

HUMANITIES INSTITUTE
J. Zimmerman, MA

Sexuality in Cinema

The Quartet (1995)

Fábio Villela Barreto Borges (1957-2019)

OVERVIEW

Director Born in Rio de Janeiro, Barreto was the youngest son of famed Brazilian film producer Luís Carlos. His younger half-brother, Bruno Barreto, is also known for directing Brazilian films. Fábio Barreto's film career began in 1977 with his direction of the short film *A Estória de José e Maria*. His films delve into Brazilian history, politics, and culture, often focusing on the colonial period and immigrants from Europe in the 20th century. He also occasionally acted. In 2009, Barreto slipped into a coma following a car accident, and he died nearly a decade later, having never regained full consciousness.

Film Based on José Clemente Pozenato's 1985 novel of the same name, *O Quatrilho* (*The Quartet* in English) follows a group of Italian immigrants living in the South of Brazil. Production occurred primarily in the municipality of Farroupilha, where the famous Salto Ventoso waterfall appears several times. Secondary production occurred in Bento Gonçalves, Carlos Barbosa, Caxias do Sul, Antônio Prado, and Caminhos de Pedra. The city scenes were filmed in varied locations in the Serra Gaúcha region. It is an underwatched film in the Anglosphere. At the time of writing, there is only one professional review of the film listed on Rotten Tomatoes and only five user reviews posted to IMDB, giving this film a close to 50% general approval rating. Reviews vary wildly, some calling *The Quartet* terribly dull while others praise its beauty, outstanding period drama, and philosophical introspection.



Background Quartet is an archaic card game popular around the turn of the last century, very similar to Go Fish and typically played with purpose-made decks of 32 cards. This game serves as the basis for the name and the dramatic conflict in the film. *The Quartet* is Barreto's most celebrated film outside of Brazil. Featured at seven different international film festivals between 1995 and 1996, *The Quartet* was nominated for 15 awards, winning Best Actress, Best Art Direction, and Best Music at the Havana Film Festival, another best actress from the São Paulo Association of Art Critics, and a final award for Best Soundtrack from the Guarani Award for Brazilian Cinema. One of the more interesting bits of trivia from behind the scenes comes at the film's end: the photographer taking a picture of the family is actually José Clemente Pozenato, the author of the novel upon which the film is based.

MAIN CHARACTERS

Teresa – A serious, hardworking woman: Angelo's wife

Pierina – A romantic young woman: Massimo's wife

Massimo – A romantic young man who desires more from life: Pierina's husband

Angelo – A frugal and hardworking young man: Teresa's husband

SYNOPSIS

The story begins in 1910 in the South of Brazil. There, newlywed couple Angelo and Teresa strike up a deal with Angelo's cousin and his wife, Pierina: with their family's combined spending power and knowledge, they plan to purchase a valuable tract of land and build a farm and mill. With hard work and help from their community, the families are successful, growing fairly wealthy and influential in the Italian immigrant community there. This life suddenly falls to pieces when Massimo and Teresa elope together one day while they're supposed to be buying supplies for the farm. Angelo is shaken to his core, lashing out at his friends and community in his grief. Pierina, however, turns to her faith, praying and taking charge of the farm's management in the meantime. With her help and guidance, Angelo keeps the business on track and recovers from his grief and embarrassment.

As with Teresa and Massimo before, we see a compatibility emerge between them, and they too fall in love with each other, Angelo getting Pierina pregnant out of wedlock. This further isolates them in the conservative Catholic community. Angelo is able to sell the land, however, and fund a new life for him and Pierina elsewhere. Twenty years later, Pierina receives a letter from Teresa wishing to reconnect with her and Angelo and hoping that even if they can't be friends, they can be familiar again. Included is a photo of their family, including Angelo's firstborn daughter. Pierina returns the favor, taking a photo with her large family, including Massimo's first three children.

PLOT

Wedding – “Easy!” a priest says to his donkey. “Faster, dear. Let's go. We have a wedding to celebrate. I don't know about you, but I'm starving.” Superimposed texts lets us know this is Santa Corona in 1910. A chapel's bell clangs in the distance. Inside the church, a wedding ceremony takes place. The groom freezes in the middle of the vows, prompting the priest to call him an idiot and demand the rings. The bride grins and helps her nervous husband complete the ceremony. Afterward, the priest retrieves his donkey to head on down the road: more priestly duties await him in other villages. The man tending to his donkey notices the sad look on his face and asks him what's wrong. “I get a little sad when I celebrate a wedding,” the priest says. As he mounts the donkey, he tells the man about how the joy fades quickly and the marital troubles begin soon thereafter.



First dance – A jaunty accordion tune fills the air as the bride and groom have their first dance as a married couple. Their friends and relatives all dance around them or sit and watch from well-stocked tables, clapping along with the music. After many different movements, the song comes to an end, and all the dancers applaud for the accordion players. The bride crosses to the table near the cake and takes an old man's hand, saying, “I accept you as my father!” The old man stutters out his response that he accepts her as his daughter, and she beams proudly. Cake and a toast soon follow, some of their friends urging them to drink more so they have plenty of stamina for their honeymoon night. While the bride jokes and laughs with them, the groom remains composed and silent, annoyance tinting his expressions.



“I feel rich” – Walking around a farmyard, the groom, Angelo, shows the bride, Teresa, around. “I own the mule,” he begins. “The family owns the pair of oxen. This milking cow is mine, but the other one belongs to Dosolina.” “We have so much!” exclaims Teresa. “I feel rich.” Angelo is quick to burst her bubble, reminding her that as soon as his younger brother is married, he'll have to follow tradition and found his own holding. Teresa asks him to save such talk for later, reminding him it's their first day as husband and wife. She



wants to see the non-productive parts of the land where they might find beautiful nature and privacy. Angelo has to be physically drug away from the farmyard by the giggling Teresa, feeling such exploration is a waste of time.

Wading – Shots of Brazil's bountiful nature take the screen as Teresa sings an Italian folk song. We're shown a waterfall before we see Teresa throw her hat on the ground, step out of her clogs, and hike up her skirt to wade in the stream water. The camera pans up from her legs and the water, showing her turn to Angelo and ask him to join her. Stubbornly, he says he doesn't want to and can't be convinced. With an obviously disappointed look, Teresa turns away from him and begins singing again, softer this time. Angelo asks if something is wrong, and Teresa claims she just has a headache. Angelo blames the water and beckons her out. "That must be it," Teresa says as she stoops to pick up her hat and kicks her clogs back into place on her feet. "I'm so stupid."



Invitation – That night, Angelo does calculations on a slate by the light of an oil lamp. Suddenly distracted, he looks away toward the bed and rises, revealing Teresa lying there. She looks up at him and slowly rolls onto her back, hiking up her nightdress. Slowly, wordlessly, Angelo crawls on top of her, the camera following his face's path toward hers. He sighs and shudders as he thrusts on top of her, Teresa's face subtly horrified as she remains motionless throughout the experience.



Jealous groping – The cock crows as Angelo smokes a cigarette, watching the sun rise in the distance. A short montage follows as he and others work around the farm. In the kitchen, Teresa works with another of Angelo's family to prepare for lunch. Angelo's younger brother enters, and Teresa asks after her husband. He responds simply, and she tells him to go and wash up so he doesn't track dirt across her freshly cleaned house. In response, the young man sits down, ignoring her. When she repeats herself more emphatically, the young man rises and tries to kiss her, grabbing her by the arms. Teresa slaps him hard and scolds him. Now holding his face, the young man ignores her again, lamenting that he is unmarried and his brother has a bride. First she comforts him, but when he continues acting rude and childish, Teresa returns to scolding, telling him he's getting married to a girl his own age and he's to leave her alone.



Women's talk – "Teresa!" an older woman calls from her loft above the aging wine barrels. "Come here, Teresa!" The young woman climbs up the stairs with a smile and crosses to the older woman's bedside, where they sit and talk. The aunt wants to know about her wedding night, specifically how Angelo performed. Teresa is reticent to talk openly, trying to hide behind turns of phrase and comparing herself to the Virgin Mary. "You don't look happy," says the aunt. "Don't try to hide it." "I thought it would be different," Teresa finally admits, revealing herself as a romantic. The aunt feels sorry for her, as the reality of husbands is often far different from what's written about in novels. She gives Teresa advice about conflict and standing up for herself: "Men are afraid of losing their women... Where else will they find some slave to do their chores?" Talk turns to another recently wed couple in the family: The aunt praises Pierina for already being pregnant and for her work ethic.



Family dinner – The camera zooms in close on a cookfire before rising to a ladle serving up a bowl and then to the woman who holds it, Pierina. She turns to pass a bowl of bread rolls to Teresa, who helps carry the dishes to the table. The family comes together at the table where the men chat in Italian about gossip in the community and pour glasses of wine for everyone. The father, seated at the head of the table, proposes a toast to Massimo and Pierina for returning to the farm. The couple smiles to everyone around the table as they lift their glasses in response. Angelo's aunt chides Teresa for not eating enough and being too skinny, turning the blame onto Angelo. Massimo stands up for Teresa, saying she's pretty, and Pierina tells him to mind his own business. The father begins a rude speech about how all women, fat or thin, are just the same in bed: "The hole is in the middle." The aunt throws a bread roll at him, shaming him. As they walk home after, Pierina asks Massimo, "Why did you have to stare so much at Teresa? You set your eyes straight at her." Massimo shrugs and replies, "They're my eyes. I can look wherever I want."



Quartet – A group of men sing in Italian as they cross the darkening field toward the farmhouse as dusk begins to fall. Teresa listens from a window, smiling. A bit later, the aunt crochets as she gossips with Teresa, who helps Pierina serve snacks to the men playing cards nearby. She pours them some wine, and one of the men says she grows more beautiful by the day. "Angelo always chooses the best company," another man agrees before complaining about Angelo's winning streak at quartet. After finishing serving wine, she crosses the room to pick up another plate of food, moving back to Angelo who sits with Massimo, isolated from the others. Teresa asks what they're talking about all cloistered away, and Massimo jokes that just like women talk about men, men want to talk about women. As she chats with Massimo, she finds herself fixated on his charming smile. She walks away to gather another plate to serve when the aunt teases her for grinning like a schoolgirl, saying her marriage to Angelo must be going well. Seated near Pierina, Teresa asks about what Massimo did in the city, getting a jealous rise out of Pierina. Teresa skillfully calms her by saying she's only curious about their family life and apologizes for not visiting yet.



Visit to Pierina – A mandolin plucks out a haunting folk tune as Teresa approaches Massimo and Pierina's home. Pierina greets her on the steps, now looking well into her pregnancy, accepting a gift of eggs Teresa brought with her. Inside the small house, Teresa marvels at the detailed beauty of the furniture. Pierina says it's all designed and built by Massimo. She leads Teresa around the house, showing her every piece Massimo has built. "I wish envy weren't a sin," Teresa teases. She wonders if Massimo would be able to make her a chest of drawers. "Just ask him," says Pierina. A bit later, after he returns home, Massimo sketches out a rough design for a chest on a scrap piece of paper. He wants to give it to her as a gift, but Teresa insists on paying. He agrees that if she pays for the lumber, he'll do the work for free. After agreeing on this, Massimo asks after Angelo, whom Teresa gently complains about. He sighs, saying Angelo will work himself to death before saying there is more to life than work.



The hoe or the pickaxe – A man mops in a general store as he speaks to Angelo about the lack of land for sale in the area. Angelo smokes and listens to the man's recommendations before commenting that all he knows how to do is work a hoe and he would starve to death in the city. The shop owner reminds him that the railway being built nearby needs people who can swing a pickaxe, and Angelo agrees that he knows how to do that too. "I could put some money aside while I keep looking for a new settlement, right?" he says. Soon thereafter, we see Angelo riding a



mule through a busy town. A well-dressed older man exits a building and greets Angelo, introducing himself as Rocco. Inside, they talk business over a glass of wine. Rocco warns Angelo that most people in the city are thieves and that he should be careful when looking for land to buy.

Chest of drawers – Massimo leads a cart and donkey up a rough track toward a farmhouse. Teresa appears in a window, smiling out at him. She hurries outside to greet him. “My chest!” Teresa says excitedly while walking to the cart to put her hands on it. “It’s beautiful.” “Not as beautiful as its owner,” Massimo flirts, placing his hand near hers on the dresser. Teresa diminishes her beauty, comparing her pregnant belly to a kite. Massimo assures her that women are the most beautiful when they’re expecting children. He then asks after Angelo before Teresa invites him in for coffee.



Settlement for sale – Dramatic music plays as men lead mules and smash rocks for the construction of a new rail line. The camera twirls around the scene before landing on Angelo using a sledge to crush rocks for gravel. Sometime later, Rocco enters the house and tells Angelo he has good news. There’s a man named Ambrosio with a fantastic lot for sale that would make an excellent settlement. “Listen to what he has to say,” Rocco advises Angelo, who munches on bread and cheese, “but don’t make any promises. You’re not the first one that he’s tried to deceive.” Rocco explains further that the settlement for sale was a foreclosure on the last owner Ambrosio sold it to, warning Angelo not to accept any advances or money lending from the man. A bit later, Angelo meets with Ambrosio, who draws out the meeting with concerns about cost and fees and interest. Angelo proves himself to be a quick study, following Rocco’s advice to the letter and promising nothing before he sees the land.



Talk of millions – Angelo leads a donkey pulling a cart towards a house, Teresa riding in the back. We see Massimo and Pierina standing on the porch with their baby, who welcomes them eagerly. The two fathers shake hands and congratulate each other on the birth of their children. The scene jumps inside the house where Teresa and Pierina gather up the dirty plates and the men talk about the lot of land for sale: “It’s a little expensive,” Angelo begins. “Five million.” “A little?” quips Massimo. “Angelo, it’s big expensive!” Angelo says the down payment is only 1.5 million, and they begin to argue as the women bring coffee from the kitchen. Angelo has a plan; both families can take joint ownership of the land, live in the big house, and manage the property until it turns a profit. Eventually, Massimo agrees on the guarantee that a mill can be built on the land as soon as possible.



Wagon train – A montage of the families and their cargo crossing the land takes the screen. Spokes of wheels and mule legs churn the earth as the wagon train winds its way over hills and around trees. Angelo and Massimo lead the beast of burden as Teresa and Pierina tend to the fussing children on the bench seat of one of the wagons. Among the belongings lashed to the wagons, the camera picks out the chest of drawers Massimo built for Teresa. Clouds begin to gather overhead and thunder claps as the music turns from jaunty to concerned.



Shelter from the storm – Rain pours as the wagon train comes to a halt outside a tiny woodland chapel. Angelo and some other men scramble to tie down the oxen and mules while the women run for cover inside with their babies held tight to their chests. Teresa hands off her child to Massimo, who follows his wife inside. She then stands, facing the storm. “Are you crazy?” Angelo shouts over the din of the storm. “Get out of the rain.” Teresa obeys, standing near the doorway of the little chapel beside Massimo, who cradles her daughter. Inside, Pierina murmurs prayers while doting on her child. Massimo’s eyes wander as Teresa sings to herself, watching the rain. His eyes linger on the outline of Teresa’s breasts in her wet dress. Teresa shoots him a knowing look but says nothing, simply holding her hat a bit higher to cover her chest.



New home – The big house on the new property sits abandoned, its empty windows yawning maws into darkness. Pierina eyes her new home with a blank expression, but her eyes betray a subtle disappointment. Teresa wears her displeasure on her face. The two men, however, smile and nod, chatting about the work to be done. As they begin moving in, the camera pulls back, giving us a wide shot of their new home. It moves back again, giving us a better view of the property and the pond near the house. Late that night, Teresa makes her way upstairs by candlelight. A baby fusses in one of the bedrooms. She turns to look and sees Pierina gently rocking her son to sleep as Massimo lies on the bed, exhausted. Teresa checks on her daughter before stopping to admire her chest and climbing into bed next to Angelo, who is already fast asleep.



The anarchist – A bunch of men chatter with one another outside a general store. A man introduces Angelo to the community as their new neighbor. The shopkeeper strikes up a conversation with Angelo about the weather and crops. A man drinking at the nearby bar shoots the shopkeeper a strange look before saying, “He’s telling upfront that prices will drop. Hah!” He turns to Angelo. “You see? You barely got here, and this capitalist pig is already taking advantage of you!” “Anyone can be a capitalist!” the shopkeeper responds, accusing the man of being a bum. “The devil should have taken both of your eyes!” the drunk man spits at the one-eyed shopkeeper. The shopkeeper assures Angelo that the man, Scariot, has a big bark but no bite, saying in a hushed, mocking tone that he’s an anarchist. Moving around the counter and pulling Angelo aside, the shopkeeper promises the young man they’ll be great friends in the near future and gives him a cigar on the house before offering to sell him a mule at a discount.



Constructing the mill – Another montage begins as Angelo and Massimo go over the plans for the mill. Massimo gestures at a stand of straight trees before the scene cuts to the mill mid-construction. Workers helping Massimo nail together planks and lift beams. Angelo enters the scene, calling out to Massimo that he has found more workers. Among them is Scariot—apparently, he’s not the freeloader the shopkeeper makes him out to be. In the kitchen, Teresa and Pierina work to pack up a large meal into baskets. Teresa carries them to the job site as Pierina stays to feed the children. In the shade of the partially completed mill, Teresa distributes the food. She and Massimo share a long look at one another, and Scariot watches them with a coy grin.



Thin walls – Late that night, Teresa prepares for bed. As the music fades, the sound of grunting and moaning can be heard. In the bedroom just one room away, Massimo and Pierina have sex. Pierina's moaning fades away as Teresa lies down, listening to Massimo's repetitive grunting. Beside her, Angelo lies fast asleep. Work is coming to an end on the mill, and Teresa delivers the midday meal, stating loudly that the men should serve themselves. She walks away, Massimo's eyes following her. Scariot puts a hand on his shoulder and asks why he's sad. Massimo claims he isn't, and Scariot chuckles before insinuating that he knows that Massimo has feelings for Teresa.



Polite thievery – Teresa helps Angelo carry baskets of corn away from the field as he tells her how much stock they've gathered already: 200 bags of corn. "It's getting better and better," Angelo says proudly. He pitches an idea to repay the loan faster than expected by taking out a loan with a better rate. A bit later, he pitches the same plan to Massimo, who calls it "immoral." He says it's taking advantage of the settlers they've brought onto the farm, but Angelo presses back, saying he'll pay them all interest out of his own savings, adding, "It's better than letting their savings rot under their mattresses." Massimo insists that it be equal to the rate he would be dodging, and this upsets Angelo, who wants to make a small profit. Nearby, Teresa and Pierina stand nearby, watching with worried expressions. Massimo mentions that it's exploitative capitalism, and Angelo chuckles, saying, "You've been talking to Iscariot... Wasting your time with that stupid drunk." Not wanting to fight, Massimo bids Angelo good night and goes upstairs. Out of curiosity, Angelo asks what Pierina thinks when she brings coffee, and she finds the plan rather practical if it could be worked out fairly. He asks her to convince Massimo, but she calls this "men's business" before walking upstairs with two cups and the pot of coffee.



Flirting – One day, Teresa makes her way to the mill in the middle of the day. She finds Massimo lying on the ground, shading his eyes from the sun. "Are you ill?" she asks, a concerned note to her voice. He looks confused. "Scariot said you were sick," she explains. He says he's fine, then she asks why he's just lying there if he's not sick. He strikes up a conversation, eventually telling her Iscariot has taken a liking to her. She wonders why, and he explains, "Because you're smart. You're not stupid like Pierina." She asks what else Iscariot has said, and Massimo continues, "Marriage is a priest's invention. What do you think?" She says it's God's law, continuing, "Don't ask me these things. I get all confused... I have my own ideas, but you have to promise not to laugh." Massimo promises, and she sits on the ground beside him, saying, "Aunt Gema doesn't believe in love. But I... I thought hard about it. I know it's real." Massimo smiles, agreeing. Her second idea is "love is never a sin." She finishes by saying love and marriage are different things. Massimo agrees with both before asking to kiss her hand, and she lets him. While she enjoys this, she makes up an excuse and runs back to the big house.



Business acumen – Angelo stands in Ambrosio's office, waiting for the money-lender to return with his books. Looking over his numbers, he lists out the payment and the remaining debt. "I came to pay off the whole debt," says Angelo. Ambrosio looks up at him in disbelief, saying, "I see that your business is doing well, Mr. Gardone." Angelo insists on paying even the last three days of interest, which Ambrosio is willing to forgive. Angelo passes over a stack of bills and then a stack of coins before saying their business is concluded, but he catches Ambrosio's interest with a new business plan. With a bit of haggling and a few displays of business



sense, he convinces Ambrosio to buy all of his farm's polenta after they mill it. Angelo grins as Ambrosio grimaces, knowing he won't squeeze a better deal out of the young man.

Christmas dinner – Teresa giggles while her daughter clumsily feeds her grapes. The little girl runs off, and Teresa sits back on a swing hanging from a long limb of the tree outside the big house, singing. Inside, Pierina pulls a hot roast out of the oven and carries it outside. The two families gather on either side of a table dressed for Christmas dinner, and Angelo stands to give a speech: "I know I never drink, but this is our third Christmas in San Giuseppe, and already we can afford to celebrate. We have the means. Cheers." They all lift their glasses and drink. Massimo complains about the heat and mentions it's probably cooler down by the river. He suggests a family trip to Angelo, who shoots down the idea, saying he has business. Pierina says she also doesn't want to drag her newborn down there and suggests Teresa go in her stead.



Sexuality – Pensive music plays as Teresa and Massimo walk through the woods to the river. They walk the trail to the waterfall, looking longingly at one another. Behind the white mist of the waterfall, they meet and kiss. The camera catches them in silhouette, black shapes against the waterfall and the nature beyond. They kiss deeper and hold each other closer. Even though we can't clearly see her face, we can see Teresa smile as she pulls Massimo away, further down the trail. Later that night, she sits in her nightgown at the front step of the big house. Massimo's hand reaches down, caressing her cheek. He kneels beside her to bring his face close to hers, saying, "I cannot sleep." Teresa grins before leading him by the hand to the barn. There they kiss and hold each other, pulling each other's clothes off before lying back on a hay bale. They have slow, passionate sex, both of them beaming at one another between kisses. After the act, they lay side by side, Teresa stroking Massimo's hair as they look at the moon.



"I thought you'd be happy" – The water wheel at the mill creaks and groans with effort as the quern and attached machines inside turn and shake. Massimo oversees the hopper, topping it up with corn as other men inspect and bag the ground polenta. Outside, he sees Iscariot approaching, and he rushes to meet with the older man. "Hug me, Sacariot, hug me!" Massimo says grabbing Iscariot. "I'm a happy man!" Iscariot seems confused by Massimo's behavior, and—after a bit of wordplay—he finally realizes what's going on: Massimo and Teresa have begun an affair. When Scariot turns away from Massimo, saying he's lost a friend, Massimo complains, "I thought you'd be happy... You're not losing any friend!" Scariot says the community will run him off once they find out, warning him about how happy he looks: "These people may not be smart, but they're not stupid."



Wedding photo – Teresa stares down at her wedding photo. A smiling version of her looks back. Pierina knocks on her bedroom door, and Teresa slowly rises to answer. The two women share a tense look before Teresa bids her to enter. Pierina looks at Teresa's backing, and Teresa explains she's just preparing for her upcoming trip to the nearby city, asking if Pierina would like her to buy anything for her while she's away. Practical as always, Pierina asks for fabric and a needle. Teresa says she likes shopping more than sewing, and Pierina says she knows in a veiled insult. When Pierina turns to leave, Teresa tells her that they're good friends. "I never said you weren't," says Pierina, confused. "It's not that," Teresa explains. "I mean, I've always trusted you."



And you, do you trust me?" "I never distrusted you," says Pierina. Unhappy with this response, Teresa asks Pierina if her marriage is alright. Pierina's body language tightens, and she says, "Men are men and women are women. If everyone knows their places, everything is fine." Teresa asks Pierina, "What if Angelo were your husband?" Pierina reacts with offense, acting like the suggestion is the same thing as infidelity, and says all of this resembles children's talk before leaving.

Wedding party – A group of older men play a brutal form of bocce where they try to break the neck of a buried chicken with the stone balls as a brass band blasts out a polka nearby. Angelo rides by on a mule, looking at the wedding festivities. He hitches his mount outside the church and heads inside. There, a priest leads him toward the altar, where he crosses himself before turning and seeing Angelo's expression, chuckling: "Don't be afraid. There's nothing wrong." He says his standing in the community is high and his business is thriving, making him a prime candidate for the church board. Praising more of his behavior—such as his abstaining from drink and cursing—the priest reminds Angelo that the church's board sets the example for the community. Angelo says he'll accept if the priest asks him. The priest barely thanks him before speaking about building a new, bigger, more expensive church, ultimately wordlessly presenting his hand for Angelo to kiss as a dismissal. The 'bomp-bomp' of the polka fades back in as Angelo opens the door on his way out.



Eloping – Massimo and the storekeeper from town crest a hill on horseback. They ride quickly across the flatlands, blossoming clouds at their backs. In the town, they hitch their mounts outside a familiar storefront, Ambrosio's business. Inside, the businessman parts with a stack of bills and shakes Massimo's hand only to murmur curses and insults when the younger man is out of earshot. The scene suddenly cuts to a train station where a man leads Teresa and her daughter toward the platform: it's Massimo. She holds his arm tightly, telling him of her trip to the movies and how spectacular an experience it was. The one-eyed shopkeeper sees them and quickly puts two and two together, nearly dropping his cigarette from his mouth as he gapes. He follows them to the train, Massimo turning to address him after handing off their luggage. "Teresa and I will leave," he says, calm as ever. "We're not going back to San Giuseppe. Tell Angelo we still don't know where we're going." He orders the shopkeeper to do all the shopping or else Angelo will kill him. Massimo, Teresa, and her daughter board a second-class carriage, and the one-eyed shopkeeper gasps as the two kiss as the train rolls out of the station.



Breaking the news – Two mules loaded with goods stand hitched to a post outside the big house at the farm. Inside, the one-eyed shopkeeper fiddles with his hat awkwardly as Angelo shouts in disbelief. "I told you already that Teresa is at her mother's," he shouts angrily. "What kind of joke is this?" The poor shopkeeper does his best to break the news of the eloping couple gently, but Angelo just gets angrier and angrier, hurling insults and curses at the man. Hearing the ruckus, Pierina comes downstairs, and Angelo lashes out at her too, but he quickly apologizes, telling her she needs to know as well. "Who died?" she asks. "No one died!" Angelo shouts. "They left! Massimo stole... Teresa." He clenches his fists and shouts, unable to contain his rage. Pierina stands there, staring in disbelief, and Angelo insults her lack of reaction. She walks away and begins praying at a small shrine as Angelo's rage gives way to insane laughter. He soon comes back around to shouting curses at Massimo and Teresa. When Pierina returns from the shrine, she asks his advice. "We'll go to sleep," he says. "They're sleeping right now. Let's sleep too."



Massimo's handiwork – Preparing to go to sleep, Massimo lays eyes on the chest of drawers Teresa kept on her side of the bed. He stares, shaking with anger before crossing to them and ripping the decorations from the top with a stroke of his arm before pushing it from the room. Suddenly, Angelo appears outside, swinging an axe. The axe falls on the pristine finish of the dresser. He screams as he smashes the chest of drawers to pieces, Pierina watching from the house with a worried expression. He lights the pile of splinters with a match and crouches to watch it burn. The morning birds chirp as the sun begins to rise, and Angelo sits beside the smoldering pile, his eyes fixed on the last embers. Pierina appears behind him and beckons him into the house: she's prepared breakfast and coffee and serves him.



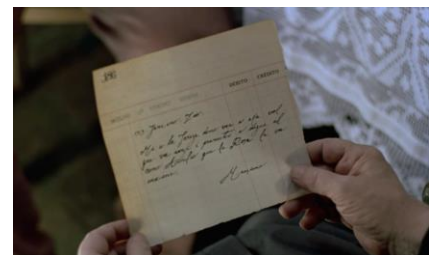
"It's not right to throw everything away" – As they drink their coffee, Angelo speaks: "I've been thinking... you should go back to your mother's house. We sell everything, and I look for another place." "Not even in your dreams," she snaps. "It's not right to throw everything away." She says that if people caught word they wanted to leave, they'd never get a good price for the land, and she reiterates that her half of the property is not for sale. Angelo worries about what people will say, and Pierina proudly says she has a clear conscience: she did no wrong so she'll feel no guilt. She then starts bossing Angelo around, seeing that he needs help finding direction. He agrees that he should apologize to the shopkeeper and finish the business he had planned for today. As he's leaving for the market, Pierina chides him for smashing the dresser instead of selling it. After glaring at the smoldering pile for a moment, he looks back at her and nods in agreement.



Announcement – At the general store, Angelo and the shopkeeper emerge from an office. A man stands and says he's sorry for what's happened to him, and Angelo reacts with confusion. The man says Pierina already visited his house this morning and told him the news. He also informs Angelo that his cousin will be coming to live with them to help 'keep them honest.' The shopkeeper worries about the business, and Angelo makes an announcement to those gathered at the store. He tells them of the eloping and promises that business will continue as usual. A bunch of people cheer for him, and one man begins playing his accordion when suddenly Angelo collapses.



Letter – The local priest reads a letter from Massimo who asks him to tell their extended family what has happened. Iscariot sits nearby, confirming several questions about the family when the priest asks. When he asks for more information, Iscariot is more than happy to gossip, though he couches his oversharing as necessary and helpful. The priest is shocked to learn that Pierina and Angelo are still living in the same house. "It looks like a quartet card game," Iscariot says after insinuating that perhaps Angelo and Pierina were in on the plan somehow. "A devil's game," the priest murmurs, "that gives life to the temptation of infidelity."



Business as usual – Angelo sits in his room, facing away from a cross. Pierina stands before a shrine in her room, reciting prayers. We then see them working side-by-side in the vineyard plucking bunches of dark red grapes. In the office of the general store, Angelo counts a stack of bills as the shopkeeper studies his books. A minor-keyed yet romantic song plays as Angelo rides his horse up to the big house. Inside, he dines with Pierina and the cousin sent to



live with them. They dine in silence, sipping wine afterward as Pierina clears the table. A bit later, Pierina stands in the doorway of the dining room, looking at Angelo. He turns to face her, and she wishes him a good night. He says the same before returning to his books, writing by lamplight. Later that night, they sit in chairs, alone in their opposing bedrooms.

Wine before bed – Angelo looks up at a woman from a group of dancing villagers. They sing and clap along with an accordion player. The woman slowly walks outside to join him, and they walk among the others chatting. By the river, Pierina mends a shawl while watching her sons play. She looks up to see Angelo smiling at the woman, and a jealous edge appears in her normally bland expression. Late that night, Pierina urges her cousin to get to bed early so he isn't late to work at the mill before asking Angelo to share a glass of wine with her. She walks away but doesn't return with the wine, sitting near him and asking what he's thinking about. He claims nothing, but Pierina tells him she knows he's thinking about the woman at the party. "That's my business," he nearly growls. "I'm also a woman," Pierina says firmly. "If you need a woman... I won't give you to anyone else..." She takes Angelo's hand, kissing it, and he pulls the shawl from her shoulders as he begins to unbutton her dress. Angelo lifts her onto the table, and they have sex on top of it, Angelo climbing atop her and kissing her deeply. When they've finished, Angelo begins to cry, and Pierina comforts him.



Cross to bear – Angelo sits in the church, crossing himself in one of the pews. The priest approaches him, telling him, "I'm deeply sorry... It must have been a hard blow.... But you will also be punished if you give to temptation, like her." The priest clearly communicates that Angelo is expected to remain unmarried and celibate for the rest of his life. He also forbids him to live with another woman, demanding that he or Pierina leave the farm immediately. As a final humiliation, he revokes the offer to put Angelo on the church board. "I'm not a child," Angelo says, standing to face the priest. "I didn't ask anything from you... Take your recommendation and..." He stops himself, remembering he is in a church, and instead storms out.



Expecting – Pierina stops mopping, urging Angelo to be calm: he's just finished telling her what the priest told him. "He practically called me a cuckold himself," Angelo fumes. "He wanted my money to build a new church. Now it seems my money is no longer worthy." Ever practical, Pierina sits beside Angelo and reminds him, "We'll be saving a lot." She doesn't see a better time or way to communicate what she needs to, so she just comes out and tells Angelo that she's pregnant. Angelo is shocked to hear it happened after only a single try, but he celebrates, saying he'll ask the more friendly priest to baptize the child. Sometime later, her belly now larger, Pierina passes two women on the road who ignore her when she says, "Good morning." At a neighbor's house, Angelo receives similar treatment, but he demands an explanation. "Father Gentilli said your way of life is wrong," the man explains. "The church's law is God's law..." He informs Angelo that he'll be keeping his son away from the mill, and Angelo says he'll have to shut down the operation without workers.



"What kind of capitalist are you?" – Angelo bangs his hand on the counter in the general store, swearing he'll think of some idea to show everyone. Iscarriot walks up, giving sound advice: "If you can't deal around here, deal elsewhere... What kind of capitalist are you? Every capitalist wants to go further and further." The shopkeeper swears his loyalty, saying, "I won't starve because of the word of



some priest.” Similarly, Iscariot pledges to help run the mill, but only so long as it takes to get back at the priest, jokingly swearing to stage a revolution afterwards. “I have a habit of siding with the persecuted,” he explains very seriously. “I feel sorry for you.” Angelo lays out his plan: he’ll trade goods for goods with the Brazilian farmers who deal almost entirely in livestock.

Condemnation – Pierina carries a child on her hip as she leads a mule carrying her other two children in baskets down the dusty road to the church. She enters with her children in tow, apparently interrupting a midday mass. The priest addresses her with scorn in his voice, and she quips back firmly, “I am no pig. I brought my children so all here may see they are not pigs. We’re people, Father. People like everyone else.” The priest claims not to know what she means while a cousin of Pierina’s in the pews stands, urging her to calm down and leave. “Calm a goats ass!” she shouts back. “I’m not a whore. I’m a mother of three, and I have another inside of me. You’re going to hell, father Gentili.” she addresses the congregation, “you’re all going to hell... If you weren’t a priest, I’d have brought a rifle.” Pierina directly blames the priest for their social isolation and the community forcing her and Angelo out: they did nothing but fall in love after having their hearts broken, and that is no sin. “I’ve never seen Christian people do what you did,” she says before leaving, turning around only once to warn the priest that hell is for his kind too.



Gunman – Sometime later, Pierina tends to the wash out on the line as the children play by the house. She looks across the field to see a man in a black hat and poncho with a rifle held by his hip, and she immediately runs to put the children inside. The man on horseback stops for a moment before riding on. The day passes, and the shutters are all closed on the big house. Inside, Pierina murmurs a prayer in panic, hearing horses whinnying outside. She grabs the old hammer-lock rifle by the door and steps outside, shouting, “Who’s there!?” In her fright, she squeezes the trigger and fires into the air, scaring Angelo, who shouts for her to calm down. She throws herself into his arms, and soon thereafter she feeds him a late dinner. “I have good news,” he says. “I negotiated the sale of our land... fifty thousand more than expected.” Pierina asks if they have a new place to live, and Angelo reveals that he bought Ambrosio’s business. “I don’t know if I’ll ever get used to city living,” she says, smiling. Angelo asks when she knew she loved him, and she simply says, “The day they left.”



1930 – The words “Caxias Do Sul – 1930” appear on the screen over a shot of a stately car rolling to a stop in front of Angelo’s warehouse. Angelo and the one-eyed storekeeper, both looking much older, step out of the front door and walk to the car, many people on the now-paved streets stopping to wish him good morning. As she walks around the lush grounds of an opulent mansion, Pierina reads a letter from Teresa, apologizing for the pain they caused and informing her of their past twenty years, with an included family photo, including Angelo’s estranged first daughter. Moved by the sentiment and seeking a connection with old friends and lovers, Pierina organizes a photoshoot of her own family in exchange, sending her own letter. We see both families sitting for the photoshoots, all smiling and much larger than they were in 1910.



CHARACTER ANALYSIS

Teresa

Much like the other characters, we only have a rough backstory for Teresa. Unlike the other main characters, she seems unrelated to the community, never having family over or going to see a cousin nearby. When her marriage with Angelo serves to disappoint her, Teresa finds herself falling in love with the charming Massimo.

Imaginative Teresa has an imagination unlike many of the other characters in the film. This comes up first and most clearly when she talks about her private life with Auntie Gema. Teresa vaguely says she's disappointed by the sex with Angelo and had imagined something more romantic for a long time. Auntie Gema tells her to simply become celibate and obstinate, but Teresa wants more. This imagined romantic life leads her to fall for and then run away with Massimo.

Submissive We see Teresa's submissive side come on quickly when it's clear she and Angelo aren't the best pair. He scolds her for wading in the water, and while it's delivered spitefully and partially as a bit of a joke for the audience, Teresa submits, apologizing for "being stupid." While she has romantic notions about her humanity and the life she wants to lead, she also bows to the expectations of her religion, her society, and her husband at every turn. It's only when she decides to be with Massimo that we see a bit of a change here, but not much. Even in this act of rebellion, she is still playing the role of a submissive wife, following his orders as they board the train, just with a more compatible man.

Unhelpful Teresa was not meant to live the life of a farmer's wife. She lacks many of the skills that would make her helpful. When we see her working, it's exclusively in the kitchen and almost entirely as a server, not as the cook. She plays with the children, but we see the actual child care being done by Pierina or other women. One of the few spoken conflicts between Teresa and Pierina has to do with Teresa's lack of helpful skills and qualities. Teresa mentions that she prefers shopping to sewing, and Pierina delivers a heavily veiled insult: "I know."

Massimo

We don't learn much about Massimo's past beyond that he is Angelo's cousin. He is a well-spoken man who wishes to do more than toil his life away. Angelo's romantic attitude towards life and love leads him and Teresa to begin an affair.

Romantic We learn quickly that Massimo has the heart of a romantic. His first lines are delivered with an ostentatious flare he never loses, drawing Teresa toward him because of their like-mindedness. He often shares daydreams of better lives where he married a rich woman or lived in the city. He says he hates work and often tries to avoid it, something Pierina hates and Teresa loves.

Controlled Massimo has a great propensity toward self-control. This makes him and Pierina seem like less of a mismatch at the beginning of the film, but as the story goes on, we see the cracks in their relationship. Massimo wants more from life, but Pierina is happy to keep cleaning up after him and having children until the day she dies. He is able to keep his life together, to live by the expectations of others even when he is tempted by Teresa. His ability to control his emotions allows him and Teresa to slip away one day without much trouble.

Planner Massimo's planning abilities are understated in the film. They underlie his personality and skills: he is a craftsman, a furniture builder. Just on a whim, he is able to sketch up a solid design for a chest of drawers for Teresa. The ability to so quickly and clearly plan out the size and design of a complex piece of furniture belies his planning skill. The next time we see this is when he agrees to buy the property with Angelo, then soon thereafter when they begin construction of the mill. It's clear he has a vision and directs others to execute it. The last time we see this trait comes in his second-to-last appearance when he and Teresa elope. Everything happens as if according to a grand plan: he meets Teresa and her

daughter at the station, he boards a train, and he gives his last commands to the shopkeeper who accompanied him there, telling him to finish the shopping as well as giving his final statements to his wife and business partner.

Angelo

Angelo is the older son of a family living in the valley. He values his ability to work the land above almost anything, marrying Teresa more out of expectation than attraction. Their incompatibility leads to Teresa falling in love with Massimo and Angelo finding that he loves Pierina.

Unimaginative Angelo isn't an unintelligent man: he's able to figure out complex business plans and engineering challenges such as the mill. He is, however, lacking in imagination. This is something we see he and Teresa butt heads about early on. She is a romantic through and through while he worries more about the livestock and the larder than his wife's feelings. We see his lack of imagination most clearly in an early scene where he ponders ways to make some money to buy his own farm. The shopkeeper tells him to find work in the city, and Angelo says he only knows how to work a hoe. After a bit of explanation and goading, Angelo realizes that a pickaxe is kind of like a hoe, meaning he could help build railroads.

Serious Angelo is a very serious man. I'm not sure he ever laughs while on screen. Jokes and turns of phrase seem to go over his head sometimes as well. He is serious to the point of being unable to just have fun, something that immediately sets him apart from Teresa. Angelo takes his place in the community very seriously as well, wanting to meet the expectations of his friends and relations. There isn't much that can be said about this trait, but it is perhaps Angelo's most important.

Angry We don't see this trait often because Angelo is self-aware enough to repress his anger, but it explodes several times in the film. We see it erupt first when Massimo refuses to agree to his slightly underhanded refinancing scheme. Massimo walks away to deescalate the situation. The next explosion of anger comes, predictably, after Angelo learns that Massimo and Teresa have run off together. He lashes out at the messenger, Pierina (for her lack of harsh reaction), and the chest Massimo built for Teresa. His anger quickly turns to despair, and it doesn't come back until the community begins to mistreat he and Pierina for falling in love. The priest insults and speaks down to him, retracting his invitation to join the church board, and here we see Angelo's pure anger at its strongest. There is an injustice in the priest's insistence that both he and Pierina should remain celibate because of the infidelity of their spouses and the roundabout way he calls him an embarrassing cuckold. Pierina and Iscariot help him to channel his anger into economic advancement, making them wealthy pillars of the community by 1930.

Pierina

We don't know a lot about Pierina aside from her being Massimo's wife. She has family in the community, as shown by her cousin sending his son to live with her and Angelo after their spouses elope. Pierina is a pious, hardworking, and serious woman who puts her family's well-being before everything else.

Observant Because she doesn't speak out often, most people assume Pierina is stupid, including her husband Massimo. Her lack of input isn't proof of a lack of thought or observation, however. For much of the first half of the film, she serves as a background character, the focus on the blossoming romance between Massimo and Teresa. However, one of the first and clearest moments of this trait comes when Angelo asks her opinion of his plan to pay off the farm's debt to get a better interest rate. She plainly states that she thinks it's a fine idea if done fairly, but she stops short of trying to convince Massimo, saying it's not her place as his wife to make demands about the household finances.

Pious Pierina is the most religious character in *The Quartet*. She believes deeply in her Catholic faith, following strict ideals around marriage, gender, work, and prayer. She is frequently seen with her hands folded in prayer in front of a shrine, most frequently when she is stressed or upset. When she first learns that Massimo ran away with Teresa, the very first thing she does is turn to a shrine to say a Hail Mary. We also see her praying in moments alone. It seems like when Pierina isn't taking care of her children or doing household chores, she spends her time devoted to prayer and religion.

Controlled Pierina is perhaps the most controlled individual in this film. The majority of the film sets her up as this unflappable, almost emotionless woman who only seeks to meet expectations and assure others meet the expectations others foist on them. At first, this is meant as a foil to Teresa, who is given to emotional and romantic flights of imagination, to help her characterization. But as Pierina moves from a secondary character to a main character in the second half of the film, we're given more screentime with her, and we learn about the complexity of her inner workings. She too is emotional; she just does a better job of controlling her reactions. She does this with the help of her piety, often turning to shrines for prayer during turbulent times.

THEMES

Society

Culture Another specter haunting the narrative is that of culture, specifically the way it intersects with the situations and social relations of the main characters. If they were Protestant Germans living in Texas, this story would have unfolded in an entirely different way. This drama is only dramatic, taking place among the family-oriented, conservative Catholic communities that followed many Italian families to South America. Their cultural norms from the old country, their religious zealotry, and their strict social expectations for men and women all give the situation we see unfold its narrative weight. Here, culture isn't explored so much as it excuses and fuels the drama in the story.

Illustrative moment One of the clearest cultural moments in the film comes very early. After the marriage of Teresa and Angelo, they celebrate back at the family property. Here, a pair of men play a jaunty Alpine tune on accordions as the friends and family of the new couple dance a complex, multi-step dance, spinning in pairs before joining up in varied lines and tunnels. This gives us a glimpse into an important part of immigrant stories: preserved culture.



Religion While not always in the viewer's face, this theme is a constant presence in the story. Much of the conflict and drama comes from the fact that this is a conservative Catholic community, and they have very strict beliefs about what people are and aren't allowed to do. Much of this conflict comes from the—as described by Pierina—'unchristian' actions of the priest and the community in the way people try to use faith to control the actions and circumstances of others. There is no rule that says a man must remain celibate if his wife runs out on him, but this is something the priest demands of Angelo. Similarly, the townsfolk shun Angelo and Pierina after they fall in love, though they've been a huge economic and social boon to the community, all because of the preoccupation with the traditional and 'Godly' way to fall in love. Faith takes many forms in *The Quartet*, from Iscariot's atheism to Pierina's constant praying and many views and beliefs in between.

Illustrative moment A pivotal moment in the film occurs in a church because of the actions of the priest. Toward the film's end, the priest at their local church rescinds his offer to put Angelo on the church board because of his cuckoldry. Further, he starts dictating how and where Angelo and Pierina can live: they are to remain celibate and to sell their land to live elsewhere, preferably with family who will ensure they stay celibate. Angelo reacts with anger, finding it insane that someone could have such control over his life when everything that has happened to him in recent weeks was because of the sinful acts of others. Why should he have to pay the price for the sins of another? Is he Christ?



Gender We see a very traditional ideal of gender in this film. It fits the time period and the community: They are conservative Catholics living in a new country, making them even more insulatory than other communities. We see very strong ideas about men and women and a segregation between them. The men sell the goods, play cards, are tended to by the women, and the women labor under them, whether it's in the house or in the field. They are expected to marry and obey, to be fruitful and multiply, to never interfere in men's work. Even when characters push the boundaries of these expectations, they often quickly relent and return to the norm, even if it pains them. Both the men and the women in this story fail to meet the expectations set for them, and they react to these failures in different ways, usually by shutting down or isolating themselves.

Illustrative moment The best way to illustrate this theme is to highlight the role Pierina plays as an idealized woman in the time and place the film is set. Whereas Teresa fails to perform well in many domestic and farm tasks, Pierina is always shown being competent and busy. She is nearly never not doing something with her hands, and when she's not, she usually clasps them in prayer. Even though she states that it's not always what makes her happiest, she believes that people knowing their place in marriage and society will make everything work out right. Where Teresa is happy to leave her children and go on short trips through the woods or into town, Pierina is always caring for her children. She is also incredibly fertile, as seen when she gets pregnant from a single encounter with Angelo and the way she has three children with Massimo and several more with Angelo. In many ways, Pierina is the feminine ideal in this community, yet they chastise and abandon her because of the actions of her husband. Through acts not her own, she goes from the ideal to the hated "pig" almost overnight.



Politics

Colonialism Never explicitly mentioned yet constantly haunting the narrative is the specter of colonialism. Brazil's colonial project had been ongoing for nearly two hundred years, but only at the turn of the last century did it start to resemble the 'Manifest Destiny' of the United States. This comes up in the economic struggles and social issues faced by the main characters. They are single-minded in their desire to start a new farm. The expansion of rail networks and towns plays a frequent role in the story. While somewhat poor themselves, this immigrant story shows us how desperate people from Europe were used as a tool to spread European farming, economics, religion, and ideals across the New World.

Illustrative moment One of the clearest moments of colonialism comes as a montage. We see the families with a series of wagons pulling their furniture and luggage piled high. While never explicitly said, it's colonialism that drives the plot, and this classic display of the colonial wagon train highlights this without a word.



Political Discussions: Capitalism vs. Socialism A minor yet repeated theme, radical politics and Marxist economic thoughts butt heads with the rising capitalism that backs colonialism. Many of the struggles in the film are caused by a lack of economic support: in the old farming system, the commons were granted or rented for a nominal return on the crops or livestock raised there, but no longer. Now the farmer must be a businessman, an architect, an engineer, a banker, a mayor, and more. All of this requires mounds and mounds of cash (several million, in the case of the property bought by the families). While the worker's struggle is supplanted by a pair of workers attempting to become owners, we see a socialist argument come up frequently. It is compared to Christ in its generosity, and, through Iscariot, we hear some direct analysis of the system at hand, its cruelties, and



inefficiencies. Iscariot ties capital to the church and its repression, which, in turn, hurts Angelo and Pierina for nothing more than having the bad luck of being cheated on. The film takes no strong stance in support of any economic system, using this struggle as a backdrop in the historic drama.

Illustrative moment Less a moment and more a character, the issue of private ownership versus collectivism often comes up in the presence of Iscariot. Scariot is introduced to us at first as an anarchist and a drunken bum, but he soon becomes a close friend and confidant of the families. He often jokes about their role as capitalists, as owners of capital, but he shows his true colors in the way he helps them as members of his community. His struggles and the way he interacts with the world step away from the typical “pitched battle” portrayal and humanizes the socialist as someone who cares deeply for flawed people in spite of everything and tries to help where he can.

Sexuality

Infidelity This is the main dramatic theme of *The Quartet*. It's a lack of romance and compatibility that push Massimo and Teresa toward one another. This infidelity grows steadily until Massimo and Teresa suddenly elope in the middle of the film. Out of this outright infidelity, we see a conservative Catholic response in the form of enforced celibacy of the victims of the actions of others and social ostracization when they refuse and form a new relationship. We see both objective infidelity and a twisted idea of religious infidelity under unusually strict biblical interpretations.

Illustrative moment The first moment of outright infidelity we see happens beneath the waterfall. Angelo, having complained about the heat, wants to take a walk by the river. Unwilling to drag her newborn out into the woods, Pierina suggests that Teresa go in her place. Massimo and Teresa take advantage of the situation by having a romantic getaway, kissing beneath the waterfall.



Desire / Romance in Marriage These ideas intertwine in a way that can't be effectively untangled. Teresa is a romantic who desires more from life. Angelo is a simple man who cares more for animal husbandry than sex. He will not fulfill this desire for romance. Later in the film, Massimo admits to a similar frustration, wanting more from life and someone who will enjoy it with him, unlike Pierina, who is more interested in prayer than most other things. Even after they elope, the theme remains as Angelo and Pierina begin to think about their own desires, creating a whirlwind romance of their own. This causes their conservative community to push them out and mistreat them and fuels the conflict to the film's end.

Illustrative moment The most interesting moment highlighting this idea in the film happens soon after Teresa's marriage. She's beckoned into Angelo's aunt's room above the wine cellar to gossip and talk about sex. Here, Teresa admits that she's not happy with her sex life as Angelo's wife. The aunt advises her to become celibate in order to get back at her husband, but Teresa admits to an expectation for some romance in her life. Here we see a conflict between the old ways of marriage of convenience and social gain or pure procreation and the new norm based more in love and compatibility.



Proximity A core idea in this drama is how isolation and proximity drive people into relationships. In the time before trains and cars and planes, most people lived and died within about thirty miles of the place of their birth if they ever left. Even with those advances, immigrants often live in more isolated communities because of language barriers and cultural differences. This is what happens to the main characters of *The Quartet*. It's only through the new proximity of sharing a house that allows the marriages to fall apart and Massimo to elope with Teresa. People can only meet and fall in love if they have proximity, and we see relationships rise and fall because of it throughout the film.

Chemistry/Compatibility This idea is behind the couple-swapping dramatic plot. Neither couple is particularly compatible, only having married the other out of expectation. Because of this, they ‘find their pair’ like in a game of quartet. Because of their big personalities and romantic ideals, Teresa and Massimo quickly find that they love one another. Angelo and Pierina are a bit slower in coming around to the idea that they love each other, but in the end, they find themselves just as compatible and in love.

Illustrative moment Because we can directly compare it to another pair of sex scenes, one of the more interesting moments of chemistry happens when we first see Massimo and Teresa have sex. Here she moans and writhes with pleasure at his touch. Compare this to the quick and unsatisfying sex she was shown having with Angelo. Again, we can contrast this to the sex scene between Pierina and Angelo, where they too kiss, moan, and grab each other in pleasure. Not only are these two mismatched pairs more socially compatible, they are more sexually compatible as well.



Love Love is a complex topic in *The Quartet*. It's shown not to be directly tied to sex, unlike many other romantic films. All four of the main characters seem unhappy in their love lives. It's through finding their proper pairing that they find both love and sexual fulfillment, as seen in the comparison of the sex scenes between Teresa and Angelo—where her face is shocked and her body is still—and with her and Massimo—where she smiles, laughs, kisses, and grabs him while writhing underneath him. We also see familial love, though most of this is very surface level.

Illustrative moment A defining moment of love in this film happens when Massimo and Teresa elope with each other. They make a plan in secret, arranging two different trips to intersect at a train station where they'll leave together. Enacting this plan, Massimo gives orders to the shopkeeper before the train rolls away. As they depart, they kiss deeply, as if to prove their devotion to their messenger. Here we see the romantic love both lacked in their marriages shine.



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. How does the theme of religion intersect with that of sexuality in this film? Would this narrative have made sense outside of a conservative Catholic community?
2. In what ways does the historical period create the relationship dynamics we're shown?
3. In what ways does proximity create desire in this story?
4. Many romantic films show us how opposites attract, but this one focuses on matching pairs (hence the title). In what ways does this narrative press against narrative norms in romantic films?