her seemingly incorruptible moral stance. Whereas Lily offers her genuine friendship, as witnessed by her unwillingness to succumb to blackmail even when she could have used evidence to gain readmission to the society that shunned her, Bertha's only interest lies in using Lily as a pawn to deflect any suspicion of infidelity away from her. Davies' staging of these scenes emphasise the cruel superficiality of Bertha's behaviour and the willingness of a society too enamoured with its own image to do anything but ostracise the source of a scandal, true or false (however, this set may have also been used due to the expense of shooting on location. I prefer my view!)

In drawing comparisons with Jane Austen's accounts of English society, Davies has commented that "With Edith Wharton, the gloves are off and there's blood on the walls." *The House of Mirth* is certainly more visceral than Austen's work. However, his adaptation never resorts to over blown melodrama. A majestically paced film, Davies has succeeded in creating a beautiful, ultimately tragic account of people's capacity for cruelty.

The Talented Mr. Ripley

Dir: Anthony Minghella, USA, 1999

A review by Paolo Rumi, Editor @ QX web magazine, Italy. <http://www.gay.it/QX/musica>

As a starting point, it's interesting to compare the plot, as exposed quite accurately and concisely, by a generic cinema website <http://www.casenet.com/movie/talentedmrripley.htm>

"The story follows Tom Ripley who travels to Italy to coax a young American, Dickie Greenleaf, back to his wealthy father. Tom is unsuccessful at his mission. And through his logic, Tom in desperation has no other choice but to kill the young man. Say What? Well, it seems logical to Tom. Tom then assumes his identity, and lives the life of a rich playboy. For a while."

... with the one available on the official website:

"To be young and carefree amid the blue waters and idyllic landscape of sun-drenched Italy in the late 1950s; that's la dolce vita Tom Ripley (Matt Damon) craves and Dickie Greenleaf (Jude Law) leads. When Dickie's father, a wealthy ship builder, asks Tom to bring his errant playboy son back home to America, Dickie and his beautiful expatriate girlfriend, Marge Sherwood (Gwyneth Paltrow), never suspect the dangerous extremes to which Ripley will go to make their lifestyle his own. After all, it's better to be a fake somebody than a real nobody."

If both are doing the same job, the second one ("to be a fake somebody than a real nobody") is deliberate in hiding what has been distorted by Minghella from Highsmith's novels: the complexity of the homoerotic relationship between Ripley and Dickie Greenleaf becomes accordingly only a matter of social and economic climbing. Of course, my point is not about "respecting" or "transcribing correctly" the book on which a film is based; we all know that cinematic and literary texts operate in different languages. A new perspective on or a new interpretation of the novel added by the movie would be welcome, but more often than not we get the impression that Minghella is cleverly exploiting Highsmith's insights into human nature to put together a quaint postcard of an exotic Italy that caters to all tastes. With regard to this, easy entertainment is never innocent. Let's put it like this: we have an opportunity to study the typical Hollywood 2000 challenge: transforming works of art in theme-park attractions. (in a similar way *American Beauty* winked to the audience "aren't we alternative?" ... gay themes sell well, exploited to the very last dollar).

The Talented Mr. Ripley is one of the most fascinating books I have ever read. It goes far beyond "noir", a genre which Highsmith definitely revisited. And it has been fundamental in my vision of homosexuality (i.e. our right to name our behaviours as such). There's more homosexuality on this planet than what we can define in Western culture, Highsmith apparently meant, and sexual attraction is not entirely "correct" at all. The argument is so

difficult and morbid that making a film about it is a challenge if not a mirage. And Minghella made a nightmare out of it.

In Mediterranean culture (blame the Arabs or the sun) many things can be done but never spoken of unless in front of a Catholic priest and the wash'n'go possibilities of the Confession. To follow an Italian nursery rhyme, "La parola maledetta resta in bocca a chi l'ha detta": homosexual male intercourse may be practised but never mentioned. This perspective allowed Highsmith -maybe a lesbian, maybe a misanthrope, surely an implacable writer- to build a perfect plot, with an amoral analysis of behaviours all too human, out of every social code as an entomologist could do. The male-to-male dynamics showed all the possession/power contents -and mixed to plagiarism- became a psychosis. And there was also something like a "j'accuse" against moral conformity: Ripley gets away with it just because homosexuality... does not exist!!! Its "invisibility" retorts upon society: silence hides the homicide, almost rewarded by normality. Who cares... psychotic weirdos killing each other!

The Italian 50's were a perfect landscape for the story, with the society's incapacity to name such a behaviour while consenting to it. In the vital South of Italy two men could and can have an affair easily, even more if they are rich tourists...But oops! Minghella deferred the scene from the 50's to the early 60's (more interesting visually, he said: you know, *La Dolce Vita*...). The never mentioned "homosexuality" turned out to give him the opportunity to show the prejudices of Italian policemen in the 60's (speaking quite a good English, a quality still rare nowadays).

Visually came the great pastiche: a triumph of glossy oleography, illustrating to a pittoresco degree full-breasted indigenous women, processions of the Virgin Mary coming out of the sea, panoramas of archaeological excavations in Rome whose anachronism is embarrassing if not insulting. The cameo of Fiorello, star of karaoke programs on Berlusconi's TV channels, singing the 50's classic "Tu vuoi fa' l'americano" ("Do you want to look like an American?"), and crying like a fountain at the funeral of a pregnant woman who has committed suicide is the final touch of perfection: you cannot help thinking "Aren't these people so emotional !"

Other elements of interest: to attract and comfort the otherwise disoriented straight audience (?), some women have been added in the movie. And yet they seem as non-existent on the screen as much as they are in the book, given that the screenplay does not provide them with much agency. As for the gay audience, an almost positive "modern gay " relationship takes place between Ripley and his last lover, a romantic musician living in Venice... Ripley is almost sorry when circumstances force him to murder this guy, too. As if, after 2 killings, he could simply settle down in a villa with a garden on the Italian Riviera...

This is perfect Hollywood 2000: speculating on every millimetre of society's evolution, being 100% sure to have banalised everything to get the maximum cash back. While, for a discerning viewer, the only thing at which Mr Minghella seems to be talented may be the opening credits.

The Deep End of the Ocean

Dir: Ulu Grosbard, 1999

A review by Eugene Doyen, Buckinghamshire Chilterns University College, UK

If you asked me what kind of film *The Deep End of the Ocean* was I'd have to say beige and soft grey. It's a tasteful melodrama and that for me is the problem. Melodramas shouldn't pretend that they're understated pieces exploring the depths of human experience, they should be brazen in their emotional manipulation and determined to wrench from the audience every gasp, sob and tear they can. *Titanic* is a good example of a melodrama wrapped in a disaster movie and *The English Patient* is a good example of melodrama wrapped in a war story. At the core of both films is a syrupy love story marked by loss, which is the key ingredient of melodrama. In each film the loss of the loved one is given an operatic setting, the ocean, the desert, beautiful costumes, attractive people and enthralling events. These films are meant to elicit tears and while you may need to wait until the final credits have rolled to dry your eyes, the movie hasn't been a life changing experience. Melodrama allows the audience to thoroughly indulge their emotions without bearing any actual cost.

Simply from its title, *The Deep End of the Ocean*, and its star, Michelle Pfeiffer, the film signals that a melodrama is on offer. After all, Michelle Pfeiffer played the fated heroine of *Dangerous Liaisons* and if you like fainting, panting and doomed love, this could have been a similar production. Unfortunately, the loss in this case is a missing child and this is a difficult topic to turn into entertainment as Pfeiffer has said for herself; "I have a low tolerance for anything bad that happens to children in movies." Another melodrama, *Fearless*, starring Rosie Perez as a woman grieving for her dead child was not a success at the box office. So, there seems to be a problem with using child abduction, or infant death as a subject. The challenge is one of delivering strong emotional impact without appearing to exploit the topic. This difficulty may explain why *The Deep End of the Ocean* is so resolutely restrained and tasteful. The press blurb points to the original novel, which is cited as being so moving that everyone involved felt they had to make the picture. This implies that the quality and resonance of the literary story must carry the same effect to the screen, but there's a difference between a book and a film. With a book the readers can create their own individual level of empathy over a child who goes missing, but a mainstream feature film, is an event experienced by the audience and must be made to create a particular level of feeling through the style of direction. Even if it is faithful in tone to the book, the direction of *The Deep End of the Ocean* is so restrained that it's emotionally ineffective. It doesn't capture the audience and compel a reaction.

Added to the difficulty of tastefully dealing with child abduction, is the problem that the production is treated as an "actors" project, with Pfeiffer dominating as the star. The result of this is you go through a readily familiar set of "relationship" discussions. Beth (Michelle Pfeiffer) with her husband, Pat, (Treat Williams) in the kitchen talking about the family, Beth and Pat on the porch talking about the family, Beth and Pat in Pat's workshop talking about the family. A large number of intimate intense dramatic scenes must have been great for the

actors to play, but they don't necessarily involve the audience. Especially, if they're directed so that the audience observes, rather than participates.

Rather than directing the film at the service of the performers, where what you get is basically close ups and over the shoulder reversal so that the actors are the audience's only potential point of connection, it might have been better to use a more contemporary style and let the camera work and editing move the audience along. A crucial scene in the picture is where Beth's son goes missing in a crowded hotel lobby, but it is directed purely through observing her. Beth pushing the trolley with the kids. Beth leaving them to push through the crowd. Beth waiting at the hotel reception while her credit card payment is processed. As an alternative treatment of the scene the size and scope of the public space and the crowd could be seen from the children's point of view and the moment when the child is lost shown for the audience to experience. In my version Ben is told to sit on the trolley and wait. He does as he's told, and then he grows bored. He becomes interested in someone, or something. The audience watching Ben, understand what he's thinking. They connect and say, "Don't step off the trolley Ben, you'll be lost." Then Ben steps from the trolley, the emotions rise and we follow Ben, worrying for him. We want to know, "won't someone in the crowd notice this wandering child?" What's going to happen to him? Suddenly the crowd moves and in a moment Ben is gone. Did we see a hand take him away, or did he just vanish? Directing the scene like this would make the disappearance of the child our experience and we would be able join in with Beth's reaction. While re-making a picture is easy with hindsight, the present result is just too neutral. The pleasantness of the design, the beige and greys, the gentle sincerity of the music and the dignity of the performances all cocoon and stupefy the reactions.

Overall the judgement, worthy, but dull, comes to mind when trying to give *The Deep End of the Ocean* some credit. However I'm wonderfully bad at predicting what the public will like and the film will surely become a huge hit. Even so I still prefer the longing and repressed desire of Michelle Pfeiffer in *Age of Innocence* where bright yellow offers hope and life, or the delirium of *Marnie* red. Melodrama needs to be vivid and moving, not careful and subtle.

Victimised

Dir: William A. Graham, US, 1984

A review by Rebecca D. Feasey, University of Nottingham, UK

SHE'S INSATIABLE' HE'S CLINICAL' SHARON STONE IS VICTIMISED

The 1984 made-for-television film, *Victimised* aka *Insatiable* aka *Calendar Girl Murders* is a slash-and-stalk tale recently released by M.I.A to buy on video. Originally released to buy in 1985, the film now contains "more erotic footage." *Victimised* is structured in the easy-to-follow format of a MTV video and as such, the narrative of the text is over-determined in both its content and style' Miss January and Miss February are dead, and Miss March is being stalked by the killer.

Dan Stoner/Tom Skerrit plays the film's central male protagonist. A detective intent on protecting the country's most beautiful centre-spread models from the wrath of a serial killer. However, the video sleeve teases the spectator with Hollywood's most desirable and insatiable leading lady igniting the screen in a fast paced erotic thriller. Therefore, rather than focus on Dan/Skerrit's character within the text, the re-released *Victimised* is reclaimed as a Sharon Stone vehicle. Thus, within the context of the development of Sharon Stone's star image, the film focuses on Cassie Bascomb played by Sharon Stone, the centre-spread model who is the next intended victim of a serial killer.

In *Victimised*, Cassie/Stone is a desirable yet deviant femme fatale reminiscent of Hollywood's golden age. Therefore, this review will transcend notions of a post-modern pastiche, textual thematics and plot elements in favour of structuring a review around Sharon Stone's star image.

Whilst a number of feminist film theorists have pointed to Hollywood cinema's obsession with making female sexuality visible, Sharon Stone has performed naked through a decade of cinema, achieving immense rhetorical significance as The Hollywood blonde. Someone in Hollywood once pointed out that men put women on a pedestal and then look up their skirts. With Sharon Stone, Hollywood looked up her skirt and then put her on a pedestal. Sex sells, and although blondes are a dime a dozen in Hollywood, Sharon Stone is a multimillionairess. With this in mind then, *Victimised* delivers Stone's now trademark sexual performative, allowing the actress to star-turn her flesh into cinematic instrumentality.

It must be noted that much energy is spent in obsessively stressing how the images of women in the media are "stereotypes", "role-confirming" and "anti-emancipatory". Thus, a tension between the project of legitimising women's pleasures and the desire to assess representations politically informs a good deal of feminist criticism, and with this in mind, a number of feminist critics would reject Cassie/Stone's narrative autonomy in favour of positioning her as the sexual spectacle. However, it is clear herein that a made for television erotic thriller and the performatives within that text can not be judged by the standards of feminist film-making

(which are themselves hopelessly confused and constantly under consideration). Rather, such a text should be contested on its own ground, that of popular culture, positioning the film and the performatives within the context of other contemporary narratives and images.

Victimised encourages the actress to overact wildly, allowing Stone to reach an audience through her physicality. Such a charge could be made against Stone's sensational appearance in Paul Verhoeven's pulp classic *Basic Instinct*.

Since delivering her sensational performance in *Basic Instinct*, Sharon Stone's star persona has been single-handedly constructed around her part in the controversial film. Since Hollywood has long favoured the practice of identifying stars with particular genres, contemporary audiences and critics alike recall Sharon Stone as the paradoxically fascinating yet repelling femme fatale of the erotic thriller. Moreover, noir's representation of women in both visual and narrative terms depicts the strength of the glamorous image of woman in the face of textual repression. With this in mind then, the predatory performance of Sharon Stone as the tough talking, fast-driving, hard-fucking Catherine Trammel can be seen to permeate reader-responses of Stone's earlier and subsequent film roles.

Sharon Stone, the forty-two year old blonde has a background in modelling, and this sense of image-as-capital is no-where more evident than in *Victimised*. The film plays overtly upon Stone's now infamous status as someone to be looked at. *Victimised* finds Cassie/Stone stalked by a male psychopath, and as such, the actress is repeatedly exposed to the male gaze. Cassie/Stone is watched through a somewhat "soft-focus" camera lens by photographers, detectives, stalkers and admirers alike.

Therefore, *Victimised* initiates a now trademark theme in the Stone star text. *Scissors*, *Basic Instinct*, *Casino*, *Diabolique* and *Sphere* all present Sharon Stone being stalked by an omnipotent male presence; the former in a literal the later in a metaphysical state. However, it is within *Sliver* that the notion of the authorial, hence male structure of looking reaches its cinematic climax. Through what one might playfully term "*sex, high-rise and videotape*", Sharon Stone is courted and coerced through a multiplicity of voyeuristic monitoring devices in which the figure of Zeke/Baldwin stands in for the director.

However, a pattern of extreme self-indulgence emerges in these pantomime displays. Ms. Stone remains far less effective in shots that include other actors than in her own close-ups. As such, *Victimised* finds the character of Cassie/Stone to be somewhat insecure and wholly unstable until; that is, she is able to play to the over-determined male lens.

At film closure, *Victimised* finds Cassie/Stone's words embedded within a psychological case history. As such, *Victimised* casts Ms. Stone in a pivotal role, that role being the unstable sexual predator, and each successive appearance as this unstable, yet beautiful seductress goes further to solidify her screen persona. From infantile trauma (*Victimised*, *Scissors*, *The Specialist*, *The Quick and the Dead*), to attempted suicide (*Sphere*) through to social and sexual victim (choose from *Sliver*, *Casino*, *Diabolique*, *Last Dance*, and *Sphere* respectively), Stone habitually plays psychologically flawed women. These women are flattened into caricatures that are characterised by emotion, violence and a brutal interrogation of self-identity and social convention.

In structuring the narrative around woman-as-case-study, *Victimised* allows Cassie/Stone to gender language in order to reveal the feminine agency of narration. Moreover, whilst

Victimised, *Basic Instinct* et al. are organised around the determining male gaze, the over-determined structures of looking allow Stone's sexual performative to establish a sexual agency and narrative of female desire. As such, *Victimised* simultaneously informs and moulds today's sexual Stone star image.

Stone's sexual performative allows the actress to change from deathly to silky smooth in a flash! The device employed in *Basic Instinct* appears as a natural extension of her role as the unambiguously lethal femme fatale of *Total Recall*, which itself appears as a natural extension of her duplicitous role in *Victimised*.

We are told how the man who "discovered" Cassie/Stone fell in love with her. To which Cassie/Stone sharply retorts that "He fell in love with the make-up and the measurements." With this in mind, *Victimised* is an example of "trash yourself" cinema, due to the fact that the film invites us to watch Sharon Stone play out her private life in public. Therefore, (in retrospect) *Victimised* refers to the commercial success of Sharon Stone's own gutsy creation, with the "make-up and the measurements" referring to Stone's self-made and somewhat predatory alter-ego.

In *Movieline's* trashy tour of what it terms "The Stone Age," Margulies and Rebello pay both popular and critical attention to some of the *Bad Movies We Love* (1995) from Sharon Stone's filmography. However, as pop culture snobs, they were not interested in a camp resurrection of the 1984 made for television movie, *Victimised*.

In his book *The Cult Film Experience* (1991), Telotte notes that we should be wary of dismissing cheap productions as paracinema, dumb sensationalism which can only be campily appreciated as bad film. However, since cementing her reputation as Hollywood's favourite femme fatale, Cassie/Stone comes across as dated, to a degree that seems innocent and therefore curiously appealing in the film. Moreover, it is such retrograde innocence rather than any crass, contemporary aesthetic that one could identify as a hallmark of camp. With an emphasis on appearance and demeanour over and above character development or exposition, the costuming and play acting aspects of the film foreground style over meaning, making it, in effect, an expression of the camp.

Victimised pays homage to "trash yourself cinema," the iconic personality and the caricature, and as such, one can see that the film adheres to that particular form of contemporary myth we call the "camp" if not necessarily the cult film.