



SHOWGIRLS COMES OF AGE

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Showgirls, Paul Verhoeven's much-maligned erotic film celebrates its twenty-fifth anniversary later this year. This essay seeks to re-assess the film – which was almost universally derided upon its release in 1995 – now that it is a quarter of a century old. Telling the story of a drifter who hitches a ride to Las Vegas, Nomi Malone (Elizabeth Berkley) works hard to climb the ladder from stripper to casino showgirl, making a series of acquaintances along the way, many of whom are only looking to exploit her. On the surface, the film seems to be simple, made to satiate the desires of the audience – primarily heterosexual males – however there are arguments to be made that *Showgirls* is so much more than that. This essay is in two sections: firstly, this part will contextualise the film, acknowledge some of the film's criticisms, and will then go on to consider the film as a postmodern self-critique. The second instalment will go on to analyse *Showgirls* as an indictment of America in terms of its hegemonic structures, artificiality, its exploitative nature, and stardom.

There is just so much interesting context to *Showgirls*, including the choices of director and writer, casting, budget, marketing, Hollywood studios, and the certification of the film. *Showgirls* is directed by Paul Verhoeven, whose reputation had grown with multiple successes in his native Netherlands before making the successful Hollywood films *Robocop* (1987) and *Total Recall* (1990). It was with his 1992 erotic thriller, *Basic Instinct*, that Verhoeven really became a household name director. *Showgirls* saw Verhoeven team up again with screenwriter Joe Eszterhas, the pair having worked together so successfully on *Basic Instinct* just a few years before. Eszterhas had developed a certain reputation for eroticism in his films – particularly *Jagged Edge* (1985) and *Sliver* (1993). The infamous moment in *Basic Instinct* – and no doubt one of the draws for some audiences – was its “crotch shot”, revealing that femme fatale murder suspect Catherine Tramell (played by Sharon Stone) was not wearing any underwear. Not only did this explicit image appear in the final cut of *Basic Instinct* but much of Verhoeven's reputation for sleaze came from Tramell/Stone's displaying of genitalia



not being in Eszterhas's script, as it was a directorial choice entirely (Williams 2005). Prior to *Showgirls*, Verhoeven was known for his satirical interpretations of what he considered to be specifically American vices, such as violence and corrupt law enforcement. This would prove to be relevant in the budgeting and control Verhoeven and Eszterhas were allowed with *Showgirls*, as well as the ways the film can be read. After the huge commercial success of *Basic Instinct*—the film grossing \$352 million from a modest budget of just \$49 million—it was assumed the pair could do no wrong.

Eszterhas's script was purchased for \$2 million by Carolco Pictures and the huge United Artists studio, who also distributed the film along with MGM. Having such powerful and famous backing boosted the filmmakers' creative egos even further and their ideas for the film were huge, bordering on excessive. The casting of actors, as always, would be crucial, and the perfect actor for the role of Nomi would need to be someone who could dance, would be fine with full nudity and someone who the core target audience—heterosexual males in their teens and above—would want to sexually objectify. Drew Barrymore was famously amongst the list of stars who refused the role, but in Elizabeth Berkley *Showgirls* had found an actress whose career standing mirrored that of Nomi somewhat. Just like the character, Berkley too was looking to reinvent herself, having been known for starring in the teen television series *Saved By The Bell*. She brought her pretty, girl-next-door innocence and insatiable Hollywood dreams, which is exactly what the filmmakers (and their audience) wanted. Kyle MacLachlan was cast as the powerful entertainment director Zack, who had experienced a certain eroticism previously in David Lynch's *Blue Velvet* (1986), albeit a film which is much overtly darker in its use of sex.

Berkley's naked body and Verhoeven's reputation were key marketing tools the studio used when selling the film to audiences. However, the ways *Showgirls* was marketed can be considered to have played an important role in the negative publicity the film received, leading to its lack of commercial success. One such example of this was through the suggestion that the film was more explicit than it actually was. This, coupled with the film being given the NC-17 certificate in the U.S., caused audiences to expect something more extreme than what Verhoeven and Eszterhas had actually made. Once the film was released, suffice to say it was a commercial flop, and a critical one too, the latter informing the former in some cases perhaps. With a budget of around \$45 million, the film accumulated just \$20 million at the U.S. box office which was a big loss for the studio. However, one of the many overlooked aspects of *Showgirls* is that it later became commercially very successful in the home video market, making more than \$100 million in sales. Berkley's performance and Verhoeven's direction bore much of the criticism of the film. Of Berkley, Anthony Lane in *The New Yorker* wrote "her breasts are more expressive than her face" and also that "there is not a whisper of satire in this movie" (Lane 1995). Leonard Maltin in the *Movie and Video Guide* (2008) branded the film "part softcore porn, part hokey backstage drama, full of



howlingly hilarious dialogue" (2008, 1245), with the *New York Times*'s Janet Maslin (1995) claiming that the screenplay prevents "any character from entertaining two consecutive thoughts in a given scene".

Whilst containing many scenes of nudity and sexually suggestive dancing, is *Showgirls* sexy enough? Perhaps in the act of showing the nudity, there is a removal of mysticism and sex appeal; maybe the women of *Showgirls* are "desexualised at the very moment they are stripped naked" (1957, 165), to borrow Roland Barthes's famous phrase. The desexualisation can be considered to be the filmmakers' way of drawing attention to Las Vegas's lack of sexiness, and Verhoeven referred to this in a 2015 interview with *Rolling Stone*, stating that "I would say *Showgirls* is more anti-erotic than erotic" (Wood 2015). Owing to the scenes of sex, lap dances and nudity being presented in an aggressive manner, perhaps Verhoeven and Eszterhas are commenting that in both Las Vegas and *Showgirls*, people *have sex*, they do not *make love*.

There has been some re-evaluation of *Showgirls* in recent years, almost as if audiences and critics needed an extended period of time to digest exactly what it was they had witnessed. One such proponent has been Eric Henderson, who in his review of the film for *Slant Magazine*, dubbed the film "undoubtedly the think-piece object d'art of its time" (2004). Furthermore, respected academic film journal *Film Quarterly* devoted seven different critics to a re-assessment of the film in 2003, with one of whom, Noël Burch, claiming that *Showgirls* "takes mass culture seriously, as a site of both fascination and struggle" and is "an excellent vehicle for social criticism" (Burch et al. 2003, 36).

This essay seeks to respond to some of *Showgirls*' criticism and to offer alternative readings of the film. To respond directly to *The Washington Post*'s Desson Howe (1995), who said that "to take *Showgirls* that seriously (as either trash-art or appalling pornography) wouldn't be worth the exertion"; this essay serves as a direct contradiction to Howe's opinion.

A POSTMODERN SELF-CRITIQUE

One approach which can be taken when analysing *Showgirls* is viewing the film as a "knowing" self-critique. Such a reading assumes that *Showgirls*, a film in-part about exploitation, is itself an exploitation film. The film features a series of dance scenes—Cristal (Gina Gershon) in the *Goddess* show, Nomi performing at Cheetah's, then later auditioning and rehearsing for *Goddess*—with each becoming progressively more sexually-suggestive and containing more nudity. In addition to these dance sequences, Verhoeven and Eszterhas show the behind-the-scenes workings through numerous scenes set in dressing rooms, which provide ample opportunity for the (female) characters to nakedly strut around, with each scene seeming to provide more screen time to the dancers' naked breasts. These characters are sexually objectified and exploited



by the audience at Cheetah's and Stardust, and then are sexually objectified by the audience of *Showgirls* too.

Not only do the dance routines and dressing room scenes get more explicit and exploitative, but the sex scenes do too. Whilst there is only one consensual sex scene in the film (between Nomi and Zack in the swimming pool), Zack's lap dance, Nomi's practice with dance teacher James, and Molly's rape are all sexually graphic, and again, become increasingly more extreme with each example. *Showgirls'* audience has bought a ticket or a DVD, and are implicated in the perpetual cycle of exploitation, voyeurism and sexual objectification of women as a result. Voyeurism is a theme which permeates the film, in terms of both the ways the audience looks at the bodies on the screen, and also within the narrative itself. In one scene, when Zack receives a lap dance from Nomi (whilst Cristal watches on), James is shown to be watching the event through the curtains. Upon the next cut, we are watching James, who in turn is watching Cristal watch Zack receive a sexually explicit lap dance from a completely naked Nomi. Through these moments of voyeurism, *Showgirls'* characters display ultimate scopophilia. Later in the film, however, the audience is implicated again, as our voyeuristic habits ensure we must watch as Molly is gang-raped by a wealthy and powerful male celebrity. The audience must live with this horrific image, unable to testify in order to get justice for Molly.

Whilst it is conceivable to consider *Showgirls* as an "exploitation film about exploitation", the question remains whether Paul Verhoeven and Joe Eszterhas consciously made the film in a knowing and reflexive way. A reading of *Showgirls* should recognise that the technique of deliberate overstatement is used in order to draw attention to that which it is criticising. In a defence of the film, Verhoeven referred to this in his interview with *Rolling Stone*, by saying, "Yes, it was over the top. And that was on purpose" (2015). *Showgirls* features numerous examples of excess, whether through mise-en-scène (neon, sequins, nudity) or sound (the "howlingly hilarious dialogue" according to Leonard Maltin, 2008), yet these can be considered as the filmmakers' ways of highlighting a comment they are making. For example, throughout the first act of the film, Nomi is shown to be child-like, throwing temper tantrums and sucking on a candy dummy. She also acts immaturely after having sex with Zack, excitedly telling Molly about it whilst clutching a child's teddy bear. These examples constitute some of the criticisms levelled at Berkley's performance (and Eszterhas's writing), yet they could be read as the filmmakers' aims to draw attention to Nomi's innocence prior to being corrupted. Indeed, the second half of *Showgirls* contains a noticeable reduction in Berkley's flamboyance, giving further weight to the assertions that her performance (and Verhoeven's direction of her) was completely conscious. Verhoeven has regularly defended Berkley's performance, claiming in the interview with *Rolling Stone* that "I pushed it in that direction... because that was the element of style that I thought would



work for the movie” (2015). One fan of Berkley’s performance, and of *Showgirls* altogether, is legendary French director Jacques Rivette, who in an interview with *Les Inrockuptibles* described the film as “one of the great American films of the last few years” and of Berkley said, “that actress is amazing!” (2001).

In contrast to the readings of *Showgirls* in the first part of this essay other approaches can be taken when analysing the film, and here it will be argued that the film is a critique of various aspects of American culture. Whilst perhaps not immediately appearing as a text which is making political statements, part two of this essay will analyse the film in terms of its commentaries on exploitation, artificiality, stardom, and the overarching hegemonic structures in America.

AN INDICTMENT OF EXPLOITATIVE AMERICA

In terms of reading *Showgirls* as an indictment of the exploitation which exists in America, many of Nomi’s relationships in the film exist due to her naivety about the exploitative nature of the world she is entering. The film makes a link between career progression (and its inevitable increased wealth) and an increase in exploitation. It is revealed that Nomi used to work in the exploitative world of prostitution, then “progresses” to be a dancer at the seedy Cheetah’s club, where she is forced to forsake a sizeable amount of her earnings to the sleazy manager, Al. Of course, the plot of *Showgirls* follows Nomi’s journey further still as our heroine pursues her dream of appearing in *Goddess*, the big show at the Stardust casino starring Cristal Connors. When Nomi’s career progresses beyond Cheetah’s club—initially as an understudy to Cristal in *Goddess* but later to lead showgirl—Nomi is exploited for sex by Stardust’s entertainment manager Zack, and further still by the casino owners who will be earning a vast amount more from their star’s performance than she will. There is a sense, however, that Nomi becomes aware of the exploitative nature of being a Las Vegas dancer, yet starts to accept it as a necessary evil. This is shown at the audition for the *Goddess* understudy role, during which it is suggested that Nomi’s dancing abilities are no better than those of her rivals. As *Goddess*’s director Tony circles the three final candidates he yells “Come on ladies! Sell your bodies!” However, Nomi gains her success not through talent, but through the willingness to do what it takes, including accepting daily sexual objectification, the loss of dignity, and the later “selling” (or giving away) of sex to Zack, which results in her being offered an audition.

Exploitation is further shown by people in positions of power (exclusively wealthy white men) using any opportunity to exploit those who are considered as inferior (such as Nomi, and her friend Molly). Here we can apply an allegorical reading of America’s ruling class (embodied by business owners, politicians) exploiting workers (for example through a low level of minimum wage, harassment in the workplace, or substandard working conditions). During a scene towards the end of *Showgirls*, two of the film’s working-class characters, Nomi and Molly, are manipulated (in completely



different ways) into being exploited by wealthy white men with power. By cross-cutting back-and-forth between the two events at the same party—Molly upstairs with her crush, the famous musician Andrew Carver, and Nomi in the main party room being charmed by the powerful Zack—Verhoeven highlights the simultaneous exploitation of the working classes, and of women. Whilst Nomi is being disingenuously serenaded by Zack’s shallow words, Molly is gang-raped by Carver and his entourage. The scene shows the destruction of two myths: Nomi’s dream of stardom and Molly’s dream of love. The rape of Molly is brutal and shocking, whereas Nomi’s violation (through Zack’s exploitation of her) is more discreet and will occur over a longer period. When learning that the Stardust casino would rather protect Carver than get justice for Molly, Nomi decides to leave the exploitative world of dancing in Las Vegas, knowing only those who are willing to be exploited can thrive there.

AN INDICTMENT OF ARTIFICIALITY AND THE QUEST FOR STARDOM

In addition to (or instead of, if the reader prefers) analysing *Showgirls* as an indictment of the exploitative nature of America, it is possible to read the film as a warning of the perils of pursuing stardom, so often associated with and Hollywood. Perhaps one of the most recycled stories told by Hollywood is the “star is born” narrative, whether that is precisely one of the *A Star Is Born* films (1937, 1954, 1976, 2018) or another close variation on that theme. Much of *Showgirls* uses this narrative until it is bluntly halted by Molly’s rape and Nomi’s subsequent decision to reject the exploitation she is suffering. The rape scene serves to draw a connection between Nomi’s increased stardom and a consequent reduction in her morals and ethics. Nomi, however, having introduced Molly to her rapist, is complicit in the violation to an extent.

Normally, the journey towards stardom is considered as *an ascent*; however, as discussed above, if we accept that the further Nomi’s career progresses (and the greater the stardom) the more exploited she becomes, then the trajectory is in fact a *descent to stardom*. In this reading, Verhoeven and Eszterhas are not only attacking Hollywood (as well as its artificiality and obsession with image), but specifically the types of stories that it so regularly produces. Typically, a Hollywood narrative is one in which the hero defeats a seemingly impossible task or enemy against unlikely odds. Here, the setting of Las Vegas—famous for its games, odds and gambling—is allegorical by serving as the backdrop for a game which is impossible to win. To use gambling parlance: the game is rigged, and the house always wins.

Showgirls, of course, does not claim at any point to be “based on real events”—it is very much a fictional story. It is quite conceivable, however, that many of the people in reality who have dreamt of stardom and have followed their dreams to places like Las Vegas or Hollywood, have suffered a plight not too dissimilar to Nomi’s. Early in the film when Nomi first meets Molly, the latter asks “Where you from?”, with Nomi’s dejected response being “Different places!”. This suggests she is an embodiment of the



different people who have followed their dreams of stardom—whether to Las Vegas, Hollywood or anywhere else—only to be rejected, or perhaps even worse.

The setting of Las Vegas is crucial in highlighting the film's themes of gambling, winning/losing in the "game of life", and facing impossible odds. By the film's close, Nomi has decided to cut-and-run from the rigged game that Las Vegas offers, having been left both literally and emotionally penniless from her experiences there. She decides to quit Las Vegas's games in exchange for those in Hollywood, which she hopes will be more lucrative. The film's final shot points towards Verhoeven and Eszterhas commenting on stardom and America's entertainment industries, especially Hollywood. Starting as a tracking crane shot of Nomi in a pick-up truck speeding along the highway (having just hitched a ride out of Las Vegas), the camera pans to reveal a huge billboard sign declaring that "Nomi Malone is Goddess". However, the crane continues to push-in towards the billboard, eventually going over it to reveal another sign—"Los Angeles 280", informing the audience of Nomi's destination and foreshadowing a potential next career for her. In Los Angeles—or perhaps more likely, Hollywood—one wonders what the future might hold for Nomi, and all the other people who have followed their dreams there. Perhaps Nomi will use her experiences in Las Vegas to her advantage, avoiding exploitation, if that is possible. Nomi could explore the worlds of acting, modelling or anything else that Hollywood offers, however, given what the mass public has always suspected about the morals and values of Hollywood—and what has since been revealed by the #MeToo movement—reaching stardom might require many dreadful sacrifices.

If we choose to read *Showgirls* as a comment on these elements of American culture, it portrays stardom (in Las Vegas at least) as something which will inevitably involve exploitation and regret; this is a remarkable attack for a Hollywood studio film to make. Of course, *Showgirls* is not the first film to make such comments on stardom and Hollywood, but it is perhaps one of the most mainstream films to do so. Another film which addressed the topics of stardom and Hollywood—albeit a completely different type of film, it must be said—was David Lynch's masterpiece, *Mulholland Dr.* (2001). What a great theatrical double bill that would be: *Showgirls* alongside *Mulholland Dr.* In a strange coincidence—or perhaps not-so-strange, considering this is David Lynch—*Showgirls'* Penny, the innocent newcomer dancer who is soon shown naked on all-fours whilst performing her routine at Cheetah's, is played by Rena Riffel. Six years later, Riffel appeared in *Mulholland Dr.*, this time as a washed-up and drug-addicted actress, a version of her former beautiful and popular self. Having witnessed her demise in *Showgirls*, it is almost as if Riffel is *still* playing the role of Penny in *Mulholland Dr.*, someone who was chewed up and spat out by Las Vegas, and then again by Hollywood. If this reading and supposition is adopted, it makes Nomi's decision to head towards Los Angeles all the more worrying.



AN INDICTMENT OF CAPITALISM, POWERFUL MEN AND THE AMERICAN DREAM

An alternative (or additional) reading of *Showgirls* to the aforementioned critiques of exploitation or stardom can be found by understanding the film as an indictment of the values at the very core of America: capitalism, power and the American Dream. The latter of these, of course, suggests that anyone can gain success through hard work, and given that all people are created equally, the same opportunities are offered to everyone.

Nomi's journey in the first two acts of *Showgirls* is a direct representation of the American Dream. Arriving in town penniless, she has dreams of making it big as a dancer in Las Vegas and of all the riches that will entail. This town, however, is a savage, animalistic place—a land of dog-eat-dog—where people only look out for their own interests. Nomi learns this immediately, being duped by James, who steals her suitcase after giving her a ride. Undeterred, Nomi sticks to the principles of the American Dream by working hard and wanting her dream badly enough, eventually achieving her goal as a showgirl in a big Las Vegas production. However, Nomi has needed to make many sacrifices to achieve her American Dream: She rejects the help of professional dancer James, who offers to train her. She sleeps with the wealthy Zack, which leads to his offer of an audition for the understudy role in *Goddess*. She pushes Cristal down the stairs, breaking her hip and ending her career, in order to be promoted to lead in *Goddess*. The results of Nomi following her American Dream are rejection, exploitative sex, rape and career-ending injury. Finally, she introduces Molly, her only genuine friend, to someone who gang-rapes her. Verhoeven and Eszterhas's critique of the dog-eat-dog nature of Las Vegas (and by extension, America too) through Nomi's individualism serves as an allegory for the condemnation of capitalism and the American Dream.

Throughout *Showgirls* Nomi is called a “whore” multiple times, a branding she always forcefully rejects. The concept of being a whore—not necessarily a prostitute—is raised by Cristal during her lunch date with Nomi, who says “you are a whore, darlin’. We all are. We take the cash, we cash the cheque, we show them what they wanna see”. In the world of *Showgirls* and Las Vegas, desirable items are constantly for sale: tickets, shows, sex, and dreams. Everyone—except possibly *Goddess* costume designer Molly—is always selling something. However, it is only the few people at the very top who will benefit in the long term, and they are certainly not getting exploited. These people might be Americans, or they might be from somewhere else (a wealthy group of Japanese businessmen appear in the film), but these uber-rich and powerful people will certainly be capitalists, and they will definitely be men. *Showgirls*, of course, is a film about men and women, and a world in which the roles and expectations for men and women are completely different to each other. The positions of power—the show directors, the casino owners, the business people—are held by men, whereas women



are marginalised. The male-dominated world of the Las Vegas shows are only available to women if they are willing to sell sex and be objectified.

By following her American Dream, Nomi gets corrupted by her immoral surroundings. At an audition for *Goddess* she draws the attention of the show's producers because of her responses to their interrogations. Another auditionee is asked for her credentials, to which she gives a list of training classes she has attended, which are not relevant for this position and she gets rejected as a result. However Nomi gives the opposite response—"I haven't had classes. I'm watching you be a prick" proclaims Nomi proudly, impressing the show's producers. By adopting this approach, Nomi embraces the aggressive and thick-skinned persona required to survive, as well as demonstrating her naivety to the world she is entering into. This scene suggests that the immoral, voyeuristic and exploitative world of Las Vegas shows do not require useful skills or experiences, they want women who are complicit in their objectification and who are willing to sell sex in the name of making money. Nomi's transformation from broke but innocent nobody, to (relatively) wealthy and successful star continues further in later scenes. After sleeping with Zack, she is shown replicating his drug use by starting her day by sniffing cocaine. By the time she pushes Cristal down the stairs in order to take her role in *Goddess*, Nomi's full transformation is complete: The innocent "white swan" Polly Ann Costello (her former name) has become the "black swan" Nomi Malone.

The relentless and infinite nature of capitalism is shown by newcomer Nomi arriving in Las Vegas and succeeding the older star Cristal. It is suggested that Cristal succeeded her own predecessor in similar circumstances to those which allow Nomi to succeed Cristal, when she says "how do you think I got my first lead?". The linking of, and then transition between, Cristal and Nomi is suggested in a number of ways. When Nomi initially sees Cristal performing in *Goddess*, she is star-struck, mimicking Cristal's dance moves from afar, demonstrating her desire to fill that role. After the show, when Nomi approaches Cristal in her dressing room, both characters are shown in the reflection of a mirror, linking them by being framed as a two-shot together within the reflected image. The mirroring and reinforcement of the visual metaphor of duplication is used again during the scene in which Nomi gives Zack a lap dance. The voyeur in the audience this time is Cristal, who replicates Nomi's earlier mimicry by acting out the lap dance. Furthermore, mirroring occurs yet again when Cristal is shown receiving a toast by the gleeful owner of the Stardust casino, a scene which is replicated later in the film when Nomi becomes the lead star and receives the owner's praise. The links between Cristal and Nomi are further visually reinforced during the lunch date scene, with both characters being costumed in black leather jackets, whilst also eating the same food items simultaneously. By using these examples of mirroring and replication—the costumes, mimicking of dances, reflections, two-shot framing, and casino owner's toast duplication—*Showgirls* is suggesting that the hegemony,



those structures which create the cycle of dreams, exploitation and profit will be uninterrupted, allowing capitalism to prevail.

SHOWGIRLS: A CRITICAL RE-ASSESSMENT

The purpose of this essay has not been to proclaim that *Showgirls* is a “misunderstood masterpiece”, or to allocate a trivial star-rating, nor to adopt an attitude of “it’s so bad it’s good”. Instead, the intention has been to approach the film with fresh judgement, forgetting the hyperbolic sensationalism which critics seemed so keen to write a quarter of a century ago.

Through the above analysis, it has been argued that *Showgirls* comments on various aspects of American culture, all have inter-connected associations with one another. The film also demonstrates a consciousness through its self-criticism, and it is through this reading that the audience is implicated in the exploitation, aiding the perpetuation of America’s hegemony, along with the cultures of sexual objectification and commodification of women which permeate the entertainment industries. Verhoeven and Eszterhas are suggesting that what happens in Las Vegas is just an exaggeration of what happens everywhere else in America.

Showgirls should not be criticised for being badly made in terms of its production values. It demonstrates high-quality cinematography, well-choreographed dance routines, as well as excellent costuming, hair and make-up design. Any criticisms of the direction, script or overall purposes of *Showgirls* are potentially problematic, as perhaps more relevant in that discussion is the consideration of the film’s audience, who were possibly mis-sold the film. In terms of the performances, whilst they understandably did not win awards, the casting choices were astute, particularly Elizabeth Berkley as Nomi Malone.

Verhoeven stated his disappointment at the reception which *Showgirls* received. In an interview with Linda Ruth Williams for her book on erotic thrillers, Verhoeven said: “Basically to make that movie more successful we should have just had a murder mystery and situated it in Vegas, and it would have been fine” (2005, 175). Perhaps the film was also misunderstood by audiences who were expecting a *Basic Instinct*-esque thriller from the previously successful writer/director partnership. *Showgirls* is simply not that film; in every sense, it bares everything, and therefore there is no mystery left to discover. However, in terms of reflecting various aspects of American culture—namely exploitation, the quest for stardom, capitalism and the American Dream—*Showgirls* can be anything you want it to be.



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