

***Valerie and Her Week of Wonders and Belladonna of Sadness: A Sartorial and
Chromatic Analysis***



***Project submitted to St. Teresa's College (Autonomous) in partial fulfilment of
the requirement for the degree of MASTER OF ARTS in
English Language and Literature***

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Valerie and Her Week of Wonders and Belladonna of Sadness: A Sartorial and Chromatic Analysis

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Movies often reveal levels of meaning beyond dialogues visual aesthetics and narrative depth. Visual elements like fashion and colour hold a lot of symbolic significance in avant-garde movies released during a period of high socio-political tension. This research will concentrate on two influential films, *Valerie and Her Week of Wonders* (1970) and *Belladonna of Sadness* (1973), both known for their dreamlike narratives and daring visual experimentation. Chapter 1, "Connotations and Denotations: Myth or Language" deals with the theoretical framework of the project and approaches to analyzing movies. Chapter 2, "Decoding Fashion: Semiotics of Clothing Based on Colour" is a detailed sartorial and chromatic analysis of the movie *Valerie and her Week of Wonders*. Chapter 3 "Gender Politics, Colour and clothing: Witchcraft and rebellion" deals with the use of colour and clothing in the movie *Belladonna of Sadness*. The conclusion includes a comparative study of the two movies.



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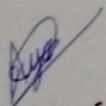
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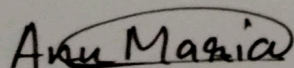
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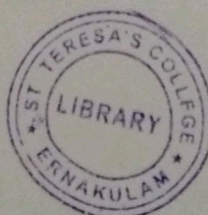
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DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this dissertation entitled "*Valerie and Her Week of Wonders and Belladonna of Sadness: A Sartorial and Chromatic Analysis*" is a record of bona fide work done by me under the supervision of Ms. Tessa Fani Jose, Assistant Professor, Department of English, and that no part of the dissertation has been presented earlier for the award of any degree, diploma, or any other similar title of recognition.



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CERTIFICATE

I hereby certify that this project entitled "*Valerie and Her Week of Wonders and Belladonna of Sadness: A Sartorial and Chromatic Analysis*", is a record of bona fide work carried out by Arya C Radhakrishnan under my supervision and guidance.



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Arya C Radhakrishnan

Content

	List of figures	i
	Introduction	1
Chapter 1:	Connotations and Denotations: Myth or Language	10
Chapter 2:	Decoding Fashion: Semiotics of Clothing Based on Colour	15
Chapter 3:	Gender Politics, Colour, and Clothing: Witchcraft and Rebellion	39
	Conclusion	49
	Works Consulted	54

List of Figures

Fig.1. <i>Valeria and Her Week of Wonders</i> (8:57, 13:27, 6:01)	17
Fig.2. <i>Valeria and Her Week of Wonders</i> (14:07, 15:17, 15:36)	18
Fig.3. <i>Valeria and Her Week of Wonders</i> (16:29)	14
Fig.4. <i>Valeria and Her Week of Wonders</i> (38:11, 44:59, 3 9:02, 38:85)	19
Fig.5. <i>Valeria and Her Week of Wonders</i> ((32:59, 32:38, 55:01, 54:57)	23
Fig.6. <i>Valeria and Her Week of Wonders</i> (56:58, 57:57, 58:19, 59:08)	25
Fig.7. <i>Valeria and Her Week of Wonders</i> (58:47)	27
Fig.8. <i>Valeria and Her Week of Wonders</i> (1:05:11, 7:30, 1:05:22, 7:35)	28
Fig.9. <i>Valeria and Her Week of Wonders</i> (1:07:52, 1:09:35, 1:11:06, 1:11:20)	30
Fig.10. <i>Valeria and Her Week of Wonders</i> (1:12:59, 1:13:16, 1:14:08, 1:14:38, 1:15:59, 1:16:26)	31
Fig.11. <i>Valeria and Her Week of Wonders</i> (2:36)	32
Fig.12. <i>Belladonna of Sadness</i> (4:13, 4:22)	35
Fig.13. <i>Belladonna of Sadness</i> (5:06, 5:22, 5:47)	36
Fig.14. <i>Belladonna of Sadness</i> (8:06, 8:12, 8:16, 8:54)	38
Fig.15. <i>Belladonna of Sadness</i> (9:31, 9:45, 10:20, 10:23)	39
Fig.16. <i>Belladonna of Sadness</i> (10:42, 13:40, 14:21, 14:38)	41
Fig.17. <i>Belladonna of Sadness</i> (17:32, 18:24, 18:53, 19:28)	42
Fig.18. <i>Belladonna of Sadness</i> (22:46, 22:48, 22:56, 26:22)	43
Fig.19. <i>Belladonna of Sadness</i> (28:53)	44
Fig.20. <i>Belladonna of Sadness</i> (48:34, 49:05, 54:20)	46
Fig.21. <i>Belladonna of Sadness</i> (1:22:40)	47

Introduction

Fashion in cinema serves as a semiotic tool that goes beyond just aesthetic and visual embellishments. It serves as a medium for both reinforcing societal norms and as a mode of resistance against them. It combines visual storytelling with symbolism, shaping characters, narratives and the audience's perception. Often, in mainstream movies, fashion subtly reinforces dominant ideologies as it aligns with social norms and cultural expectations. The clothing of a character reflects class, gender roles, power dynamics and character traits. For example, a white lotus character will often be portrayed wearing simple clothes in pastel shades. Sartorial choices also indicate the power dynamics that exist in the culture the movie originates from. For instance, an American woman with a high position in a company may be portrayed wearing masculine clothing like a suit. This reinforces the idea that women have to seem more masculine to be in power.

On the other hand, fashion in films can also serve as a tool of subversion. This is especially evident in queer movies. In these movies blurring the boundary between femininity and masculinity through sartorial choices often symbolize resistance against existing patriarchal ideas. Certain sartorial choices in specific settings may also be perceived as a form of resistance. For example, an ethnic minority donning their traditional clothing to a formal western conference can be considered as resistance against western ideological domination. Clothing can also be perceived as a tool for self-expression and empowerment challenging mainstream notions of gender, sexuality and identity. In this manner it also becomes a tool of gender politics. Beyond this, clothing may also be used as a metaphor for transformation and character development. It also reflect a character's emotional or mental state. For example, in *Belladonna of sadness* the

shifting aesthetics of the protagonist's clothing and appearance symbolizes her journey from an oppressed individual to a defiant rebel who inspires others to follow her example.

Akin to fashion another integral part of film language is colour. It helps to evoke emotional response in the viewer, build atmosphere and conveys meaning metaphorically. The symbolic meaning of an object may differ based on its colour and context. For instance, a white rose, depending on context may represent purity and innocence while a red rose may represent love and passion. Certain colours may be universally associated with certain things but there may also be culture-specific meanings to them. These associations are not fixed and their meaning may be subverted or enhanced with cinematic framing.

Another important function of colour in movies is building atmosphere and setting the tone. In horror movies desaturated or darker tones are used to build a sense of unease. On the other hand a brighter colour palette is used in rom-coms to project an optimistic and romantic world view. Another example would be the way in which cold blue tones and fiery oranges are used to construct a dystopian atmosphere in the movie *Blade Runner 2049* (2017). Colours are also used to highlight and reinforce certain values the best example of which would be Steven Spielberg's *Schindler's List* (1993) which is shot in black and white as it helps to emphasize the historical gravity of the Holocaust. The only splash of colour used in the movie is the red coat a six-year-old girl wears emphasizing the loss of humanity and reinforcing the idea of moral responsibility. Another example would be the manner in which colour, particularly black, is used to establish power dynamics in *The Godfather* (1972). In the movie's framework black

comes to be associated with the Corleone family and symbolizes their authority. It also emphasizes the moral ambiguity of their actions.

The movies *Valerie and Her Week of Wonders* and *Belladonna of Sadness* are both avant-garde Movies that use sartorial and chromatic symbols to communicate meaning. The former uses a combination of soft pastels, warm hues and black, shadowy contrasts while the latter uses a psychedelic mixture of colours. *Belladonna of Sadness* being an animated movie that uses slow panning over water-painted still images, a wider range of colours is used symbolically and focuses less on sartorial designs. *Valerie and Her Week of Wonders* on the other hand relies on contrasting light colours with darker ones and the structure of clothing to convey certain ideas.

These movies were chosen for this study due to their similar themes and backgrounds. Both focus on the subjugation of women under patriarchal rule and the hunting down of non conformist women after labeling them as witches. Both movies also deal with the various social institutions, such as religion and marriage that are used to suppress a woman's agency. The symbolisms used in these movies are deeply rooted in European culture and both explore the transformation of women in their respective cultures. The colour symbolisms used in these movies are also similar.

Valerie and her Week of Wonders is a movie loosely based on a book by the same title written by Czech poet, translator and writer Vítězslav Nezval. The work is heavily influenced by gothic novelists like Mary Shelly and M. G Lewis. The novel's gothic elements have been retained in the movie though the narrative has been changed slightly. The movie, co-written and directed by Vítězslav Nezval, is about a 13-year-old girl and

her transition into adulthood. The story begins with her earrings getting stolen and the thief returning the earrings later angering his master, the constable. Valerie gets her first period that night and the narrative grows progressively absurd from here. A group of missionaries arrive in the village and Valerie starts to develop feeling for a young man named Orlik. A priest named Grecian, who had arrived with the missionaries, attempts to rape Valerie but he fails. Her Grandmother turns into a vampire after striking a deal with a mysterious figure called the constable. The constable is a figure that constantly threatens Valerie's safety and he eventually gets tricked into consuming a pearl that turns him into a polecat. The movie ends with Valerie reuniting with her parents and falling asleep on a bed in the middle of a forest.

The second movie explored in this project, *Belladonna of Sadness*, which is inspired by *Satanism and Witchcraft* by Jules Michelet. It was first published in Paris in 1862 and is a semi-historical, semi-imaginative work that explores witchcraft as a form of rebellion against existing dominant power structures. The movie was directed by Eiichi Yamamoto, produced by Mushi Productions and distributed by Nippon Herald Films. The movie revolves around Jeanne who was raped by the local feudal lord and his men on her wedding night because her husband couldn't pay the tax required to have their marriage acknowledged. She then strikes a deal with a devil in order to protect her husband but as the movie progresses the husband's role in her life decreases and she eventually makes a deal with the devil to satisfy her own desires. She becomes popular for her knowledge and kindness which upsets the local feudal lord and the clergy. She is eventually declared a witch because of her defiant attitude and burned at the stake.

This project explores how sartorial and chromatic choices serve as symbolic tools to reflect psychological and sexual transformation, subvert traditional gender roles and highlight themes of liberation, identity and power hierarchy. While these movies have been studied individually a side-by-side study focusing on the use of clothing and colours as symbols has not been done. Comparative studies on how fashion and colours are used in animated films and ordinary feature films are limited. Both films are relatively obscure with a cult following due to which studies on them are limited and this research paper seeks to fill this gap.

Chapter one of this paper deals with the theoretical framework used to analyze the movies. It provides a brief overview of Roland Barthes' theory of mythic analysis and Christian Metz's film language theory. Chapter two is a detailed analysis of the movie *Valerie and her week of wonders* and chapter three is an analysis of *Belladonna of Sadness*. The concluding chapter includes a comparative study of the two movies and summary of the symbolisms used in the movie.

Chapter 1

Connotations and Denotations: Myth or Language

There are two broad categories that can be used in film analysis, poetics and hermeneutics. Poetics is modeled on linguistics and focuses more on form and structure. This approach focuses on the question of how a certain meaning is achieved and communicated. Hermeneutics on the other hand comes from the field of law and religion. It focuses on unearthing deeper meanings hidden within a text and has more to do with interpreting an artwork. This method tried to find the answer to the question, what does this mean? Rather than the question, how is this constructed in a manner that would have this effect on the audience? The poetics approach can be attributed to film theorists like Christian Metz who were inspired by Ferdinand De Saussure. Hermeneutics draws from the theories of C. S Pierce and Roland Barthes. This project is an attempt to blend both these approaches when analysing how colour and fashion bring forth several layers of meaning within two particular movies; *Valerie* and *Her Week of Wonders* directed by Jaromil Jireš and *Belladonna of Sadness* directed by Eiichi Yamamoto.

This approach relied heavily on the theories of semiotics. The word semiotics is derived from the Greek word “*sēmeiotikos*” meaning “of signs”. It can be defined as the study of signs and symbols and their application and interpretation. It deals with how things we see and hear come to have meanings and how they represent certain ideas. The origin of semiotics is attributed to two key figures, French linguist Ferdinand de Saussure and American philosopher C. S Pierce. Saussure introduced the concept of semiology which deals with language and its relation to other sign systems and focuses on the

mental sphere. On the other hand, semiotics deals with how meaning is created through symbolic systems of communication and considers the relationship between the natural environment and the human conscience.

Later Roland Barthes contributed to this field with his work *Mythologies* in which he explores the semiotics of culture. Saussure studied denotative meaning expressed by signs and Barthes focused on the connotative meanings expressed by signs. Denotation can be considered the first order of signification and refers to the literal and fixed meaning of a sign. Connotation on the other hand digs deeper into the meaning of a sign and looks for the cultural meaning. For example, the denotative meaning of a red rose is that it is a flower and the connotative meaning could be passion or love. The area of Barthes' study in the last chapter of his book *Mythologies* titled "Myth Today" goes beyond denotation and soft connotation. He digs deeper into mythic signification.

The concept of a myth can be explained in two ways. Firstly, they are stories that help to explain the world and communicate certain messages. These stories often express dominant ideologies. Secondly, myths are not natural, they are manmade and are unique to certain cultures and at certain points of time. Myths often explain things that we think of as natural. According to Barthes "Myth does not deny things, on the contrary, its function is to talk about them; simply, it purifies them, it makes them innocent, it gives them a natural and eternal justification, it gives them a clarity which is not that of an explanation but that of a statement of fact." (Barthes 143)

Using this idea of myth Barthes attempts to answer the question of what associations we tend to have with ordinary objects of popular culture. Saussure explains

“concepts are purely differential and defined not by their positive content but negatively by their relations with the other terms of the system. Their most precise characteristic is in being what the others are not.” (Saussure 117) A Barthes-style mythic analysis when done with this concept in mind would yield the different ideologies hidden within a symbol. For example, in several cultures, wine is considered a women’s drink while beer men’s drink. A deeper analysis will reveal the predominant association of males with drinking culture. According to Barthes, this association is not natural though it is made to seem natural. For him, myth supports certain ideologies by taking certain social realities outside the arena of political debate.

On the other end of the spectrum of film analysis, we have Christian Metz who considers film as a language. In his work *Film Language: A Semiotics of Film Theory* he explores how narrative films create units of meaning. Previously soviet montage film theorists have thought of film as a language system or have striven to structure films like a language. Language, following the structuralist manner of thought, can be considered a self-contained system of meaning and Metz establishes his opinion that film is not a self-contained system of meaning hence it is not a language system. His reasoning behind this is that the smallest unit of film, a shot, is intended for the audience to see. For example, if there is a shot of a flower then it does not equate to the word ‘flower’ it equates to the phrase ‘here is a flower’ because the director shot it with the intention of having the audience see the flower. “The shot is therefore not comparable to the word in a lexicon; rather it resembles a complete statement.” (Metz, 100)

According to Metz cinema may not be a language system but it is a language. He clarifies that film does construct meaning through a set of codes that operate in

succession but not in the way English, French or Hindi is a language. Metz further elaborates, “Whether language or art, the image discourse is an open system, and it is not easily codified, with its non-discrete basic units (the images), its intelligibility (which is too natural), its lack of distance between the significate and the signifier. Whether art or language, the composed film is an even more open system, with its whole sections of meaning directly conveyed to the audience.” (Metz, 59)

He clarifies that film is a language because editing forms signification along “syntagmatic chains.” Syntagma refers to something that denotes the relationship between two or more linguistic units that are used sequentially to form a structure. Metz believes that signification in films operates syntagmatically and not paradigmatically. When analyzing a film using his method one would have to categorize cinematic sequences into syntagmas and analyze their function. This Metzian concept is called, in his own terms the “grandesyntagmatic” and he includes six main syntagmatic categories; “autonomous shot, the scene, the sequence, the descriptive syntagma, the alternating syntagma (including three subcategories: alternate, alternating, and parallel), and the frequentative syntagma (also with three subtypes: full frequentative, "bracket" frequentative, and semi frequentative).”(Metz 121)

Chapter 2

Decoding Fashion: Semiotics of Clothing Based on Colour

The narrative of *Valerie and Her Week of Wonders* defies conventional linearity and unities embracing a dream-like sequence. From start to finish the movie is wrought with various symbols and uses autonomous shots to create the dreamy atmosphere. The movie makes use of clothing, colours and jewellery as signifiers that contribute to the overall theme of the movie. The movie depicts Valerie's rite of passage into adulthood and the societal pressure she has to face after she is deemed a woman. The first two to three minutes of the movie consist of several disjointed autonomous shots that introduce us to key symbols and are highly poetic shots. Shots like that of Valerie tying her hair with a white ribbon, a close-up of her bell-shaped earrings and her holding a dove are all symbolic of purity and innocence. White is a colour that is constantly associated with purity, peace and innocence in various cultures. It reinforces the traditional notion of purity and virginity associated with young girls. In Czech culture white clothes are worn by babies, young women and brides to symbolize purity and virtue.

In the 1960s and 70s Czech fashion was heavily influenced by Western Europe. The hippie look, disco and punk fashion were in vogue during the period and a trend of reviving Victorian and gothic fashion was also going around. The movie, released during this period, blurs the historic accuracy of fashion. The type of costumes used in the movie helps to place the movie outside a specific time period while simultaneously evoking several historical and cultural influences. The off-shoulder lace dress that Valerie wears in the introductory shot of the movie is the best example of how various eras of fashion in

Czechia are combined into one. The high–low skirt pattern of the dress is indicative of contemporary influences while the simple, flowing white fabric resembles historic Czech and Slavic peasant clothing. Another intricate detail that is influenced by Czech fashion is the repeated use of lace. Lace-making is a century-old practice that blends European influence with local styles. The lace patterns are often influenced by folklore motives and the traditional Czech and Moravian costumes make use of lace, especially for the aprons, collars and blouses. Laces were later incorporated into bohemian and hippie fashion and remain popular even today.

Traditionally, in Czech culture, lace was associated with femininity and elegance and was often incorporated into women's clothing, wedding veils and ceremonial garments. They were also used to decorate church altars and curtains. Valerie's dresses often include lace works with floral motives giving her a delicate feminine look, even the curtains in her room are made of lace with floral patterns. Flowers are an important part of Czech culture especially because the culture is a blend of paganism and Christianity. They are significant Czech folk motifs for reasons that are rooted in the country's history, culture and environment. In Czech folklore, they often symbolize love, beauty and proximity to nature. They also have ritualistic significance and stand for fertility, change and growth. The use of floral patterns in embroidery and lace works reflects the aesthetics and values of rural life.

Flowers are not just used as motifs on Valerie's clothes in the movie they are also used as metaphors for innocence, transformation and purity in several scenes throughout the movie, for instance, in one of the opening shots of the movie Valerie is depicted swimming in a pool of clear water with several types of flowers including white water

lily and daisy that stand for innocence and purity, These flowers are also associated with qualities like purity, innocence and fertility that are often viewed of feminine. Another key scene in the movie is that of blood dripping onto a daisy as it foreshadows Valerie's transformation and is a metaphor for her getting her first period. The daisy is considered to be a symbol of purity and innocence and the drops of red blood falling onto a daisy may be analyzed as a symbol of tainted innocence. The arrival of a girl's period, in several cultures, is viewed as the marker for the end of girlhood and the beginning of womanhood.



Fig.1. *Valeria and Her Week of Wonders* (8:57,13:27, 6:01)

Following this scene, Valarie, who usually wears white, is portrayed wearing a simple black dress with a white lace collar as she breaks the news to her grandmother. The black dress acts as a mythic signifier as it marks a deeper transformation in her identity. Her black clothes which stand in contrast to her grandmother's pure white clothes and white dining hall draws attention to the change in Valerie. It marks her rite of passage into womanhood and is indicative of her sexual awakening. In the scene that

follows Valerie carries a white dress with a black lace collar into a birdcage and hangs it on the swing in the middle of the birdcage. Birdcage in literature has always symbolized entrapment and oppression. Here the cage may symbolize the social oppression and the white dress may symbolize the expectations of the society when it comes to women. The scene overall suggests restriction of freedom however, Valerie does not confirm these expectations completely. Through the gaps in the cage, she observes a couple making out in contrast to the nuns who look away from the scene and mumble prayers as they pass by. The black net on the white dress may symbolize her curiosity or rebellious streak. It may also be symbolic of impending danger or a foreshadowing of a threat to her identity.



Fig.2. *Valeria and Her Week of Wonders* (14:07, 15:17, 15:36)

In another scene, Valerie enters a church for mass and she is the only girl wearing an all-black dress. She stands out in a crowd of girls wearing all white indicating that she is now different from the other girls her age who are yet to transition into adulthood. The

other people in black include the nuns, the flower girl, the priest and the constable. The nuns' habits are white but they wear a black veil which may be due to the fact that the veils worn by catholic nuns are usually black. The only other girl wearing black is a flower girl who reappears several times throughout the movie. She is portrayed wearing a white dress with a black shawl draped around her shoulder. This may indicate premature maturity or adult-like knowledge or awareness despite being a young girl who has not come of age or gotten her period.



. Fig.3. *Valeria and Her Week of Wonders* (16:29)

The two key male figures in this scene are both portrayed wearing pure black robes. The priest wears a cassock and marks his status as a clergyman. The other male figure is the constable who appears wearing black robes, with his face also painted black which may symbolize the corruption of the church which is a minor theme in the movie. The constable is a figure that wears black throughout the movie and has a fluid identity. He represents the various forces of oppression in a society especially oppression from different types of men that play a part in a woman's life. He appears as a lover, a father, a law enforcer and a religious figure. In all his appearances he wears flowing black attire.

In Western iconography, black is often worn by those in power like judges, priests and the police. The colour represents power, authority and control and has been linked to authoritarian structures in the movie. The black, excessively flowing clothing way also be considered a symbol of concealed corruption and unifies his ever-changing role as a single symbol of oppressive masculinity. They can therefore be considered more of an idea than a person. He represents the ways in which a patriarchal society attempts to control, manipulate and oppress women.

On the other hand, we have Orlik who subverts the traditional idea of masculinity. He wears light shades and loose shirts and often acts as Valerie's protector and ally. He is, however, unreliable as he himself is manipulated into harming Valerie. His appearance and clothing link him to the traditional archetype of a prince-like figure and protective brotherly spirit. There are times, however, when Valerie is the one to release Orlik from chains subverting the narrative of the prince saving the princess.

Clothing is once again used to portray a woman's changing nature in the scene where Valerie's grandmother, Elsa, meets the constable who is also her lover and dances with him. When we are introduced to her, Elsa wears a pure white dress but in the scene of her meeting her lover, she is portrayed wearing a grey suggesting moral ambiguity. She is conflicted over her loyalty to Valerie and her desire to please her lover who demands the property that Valerie is supposed to receive. In the scene that follows Valerie appears in a grey dress while Elsa appears in a black dress for a luncheon with the priest. The colour grey once again stands for ambiguity. When contrasted with the black dress she wore in the previous scenes the dress appears muted or even subdued. This change may indicate the influence external forces have on her partially developed and developing

identity. It may also metaphorically represent a state of in-betweenness, not a young girl anymore but not a complete adult either. This scene also represents the power dynamics between Valerie, her grandmother and the priest. The priest sits at the head of the table and holds more authority. He offers wine to Valerie as he decides that she is old enough to drink it however she also asks for her grandmother's permission before accepting the drink. Elsa has the power to influence Valerie's decisions as her guardian but is lower in rank than the priest so she could only instruct Valerie to drink from a smaller glass. Valerie's sartorial choice in this scene may also indicate how her agency is overshadowed by authoritative figures.

Grandmother Elsa, in this scene, shifts from wearing white and grey clothes to black attire in this scene. Black is associated with corruption, authority and oppression throughout the movie and this shift in her colour pallet indicates her alignment with such forces. It also represents the failure of older women to protect the younger generation as they themselves are corrupted by patriarchal ideas. The grandmother's sartorial choice indicates the change in her psyche as she is corrupted by male manipulators. She goes from a maternal figure wearing all white, to a woman grabbed in grey who is in love with a manipulative man and finally appears in a completely black dress that indicates that the male influence in her life has completely corrupted her, turning her against her own granddaughter. In the scene following the luncheon, we see the grandmother running away after covering her head with a black veil. The black dress and veil are traditionally associated with mourning and these could be a symbol of Elsa mourning the death of her previous self.

Elsa is both a victim and reinforcer of the patriarchy. She represents the women of the older generation who have to sacrifice other women to protect themselves. She also represents the impact of systemic oppression. In addition, the identity of Elsa and Valerie's mother are blurred with both roles being played by the same actor. It is hinted at the beginning of the movie that Valerie's mother has passed away but she does appear later. The narrative seems to hint that the identity of Valerie's mother is also part of the Grandmother's identity which could also signify generational trauma passed down from mother to daughter.

In the scenes that follow the luncheon with the priest, Valerie returns to wearing white however the meaning of her white attire shifts. The delicate white lace dress Valerie is depicted in when the priest attempts to rape her represents her virginity and her partially nude state represents her vulnerability. Earlier in the movie Valerie's white clothes represented a childlike innocence and purity based on naivety however following this incident it takes on a new meaning. White comes to symbolize resilience and Valerie's ability to remain pure despite corrupt forces attempting to manipulate her. Valerie is portrayed running across a grass field wearing a tent dress appearing carefree and almost ethereal. She becomes a symbol of uncorrupted femininity. Earlier in the film, white may have represented passivity but halfway through the movie, it becomes a colour of defiance. While the white wedding dress that Hedvika wears symbolizes patriarchal control and a forced initiation into adulthood, Valerie's flowy white dress represents her rejection of forced maturity and the maintenance of her individuality. Her white dress transforms her into a mythic figure of untouchable innocence and female resistance.

Valerie's next phase of transformation is marked by her appearing in a lavender dress after she and Orlik find Elsa's body in a coffin. Valerie faints from sadness upon finding her Grandmother's body but in the scene that follows, she appears calm and collected as she ties her hair up with a lavender ribbon. This scene can be contrasted with the scene of Valerie tying her hair up with a white ribbon in the introductory shots of the movie. The lavender ribbon can be considered a sign of a new beginning and of her lost naivety, however, she still retains her innocence, unlike her grandmother who was tainted by the ideologies imposed upon her by the patriarchy. The lavender dress she wears in this descriptive syntagma reflects a phase of transition. Like the colour grey, lavender is a muted shade which is a mix of white and purple. It symbolizes a state of in-betweens but unlike grey, there is no hint of being tainted by manipulation and conspiracies. It expresses that Valerie is not a victim but neither is she victorious heroine, it reflects that she is still on the path to fully understanding and consolidating her identity as a female in an oppressive society.

The scene of Valerie and Orlik putting the priest's dead body in a coffin and finding Elsa's dead body in another coffin symbolizes closure, the death of these two characters mark the end of a violent chapter. It signifies the collapse of an oppressive order and Valerie appearing in a light-coloured dress that isn't completely white signals a new beginning in which she hasn't completely detached herself from the past but she is moving on. Elsa also reappears after regaining her youth claiming that she is Rusovláška, Valerie's cousin. Her resurrection hints at a new threat as well as the cyclical nature of oppression and change.

The colour lavender is based on the flower of the same name which is used in funeral bouquets that are used to honour those who have passed away on All Souls Day. The flowers used in these bouquets, including lavender, symbolize love, admiration, death, and forgiveness. These flowers are popular due to their durability and symbolize eternity. Thus, the lavender dress can be considered as a symbol of mourning, however, traditionally mourning is associated with black clothes and Valarie's choice of lavender marks a break from tradition and unlike black, lavender has a hopeful and gentle quality. It can also symbolize forgiveness and hints that Valarie understands the nature of systemic oppression and why her grandmother would try to manipulate her. This provides hope for the next generation as a generation of women who would support each other.



. Fig.4. *Valeria and Her Week of Wonders* (38:11, 44:59, 39:02, 38:85)

In contrast to Valarie's simple lavender dress, Rusovláška appears in an attire that is reminiscent of Victorian men's fashion. She appears wearing a black suit jacket, white lace cravat, black Knickerbockers, black lace gloves and formal leather shoes evoking

militaristic and androgynous elements. Black throughout the movie represents power, secrecy and control. It gives Rusovláška a threatening presence, creating a sense of unease. Her outfit places her outside the traditional bounds of femininity and she represents forbidden knowledge and a morally questionable form of authority and power. This manner of Rusovláška's portrayal reinforces the patriarchal narrative that women who embrace more masculine characteristics are unreliable and undesirable. By equating masculine clothing with deception and moral ambiguity the movie reinforces binary gender politics and pushes forth the idea that women who embrace elements of masculinity are untrustworthy, unnatural and threatening. Rusovláška's costume in this scene encodes patriarchy's fear of women who do not conform to gender norms.

It is also important to note that in this scene Valerie also wears leather riding boots that are typically worn by men unlike in previous scenes in which she is either barefoot or wearing Mary Janes. This hints that a slight break from tradition is acceptable however a complete subversion of tradition is not favorable. Valerie is portrayed in a positive light because she only wears one masculine coded item unlike Rusovláška who completely breaks away from what is expected of a "good woman". This could also represent how gradual changes or one small change at a time is easier to accept than a sudden change that would be viewed as nothing but a threat by any social order.

A key scene that places Rusovláška in the tradition of the Femme Fatale is the one in which she stands over the fallen constable in a domineering fashion and kicks him. In this scene, she wears a white lace dress paired with black stockings and gloves. Contrary to her previous outfit this one is more feminine however it is different from Valerie's white flowy dresses that exude not just femininity but also an ethereal innocence.

Rusovláška's lace dress is short with a deep neckline and paired with stockings and gloves painting a picture of seduction. Her outfit paired with her action of kicking the constable makes her seem both seductive and dangerous, the type of woman who operates outside the bounds of patriarchy and perceived a threatening presence to the existing order. The lace dress symbolizes delicate femininity and its colour, white, is often associated, with innocence and purity, however Rusovláška's aggressive actions contradict these ideas.

In this scene, Rusovláška reverses the existing power dynamic and instead of confirming to the patriarchal idea of a passive woman she takes control but this is not portrayed in a positive light. Her portrayal as violent and vindictive reinforces patriarchal anxieties about women who do not conform to the ideal of femininity propounded by patriarchy. This helps us understand the limits of the pro-feminist agenda of 1970s Czechoslovakia. The struggles that women faced due to men's dominant position in a patriarchal society are acknowledged and the movie criticizes the various forms of violence against women however, the movie also reinforces the idea that only women who exhibit certain characteristics are acceptable. It reinforces the idea that women who are ambitious, seductive or willful are corrupt equating them to men who use violence to oppress women.

In contrast to Rusovláška, Valerie attempts to help the constable paint her as caring, empathetic and forgiving which are all qualities associated with traditional notions of femininity. Valerie's strength lies in her unchanging nature and her refusal to forsake these qualities despite being betrayed by authoritative figures around her. She refuses to compromise her identity based on external factors which is established by the

fact that at the end of the movie she returns to wearing her simple white nightdress. The constable, who is a symbol of patriarchal power, is portrayed as a helpless figure under Rusovláška but soon regains power with Valerie's help and sexually harasses her. The quick regaining of power through sexual violence shows that patriarchal power is never truly dismantled; it may weaken momentarily but quickly reasserts itself. Valerie does not succumb to the violence but fights back and escapes. This pushes the message that women like Rusovláška are dangerous however women like Valerie who conform to traditional ideals of femininity are constantly under the threat of male control and violence.

Another key scene that uses clothing to depict transformation and criticize oppressive patriarchal systems would be that of Valerie meeting up with Hedvika and then spending the night with her after comforting her. Hedvika wears a long black dress in this scene which sharply contrasts with the white walls, curtains and bed sheet of her room and Valerie's pale lavender dress. Her body language conveys despair, distress and shame and the black dress she wears embodies her mixed negative emotions. The black dress also symbolizes her traumatic experience and the loss of innocence. Her attire can be interpreted as a sign of her mourning for her former self.

This scene of Hedvika's intimate night with Valerie can be contrasted with that of her wedding night. For her wedding, she wore a traditional white wedding gown that symbolizes virginity and innocence in several cultures including Czech culture. On a deeper connotative level, it also symbolizes the societal expectations imposed upon women through the institution of marriage. Within the framework of this movie, purity is an imposed quality and not natural, and marriage is portrayed as a performance that one

is forced to act in rather than a personal choice. This fact is highlighted by the fact that Hedvika was passive and detached while others prepared her for her wedding to a man several times her age and her dejected tears at the end of her wedding banquet suggest that a marriage is not necessarily an auspicious occasion for a woman but a rite of submission some. The surreal atmosphere of the wedding, which is created using autonomous shots, subverts the fairy-tale notion of happily ever after following a wedding. Clothing is once again used in the shot of Hadvika placed on the wall in the same position Christ was nailed to the cross to metaphorically represent Hedvika's situation. The decoration surrounding her symbolizes the festive atmosphere around her while the black veil represents mourning for her lost freedom and grief over her predicament. The white cloth wrapped around her torso, combined with the allusion to crucifixion represents her vulnerable position and self-sacrifice to satisfy societal expectations.



Fig.5. *Valeria and Her Week of Wonders* (32:59, 32:38, 55:01, 54:57)

In addition to this, Hedvika's chaotic wedding night is in stark contrast to the peaceful night she spends with Valerie. Their friendship takes a homoerotic turn, deviating from the heterosexual norms of society. While Hedvika's marriage was something she did not choose for herself, she initiates a kiss with Valerie and her body language expresses her willingness, unlike her marriage night during which she submits to her husband. This scene also hints that one of the reasons for Hedvika's dismay over her marriage may be her queer identity after all, despite the fact that homosexuality was decriminalized in 1962 it remained taboo and stigmatized. It is also important to note that after Valerie comforts her, Hedvika changes into a simple white nightgown. This change in clothing symbolizes the reclamation of freedom and identity. This change along with her body language suggests that Hedvika has broken away from the societal norms that bind her. Her night with Valerie in which the two girls lay in bed, physically close, comforting each other, with Hedvika covered by a white sheet and Valerie in her white nightdress is a moment that exudes tenderness. Here female intimacy becomes a space for escape and safety from mandatory heterosexual relationships. This moment is sadly fleeting for Valerie.

In the Scene that follows, the priest who had miraculously resurrected addresses a crowd of people wearing all white except for a cap which is black. He accuses Valerie of seducing him and orders for her to be burned at the stake. This scene is a reference to the witch trials that were conducted in several Czech states like Moravia and Bohemia in the seventeenth century AD. Many of the women who were burnt at the stake were women with knowledge about herbal remedies, midwives or women who rebelled against patriarchal norms. These public executions served as a warning to other women and were

a means to control female autonomy and sexuality. The priest's white garments symbolize the saying wolf in sheep's clothing. His attire paired with the black cap connotes deception as he falsely accuses Valerie of a crime she did not commit and sentences her after a quick trial with no proof. After her sentencing, Valerie's lavender dress is replaced with her white nightdress which she is portrayed wearing when she is in a vulnerable position. She appears in this dress when she compares her body with that of other women, when the priest assaults her and when she is in bed with Hedvika. It symbolizes her insecurities, helplessness, and vulnerability depending on the scene. Her white dress also elevates her to the position of a Christ-like martyr.



Fig.6. *Valeria and Her Week of Wonders*(56:58, 57:57, 58:19, 59:08)

Despite being in a vulnerable position after being tied to a stake on a pyre, Valerie does not passively accept her fate. She mocks the priest and the band. This scene may have been inspired by the execution of John Hus who was a catholic priest who spoke out

against the corrupt practices of the church. He was burnt at the stake for heresy on 6 July 1415 following which the locals and his followers protested and this eventually led to the Hussite war. Jan Hus was considered a figure who stood against corruption and became a symbol of struggle against systemic oppression. Similarly, Valerie is presented as someone who suffers from social and religious persecution.

The Crowd, in this sequence of shots, is divided into five groups. The first group consists of the priest and other men dressed in black with their faces covered with black cloth. The black uniforms of the executioners represent an oppressive regime which may be the communist regime or the church's oppression and persecution of women throughout history. The faceless presence of the men in black who seem to mindlessly follow orders contrasts with the individuality of Valerie. The second group consists of nuns who passively follow the priest. The third group consists of young girls, all wearing white similar to Valerie. The public execution serves as a warning to these young girls who may be the next victim of their persecution if they go against the people in power.

The fourth group is a band of musicians playing a festive melody. Their presence clashes with the grave situation of an execution. They also represent the manner in which punishment is turned into a spectacle under authoritative powers. These musicians who are dressed in varying shades of brown and gray seem out of place and add to the absurd and surreal atmosphere of the movie. Lastly, the fifth group consists of people who are all dressed in black and watch the execution from a distance. A close-up autonomous shot of an old lady gleefully laughing is also added to underscore the way in which the death of a person is turned into a gruesome spectacle for people to enjoy. This shot also stands as a testament to the role the women belonging to a generation play in the oppression of

young girls. The gleeful giggle of the old lady coupled with the festive music by a band turns Valerie's execution into a carnivalesque spectacle. The black attire worn by the people watching from afar symbolizes their lack of empathy for female suffering. The distance from which they watch the execution combined with their black attire signifies detachment and the dark side of humanity. Overall, this scene explores how female or human suffering is weaponized and used as a means to control the masses through fear.



Fig.7. *Valeria and Her Week of Wonders*(58:47)

Once Valerie escapes from the pyre and turns the constable into a weasel she returns to her room and takes off her nightdress then falls asleep naked while hugging herself. Removing the white dress symbolizes the rejection of an imposed identity. The white dress symbolizes childhood and cultural myths of purity. In her room she is alone and in control of her own body which contrasts with the execution scene. The notion that nudity is vulnerability is subverted in this scene. A black dress is hung in her room but she does not put it on, opting instead to be naked. Her nudity here is not sexualized instead it represents her natural state untouched by opinions norms and customs. It also represents rebirth and a rejection of the various roles society imposes on her. In several

European cultures including Czech culture a woman's life is mapped as three stages; maiden marked by white clothing, wife marked by colourful clothes and widow marked by black clothes. By taking off her white dress and not wearing the black dress hung on her wall Valerie symbolically refuses to conform to any of these stages and leaves her in a state of ambiguous independence.



Fig.8. *Valeria and Her Week of Wonders* (1:05:11, 7:30, 1:05:22, 7:35)

The next scene is a reversal of the breakfast scene at the beginning of the movie. This parallel Syntegra adds a new layer of meaning to the breakfast scene at the beginning of the movie in which Valerie appears in a black dress. In this scene, despite her actions being the same, her clothing and attitude are different. She had a submissive demeanour while interacting with her grandmother in the former scene but in this scene, she appears more assertive and confident. Additionally, Elsa who had worn all white in the first breakfast scene appears in a black dress. Valerie's return to white clothes now marks rebirth and spiritual transcendence. It is symbolic of her journey and no longer

symbolizes, childlike purity, innocence, vulnerability or sacrifice. On the flip side it also represent how it is hard to escape from the expectations imposed on women by society is hard to escape. Even if she gets to experience a brief moment of autonomy within her room she still has to return to playing a specific role in order to survive.

In the breakfast scene at the beginning of the movie, Elsa wears white which symbolizes her maternal authority over Valerie and in the breakfast scene at the end of the movie she appears in black. Valerie, who wore black in the initial scene, appears wearing white in this scene representing reclamation of autonomy and the power that white signifies throughout the movie. It may also represent the consolidation of both identities. The black is a colour that is often used to signify death and with that in mind, Elsa wearing black may signify that she is nearing her death. Her death in the scene that follows also signifies the fact that all life comes to an end and no amount of power or authority would help one escape one's fate. This scene also blurs the boundary between what is real and unreal by mirroring the first breakfast scene but proceeding in a different manner. When asked about the Christian missionaries visiting their town Valerie's grandmother does not seem to know about such a group of missionaries. This prompts the question of whether the sequence of events leading up to this scene was a dream.

On her deathbed, Elsa is once again portrayed wearing all white. She confesses that Valerie's mother is still alive and that she had driven her out of the house due to jealousy. Her confession and return to wearing white evoke the Christian ideas of repentance through confession of sins. The black dress in the scene that follows represents her soul which is heavy with the burden that she carries and upon confessing everything to Valerie the burden is lifted and she finds peace and salvation. In the scene

that follows Valerie finally reunites with her parents and Elsa appears wearing a loose black dress covered by a black cape and a black veil. Here Elsa has a spectral presence, with her outfit adding an element of mystery to her presence. Her black robes in this scene do not symbolize authority and corruption like in preceding scenes; instead, they symbolize death and finality. Elsa and her daughter embrace in this scene symbolizing forgiveness and redemption, however, the black veil that both women wear serves as a reminder that what has been forgiven may not be forgotten. The past cannot be changed and both Valerie's mother and grandmother represent the past that cannot be changed or forgotten. Valerie represents the future generation of women who are not completely free of oppression. The white she wears in the scenes leading to the end of the movie represents a blank canvas.

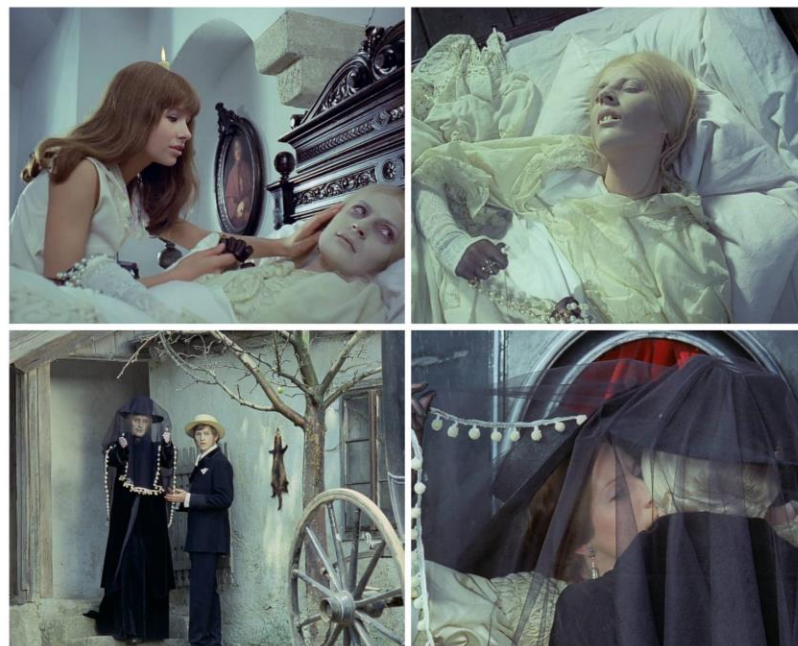


Fig.9. *Valeria and Her Week of Wonders* (1:07:52, 1:09:35, 1:11:06, 1:11:20)

The penultimate scene of the movie follows Valerie as she walks through a lakeside woods with several people beckoning her to join them. She eventually walks up

to her bed which is placed in the middle of a clearing and several people including major and minor characters in the movie circle around the bed as she falls asleep on the bed. Valerie, in this scene, once again appears in her nightdress. She is depicted as a wanderer who has not chosen any particular path in life. The people beckoning to her, some dressed in black, some white, some groups a mix of both, represent various identities and paths that Valerie can opt for in life. However, Valerie chooses none of these paths which symbolizes her rejection of the existing paths that are prescribed by society. Her falling asleep on her white bed evokes a sense of peace. She creates a place for herself in society despite the hardships she has to face due to the existing order. She also symbolizes a mysterious future in which one cannot predict the direction that women's rights movements will take. The ending also leaves the question of whether Valerie has escaped the cycle of oppression and imposed identity or if she is just another version of the women before her.



Fig.10. *Valeria and Her Week of Wonders* (1:12:59, 1:13:16, 1:14:08, 1:14:38, 1:15:59, 1:16:26)

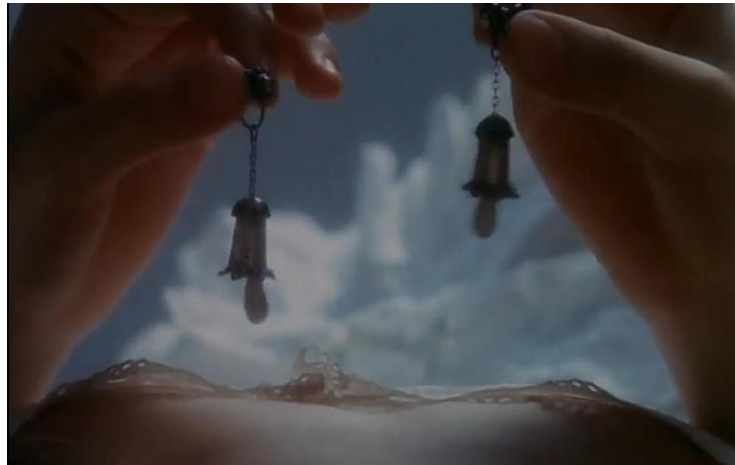


Fig.11. *Valeria and Her Week of Wonders* (2:36)

Valerie's earring is another key symbol in this movie. It was something that she inherited from her mother and eventually, she returned it to her mother. The earrings symbolize her agency, autonomy, virginity, purity, and generational burden in several scenes. Its bell shape is also symbolic of awakening. The earring being stolen represents a loss of control and agency due to external factors. The constable's constant attempts to steal the earring represent the constant threat to Valerie's agency and the fact that it is another man, Orlik, who seems to always return the earring suggests that women's autonomy is always at the mercy of men. When Valerie, voluntarily returns the earring to her mother she exercises her agency. In the final sequence of the movie, however, she appears wearing the earring once again symbolizing the cyclical nature of power, desire and loss.

Most of the young girls in the movie wear little to no makeup. Valerie's make-up includes light blue eye shadow evenly applied to her lids and a thin liner on her top lid, giving her a youthful yet innocent look. This look was a popular choice for heroines in several movies produced in the 1960s and 70s. The constable appears with a face painted

white or black to intensify his vicious appearance and Valerie's grandmother appears wearing a very pale foundation which is reminiscent of Victorian make-up practices. Her look adds to the gothic element of the story. Hedvika, following her marriage appears sporting thicker, winged liner and pale foundation to symbolically represent her loss of innocence and youth after being bitten by Elsa. Rusovláska, who represents the dark feminine, has her top lids lined thickly with light blue eye shadow applied evenly and her lower lids lined lightly in order to sharpen her eyes. To symbolize that Elsa has regained her youth she does not wear a pale ivory foundation as she does when she returns to being Valerie's grandmother.

The clothing, contrasting colours, make up and accessories used in the movie adds to the gothic, surreal atmosphere of the movie. The costumes used in the movie combined with chromatic contrasts play an important role in mapping Valerie's transformation throughout the movie. The movie is driven by visuals rather than dialogues and these visuals heavily draw from Czech folklore, Catholic beliefs and imagery, and cultural anxieties of the 1970s.

Chapter 3

Gender Politics, Colour, and Clothing: Witchcraft and Rebellion

The movie, *Belladonna of Sadness*, Unlike *Valerie and Her Week of Wonders* is an animated film. Not just the clothing but the entire colour scheme of the movie shifts with the protagonist, Jeanne's transformation. It is a highly experimental movie that blends both European and Japanese techniques of art and filmmaking. The film's animation technique is inspired by the Japanese scroll painting tradition (emakimono and ukiyo-e) and the European tradition of illuminated manuscripts. Most of the movie consists of hand-painted water-colour images with intricate details and uses the technique of animated tableaux to create a scroll effect instead of fluid animation. The movie has a lot in common with *Valerie and Her Week of Wonders* in terms of themes, imageries and its use of autonomous shots and descriptive syntagmas. The movie blends still image animation and limited camera movement with water-colour paintings and psychedelic visuals. The movie is thus a bold fusion of European aesthetics, Japanese art traditions and 1960s psychedelic art.

The movie begins with a descriptive syntagma, slowly panning across an illustration of a village, people holding flowers and decorations that help with world-building. This scene can be contrasted with the dark castle in the following shot. The castle is depicted as dark and looming using darker shades that grow lighter as it reaches the village at the base of a hill. The village exudes a pastoral, simple and cheerful aura while the castle at the top of the hill exudes a gloomy aura that seems to foreshadow the tragedy that is to befall Jeanne. In the first couple of scenes that revolve around Jeanne

and Jean's wedding, a patchwork of soft pastel shades is used to denote the cheerful atmosphere. The delicate colours however could also connote fragility and help create a dream-like atmosphere.



Fig.12. *Belladonna of Sadness* (4:13, 4:22)

Jeanne's simple white wedding dress is tied to ideas of female virginity, innocence and purity. The simple flowing gown enhances her femininity and makes her stand out especially in the dark castle when she visits the baron to have her marriage acknowledged. Her hair is left flowing and is painted a light shade of purple. This symbolizes her freedom and youthfulness. Her outfit and demeanour paint her as innocent and submissive, the traditional idea of an ideal wife. Jean on the other hand is portrayed in a simple brown tunic. The earthy tone of his attire combined with the lack of embellishments connotes his status as a peasant and confirms him to the everyman archetype.

In the court scene, the power difference and social hierarchy are highlighted using the difference in clothing. The baron's outfit consists of a plain black garment covered with a heavy cape with an orange to dark brown gradient. Compared to Jean's simple

brown tunic this double-layered outfit seems luxurious and connotes authority and wealth. The cape symbolically represents the feudal privileges the upper class enjoys. Similarly, the baroness' outfit seems to be inspired by the gowns worn by French aristocratic women during 1790. Her costume includes a simple black gown covered by a cloak, a red neck scarf and a structured hat. The outfit, her pale face dark-painted eyes and lips are reminiscent of Venetian carnival costumes. By using black and red the baroness' costume becomes a symbol of conformity. Her whitened face, red lips and thickly lined eyes combined with her costume, stands for wealth, detachment and superiority attained through manipulation. Her presence in this movie is similar to Elsa's presence in *Valerie and Her Week of Wonders*. Additionally, varying shades of black are used for the outfits worn by authoritative figures like court officials and the clergy. Just like in *Valerie and Her Week of Wonders*, black represents power and oppression additionally it adds a sense of gloom and danger.



Fig.13. *Belladonna of Sadness* (5:06, 5:22, 5:47)

The wedding scene represents the idealized myth of marriage with its light pastel hues, flowers and colourful geometric designs similar to the stained glass works found in European churches. The court scene that follows deconstructs this myth, revealing the political and economic powers at play behind the idea of marriage. The baron demands money worth ten milk cows as tax to have Jean and Jeanne's marriage acknowledged and legalized even though Jean states that he only has one cow. The baroness eventually grants the people working in the palace permission to rape Jeanne after the Baron "enjoys" her as payment to have their marriage acknowledged. The couple is not given much of a choice as Jean is forcefully removed from the castle.

White, in several cultures is also the colour of sacrifice. In Japanese culture, a young woman draped in white garments used to be buried alive before construction of buildings, dams or castles. Similarly in several European cultures virgins were sacrificed before war. Sacrifices before a new beginning was a part of several cultures and in the movie Jeanne is forced to sacrifice her body to begin her married life with the man she loves. Her white wedding dress thus comes to foreshadow her fate.

The sequences of shots leading up to the rape scene are a chaotic blend of black, white and red. These stark, chaotic illustrations that depict the long winding interior of the castle builds a sense of crisis within viewers. In the rape scene Jeanne's colourless, almost luminescent white body is contrasted sharply with black and red backgrounds. Rape is symbolized by her body being ripped apart with a red tear starting from between her legs. The blood that pours out of her turns to bats and covers the screen. Red here stands for blood, violence and pain. Bats are viewed as harbingers of death and decay in several cultures and in popular culture they are often linked to vampires, evil and the

supernatural. The red phallic shape tearing her body is a metaphoric representation of the physical and psychological impact of rape on Jeanne. It represents the fragmentation of Jeanne's psyche and her light hair which is painted dark in this scene represents her degrading emotional state.

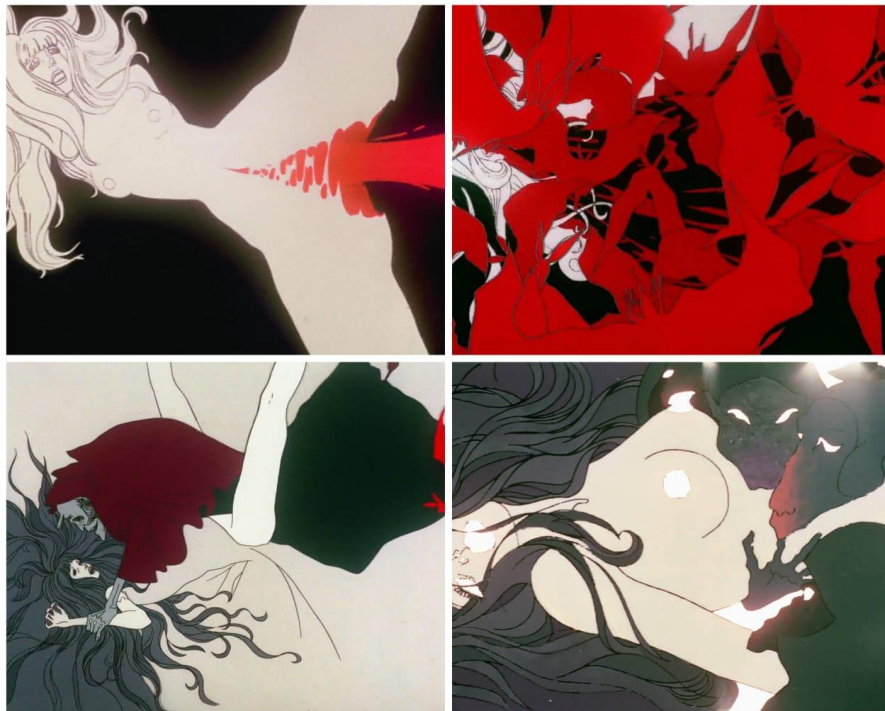


Fig.14. *Belladonna of Sadness* (8:06, 8:12, 8:16, 8:54)

Jeanne eventually stops struggling as if she has lost hope. The baron's men are depicted as faceless, black, monstrous figures wrapped around her pale body. These monstrous figures represent the dark side of humanity and reinforce the brutality of their actions. In this scene, Jeanne's body is used as a site to enforce feudal and patriarchal authority. She is dehumanized and violated based on the misogynistic idea that the feudal lords have the right to 'enjoy' her body. This scene is a pivotal point in the movie as it depicts how women's bodies become a site of power play. In the scene that follows Jeanne returns to her home, where Jean waits for her in the dark. She stands in the light,

her wedding dress now torn and tattered, blood trailing down her thigh. The light exposes Jeanne's suffering and to Jean, it highlights his failure to protect his lover. In contrast to the light is the darkness surrounding Jean representing his helplessness. His hair is white which is often linked to stress and his earthy brown outfit is replaced with a dull dark purple which adds to his melancholic aura. Jean's tattered dull clothes and the shadow surrounding him represent both his depressed state and the emasculation of lower-class men under the feudal system.



Fig.15. *Belladonna of Sadness* (9:31, 9:45, 10:20, 10:23)

In several patriarchal systems, rape is considered an attack on male honour rather than an attack on the woman herself. In Western and Christian mythology women who were raped were considered irreversibly tainted. Jean's attempt to strangle Jeanne reflects an internalization of this myth and the system of blaming the victim instead of the perpetrator for the rape. This also represents Jean's attempt at regaining control over

both, his masculinity and his marriage. His arms and body are painted black before he attempts to strangle Jeanne metaphorically representing his contamination under the feudal system. It also stands for the degradation and loss of the former self. This represents how ideas of hegemonic masculinity lead to violent tendencies in lower-class men who are suppressed by the system and fail to meet the expectations of an ideal man prescribed by the dominant class of society.

Jean's skin colour then shifts to a chaotic mix of grey, green, red and white symbolizing his internal conflict and collapse of his identity. It evokes a sense of instability and madness and highlights the collapse of male power among the people of lower classes forcing women like Jeanne to forge a path beyond social norms. The strangulation combined with the rape acts as a catalyst for Jeanne's first major transformation. Her hair, lips and eyelids are painted a shade of green called Caribbean Current (P460-7) evoking a sense of melancholy. Eventually her colour pallet changes to more earthy brown shades. Her hair, makeup and clothes which were vibrant and lighter in her wedding scene are now a dull brown reinforcing her emotional desolation. Her colour pallet goes back to being lighter and vibrant after her encounter with the devil which symbolizes her reclamation of her agency.

The devil plays an important role in shaping Jeanne's identity and her transformation throughout the movie. During her first encounter with the devil, he is white which could symbolize deception or it could be considered a subversion of traditional good versus evil colour coding. The devil may also be considered a visual metaphor for Jeanne's suppressed desire or in psychoanalytic terms, he symbolizes her id. The initial white appearance of the devil may connote the vague, uncertain nature of her

desire which grows as she interacts with the devil. As her desire grows the devil grows too and changes to red. Here, the red represents Jeanne's repressed desires that are both sexual and existential. The devil's growth on the other hand mirrors not just her growing desire for agency and power but also her willingness to be defiant. Her desire to be personified as a devil is also ironic and alludes to the myth of the monstrous feminine. It also alludes to the idea of sexual desire, especially for women, being a sin.



Fig.16. *Belladonna of Sadness* (10:42, 13:40, 14:21, 14:38)

Patriarchy is very particular about controlling a woman's sexuality and in an attempt to deconstruct this idea the movie links Jeanne's transformation with her sexual awakening. Following her first encounter with the devil she undergoes a sexual awakening after which she gains power and prestige in society by improving her economic position. She appears in a pink dress and her hair returns to being a lighter shade. Her bright pink dress and blonde hair can be contrasted with her previous dull brown hair and clothes. Pink is a colour that is often linked with traditional notions of

femininity however the design of her dress makes her appear more seductive. Her dress is flowy and has a slit that exposes her leg which depicts a subtle break from tradition. Her outfit is symbolic of Jeanne breaking away from the traditional expectations of women, especially married women. By going to work and earning money in order to support her husband Jeanne subverts the traditional notion of the husband being the breadwinner of the family.



Fig.17. *Belladonna of Sadness* (17:32, 18:24, 18:53, 19:28)

After Jean is appointed as the town tax collector with Jeanne's help he appears wearing a brighter shade of purple and a red cap. In the scene following Jeanne's rape, he appeared clothed in a darker, dull purple symbolizing his melancholy and depression however after being appointed as the town tax collector he appears wearing a lighter shade of purple which stands for authority and power. Mixing in of black helps to denote negative emotions. The red hat he wears seems to be inspired by the liberty cap which

had become a popular symbol of freedom and the pursuit of liberty during the French Revolution. The origin of the cap may be traced to the Roman ‘pileus’ which was a cap given to liberated slaves. Here the cap symbolizes a form of limited liberty granted to Jean by those in power. The cap also symbolizes authority, though limited.



Fig.18. *Belladonna of Sadness* (22:46, 22:48, 22:56, 26:22)

Jeanne's third major transformation takes place after another tragic incident. Jean having failed to collect enough money from the people as the Baron prepares for war has his left hand cut off as punishment. Following this Jean appears in dark blue attire which represents his sorrow. He takes to drinking and often relives his frustration by abusing his wife. Jeanne is portrayed in an orange and black striped dress in this scene. This outfit which is similar to the uniforms used in prisons established Jeanne as a prisoner of her marriage and the oppressive feudal system. She once again undergoes a spiritual and emotional transformation after encountering the devil a second time in her depressed state. Her transformation this time is marked by her hair turning a light shade of brown,

her lips taking on a light pink hue and her eye shadow becoming a dark blue shade. She appears more seductive and her bright appearance is contrasted with Jean's who is painted using varying shades of grey. Her features become more defined and sharp. In the illustrations that follow Jeanne appears in a light green dress and cape, her eyes are accentuated with dark blue eye-shadow and light blonde hair. This transformation is accompanied by financial improvement. She symbolizes the rising middle class who earn a higher position in society through money.

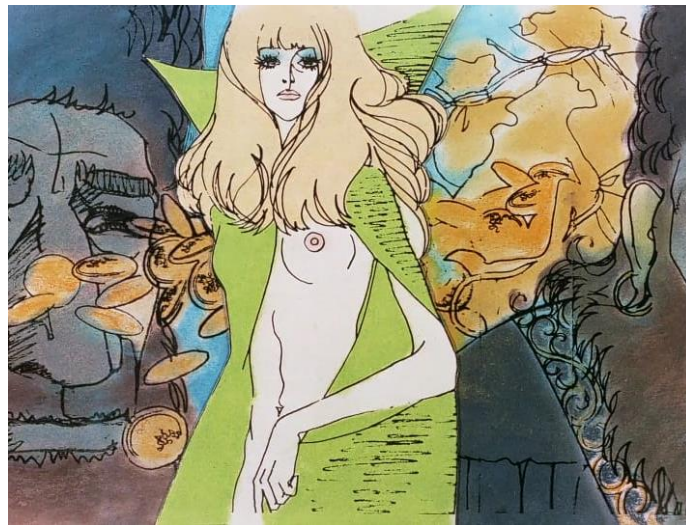


Fig.19. *Belladonna of Sadness* (28:53)

Jeanne, following her third encounter with the devil, learns to weaponize her beauty to earn money, respect and power. Her beauty, enhanced by her outfit, allows her to effectively harness “erotic capital.” (Catherine Hakim) Green is associated with power in movies but the colour could also be seen as a symbol of renewal. The cloak is also a piece of clothing that is associated with power in the movie as only those in power are portrayed with cloaks within the movie. Jeanne's cloak however is a light shade of green which is in contrast to the baron and baroness' dark cloaks. This difference highlights how the power held by the feudal aristocrats is oppressive and based on fear and control

while the power Jeanne holds is based on earned respect and has little to do with oppressing others.

Her influence on the people of the town ends up upsetting the baroness who with the baron's support orders for her cloak and clothes to be torn. The baron's men then chase her and eventually, all her clothes are torn off leaving her naked. The act of disrobing Jeanne is an attempt to humiliate her and cutting off her cloak symbolically represents her power and autonomy being destroyed by those with a higher level of authority. Her hair once again returns to a darker shade of brown signifying her emotional collapse and her nudity symbolizes her vulnerable state. She eventually escapes to a cave after her husband, Jean, refuses to open the door for Jeanne when she returns home in an attempt to escape her attackers.

In several cultures, especially in Eastern a culture, disrobing a woman is seen as a great insult to the woman and her husband. In several other cultures, especially in European and African cultures, nudity is perceived as the purest state of being. Jeanne's final transformation in the movie is marked by her nudity. Here, her nudity becomes a symbol of autonomy and freedom rather than humiliation and vulnerability. Unlike in previous scenes, nudity becomes a sign of resistance against patriarchal structures that try to control female sexuality. This transformation follows her fourth encounter with the devil after which the devil merges with Jeanne. This merging symbolizes her acceptance of her repressed desires and emotions as part of her identity. It also represents reclamation of identity and autonomy.



Fig.20. *Belladonna of Sadness* (48:34, 49:05, 54:20)

Jeanne's nudity also establishes her as a figure that represents the defiant feminine similar to Lilith. Her transformation this time is marked by a series of changing backgrounds and images. These images are painted using light, and pastel shades and feature flowers, birds and insects. This represents a proximity to nature and a distance from the structures of society. Historically, witches were associated with nature, herbal knowledge, weaponization of sexuality and rebellion against patriarchal structures. The floral imagery and her use of belladonna as a cure for the plague align her with the witch archetype.

Additionally, a plague spreads in the village disrupting the existing social structures especially among the people of the lower class. The collapse of social structure is metaphorically conveyed through structures like buildings melting into a puddle. The whole sequence is painted using monochromatic contrast and the bleak imagery of death

and decay in the village is contrasted with the combination of colours used to paint the flora and fauna surrounding Jeanne.

Jeanne, with her knowledge of the cure for the plague, eventually becomes popular in the town and word of her existence eventually reaches the aristocracy. The clergy implores the baron to hunt her down as she threatens existing Christian ideals by promoting promiscuity. The baron, on the other hand, hopes to gain access to her knowledge. Jeanne refuses to share her knowledge or help the baron unless he gives her the world which angers the baron. He realizes that he would not be able to control or manipulate her.

Jeanne is burnt at the stake for her rebellious attitude and this scene is highly symbolic.



Fig.21. *Belladonna of Sadness* (1:22:40)

The final scene of the movie can be contrasted with the initial wedding scene of the movie. Jeanne is once again dressed in white however her white dress signifies sacrifice, punishment and resistance. While the wedding dress in the first scene symbolizes purity the tattered white dress in the final scene establishes Jeanne as a sinner, a witch and a corrupt woman. Just like in *Valerie and Her Week of Wonders* the soldiers

and those who follow orders blindly are painted black and are faceless. They represent the oppressive authority held by the aristocrats and the military control imposed on people by the French monarchy. The Priest appears beside the baron, both of them on horse backs, reinforcing their higher position on the ladder of social hierarchy. The Baron's bright orange cloak that almost looks golden represents wealth and detachment from the sufferings of the common people.

Jeanne is tied to a cross with her arms outstretched resembling Jesus' crucifixion. Just like Jesus is executed for disrupting the established social order. Her serene appearance as the flames lick her body resembles the artistic depictions of saints being executed. This connotes pain being transformed into divine transcendence. Eventually, as Jeanne is completely burnt the features of the women in the crowd begin to resemble hers, turning Jeanne into a universal symbol of female suffering. She becomes a martyr whose death inspires people to rebel and who reflects the suffering of the masses. Her death foreshadows a revolution, specifically the French Revolution. The movie like *Valarie and Her Week of Wonders* ends on a positive note. It ends with the statement "On July 14, 1789, at Bastilles, at the head of the French Revolution stood the women" (1:26:09) and two paintings, first an illustration of Women's march at Versailles and second *Liberty Leading the People* by Eugene Delacroix which depicts liberty as bare-breasted women leading a group of people with the French flag in one hand and a gun in the other.

Conclusion

Valerie and her Week of Wonders uses a limited colour scheme compared to *Belladonna of Sadness*. The latter being an animated movie uses a wider range of colours and also includes scenes with monochromatic contrasts. The background of *Valerie and Her Week of Wonders* is neutral and static when compared to *Belladonna of Sadness* that uses a variety of colours and changing, fluctuating patterns to bring about a psychedelic effect. The background of the former mostly includes muted shades of brown, black and white. Both movies include an agrarian setting with the use of animals like hens and cows in the background. In *Belladonna of Sadness*, these animals symbolize the rustic simplicity of feudal agrarian peasants. On the other hand, animals like the hen and polecat are used to symbolize gender politics. The hen is equated with young women while to polecat is equated with powerful patriarchal figures like the Constable.

In both movies, black clothing with cloaks is associated with those in power. White and other pastel tones are used to symbolize the traits of the female protagonists and they take on various meanings with the progression of the narrative in both movies. The colour initially associated with innocence and purity by the execution scene becomes a symbol of sacrifice. Parallels can also be drawn between the characters in the two movies. Elsa and the baroness may be categorized under the dark mother archetype. Both represent an older generation of women who have internalized patriarchal ideas and turn against younger women in order to survive in a society dominated by misogynistic men. These women are portrayed wearing black structured clothes symbolizing corruption and the oppression they are accustomed to. When these women break away from what is expected of them they are punished. When the baron finds the baroness in bed with

another man he kills her without hesitation which reflects the loveless, apathetic nature of their marriage. The deaths of these women near the end of the movie represent the end of a generation that submitted to the patriarchy with no questions asked. *Valerie and Her Week of Wonders*, however, includes an element of forgiveness and understanding while *Belladonna of Sadness* seems to hint at a storm brewing, that is, the revolution. Either way, both suggest a change in the existing system.

Parallels can also be drawn between the male characters present in these movies. The baron and the constable both represent authoritative powers that seek to oppress both men and women. The Baron represents the oppressive feudal monarchy of France before the French Revolution while the constable represents the unilateral communist regime that existed in Czechoslovakia. Their free-flowing dark garments can be contrasted with the structured clothing of their female counterparts, the baroness and Grandmother Elsa. These dark garments and cloaks are associated with power, authority and nobility in both movies.

A parallel can also be drawn between the characters of Jean and Orlik. Both represent a category of men who do not conform to hegemonic ideas of masculinity. These men are ostracized and marginalized. These men have relatively effeminate characteristics that subvert the existing ideas of masculinity. While Orlik and Valerie help each other out Jean is financially reliant on Jeanne. Both men, however, leave their lovers at some point painting them as unreliable characters. Both movies also include themes of religious corruption and oppression. The movies, through the characters of the priests, explore how religion is used as a pretext to punish and exploit women. Both pre-

revolutionary France and 1960s Czechoslovakia had to deal with the corruption of the Catholic Church and this is reflected in both movies.

The most striking similarity between both movies is the scene in which the female protagonists are accused of being witches. Both include a public execution through burning and this is rooted in the European tradition of witch-hunting which had left a deep mark on the people of Europe. Be it France or Czechoslovakia, both dealt with a history of witch hunts and women being burnt at the stake. Because of this both movies establish witchcraft as a form of resistance. Valarie and Jeanne represent the women who were previously burnt after being falsely accused of crimes they did not commit or because they threatened the power structure of that period. The main difference that can be spotted would be the reaction of the crowd. In *Valerie and Her Week of Wonders*, the older generation of people in the crowd seems pleased with her suffering. The majority of people in the crowd seem distant and passive. On the other hand, in *Belladonna of Sadness*, the crowd is enraged but silenced through the military. The reaction of the crowd foreshadows the French Revolution. This difference highlights the historical difference between the French and Czech society. The people of France were burdened by famine, taxes and oppression on the basis of class (estates), economic status, and gender. This pushed the people into starting a bloody revolution. The situation in Czechoslovakia was more subtle due to which the execution scene in *Valerie and Her Week of Wonders* did not carry the same gravity that the scene carried in *Belladonna of Sadness*.

Both movies contrast black and white to symbolize innocence and purity being corrupted by authoritative, patriarchal powers. The signification of white also changes

from reflecting purity to vulnerability to resistance. Nudity is another key element in both movies. Nudity is not sexualized the way it is according to Puritan ideologies. This may also be regarded as a rejection of Puritan American ideas of shame and sexuality. In both Czech and Japanese society lust is viewed as a natural part of human existence which clashes with the Christian idea of sin. French society is a bit more conservative but the Japanese influence in the movie *Belladonna of Sadness* makes promiscuity an integral part of the narrative and an act of resistance. The erotic imagery used in *Valerie and Her Week of Wonders* is associated with coming-of-age and curiosity, it is intimate but restrained, but in *Belladonna of Sadness*, it is tied to oppression, violence and rebellion. The portrayal of eroticism is tactile and natural in the former while it is psychedelic and abstract in the latter. Sexual violence, however, is portrayed as a tool used to oppress and dominate women in both movies. Additionally *Valerie and Her Week of Wonders* is a movie that is based on a book written by a Czech author and directed by a Czech director, the production and setting of the movie is all rooted in Czechoslovakia. *Belladonna of Sadness* is a movie produced in Japan, inspired from a French book set in prerevolutionary France. Despite this the influence of Japanese culture on the movie is limited. The movie has deeper roots in French and European culture than Japanese culture.

In conclusion, both movies make use of colours specifically in clothing to denote change and power dynamics. The usage of certain colours in movies reinforces a certain myth associated with the colour or subverts it. It may also lead to the development of a new mythical association. Sartorial choices similarly are associated with certain power structures. For instance, Cloaks and black attire are associated with authority and

financial power. This association emerges from such clothing being used as uniforms by authoritative figures like judges, barons and aristocrats. These mythic associations also extend to animals with hens, cows and donkeys being associated with the lower class while horses are associated with the upper class in the movie *Belladonna of Sadness*. Other colours like grey and lavender that are attained by mixing white with darker colours are used to denote a state of in-betweenness in *Valerie and Her Week of Wonders*. In *Belladonna of Sadness*, the brightness of the colour can connote emotional states such as a darker shade of purple attained by painting a layer of black on a lighter shade of purple is used to denote melancholy and emasculation while a brighter shade of the same purple is used to denote authority and higher status.

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