

Redefining Lesbian Representation: The Evolution of Queer Female Desire in the Films of Céline Sciamma

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Abstract : The portrayal of lesbianism in cinema has undergone significant transformations. This study explores the evolving portrayal of lesbianism in the films of French director Céline Sciamma, focusing on how her works have redefined the representation of queer women in contemporary cinema. Through an analysis of *Water Lilies* (2007), *Tomboy* (2011), and *Portrait of a Lady on Fire* (2019), the study investigates the ways in which Sciamma's films diverge from traditional depictions of lesbianism in film, which often relied on either fetishization or tragedy. Instead, Sciamma adopts a quiet, minimalist style that foregrounds emotional intimacy, offering a more nuanced and authentic portrayal of lesbian relationships. Through a comparative analysis of these films, this research explores the thematic and stylistic progression of Sciamma's portrayal of lesbianism, highlighting her commitment to centering queer female experiences. The research highlights Sciamma's commitment to focusing on the complexities of desire, identity formation, and the female gaze, particularly through her use of visual storytelling, character development, and narrative silence. Her films emphasize the fluidity of gender and sexuality, portraying lesbianism not as a fixed identity but as part of a broader spectrum of human desire. Sciamma's nuanced approach resists the traditional marginalization of lesbian characters, allowing them to exist as individuals rather than as plot devices or objects of spectacle. This study draws from queer theory and feminist film criticism to examine how Sciamma challenges conventional heteronormative narratives, prioritizes the female gaze, and subverts traditional cinematic representations of lesbian desire. It also explores how her work contributes to a broader conversation on the representation of queerness in contemporary French cinema, challenging heteronormative paradigms and offering new possibilities for depicting female relationships on screen. By tracing the evolution of her films, this research contributes to broader discussions on LGBTQ+ visibility in cinema and the cultural significance of lesbian representation in contemporary cinema.

Keywords : female gaze, feminist film criticism, lesbianism in cinema, queer theory

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