

Le Notti Bianche, directed by Luchino Visconti, 1960 (black/white, Italian with English subtitles). Visconti is known as a pioneer of Italian neorealism which combines a realist aesthetic with a romantic story line. This film is an adaptation of Dostoyevsky's novella "White Nights." Our interest is in the development and understanding of the two characters in this love story: Mario (Marcello Mastroianni) and Natalia (Maria Schell).

1. The first night. In light of the introduction and what in later scenes he tells about himself to Natalia, Mario a "characterless" underground man? As he sees Natalia crying and, at a tender moment, another woman passes. What is the significance of this other woman? She will return again later in the movie playing a larger role.

2. His hotel and scene with the manager.

3. The second night. He returns (the same other woman is in the bar), he sees Natalia fleeing, so he runs out to catch her and after a "clarifying" conversation for her, she becomes friendly: "It'll be as if we've always been friends." After she tells him that she is waiting for someone, she recounts her story in a visually clever flashback scene. At a key point at the opera, she says "we didn't say a word, but for me it was as if we had said it all. That we'd love each other forever." Clearly, for her, when she commits to something it is for good. In Kierkegaard's language, her consciousness of this commitment is eternal. He promises to return to her in a year and as she replies to him, the scene returns to Mario. Clearly these two men are connected for her. Mario claims that this is "so alien to me, to my way of thinking" and he implies that she is "crazy." After the conversation progresses, he suggests she write a letter to him, but she has already done so. He agrees to deliver the letter and, at another tender moment, the other woman appears. After Natalia leaves, he approaches the other woman and rips up the letter.

3. His hotel and scene with the manager, where he wavers between remorse and wanting to forget about Natalia and go out the next evening to just have fun.

4. The third night. They meet on an active, fun-filled street and their roles are reversed to some extent as he tries to avoid her. After he lies about the letter, he seems to decide to give their relationship one last try. They go to a nightclub with a famous dance scene to an American pop song "Thirteen woman (and only one man in town)" (Bill Haley and the Comets, 1954). In this bar, he talks about his past for the first time. His upbringing and then his "dreamer" aspect, then they dance. When she finds out that it is past the time for her "appointment" and she runs out to meet "him." He tries to stop her and they argue. As he leaves, he yells "If they're not tramps, they're crazy, certifiable." At yet a third emotional moment, he meets the other woman and this time he agrees to go with her. She lures him into a trap and after a fight, in which she seems to switch sides to protect him, he escapes.

At this point in the story answer the following question:

Q1. Compare and contrast Mario and Natalia with respect to SK's knights of infinite resignation and faith. Clearly, Natalia exhibits a choice or commitment that SK believes can lead to faith. I believe that she may well be a knight of faith for SK. Please tell me if you agree or not and give me your reasons. Mario clearly mocks Natalia's choice and he probably would not take seriously any such choice or commitment. His character so far is in line with the "underground" Dostoyevsky-like character outlined at the beginning of the movie. Do you agree that so far in this movie he is a kind of underground man for Dostoevsky? The key part of this character is

that he is not even a candidate for being a knight of faith. Please give reasons for your answer.

The remainder of the movie involves two plot twists. Mario and Natalia find each other again and, after she is again disappointed, she surprisingly gives up her waiting for her past love. However, Mario confesses that he ripped up the letter. He asks for her forgiveness and says "Never trust anyone. Especially a man in love." However, instead of restoring her hope, she now says that she will forget her past love! Mario is buoyant. Has he now taken the step that she took in making a commitment? Or is his love "temporary"? They talk about the possibility of a shared future love and they impulsively "steal" a boat and in a romantic moment it begins to snow. They return and one senses the movie is about to end, when her former love appears at the bridge where she had been waiting for him for so many nights. Natalia sees that he has finally returned to her and she "returns" to him. She asks forgiveness of him and he thanks her for the few moments of happiness he has had with her.

Final question: Q2. Since the last answer, has your opinions of about the character of Mario and Natalia changed with respect to her being a knight of faith and he not even being a candidate for one? Please indicate how the ending of the movie adds evidence to your answer.