

Girl, You'll be a Woman Soon:  
The Changing Role of Women  
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*"Any 'tradition' of representation involves both continuity and change"*  
-Yvonne Tasker

The gangster genre is a long-standing cinema tradition, easily recognisable through its characteristic violence, guns, and criminal activity. The genre is considered a traditionally male domain, its texts are made by men, about men and as stereotypes would have us believe, for men. So where do women fit in? Historically, it could be said that the gangster genre is a medium in which masculinity conquers femininity and reimposes its patriarchal value systems. Women in these texts are generally placed in three clichéd roles, mother who is treated with the upmost respect and love; wife, loved and provided for but also having to put up with infidelity and abuse; and moll, attractive women who serve as nothing more than decoration. By how true are these clichés? Times have changed, the 20th century began with women not even allowed the vote and ended with equality won in most areas of life, in westernised countries at least.

As Rowley (2000) points out, genres do not simply develop a range of identifying features and then cease developing, they are characterised by both "continuity and change" (Tasker 1993). Thus by analysing gangster genre texts from different eras, The Public Enemy (1931); The Godfather Part I (1972) and The Godfather Part II (1974); and The Sopranos, Series One and Two (1999/2000), this critique aims to examine whether social changes brought about by the women's movement have been reflected in the intrinsically masculine gangster genre.

## The Public Enemy (1931)

The Public Enemy observes the rise and inevitable fall of the gangster protagonist, Tom Powers, a charismatic madman. This film is one of the earliest of the genre, thus the source of many its defining characteristics; the typical clichés of violence, guns, big money, fancy suits and fast women.

However the women in this film are as much props as the guns or the suits, they simply are objects that exist in terms of the male, as Johnston (1973) notes, “Within a sexist ideology and male dominated cinema, woman is presented as what she represents for man”, the gangster molls, Kitty and Gwen, are simply objects that look good and symbolise Tommy’s status as a gangster. Their objectification is conveyed with what Mulvey (1975) describes as the “male gaze”, which projects its fantasy onto the female figure, who in patriarchal culture is a “signifier for the male other”. The male gaze is characterised in The Public Enemy by the shot reverse shot, the audience first sees a shot of Tom looking at Kitty, then a shot of Kitty reacting to his gaze, as Mulvey (1975, p 63) describes, “she holds the look and plays to and signifies male desire” The narrative is structured around, Tom, thus when women enter the film, they are portrayed as seen through his eyes, objectified by the male gaze and having no value other than their relationship to him.

Tom Powers is certainly characterised by masculinity, however at times in the film it borders upon misogyny. The early scenes of the film depict his childhood and the first words to come out of his mouth in the film are: “That’s what you get for fooling with women”, after his friend Matt gets a door slammed in his face. The following scene

shows him setting up a wire to trip up Matt's sister, defending his actions "What do you care, it's only a girl". This film depicts Tom's toughness, his masculinity, as a rejection of all that is feminine.

As he gets older, his growing masculinity is rewarded and enhanced when gang boss Putty Nose gives him and buddy Matt their first guns, phallic symbols of their gaining of masculinity. Their pride is conveyed when the camera zooms in to a mid shot as the boys examine their new guns with smiles on their faces. For Tom Powers there is no room for any weakness, Easthope (1990, p 42) describes how, in the dominant myth of masculinity, "to be unified it must be masculine all the way through, and so the feminine will always appear as something other or different", thus Tom opposes any sort of feminine behaviour. While most people use a hug or kiss to show affection, the character of Tom Powers mock punches the person on the jaw, in the hospital scene of the film his mother smiles lovingly down at him and he responds with his mock punch literally wiping the smile off her face.

With this as his version of fondness, his anger is frightening. One of the most memorable moments in cinema history, in terms of violence against women, is depicted in the scene where Tommy has grown tired of girlfriend Kitty and slams a grapefruit into her face to deliver the message. The action is shocking; Kitty is hurt physically and emotionally humiliated, yet as the passive female, there is little she can do but accept it.

Tom's violent actions in the film can be explained by turning briefly to psychoanalytic theory. Tom's father is absent thus Freud's "oedipal triangle" fails, Tom has no father to identify with so he identifies with his mother and risks becoming

effeminate and this leads to his psychosis (Kristeva, 1982) against the domesticating, softening threat of women.

His rejection of the women who try to 'mother' him is evidence of this. The glamorous blond Gwen, unlike most women who fall at his knees, plays hard to get which is why he likes her at first, however when his friends tell him he's getting "the merry-go round" he tries to end the relationship. At this point Gwen reverts to feminine type, pulling his head to her breast as if he was a child, and cooing, "Oh you bashful boy" and confessing that she loves him because, "You don't give. You take." Any strength or independence in her character is sacrificed in the face of his masculinity. Gwen assumes the delicate female role, which in this film is presented as the mothering role, as Tom's mother is so weak. However Tom cannot abide this femininity and thus moments later leaves Gwen for the safety of the masculine world of crime.

This same situation is examined in the character of Jane, an older unmarried woman who looks after the boys while they're hiding out. Tommy drinks too much and Jane undresses him for bed as if she were his mother saying, "Just a goodnight kiss for a fine boy." Her attempt at mothering this "bad boy" also fails. When he comes to his senses in the morning, he slaps her viciously.

The idea that Gwen and Jane try to mother Tommy is a reference to women's traditional role in the Thirties. These women have shunned conventions, not marrying and making a home, instead living a life in the criminal underbelly. Yet despite their defiance, they try to mother Tom suggesting to the audience that they do have an underlying maternal instinct but having no outlet for it in their immoral existence, which is the film's way of conveying that all women should be at home looking after the

children and thus reinforcing patriarchal values. Also the violence and mistreatment directed towards women is not shown to be deplorable due to their depiction as “loose” women; Kitty lives “in sin” with Tom in a hotel, Gwen is a spoilt gold digger and Jane, a desperate old woman. Thus, when they fall victim to Tom’s abuse, they are not portrayed as innocent. The allegorical message of the film is instructing women to conform and behave in the manner deemed proper at the time or they will fall victim to such treatment.

### The Godfather (1972) and The Godfather Part II (1974)

These films are the most famous of the genre, beginning the traditions of the modern gangster film that in contrast to The Public Enemy, shows organised crime as a ‘family’, opposed to one or two mobsters. The Godfather series also initiated the cliché of the Italian Mafioso that has been evident in most American gangster films since then.

Kay is the most significant female character in The Godfather films; her evolution through both films conveys how changes in society for women are not reflected in the world of the Corleone gangster family. From the first scene she appears in Kay is portrayed unlike the other women in the film, her blond hair and striking red dress separating her from the dark Sicilians at Connie’s wedding to Carlo. She is innocent, believing Michael when he tells her about his father’s criminal activities, “That’s my family Kay, it’s not me”. Her relationship with Michael in the beginning differs from the traditional wife-husband relationships of the Corleone family; he treats her as an equal, conveyed by shots that show both their faces in a single frame. Michael’s time in the war has allowed him to see that there is a world beyond “the family” and shown him different

values towards women are possible. Kay and Michael's close relationship contrasts to the conventional marriage of his brother Sonny who tells his wife Sandra to "watch the kids - don't let'em run wild", while he proceeding to sleep with a bridesmaid only minutes later, Sandra is fully aware of her husband's actions but helpless to stop them.

The equality in Kay and Michael's relationship does not last, after an attempt is made on Vito's life Michael becomes involved in his father's family and parts with Kay. This is conveyed by the shot of Michael in a phone booth calling home about his father, while the shot taken from inside the booth shows Kay on the outside looking in, the window frame making her look as if she is trapped. From this moment onward, Michael treats Kay in the same way the other men in his family treat women, as wives, mothers, but certainly not equals.

She asks Michael, "When will I see you again?" on their last night together, his response is silence but the real answer is never, as the Michael that returns from Sicily is one that has murdered and thus assimilated with the traditions of his 'family'. And such traditions are use of power and violence which is, "about the maintenance of manhood", a manhood that, "defines itself in opposition to femininity" (Grioux 2000), The men of the Corleone family need feminine traditional wives to serve as 'the Other' to their masculine selves and Michael can no longer treat Kay as an equal.

Instead Michael treats her as a wife; she bears children and looks after the home, but is an outsider to his other world. This idea is depicted through lighting, in the scenes where the men's crimes are planned or carried out is nearly always dark while scenes where wives are present are always in noticeably brighter setting. For example, as

Haskell (1997) notes, the juxtaposition of the family's celebration in the bright Nevada sunlight and the Don's darks study in Part II demonstrates up this gendered contrast.

The division between husbands and wives in the Corleone world is also conveyed through a repeated camera shot showing two men in the foreground, while in the background in the space between their bodies is the woman, for example, this shot is used when Clemenza visits Sonny, two men are talking 'business' and Sonny's wife Sandra is depicted in between them in the background nursing their child, conveying her presence and role but exclusion from the events that are taking place. This role is also highlighted with most scenes involving women depicting them taking care of children or involved in some form of food preparation, when the Don returns home from the hospital, the men talk 'business' upstairs while the shot downstairs shows the women fussing about in the kitchen. This conveys the defined roles for women, as wives they must be domestic and care for the children; it also contrasts to changes in Women's rights that were taking place at the time of the film's release. In 1972, the same year as Part I was released, the Equal Rights Amendment finally made it to the floor of US Congress, in an attempt to stop sex discrimination and women all over the America were protesting for the states to ratify it, meanwhile this film exemplifies the kind backward attitudes they were fighting against.

The final scene in Part I shows Kay watching Michael in his father's office, with the door slowly closing across her face, she is shut out of her husband's other life. However in Part II, Kay grows tired of such treatment, at one point when Michael has barred their family going out, she asks with frustration, "Am I a prisoner?" Michael recognises Kay's growing unrest and confides in his mother, who is portrayed in the film



as the “stereotypical Italian mama”(Donatelli and Aylward 2002, p 4) providing “sympathy and pasta for all” and representative of the “proper” behaviour of the gangster mother/wife. When Michael describes his fear of losing his family, her answer is, “You can never lose your family”, conveying domestication is so deeply ingrained in her character, she cannot fathom a world beyond it, however Michael responds “Times are changing”, suggesting that with the shifting role of women in society, Kay may no longer be subject to his absolute power. The Godfather Part II as a film recognises this shift and symbolically rejects any societal change through its defeat of Kay. When she does assert her independence and attempts to leave with the children, Michael tells her he “will not allow it”. She does not submit as she has done before, she reveals that her miscarriage was actually an abortion, “I wouldn’t bring another one of you sons into this world”, this line conveying her defiance of the patriarchal order that characterises her world.

This action allows Kay to be separated from the Corleone family, however she does not gain independence, only alienation. Kay is forbidden from seeing her children and has to visit them secretly. On this occasion Michael, who has evolved from patriarch to tyrant, catches her. There is an ominous silence before he closes the door on her, a parallel scene to the closing door that ended Part I, however this time it symbolises not just her exclusion from the family business, she is cast off from the family as a whole. Kay’s demise in the end of Part Two has antifeminist sentiments, although she challenges the patriarchy and demonstrates a woman’s right to choose, she is punished for her actions, like the women of The Public Enemy, she is punished for betraying the conventional role for women in the film.

Another significant female role in the film is that of Connie, Michael's sister. Unlike Kay, she suffers physical abuse from her husband Carlo, a scene of violence towards women that conveys its impact through what it doesn't show. Connie's humiliation when she finds evidence of her husband's affairs causes her to break plates to demonstrate her anguish. This only leads to punishment, she attempt to hide in the bathroom and Carlo kicks down the door and enters, with her screams heard as the bathroom door slowly closes.

Connie is treated badly in other parts of the two films, for example when she confronts Michael about her husband's death. Costuming has her in a baby doll dress with hair pinned to the side so as she expresses her anger, she seems like a child throwing a tantrum and thus her emotion is not taken seriously. As she challenges Michael, the camera focuses on Michael's face, only showing the back of Connie's head. This shot mutes the impact of her outburst, as the audience can only see Michael's calm face, conveying that Connie as a woman is largely ignored and treated like a child in this male dominated family. In Part II Connie initially appears a stronger woman having moved on with her life, however Michael soon defeats her independence and plans to marry by telling her, "You'll disappoint me", as if he were a father speaking to a daughter, this shot conveying this as she is sitting looking up at him. This links back to a scene of male bonding between Michael and his father, where he imparts that "Women and children can be careless but not men", thus conveying the patriarchy ideals of the film, men regard themselves as the wise leaders that care for the women and children, who can't look after themselves.

There are sequences in both Godfather films that show a return to the homeland of Sicily, in Part I Michael hides there after committing his first murder, while Part II shows flashbacks of when Vito took his children there to visit. This homecoming can be viewed as a fantasy in which time is turned back and traditional values are reinstated, as Roberts (2002) notes that The Godfather “locates its ideal masculinities in Sicily, in a fantasy narrative of nostalgia for the phallic wholeness of the homeland.” In this world men are men and women do as they are told, which is seen as the ideal arrangement of gender relations to the Corleone men. When Michael is in Sicily he falls in love with village girl, Apollonia. In a demonstration of conventional values it is Apollonia’s father who decides whether or not this relationship will take place. Her character has virtually no depth, however her personality is largely irrelevant, she is a beautiful old style Italian girl and that is all that needs to be presented. This idea of moving values backward in time opposes feminist sentiments of the seventies where it was hoped there would, as Gloria Steinem suggested, “be no roles other than those chosen or those earned”. Overall The Godfather films evoke as Schatz (1993) describes, “the male ethos and patriarchal order of a bygone era”, even though they were released at a time in history when “the women’s movement, on fire with a whole range of equity issues, was coming out of the closet into the media spotlight” (Haskell 1997, p17) Thus The Godfather films represent an attempt “to reinforce, not the status quo but some mystical golden age where men were men and women girls” (Smith 1972), an attempt by patriarchal dominated cinema to repress the changes emerging in society.

## The Sopranos - Selected Episodes Seasons 1 and 2 (1999/2000)

The most recent example of the gangster genre is the critically acclaimed HBO television series The Sopranos. The opening of scene of this dark comedy-drama depicts a statue of a naked woman with arms raised powerfully behind her head, with gangster protagonist Tony Soprano staring up at her at with bemusement. He is waiting to see his psychiatrist, who helps him deal with the stress of 'the business', and the stress of women it would seem.

Gone are the days of the secret masculine world of the Mafioso, Tony Soprano is half suburban dad half gangster whose life revolves around his family, "what my mother, wife, and daughter all have in common is that they all break my balls" (Pax Soprana #6) is what he tells his psychiatrist, another strong female he has to contend with.

In The Sopranos the traditionally domain of the gangster has been merged with everyday life, Tony's criminal activities are juxtaposed with, "shopping malls, soccer moms and dads, SAT's and video games." (Auster 2000). In contrast to the intensely masculine environment of the Don's study in The Godfather Tony Soprano's conducts gangster meetings in the basement of his suburban home, where he turns on the rinse cycle so "The Feds" can't hear what they're saying (Donatelli and Alward 2002). There is no longer any sense of masculine domination, in contrast to the objectification through the male gaze seen in The Public Enemy, the show's focalisation often shows Tony through the female gaze of his wife Carmela, however her gaze doesn't symbolize her desire, more her general disgust. And in this family, it's Carmela who truly wears the pants.

When Tony asks her to wait outside while he discusses 'business', and play the role of outsider wife like Kay Corleone, her response is "Kiss my ass Tony" (Isabella #12). Carmela also wields power in her role as wife of a mobster, using her ricotta pie to give a woman reluctant to write her daughter a letter of recommendation an 'offer (s)he couldn't refuse', the upshot in these scene conveying her dominance (Full Leather Jacket #21). Carmela knows exactly what her husband gets up to, both in business and recreationally. She helps him hide guns and money hidden in the roof before the FBI search their house, sighing "Here we go again," (Legend of Tennessee Moltisanti #9) while runs crying from an engagement party after smelling Tony's mistress' perfume on his clothes (Knight in White Satin Armour #25). While there are some aspects of the old style gangster wife in her, she spends much of her time in food preparation and she does (barely) condone her husband's adultery, she cannot be classed as a victim of patriarchal domination like Kay, as she tells Tony herself, "I have eyes". Carmela knows what is going on chooses to accept it, for reasons perhaps revealed in her transformation from woman scorned to happy wife when Tony brings her home a fur coat. At the end of the day Tony's bucks stop with Carmela and that's the way she likes it.

The other significant female in The Sopranos is Tony's mother Livia. Unlike the Corelone's stereotypical Italian 'Mama', Tony Soprano's mother is "part Medea, part Lady Macbeth... hitting operatic heights of maternal fury and self-pity" (Millman, 1999, p1). In contrast to the usual patriarchal Mafia stories, The Sopranos examines how sins of the mother are visited on the son with the show's deep understanding of the psychological power mothers wield over their children (Millman 2000). In Tony's therapy sessions he describes a dream where a duck flies away with his penis (Pilot #1),

his Freudian fear of castration ever present in his mind, but through extended psychotherapy Tony comes to realise the fear is from his mother who wore his own father “down to a little nub” and she is even described by Carmela as a “peculiar duck” (I Dream of Jeannie Cusamano #13). Tony realises his mother is not as harmless as she appears telling her, “If you had been born after those feminists, you would have been the real gangster” (#9). This statement rings true as Tony’s mother, angered at being put in a retirement village, deliberately sets in motion events that lead to an attempt on his life, and when it fails, feigns Alzheimer’s disease.

Despite the strong females in the show, masculinity or at least the appearance of it is still valued in Tony Soprano’s world. In Boca (#9) it is revealed that Tony’s Uncle Junior is a great lover, “down there”, as it is so delicately put. However he instructs his girlfriend to tell no-one as, “It’s a sign of weakness and possibly a sign you’re a Fanook”, (mobster slang for a homosexual), despite the fact the act is between male and female. Tony manages to find out and mocks his Uncle at their golf game, raising his club as an erect extended phallus to flaunt his own masculinity while singing “South of the Border”. But, Uncle Junior has also recognised weakness in Tony’s masculinity, the fact he sees a psychiatrist replying, “At least I can deal with my own problems, my friend”.

In response to appearing weak, Uncle Junior, becomes a “hysteric”, which occurs in moments of powerlessness in the presence of other males (Smith 1995), and requires an action to reclaim his masculinity. His response is to shove a lemon meringue pie in the face of his girlfriend, in homage to the grapefruit scene in The Public Enemy, however as it is literally a ‘pie in the face’ it appears far more comical and less violent.

In actual fact, violence towards women evident in the earlier gangster films is turned on its head on The Sopranos. In “The Knight in White Satin Armor” (#25), Richie, the most hardened gangster yet to grace the series, tells his fiancé Janice, (who happens to be Tony’s older sister) to, “Put my dinner on the table and keep your mouth shut”. She ignores him and he sees fit, in traditional mobster style, to punch her in the mouth. The shock of this action is conveyed by a headshot of Janice with the fist suddenly coming from the corner of the screen without warning. However, Janice is no Kitty or Connie Corleone. Her reaction is to get Richie’s gun and shoot him in the heart, doing what Connie could not do to Carlo (Donatelli and Alward, 2002) and what Kitty could not do to Tom Powers.

Despite his Uncle’s teasing in Boca (#9) about his therapy, Tony continues regardless. Perhaps his masculinity is already so trampled by his wife and mother he sees no point in becoming a “hysteric” to defend it. In a society in its third wave of feminism, this idea of ‘masculinity in crisis’ is gaining momentum. For example Giroux (2000) describes how “In simple terms, the new millennium offers white, heterosexual men nothing less than a life in which ennui and domestication define their everyday existence.” The character of Tony Soprano certainly supports this idea, his longing for a time when men were men, is evident in his reference to The Godfather, describing how he likes “the part where Vito goes back to Sicily”, the section of the film which reminisces on old style values. Ironically when Tony make his own pilgrimage back to Italy in the episode Comendatori (#17), he finds the opposite of what is portrayed in The Godfather the Italian mob boss is actually a woman, Annalisa. His disapproval is conveyed when they play golf together as he tells her “That’s a man’s club, I’ll send you

one your own size". This statement is laden with Freudian reference as he had previously used a club in the episode Boca (#9) to symbolize his phallus and thus he insinuates that she is behaving masculine in taking on of what he considers a man's role.

The extent of the end of patriarchal dominance is evident even in the characterisation of the gangster moll, who after being ignored by the tyrannous Michael in The Godfather makes reappearance in The Sopranos. The moll is traditionally the bearer of the worst treatment from the gangster however Tony's sensitive new age personality causes him to counsel his goomah (mobster slang for mistress) to find a husband and settle down. The other so-called molls are the strippers in Tony's club, Bada Bing, who are shown dancing topless in virtually every episode. However Silvio, one of Tony's gangster buddies, does not see this as degradation of women, after all they choose to work there. He describes how his daughter tells him that the club "objectifies women-shit like that. They're pulling in \$1500 a week!"

Essentially, the change reflected in these three texts is an evolution in women's choices. In The Public Enemy (1931), women are just objects to orbit the masculine focus of Tom Powers, they have no choices. For Kitty, Gwen and Jane, their role is simply to fall victim to his abuses and serve as "The Other" in definition of his masculinity. And in the context of the 1930s, this seems just punishment considering their own "sordid" behaviour, sending a message to women at the time to remain within conventions or face similar treatment. The Godfather Part I (1972) and The Godfather Part II (1974) show a world where women have choices, but face significant consequences if they make them. Connie and Kay both exist in the Corleone's patriarchal world where wives have defined



roles and are outsiders to 'the business'. Connie eventually gives in and accepts her inevitable repression while Kay grows tired of domination. However she finds there are negative consequences of making her own choices, she is cast off and alienated from her family. Overall these two films demonstrate a longing for the patriarchal world of the past, a hostile response to the growing feminist movement at the time. However, as demonstrated in the most recent text The Sopranos (1999/2000), the response is no longer hostile, this is a world where women can make all the choices they want, and patriarchal domination is a thing of the past. If anything, this series suggests things are turning the other way through its strong female characters Carmela and Livia, its reversal of violence against females and its fusion of the gangster and suburban lifestyles.

Any genre is a product of society and the changes Western society has seen in the roles of women have been so significant they could not be ignored, even by the inherently masculine gangster genre. The Sopranos thus does not portray its female characters like the "girls" of the earlier texts, lost in a masculine world, they are in charge of their own destinies, they have become "women".

# B I B L I O G R A P H Y

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The Godfather (1972), Directed by Francis Ford Coppola, Paramount Pictures

The Godfather Part II (1974), Directed by Francis Ford Coppola, Paramount Pictures

## T E L E V I S I O N

The Sopranos Season One (1999), Created by David Chase, HBO Television. Episodes:

#01 Pilot

#06: Pax Soprana

#08: The Legend of Tennessee Moltisanti

#09: Boca

#12: Isabella

#13: I Dream of Jeannie Cusomano

The Sopranos Season Two (2000), Created by David Chase, HBO Television. Episodes:

#17: Commendatori

#20: D-Girl

#21: Full Leather Jacket

#25: The Knight In White Satin Armor

# 26: Funhouse

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## Reflection Statement

The gangster genre transcends everyday reality as what it explores goes beyond the realms of our everyday lives and experiences. Equally however, in terms of morals and ideology, it requires a high degree of verisimilitude, thus it can be classed as a type of “realistic fantasy”. Due these elements I have always been fascinated by the genre thus decided to write a critique that was somehow based around it. The possible paths to follow were numerous, and the first parameter was my decision to investigate the genre from a feminist perspective. This is particularly relevant, if you consider firstly, the gangster genre is an inherently male domain and secondly, the advances in Women’s Rights this past century have been significant. Thus, the aim of this critique was to discover what happened when these points intersected by examining the changing role and treatment of women in the examples from the genre.

My independent investigation was in various areas, first an investigation of the texts themselves, this process involved watching the works and making notes, then picking relevant areas to discuss in terms of role and treatment of women. This expanded and extended my knowledge and understanding of film analysis and how to read texts from a feminist perspective that I previously learnt in English and English Extension 1. My choice of examples, The Public Enemy (1931); The Godfather Part I (1972) and The Godfather Part II (1974); and The Sopranos, selected episodes from Series One and Two (1999/2000), is a reflection of the dominant genre pieces of each period and my own tastes. My investigation into The Sopranos was aided through the DVDs I already owned

while I chose to omit The Godfather Part III as it was released sixteen years after Part II and seems out of date.

Another aspect of my independent investigation was research into the area of feminist film theory, which had significant impact on my work. Firstly it showed different ways of examining films, with ideas such as the “male gaze”, however much of Feminist film theory is deeply intertwined with in-depth psychoanalysis that was difficult to comprehend much less apply. My original intent stemmed from the gangster genre and I risked it being overshadowed by detailed explanations of Feminist film theory, thus I stuck to my original intent and called upon the more simplistic aspects of the theory. This was a suitable method however as, my aim was not to write an inaccessible academic paper. The text themselves are examples of well-loved popular culture, they appeal to large audiences thus to analyse them in a way that would be beyond the intent of their makers and their level of appeal would be pointless.

This critique is written in style and structure that aims to be interesting and accessible to the reader, it is similar to articles that found film magazines or journals. The subject matter of the critique however, somewhat limits its audience to those who have interest in the gangster genre, as the impact of the analysis is greatly improved if the reader has some knowledge of the texts it examines. The purpose of the critique is to entertain and inform, to possibly give the responder a view of the genre they had not previously considered and to place it within the context of societal changes. While films and television can simply entertain, their value increases in examination of their contextual significance and the ideas they are trying to communicate. The purpose of my

critique is to illuminate these ideas and place of these texts in a context, in terms of role and treatment of women.

As the critique examines the changing women's role in texts from different eras, I felt structurally it would be better to place the texts in chronological order. I had originally planned on an integrated structure, however after reading past critical response major works I found the integrated structure to be confusing, as it was not clear what was being discussed at each point. Thus I divided my critique into three clear sections.

In terms of language, I feel my style is fairly understandable, after reading various impenetrable academic papers in my independent investigation I attempted to write something that was comparatively easy to read. I aimed for my critique to be interesting, but still a strong and valid analysis fulfilling my original intent. I have included throughout my work reference to materials researched in my independent investigation to give support and grounding to my own analysis as well as reference to the texts themselves. Overall there are no particularly significant language features or conventions, as a critique with the aim to entertain and inform, I simply wrote it as I would any essay.

The process of composition has been ongoing and only recently have some of the concepts I was struggling with became clear. At times I felt like the critique was out of control, running off onto these tangents leaving me feeling like I was losing sight of my original intentions. I struggled with the idea of feminist film theory but resolved this in a realisation the focus were the texts and the theory a tool to analyse them, though at certain times I felt it was the other way around. And although my premise had always been that changes in society would be reflected in the texts it was only recently when I



briefly investigated genre theory I realised, “Genres depend on receptive audiences who are willing to grant credibility to the conventions of the genre to the extent that those conventions become invisible.” (Ryan and Kellner 1988). Thus the changes in the genre are not simply reflection, they had to occur for the genre to survive. If the genre had continued with its themes of patriarchal dominance, it would have lost appeal and appeared out of date and sexist. Therefore The Sopranos with its strong female characters revives and adds to its appeal of the genre.

Another concept that I think was in the back of my mind the whole time was this concept of the “evolution of choice”, which I talk about in the conclusion to my critique however it is only when the major work was in one whole piece that this link real made sense and became a tie to bind the entire work together. Overall, I feel the critique has fulfilled my own intentions, the final product analyses the role and treatment of women in examples, demonstrating that changes in society have been reflected in the genre. But in equal importance to the actual product, I found the process of creating it challenging, interesting and worthwhile.

## ENGLISH EXTENSION 2 — Critical Response

Band E3/4

[View Sample](#)

Sample 1

**Title: Girl, You'll Be A Woman Soon! – The Changing Role of Women in the Gangster Genre**

This critical response is highly developed in the critique of where women fit into the gangster genre. The ideas are complex and supported by extensive independent research.

The composition is original and the candidate demonstrates a sophisticated and highly developed ability to engage the audience.

The critical response exhibits the candidate's highly developed ability to articulate, monitor and reflect on processes of investigation, interpretation, analysis and composition.