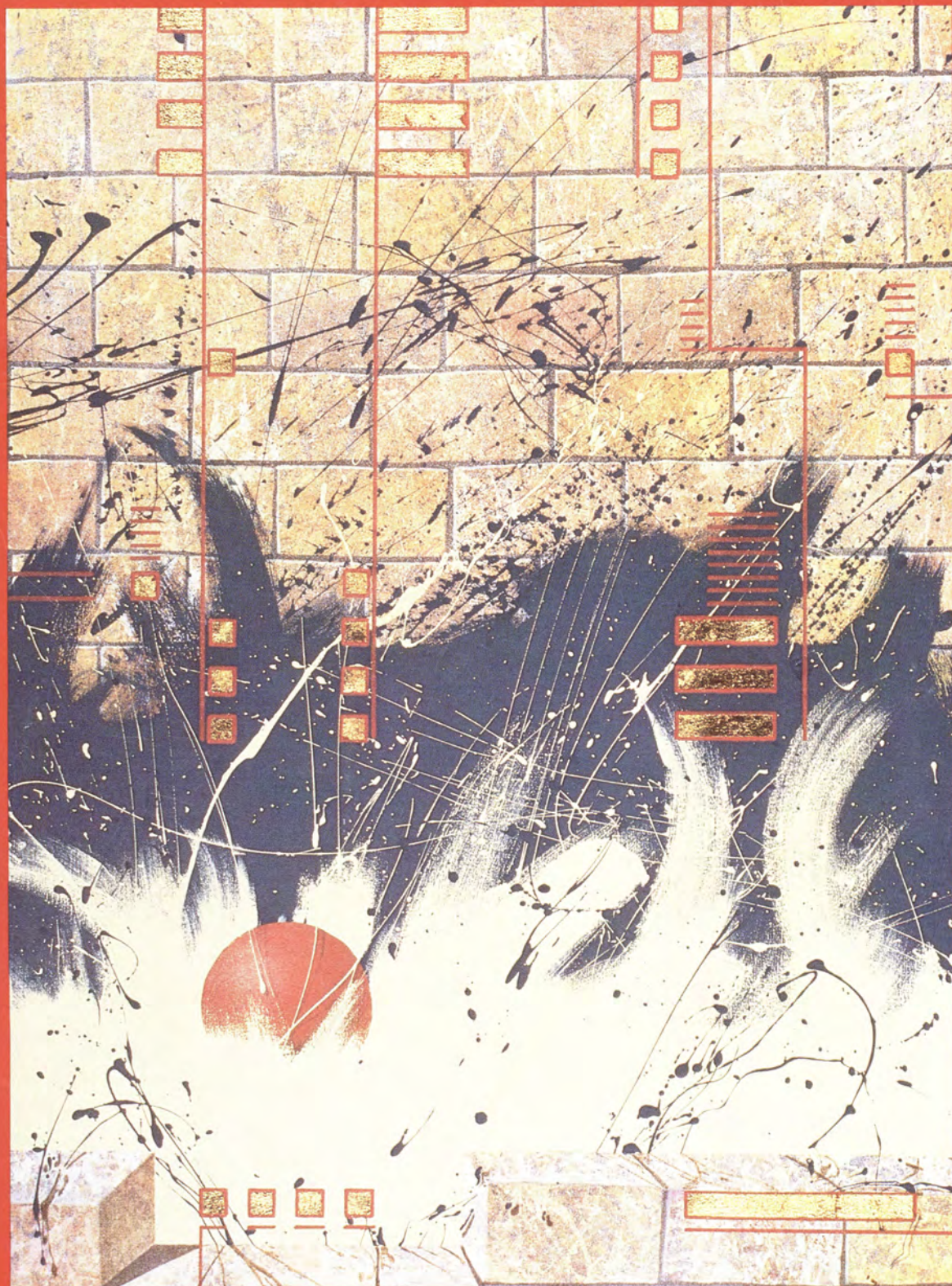


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# New Orleans Review

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<i>Shane's Pale Ghost</i> Ann Ronald	5
Voyeur Ron De Maris	10
Fortune Edward Nobles	12
The Western Film: A Sense of an Ending Philip J. Skerry	13
Immobilizing the Boundless Yannis Ritsos/tr. Kostas Myrsiades	18
The Song of Adventure Hans Lipinsky-Gottersdorf/tr. David Vandenberg	19
Morning in Salerno, IV Yannis Ritsos/tr. Kostas Myrsiades	22
The Usual Suspects: Eastern Europe and the World. Cannes 1990 John Mosier	23
The Creation of Birds Laureano Albán/tr. Frederick H. Fornoff	48
The Dark George Angel	50
From Screwballs to Cheeseballs: Comic Narrative and Ideology in Capra and Reiner Barbara Ching and Rita Barnard	52
My Doomsday Sampler Sue Owen	60
Rapture: Nature, Religion, and an Actress Named Patricia Gozzi Steven R. Johnson	63
First Riddle Frantisek Halas/tr. Don Mager	70
Second Riddle Frantisek Halas/tr. Don Mager	70
Third Riddle with Its Solution Frantisek Halas/tr. Don Mager	70
A Mirror for Mankind: The Pose of Hamlet with the Skull of Yorick Jeffery Alan Triggs	71
The Next Day Katherine Soniat	80
The Light Blanca Elena Paz/tr. John DuVal and Gastón Fernández-Torriente	81
Close-Up of Death Laureano Albán/tr. Frederick H. Fornoff	82
Scholarly Disinterest or Disinterested Scholarship? Eugene J. Devlin	84
Epistle Kevin Hearle	93
Silver Season Andy Solomon	94

Ann Ronald

## SHANE'S PALE GHOST

That "Pale Rider" imitates "Shane" is unquestionably true. If moviegoers seemed unable to see the common patterns, reviewers were quick to point them out. "Pure 'Shane,'" wrote David Ansen in *Newsweek*;<sup>1</sup> "shameless plagiarism," carped John Simon in the *National Review*.<sup>2</sup> The two films' story lines, to be sure, sound almost identical.

Each stars a mysterious protagonist who materializes unexpectedly and who, at that point, has opted for pacifism. He finds a collection of nesters/miners in need of his two-fisted services, is attracted to the wife/lover of their leader, and must confront that love as well as the malevolence of the entrepreneurial antagonist and his hired guns. Then, although psychologically battered, the hero emerges victorious only to disappear as mysteriously as he arrived. Details, as well as plot sequences, are equally reminiscent of each other. Where Shane helps Joe Starrett remove a stump, for example, the pale rider works with Hull Barret to excise a boulder. Similar names, similar relationships, and similar scenes repeat themselves so often that the astute moviegoer cannot help but see the connections.

But those connections seem more fortuitous than wise. Pauline Kael pinpointed the difference when, after acknowledging that "'Pale Rider' lifts its general outlines from 'Shane,'" she damned the Eastwood venture with metaphorical enthusiasm: "This may be an ecologically minded Western, but it's strip-mining 'Shane.'"<sup>3</sup> It does so, I think, because "Pale Rider" is a product that was designed for a different generation.

"Shane" belongs to the decade following World War II. Jack Schaefer first wrote it in 1946 as a three-part *Argosy* serial called *Rider from Nowhere*. The story later was expanded slightly and issued in a 1949 hardcover edition. From its inception,

Schaefer meant the piece to be a literary endeavor, "classical in form," he said, "stripped to the absolute essentials."<sup>4</sup> Indeed, he speaks freely of the conscious artistry he brought to the novel, designing its narrative technique and shaping its story line so that layers of meaning gradually are revealed. As one critic summarizes: "Through its use of illustrations and captions, *Argosy* clearly attempts to place *Rider from Nowhere* in the pulp Western tradition. The novel version of *Shane* attempts to refine the original structure so that the story's classic and timeless elements are presented in their most natural rhythms."<sup>5</sup> Most viewers would agree that the film version, produced four years after the novel, aspires after similarly mythic goals.

"Pale Rider," on the other hand, metamorphosed in reverse. Clint Eastwood, with myth in mind, commissioned the movie script from Michael Butler and Dennis Shyrack. Then Alan Dean Foster wrote two hundred and eighteen pages based on the screenplay—a novelization, as *Pale Rider's* title page boldly announces, not a novel. The book's execution may have been consciously literary, though, for Foster tried superficially to infuse what was inherent organically in *Pale Rider's* predecessor. By including historical allusions to John Sutter and literary allusions to John Muir's "Range of Light," he apparently thought he was elevating the text. Foster failed, of course, because allusions alone are not enough, but he also failed because the whole conception of *Pale Rider* is insufficient. First, Eastwood, Butler, Shyrack, and Foster put archetype before humanity. Second, the plot, the characters, even the mythic foundations, so appropriate for a hungrily romantic generation, are out of place now. Thus, *Pale Rider* creaks on the hinges of outmoded conception and present-day execution.

<sup>1</sup>David Ansen, "Shane," *Newsweek* 106 (1 July 1985): 55.

<sup>2</sup>John Simon, "Cowboyless Indians, Indianless Cowboys," *National Review* 37 (9 Aug. 1985): 50.

<sup>3</sup>Pauline Kael, "Pop Mystics," *New Yorker* 61 (12 Aug. 1985): 64-5.

<sup>4</sup>Gerald Haslam, "Jack Schaefer," in *Shane, The Critical Edition*, ed. James C. Work (Lincoln: Univ. of Nebraska Press, 1984) 22.

<sup>5</sup>Michael T. Marsden, "A Story for All Media," in *Shane, The Critical Edition* 342.

To begin with, both versions of *Pale Rider* appear hastily imagined. Pauline Kael points out several structural lapses that detract from the movie: the bigamist implications of Hull Barret's frequent marriage proposals, the irregular patches of snow that appear and disappear from scene to scene, the mining claims clustered together, the utter absurdity of hardscrabblers working the same stream bed for generations. *Shane* (the novel) is held together by no such oddities. That film's major inconsistency—daylight and darkness dissolving together—comes from a technical source, while "Pale Rider"'s more frequent incongruities stem from carelessness. Likewise, the vernacular language of the Foster book sounds forced—"Women didn't settle in a mining camp unless they had thoughts of living there permanent"<sup>6</sup>—where *Shane's* prose authentically replicates colloquial speed: "Can I call the turn for you, Shane?"<sup>7</sup> These are just details, however. Far more telling are the elemental ways in which these two westerns differ.

Part of *Shane's* power comes through its point of view. Narrated by a man who was once the boy of the story, its action unfolds retrospectively. Indeed, this is the major difference between Schaefer's novel and the film, for the book's "characters are not so much concrete human beings as memories, subjectively conceived, which are summoned up only before the mind's eye," as James K. Folsom acutely observes.<sup>8</sup> He goes on to explain that because film must be visualized directly, no such retrospective point of view is possible. Young Joey and Shane, especially, are living figures on the screen, not nostalgic recreations of someone's imagination. But George Stevens, the producer and director of "Shane," was able to work within this cinematographic constraint, while Clint Eastwood tried to exceed the limits.

The first production decision for "Pale Rider" was logical but inappropriate. Perhaps because a 1980's audience expects sexual—rather than hero-worship and probably because Eastwood liked the idea, "Pale Rider"'s innocent is female. She's also older than Joey Starrett (or Bobby, as he's called in the novel), a nubile adolescent instead of

a reverent boy. And just as the viewer sees the film's Joey more directly than the reader apprehends the fictional Bobby, so we watch Megan Wheeler functioning more actively than either *Shane* counterpart.

"Pale Rider" opens aggressively, with a pack of miscreants trampling through Carbon Canyon and killing Megan's dog. She is immediately a part of the action, then, rescuing the mongrel's body, cradling it to a secluded grave, praying for the appearance of a miracle. Later, as events unfold, she is personally responsible for getting entangled with Lahood's men. Where Joey only spies on violence, Megan precipitates it. "She was pounding very weakly at Josh Lahood's chest now, her tiny fists like gusts of wind on his shirt. He was using his weight to hold her in place while he worked on her with his hands" (163). Her subsequent rescue by the Preacher sends the movie on to its climactic scenes.

But the finales of both "Pale Rider" and "Shane" reveal that neither Megan or Joey is designed as subtly as their novelistic archetypes. "Shane," calls the boyish voice to one receding figure; "Preacher! I love you, Preacher," cries the girl. Two heroes ride off into technicolor landscapes followed only by the voices of immaturity. *Shane* (the novel), however, sends Bobby back to his parents and offers two more chapters of retrospective analysis.

Those chapters get to the heart of *Shane's* mystique. The first, taking place immediately after the final gunfight, voices a major premise about the hero's character. "No bullet can kill that man," Mr. Weir reports. "Sometimes I wonder whether anything ever could" (266). Such musing seems far more provocative than the blatant resurrection of Clint Eastwood's Preacher. Scarred by five bullet holes (or six—the book and the movie disagree), the pale rider pretends his immortality unconditionally. His initial appearance is vague, for it is "difficult to determine whether he was resting on the near ridge or the one behind it" (15). Later the marshal speculates, "Couldn't be him. The man I'm thinking about is dead," yet changes his mind when he meets the Preacher face to face (170). "You," he gasps his last words. "You!" (215). Clearly the audience is supposed to believe the avenging spirit has risen from the dead. But that spirit isn't mythic, and Shane's is.

Five (or six) patterned bullet holes and Marshal Stockburn's recognition tell us that the Preacher is a ghost. Mr. Weir's remarks—"No bullet can kill that man"—tell us that Shane is something more. What can never die is not this particular man but the conception of the man, the invincible American

<sup>6</sup>Alan Dean Foster, *Pale Rider* (New York: Warner Books 1985) 4.

<sup>7</sup>Jack Schaefer, *Shane, The Critical Edition* 231.

<sup>8</sup>James Folsom, "Shane and Hud: Two Stories in Search of a Medium," in *Shane, The Critical Edition* 378.

hero who can regenerate peace and civilization through violence on the frontier.<sup>9</sup> Immediately after World War II, Americans still believed in regeneration through violence—the impetus for an American presence in Europe and Asia and the thrust of our mid-twentieth-century foreign policy. Shane images the pattern. A 1950's audience necessarily would admire him because a 1950's audience would recognize a role that embodies an important ingredient of the masculine spirit informing this country's past. Truly no bullet can kill him, for he is crucial to the American dream.

The Preacher, on the other hand, comes from a different milieu, one where archetype quickly turns to stereotype. He, too, shares heroic stature, of course, but his heroism grows out of a post-Vietnam age that admires Rambo and Sylvester Stallone. The mysterious aura is forced, the immortality imposed, the omnipotence almost a caricature. Sarah, trying to penetrate "the veil of mystery," asks, "Who are you? Who are you, really?" (193). An inhuman howl answers from somewhere in the heavens; then the man answers sexually. Neither engages us in mythic proportions.

Yet Shane does, especially when Bobby's larger-than-life interpretation evolves naturally from flesh-and-blood knowledge. The boy eyes someone "tall and terrible there in the road, looming up gigantic in the mystic half-light. He was the man I saw that first day, a stranger, dark and forbidding, forging his lone way out of an unknown past in the utter loneliness of his own immovable and instinctive defiance. He was the symbol of all the dim, formless imaginings of danger and terror in the untested realm of human potentialities beyond my understanding" (249). In short, he was both human and something more than human, both a man and a mythic symbol.

The final chapter of *Shane*, ostensibly written years after the action of the story, codifies the figure's true immortality. "For mother was right," writes Schaefer in Bobby's voice, sounding a 1950's frame of reference. "Shane was there. He was there in our place and in us. Whenever I needed him, he was there" (272). Marian Starrett and Bobby both understand, as Sarah Wheeler and her daughter never could, that the hero's name and physical presence are immaterial. Real archetypes belong to a universal consciousness, ghosts, only to the particular. "He was the man who rode into our little valley out of the heart of

the great glowing West," Schaefer's novel concludes philosophically, "and when his work was done rode back whence he had come and he was Shane" (274). When the pale rider's work was done, he could only ride off to the echo—"I love you, Preacher"—of Megan's voice insisting that she can conjure him up any time, "if I ever need him again" (218). A member of the me-generation, Megan has no conception of her Preacher's greater possibilities.

Apparently Eastwood didn't either. Indeed he suppresses greater possibilities in other "Pale Rider" characterizations, too. Sarah's attraction to the mysterious man, for example, displays little of the psychological ambivalence Marian feels for Shane. And while Marian turns to her husband for tacit understanding, Sarah succumbs to the pale rider's charms. One is tempted to extrapolate, here, about immediate sexual gratification in the 1980s. But the fact is that Marian's dilemma and painful resolution are far more compelling than Sarah's ready acceptance.

The same generalization can be made about the men in their lives. Joe Starrett's motivations are historically plausible as well as more psychologically keen. On the one hand a settler like so many others who pioneered the west and tamed the frontier and, on the other, a man sensitive to his wife's emotions, Schaefer's character plays a multidimensional role. Hull Barret, in contrast, is flat. Not only does he bear little resemblance to any real-life hardscrabber, but he wears his heart on his sleeve. Lacking the dignity so inherent in his counterpart, Hull's personality remains superficial.

*Pale Rider's* villain also could have been developed further. Like *Shane's* Fletcher, Coy Lahood represents a genuine historical force on a collision course with historical change. Fletcher was a Wyoming rancher whose cattle roamed freely; Lahood, an empire-builder whose hydraulic mining operation scoured California canyons. Both make impassioned speeches about their respective corporate rights versus the whims and wills of nesters and squatters. Both are interesting emblems of their respective eras.

"Shane"'s Fletcher straightforwardly represents a capitalist doomed to be replaced by individual entrepreneurs, the ranch giving way to farms. A product of the 1880s and yet reminiscent, perhaps, of 1940's warmongers, he was ripe for destruction in his time.<sup>10</sup> "Pale Rider"'s Lahood is a capitalist on somewhat different ground. Carrying more

<sup>9</sup>See Richard Slotkin, *Regeneration Through Violence* (Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan Univ. Press, 1973), for an extended treatment of this important American phenomenon.

<sup>10</sup>Ironically, the pattern has reversed itself in the 1980s; now family farms are giving way to agribusiness corporations.



baggage of the 1980s than of the century before, his venture not only pits the corporation against the workers but does so at the expense of the environment. As cinematography makes clear, sluicing is the forerunner of ecological disaster, and Lahood's operation, in contrast to the claims in Carbon Canyon, rapes the land. Still, "Pale Rider" isn't capable of taking its special effects any further. Its filmmakers disregard the futility of a hardscrabble enterprise and the ironic fact that hydraulic mining is more profitable. Instead, they expect their 1980's audience to cheer against the techno-industrial model and to imagine that a single gunfighter can right environmental, as well as legal and moral, ills.

"Shane" makes fewer pretensions. Its hero simply battles against a single rancher, and prevails because he can draw a six-gun faster. Meanwhile, an overlay of meaning traps "Pale Rider"'s creators one more time. "I've built an empire here with my own two hands, and I never asked for anyone's help," Coy Lahood waxes comprehensively. "All I ever asked for was a fair chance to build" (99). But, because psychological motivations like his love for his son remain obscurely undeveloped, viewers understand little beyond his corporate mentality. Like his nemesis, he's a symbol before he's a man. (On the plus side, Lahood's demise allows Hull Barret a singular moment of bravery, but that in itself is inexplicable in terms of the logistics of the film.)

If "Pale Rider"'s characters aren't interesting, though, perhaps their deaths are worthwhile. In this respect, "Pale Rider" proves itself timely if not profound. Where "Shane" is content with fist fights, a quick murder, and a climactic shoot-out, its imitator must fill the screen with eruptive violence and blood. From the opening death of Megan's dog to the final dispersal of Marshal Stockburn and his men, killing abounds. Since Clint Eastwood is no Sam Peckinpah, the mayhem isn't necessarily gruesome—but gratuitous violence is there nonetheless.

Two scenes near the film's end are noteworthy. The first has no counterpart in "Shane." It sends Hull and the hero into Lahood's camp, where the two boyishly toss dynamite sticks into the operation. Wonderful explosions occur while miners, unable to ferret out the source of the confusion, run in all directions. The scene is pure spectacle. "The platform exploded in a geyser of splinters. The monitor teetered drunkenly atop it for a moment before tumbling heavily to the ground. Metal bent and rivets popped free as the water cannon smashed against the boulders below"

(196). An audience attuned to television and movie brutality expects such detonations, even if no one is killed. By contrast, Shane's relatively quiet battles are fought along much less sensational lines.

However, the explosions in "Pale Rider" are just skirmishes before the war. Leaving Hull afoot to protect him from danger (Shane, in a far more provocative gesture, taps Joe gently with his gun), the solitary hero turns toward town. There, he faces an imported armada. Where Shane confronted the lone Stark Wilson, the pale rider must face seven deputies along with a corrupt marshal. Where Shane fast-draws a known opponent, the pale rider impersonally mows his foes down with stoic precision. And where Shane is badly wounded in the fray, the pale rider's immortality stands him in good stead. He leaves majestically; Rambo (or Clint Eastwood), superimposed on a western setting, has done his job.

It was a job neither "Shane" nor his audience would have chosen. Several "Shane" scenes indicate his reluctance to don his gunslinger guise. The man appears to Schaefer and Bobby as "strange and stricken in his own secret bitterness" (135). Fearless and skillful, Shane is every bit as competent as the pale rider, but the former—as Marian well understands—agonizes when he has to take up his guns. The latter may have preferred pacifism too, but he exchanges his collar for his firearms and transforms himself into a killer without a word. "Right or wrong, the brand sticks and there's no going back," Shane explains (263). His counterpart says nothing. "Slipping smoothly into the saddle, the Preacher flicked the reins" (216). Ours, an age that expects no remorse, is given none.

But we do expect certain things from Clint Eastwood—the taciturn presence, the sardonic omnipotence, the capacity for violence, the ultimate victory. Perhaps we should compare the pale rider with his high plains drifter instead of with Shane. Certainly the denouements of those two Eastwood films are the same (although I prefer the drifter's red aura to the Preacher's dark clouds). *High Plains Drifter*, however, with characterizations like the Mayor's and the minister's, with controlled irony, and with a properly hellish ending, is a much more satisfying film than "Pale Rider." *Drifter's* cynical exaggeration finally turns serious, and the result is the most complex and provocative western that Eastwood has made. "Pale Rider," on the other hand, takes itself and its remake of "Shane" far too seriously from the start. The result is almost a

caricature of the Eastwood power. And I think the problems stem primarily from its reliance on someone else's plot.

Although Eastwood adjusts certain layers of the romanticism of the *Shane* story line, he does so mistakenly. By bringing corporate villainy up to date, he destroys the credibility of the plot's motivation. By flattening the characters, he loses the grace of subtlety and innuendo. By replacing a whole complex of pleasures with mere sex appeal, he dismisses too much. By adding impersonal violence, he actually eases the impact of the blows. And finally, by eliminating innocent interaction

between youth and adulthood, he destroys the mystic possibilities of the tale. In short, *Shane's* myth is neither Eastwood's nor ours, although he tries to make it so.

"He's not gone," Marian rightly said of Jack Schaefer's hero. Shane is "all around us and in us, and he always will be" (270). Unfortunately, Clint Eastwood believed her. Thus the larger picture of "Pale Rider" was doomed from its inception. □

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Ron De Maris

VOYEUR

Light falls short of his eye  
and settles in a wrapt chimera  
where the world carries on its conversations.

Puddles of light  
recede before him or vanish  
into wells

and even his own voice  
takes on the veil of someone else  
and disappears  
where shadows move across planes of light  
in a constant murmur for attention.

And within his clothes,  
which turn around him as he moves,  
he does not rest well.  
There is always some part of him

half out of sleeve, between him  
and the world

always a light that presses  
too closely on the world he sees, a crystal  
lymph in which all things,  
reduced and fine, appear with a clarity  
too bright to doubt:

in the wrapt bole of a cottonwood,  
the gauze wings of an aphid.

He falls still further  
in that nearer distance, as did Leeuwenhoek,  
lost in the wonder of microbes  
adrift in a single drop of water,  
an unnamed bestiary,

the largest among them smaller  
"than a louse's eye,"  
swimming like nebulae;

and the voyeur longs for glasses,  
thick lensed, to correct his myopia,

behind which, owl eyed and bulbous,  
he can look upon the world,  
keeping distance at a distance.

## Edward Nobles

### FORTUNE

This silver brooch is beautiful: spider-fine filigree, bordered by two bands and then a row of circles, each its own creature, a coin-like design, all tarnished, slightly dented, and twisted in a bow. Unclasped from the pin, I unstick it from her sweater. Some things are meant to come undone. Buy why must everything appear in terms of money? Even this seat, in which I stab the brooch, I had to buy smothered in smoke, from a bunch of brokers trying to better one another, against a lover, for what they'd probably never miss.

But the hard-bought chair is beautiful, too. All rosewood, except the cushion, which is an intricate scene done in point, of a lion and his mate in somber pose. Should I choose to die, theirs would be the place I'd mean when I whispered for taut black trees and claw-torn deer stitched in blue. And now one stag wears a bow. I love the way the silver pin slid so smoothly from the cashmere swell, and how I know where the bow had been, and what forces steer the fingers and the heart. That lions sin

is clearly in their eyes. There's no doubt this craftsman knew his task. Look at the back, how the leaflets rise, but how the two flowers sweep downward in long pout. Or how the wood so perfectly swerves to catch the light or its lack. Even the arms, on which drunken vines weave, were done to perfection. Yet who was this carver? Did he create for one who loved as Lear, lingering long hours in the dark, dreaming of what sword to strike the head off of a daughter? I unpluck the brooch and pull it near to run along my face. The blackish silver has the features of a nun. No faith can buy the tiny coins, the creatures in a spin, the web-like

tracery weaving in every fraction of an inch. I take the seat and set the brooch on my lap. I touch the pin and feel each flower pinch into my back, and wonder how the evening wraps the hours, the decades, the seconds with a bow. Quietness exerts its influence on both the lion and the vine. Rosewood in every wood and from the blue the deer leap into nonexistence for those who love to dine in dark interiors, where black trees range the skies and skies express the furniture, the magazines, the clothes removed. With love and fear.

Philip J. Skerry

## THE WESTERN FILM: A SENSE OF AN ENDING

Several years ago while choosing films for my class on the American Western film, I was faced with a series of vexing questions: With which film would I end the class? Which film represented the final stage of the Western film? Ultimately I was confronted with the question that students of the Western film (and, by extension, of the TV Western) must ask themselves: What happened to the Western? Since teaching that class, I have thought a good deal about this last question, particularly in light of some of the statements that have been made about the importance and durability of the Western. Critic Ralph Brauer believes: "Westerns are our fables of identity, our national 'epics' in which we express the complexities and ambiguities of our own existence."<sup>1</sup> Filmmaker Sam Peckinpah is reputed to have said, "The Western is a universal frame within which it is possible to comment on today."<sup>2</sup> My purpose in the following essay is to discuss why neither of these statements appears to me accurate or true any longer about the Western film genre. I have chosen as a focal point a particular year—1962—and three films made that year—*Ride the High Country*, *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance*, and *Lone Are the Brave*. What happened to the Western, I believe, is prefigured in these three films, as well as in the year of their production.

### I

The year 1962 is a watershed in the evolution and eventual disappearance of the American Western film. To put it simply, 1962 was the final year of American innocence. In politics the traumatic assassinations of John F. Kennedy in 1963 and Robert Kennedy and Martin Luther King, Jr., in 1968 put an end to the optimism of

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<sup>1</sup>Ralph Brauer, "Who Are These Guys? The Movie Western During the TV Era," in *Focus on the Western*, ed. Jack Nachbar (N.J.: Prentice Hall, 1974) 120.

<sup>2</sup>Qtd. in Jon Tuska, "The American Western Cinema: 1903-Present," in *Focus on the Western* 38.

the early 60s and introduced into American public life a level of violence that escalated in the 1970s. In 1962, America's involvement in Vietnam seemed minor and inconsequential; few could guess that Vietnam would turn into a nightmare as the 60s wore on. Few also could foresee the racial strife that would culminate in full-scale riots in major American cities, nor the revelations of racism and genocide that would accompany the publication of books that documented the brutal mistreatment of Native Americans in America's push westward. In public life, violent crime increased dramatically; drug use skyrocketed; students demonstrated against the establishment; and there seemed to be a cultural malaise that worsened in the 70s with the Watergate revelations.

Popular culture, particularly the movies, reflected this malaise and loss of innocence in the increasing disillusionment and nihilism of film characters and in the revisionist themes and tone of movies, and concomitantly in the graphic depiction of violence and sexuality that accompanied the disintegration of the Production Code after 1962.

It was inevitable that a film genre like the Western, which was predicated upon a set of shared conventions and built upon a bedrock of icon and formula, would be profoundly affected by this loss of American innocence and by the profound questioning of American values, history, and national character that accompanied this loss. The three major Westerns produced in 1962 act as a kind of barometer in measuring the depth and strength this questioning would later take. Ultimately, these three films foreshadow the disappearance of the Western film.

### II

All three films are saturated with a sense of loss and disillusionment. Peckinpah's film *Ride the High Country* is the most optimistic in its depiction of the last stand of the two aged protagonists, Gil Westrum and Steven Judd. The

film opens symbolically as the noticeably old, and somewhat seedy looking Steven Judd rides into town during a celebration. Applauding crowds line the streets, and as Steve rides past them, he smiles and tips his hat, thinking the applause is for him. A policeman, though, quickly enlightens Steve by yelling, "Get out of the way, old man. Can't you hear? Can't you see you're in the way? Get out of here!" What could be a more appropriate scene to emblemize the disappearance of the heroic ideal and the anomaly of the hero in a world dominated by the petit bourgeois? When Steve reports to the bank manager to sign up for his job, escorting gold out of a miner's camp, the manager says, looking at Judd's frayed cuffs, "I was expecting a much younger man, Mr. Judd. . . . The days of the 49ers are past, and the days of the steady businessman have arrived."

Later, in a town carnival, Steve meets his old partner, Gil, who, wearing a disguise and billing himself, "The Oregon Kid, The Frontier Lawman who tamed Dodge City and Wichita . . .," runs a cheap shooting gallery. Gil's deliberate distortion of his exploits and his creation of a mythic, fictitious past parody the hero of the traditional Western. Although the film does end with Steve and Gil bravely facing and vanquishing the vicious Hammond Brothers, there is a strong sense that there is no place for the hero in the West. Peckinpah does leave room for hope at the end of the film. Steve and Gil do team up again; the Hammonds are beaten; Steve "enters [his] house justified"; and Gil gives up his plan to steal the gold. But Peckinpah films Judd's death scene—the final one in the film—in an elegiac way. In a low-angle close up, Judd falls in slow motion out of the frame, and we are left with a void, a sense of loss, a feeling that an era has ended.

The film's self-consciousness and nostalgia reflect a new note in the American Western, one that Peckinpah would return to again and again. In the *Ballad of Cable Hogue*, an automobile, symbol of the "new" west, runs over Hogue, killing him. In the *Wild Bunch* Dutch and his boys are slaughtered in the notoriously violent last stand against the forces of General Mapache. The sense of irreplaceable loss that these deaths represent signifies a very important stage in the life span of the Western genre.

We might say that the stages of a genre's development are eight-fold:

1. establishment of conventions;

2. repetition of conventions and creation of icons;
3. full flowering of convention and icons and development of formula;
4. theme and variations on formula;
5. critical questioning of conventions;
6. sense of ending of conventions;
7. ironic reversal of formula and icon;
8. satiric treatment of icon, formula, and conventions.

A film genre, of course, does not exist in a vacuum; it is directly related to the art, technology, and business of film at the same time as it's connected to the culture at large. The way film interacts with culture is much too complex to get into in this limited space, but suffice it to say that a film genre's viability is inversely proportional to the critical and revisionist tone of a culture. In short, the more cynical we got about our national character and about our history, the harder it was for us to believe in the conventions, formula, and icons of the Western genre, for all three of these depended upon shared values and expectations. One sure sign of the decline of a genre is the appearance in a film of the sixth stage—the sense of ending of conventions—of an actor who has been intimately identified with an earlier stage of the genre. Hence Randolph Scott's portrayal of Gil Westrum in *Ride the High Country* adds an aura of nostalgia and loss to the film, mainly because the audience is aware of the earlier roles that actor played and of the set of conventions which defined those roles. It is particularly significant that it is Scott's character, Gil, who has betrayed his own past. He plans to steal the gold and even turns against Steve, his old partner. Gil's cynicism comes out forcefully in his statement to Steve, who has refused to go along with Gil's plan.

*Gil:* Partner, do you know what's on the back of a poor man when he dies? The clothes of pride. And they're not a bit warmer to him than when he was alive. Is that all you want, Steve?

Steve's sense of honor does prevail, though, but it takes his death to change Gil. The film ends on a nostalgic note. Steve is dying; Gil is wounded.

*Gil:* Don't worry about anything. I'll take care of it just like you would've.

Steve: Hell, I know that; I always did. You just forget it for awhile, that's all. So long partner.

Gil: I'll see you later.

### III

Loss and disillusionment are even stronger in *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance*. In a reversal of Peckinpah's film, the "hero's" death (the quotation marks are deliberate) opens the film; Tom Doniphon has died, and Senator Ranse Stoddard and his wife, Holly, have come to pay their respects and to repay a debt, which is, of course, the actual life of Ranse Stoddard, Doniphon having killed Valance and saved Ranse's life. Yet ironically, Ranse became the hero, and he rode this heroism to eventual fame, power, and wealth. Now Ranse has returned to Shinbone to pay homage to the real killer of Liberty Valance, Tom Doniphon, who will be buried in a simple pine box, mourned over by the few who still know him. Ranse tells the actual story of Liberty's death to the editor of the *Shinbone Star*, who, after hearing it, refuses to print the story, offering this rationale, the film's most famous lines: "This is the West, Sir. When the legend becomes the fact, print the legend."

What is ironic about these lines is that Ford himself is refusing to print the legend. He has, in fact, printed the truth in this film, and the truth is that the picture of the West preserved in legend is more fiction than fact. Ford's career had been leading up to this sixth stage of the evolution of the genre.<sup>3</sup> His early Westerns had done much to establish the first four stages of the genre, *Stagecoach* being the quintessential stage three Western, a full flowering of the form. When Ringo and Dallas escape to Ringo's cabin across the border, Ford's Edenic vision of an unspoiled, timeless frontier, where people could start life over, was complete.

After World War II, though, Ford's Western vision was metamorphosed into the more somber *My Darling Clementine*, in which civilization seems to be a preferable alternative to the anarchy of the frontier. But in *Liberty Valance*, there is no frontier; the action takes place largely in the confines of Shinbone. Gone are the straightforward dichotomies of Ford's

earlier Westerns: town-frontier; hero-villain; law/lawlessness. Instead we have the more sophisticated motif of appearance and reality, characteristic of late stages of the genre. Ranse appears to be the hero, but he isn't; Liberty Valance appears to have been shot by Ranse in a good, old-fashioned public gun fight, but he isn't; he is bushwhacked by Tom who is off in the shadows; Ranse appears to have brought law and order to Shinbone, but he doesn't; the symbol of lawlessness is actually murdered by Tom, the scoffer of the law, who continually urges Ranse to give up his law books for a gun. And the moral ambiguities of the film go on.

The sense of loss in *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance* is not for the heroic ideal; the loss is a more profound one—the belief that there ever was a hero. In fact there are no heroes in *Liberty Valance*. Ranse knows that he has not shot the evil Liberty, but he still builds his career on that lie. Tom Doniphon murders Liberty—ambushes him in effect; he claims, "It's cold blooded murder, but I can live with it." Ranse brings civilization to Shinbone, but he also brings progress, in the form of technology and mass communications, mixed blessings to be sure.

Ford's disillusionment with democratic principles is also strong in *Liberty Valance*. Ranse is no match for Liberty, even if he has the weight of law on his side. Throughout the film, Ford juxtaposes the gun and the book, lawlessness and the law. When Ranse is first brought to Shinbone, half-dead from a beating by Liberty, Doniphon says, "You'd better start packing a handgun," to which Ranse replies, "I don't want a gun. . . . I don't want to kill him. I want to put him in jail." Eventually, Ranse's belief in the law collapses in the face of Liberty's vicious lawlessness. Ranse takes Doniphon's advice—"Either buy a gun or get out of the territory"—and admits to Holly, "When force threatens, talk's no good anymore." In a blatantly symbolic scene, Ranse erases the words "Education is the basis of law and order" from the ersatz classroom he has set up to teach the people of Shinbone reading and civics. Ironically, Ranse abandons his belief in the law as he takes his gun to face Liberty on the street, in true Western fashion.

Ford's disillusionment is most obvious in his treatment of Tom Doniphon. It is true that in *Stagecoach*, the Ringo Kid kills the Plummer Bros. outside the auspices of the law, but the killing is done true to the convention of a classic—that is, stage three—Western. He faces

<sup>3</sup>For a fuller discussion of Ford's evolution, see my article, "Space and Place in John Ford's *Stagecoach* and *My Darling Clementine*," *New Orleans Review* 14.2 (1987): 87-91.



the Plummer Bros. on the streets of Lordsburg. In *My Darling Clementine*, Wyatt and his brothers face the Clantons at the OK Corral. But in *Liberty Valance*, Doniphon does not face Liberty on the street, but rather shoots him from the shadows. At this point it would be easy to say that Doniphon secretly kills Liberty to preserve the illusion that Ransie has done the job, thus paving the way for Ransie's acceptance by the townspeople, for his eventual election, and for the introduction of statehood and thus law to the area. But this interpretation is too simple. Doniphon's killing of Liberty just reinforces the vigilante notion that has motivated Ransie, and that leads him to live a lie.

#### IV

If Ford's film is colored gray by the confusion of appearance and reality, then David Miller's *Lonely Are the Brave* is indeed a black vision of the American West. Set in contemporary New Mexico, the film shows a West that has been turned into a bureaucratic and technological nightmare. The West presented in this film is an extension of the world that was shaped by the Ransie Stoddards, who brought "civilization" to the wilderness. In Ford's film, the opening shot shows a train belching ugly black smoke as it pulls into town. Later Holly, riding through the town, says to Linc Appleyard, "The place has sure changed: churches, high schools, shops." Linc responds, "Well, the railroad done that. The desert's still the same." Associated with the desert, of course, and emblemized by the cactus rose, is Tom Doniphon, who could no longer live in a world created by the Ransie Stoddards. In *Lonely Are the Brave*, the world that the Stoddards have created is hemmed in and controlled by barbed wire fences, by state borders, by the ubiquitous automobile, and by institutions—schools, businesses, police forces. The car has replaced the horse as the primary means of transportation, and the semi-rig has taken over from the train the primary job of hauling freight from one part of the country to another.

The film's protagonist, Jack Burns, is similar to an earlier Western hero, but with a big difference. Like Shane, Jack rides out of the frontier, now divided up by barbed wire, streaked over by jets, and cut up by highways, and rides up to his friend Paul's house; Jack is there to help Paul's family, just as Shane helps Joe Starrett's family. It turns out that Paul has

been arrested for aiding illegal aliens, and Jack plans to help Paul escape from jail. Jack explains his philosophy to Paul's wife: "A Westerner likes open country. That means he's got to hate fences. And the more fences there are, the more he hates them. . . . Did you ever notice how many fences they're getting to be?" Paul's wife replies to this and, in the process, voices the credo of the film: "The world that you and Paul live in doesn't exist. Maybe it never did. Out there is the real world and it's got real borders and real fences, and laws, and real trouble. And either you go by the rules or you lose; you lose everything." These words become prophetic as Jack Burns does indeed lose everything. And this is where *Lonely Are the Brave* differs greatly from *Shane*. The saloon, the scene of the classic fistfight and gunfight of George Stevens' film, is in Miller's film a place of deceit and deception, where Jack is attacked by a mysterious one-armed man. Jack, obeying the traditional hero's code of honor, fights with one arm—his "good" arm—behind his back; but the one-armed man fights with two arms—one a stump with a sleeve that acts like a garrote; and then Jack is attacked by the rest of the men in the saloon. No one seems to fight fair. Jack is hauled off to prison where he encounters a sadistic guard who beats him. Eventually Jack escapes, but he can't convince Paul to leave with him since Paul, it seems, has joined the world of Ransie Stoddard. After he has escaped, Jack is pursued by the forces of the modern world: police in a jeep, and an army helicopter, which he shoots down. Just as he seems to be making his escape, keeping alive the hope that such an individual might be able to survive in the contemporary West, he and his horse, Whiskey, are accidentally run down by a semi delivering toilets to Duke City. Throughout the film, we are given glimpses of this truck, but only at the end do we realize its ominous mission: it becomes symbolic of all the fences—technological, mechanical, impersonal—that have undermined the freedom of the individual; and of all the "modern conveniences"—the car, the TV set, the indoor plumbing—that have made contemporary humans a faceless mass. Instead of riding off into the hills like Shane, Jack lies dying in the middle of a rainy highway at dusk, with no identification, a true victim of the modern world.

#### V

In discussing the Westerns of the 60s, critic

Ralph Brauer claims that these films present "a vision of closing options, of men run out of territory, of mass society, corporate America, killing the individual" (119). The three films focused upon here do indeed present closing options and destroyed individuals. Steven Judd dies in *Ride the High Country*; Tom Doniphon lies in a pine box at the beginning of *Liberty Valance*, bereft of the icons of the Western hero—boots, gunbelt, and spurs; Jack Burns in *Lonely Are the Brave* dies ignominiously, along with his horse, Whiskey, on the "expedient and wicked stones" (poet Karl Shapiro's phrase) of a modern highway. The West that these characters inhabit is no longer the frontier of the early stages of the Western genre, with its limitless

possibilities and its fostering of individual heroism and greatness. Instead the frontier has been tamed and in the process transformed. After 1962, the Western would shift into the later stages of the genre's evolution (or devolution). Arthur Penn's *Little Big Man* illustrates stage seven: the ironic reversal of formula and icon; and Mel Brooks's *Blazing Saddles* delivers the *coup de grace*, marking the last and final stage, satiric treatment of formula, icon, and convention. □

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Yannis Ritsos

IMMOBILIZING THE BOUNDLESS

*Translated by Kostas Myrsiades*

Nicola—he would shout—drive a bit more slowly. I want to see  
this face, this body, that rock,  
this half-naked girl with water dripping from her breasts,  
this peddler with a basketful of silver lemons,  
this blooming sonorous tree. Take your foot off the gas pedal.  
Stop.

Take my picture; not with this old tourist woman  
made up like a harlequin with a spotted bikini; no, no;  
rather with this statue—I'll lean on its shoulder lovingly,  
handsomely, imposingly, a Greek, and behind my back  
the whole incandescent sea—my azure mother,  
boundless and limitless—the azure mother who embraces without  
holding.

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Hans Lipinsky-Gottersdorf

## THE SONG OF ADVENTURE

*Translated by David Vandenberg*

I owe everything to the wind and the cold, the stars and the snow. I might still be on the move and convinced I was a great adventurer if the train to Hamburg hadn't stopped so long in the middle of nowhere. But it did stop, and we were freezing, Leo and I.

The train hadn't moved for almost three hours when Leo finally forced his way back to my compartment and suggested we get out. We could still ride on to Hamburg in a couple of days. He felt like eating something to warm him up, and there had to be a village nearby. The other people in the compartment just laughed. "Something to eat! They'll hunt you down with their dogs, those farmers!" We snorted at them disdainfully and readied ourselves to climb out the window. Even the greediest farmer has his weak side; you just have to find it fast enough.

As we stood on the railway embankment, we felt the sharp, icy wind clawing at our faces. We ran down the slope together and walked diagonally into the fields. Enormous fields of snow were lying before us; they were perfectly white where the wind hadn't scratched through to the dark, frozen earth. An unpleasant, piercing sound was accompanying us; snow whistled with every step we took. Clumps of dead heather bristled under the snow. From the train window everything looked white and motionless, and the broad fields that had passed before our eyes now seemed dead under the weight of the low sky. But now, it took only one look to reveal the truth. The entire countryside was filled with mysterious, seething life. Columns of smoke were rising everywhere; some scattered into long wisps; others grew as tall as a man and fled. It was difficult to keep them in view; a hundred meters farther they disappeared behind the icy-gray curtain of snow and sky.

Behind us the locomotive whistled; its cry flew into the sky, and the storm flung it back down. I looked up into the clouds, black and gray and torn like dirty rags. Dull yellow sparks

were glimmering in the direction from which the wind was blowing.

"We're going to get some snow," I said, but before Leo could say a word, shots rang out, frightening us. The wind tucked itself tighter and tighter until it wasn't any bigger than a fist and began pounding the snow beside us and spinning like an evil spirit. In a second it grew as large as a cow, and then spun into a white, shimmering ball and rolled off. Black bushes were clutching the gray ground.

In those days, I was dumber than words can describe. I said, "We're going to get some snow, Leo." And he wasn't any smarter. He just nodded and said, "Let it snow! It'll be easier to find a bed then. Hey, do the farmers around here make red wurst? You know, the kind with thyme and pepper!" Then he licked his lips. That's the way we were back then. The whole world was readying itself to sing the great Song of Adventure and the wind was already howling the first verse. Yet neither of us would have guessed. We passed a birch as thick as a man is wide. It was groaning, and its long, black branches were whipping the wind. The tree was trying to defend itself—straining every fiber to the limit. Even though frost had penetrated to its very heart, the wood still had enough strength to combat death.

We were on the lookout for a road, for any sign of civilization, and all the while the wind was still struggling with the clouds. The wind was crouched in a juniper break's branches for some minutes; then, unexpectedly, it sailed up into the sky and tried to rip the clouds to shreds. But they held, and the yellow patches in the northwest sky grew until their edges touched. A quarter of the sky was glowing with a strange phosphorescence as the sunlight and everything we could see darkened. Then the horizon closed around us, and the black bushes we were approaching became dark blurs. Barely fifty meters ahead the world ended—everything was a flickering gray.

Without wanting to we began walking faster and faster, until we ended up running. Breathless, we rushed across a forest cut clear of trees. We jumped over the outlines of stumps. It must have been years since enormous trees had made a forest out of that land, because long, snow-covered shoots were everywhere, snagging our pants as we knocked into them. It's obvious that you can't run across a field like that one. Every boy knows that—but we didn't even think of it until Leo's right foot landed in a hole and he fell. I helped him up, and he examined his skinned and frozen hands.

"Why the hell were you running like a fool?" he yelled. But I didn't have time to answer. A dog was coming from our left. We watched him bounding across our path until he disappeared. He was a big yellow cur, the kind farmers use as watch dogs, since no one will set foot in the farmyard with them around.

"We need to find a good club," Leo suggested, and then said something else but his words were torn from the air. The storm's fury grew ten times worse; it was falling over us from above. I tried to look at it, but was frightened by the sight of so much snow. The yellow glow in the sky turned white and disappeared. Cold rushed into our faces. The storm was a massive wall of snow as big as a thousand freight cars; the wind was tearing sheets of snow out of it, and even before the wall reached us, we were covered from head to toe with a thick coat of snow. We tried to stagger on. "Try for the forest!" I shouted with everything I had. But I might as well have thrown feathers into the wind, since my words flew away uselessly. We hadn't gone five steps farther when the wall crashed over us.

I had said, "It's going to snow," but I had said it without knowing what that really meant: flakes the size of a man's fist flying at us as fast as a train, flakes so thick they formed a loose, grainy mush as the wind howled louder and louder. It was as if the storm were pressing the clouds against the earth, straddling and grinding them to a glittering powder under its weight. I couldn't see a thing; I wanted to throw myself on the ground and hold on, but I knew I would be buried alive. I walked straight ahead; my feet hit against something hard, and I walked around it, sinking in snow up to my hips. I shouted desperately. Twigs touched my face, and I grabbed them and pulled myself up a hill, where I stood, catching my breath. My hands hurt, and I put my finger in my mouth. It tasted warm and sweet; I swallowed blood. "It's

all over," I said to myself. "I'll just lie down, and the snow'll cover me." I felt sorry for myself. Tears were running down my cheeks. I imagined how the farmers would find my body in the spring. It was a shame someone so young should be laid to rest so soon. But then I remembered that this was the adventurer's fate, and I somehow felt better, as if I had heard the quiet singing of a dove. Then I heard Leo; his voice was close.

"You see the dog?"

I opened my eyes wide. Everything was completely still, and the earth seemed to be glowing from underneath. A white plain stretched to the horizon. I couldn't see the stumps anymore. Snowflakes were still in the air, but now they were gently drifting to the ground.

Leo walked slowly through the knee-deep snow. He was completely white, even his face. "There must be cattle around here. One brushed right by me a second ago." He crossed his arms over his body. "God it's cold!" he said. "I thought the whole world was freezing over. Damn dog!" He bent down and snatched up a handful of snow. He threw it at the dog, who was looking at us with his head tilted to one side. But when Leo lifted his hand, the dog ducked. Then he jumped up and ran off. Leo grumbled and cursed; then we went on.

Making headway was difficult. We were always running into tree stumps buried in the snow and falling over them. But we were happy then, since a forest was ahead, and behind it there had to be people, somewhere. All around us the stilled earth was slowly changing, but we didn't pay any attention to it; we talked about what we would tell the farmers when we found them.

Night came almost imperceptibly. Colors fell like the shadows of spider webs, sweeping across the countryside. The clouds became thin and the air pure and empty of snow. We heard the groaning of the forest under the snow's weight, as stretches of violet sky became visible.

We entered the darkness under trees. The snow wasn't as deep here, but we ended up in an almost impassable tangle of tree limbs. Tree tops cracked as snow fell from the branches and thudded dully on the earth around us. Silver dust trickled from the swaying limbs. A hundred meters ahead bright light shown between the trunks; we pushed toward it and into the open. No village or house far and wide. Everything smelled like dry wood and cold. We

stood for a long time without saying anything, then Leo saw a row of telegraph poles in the distance. He raised his arm. "If we walk along that line, we'll run into some houses. Come on!"

Our teeth were chattering in our heads as we struggled on. The sky opened wider and wider. The clouds rose up and disappeared into the motherly blue of the sky. The darker the sky became, the more radiantly the snow glittered; the light of the stars broke out in millions of tiny crystals. It's been a long time, but today when I remember that night, I know that in that moment of deepest stillness my heart perceived for the first time the great melody that sounds throughout all creation. I saw the earth's sparkling skin and how it stretched from one edge of the sky to the other, the blue-white of the winter night. From the depths of the firmament, cold fell like invisible smoke; quietly hissing, the cold touched the snow and rose up high again. Every second a new star flamed; into the farthest distance the sky was studded with gold.

A shadow was following us on the right. It was the dog, but neither of us felt like throwing anything at him. We felt our hearts hammering even in our lips. We hadn't reached the telegraph poles yet, and our strength was almost gone. My legs were trembling. Leo looked at me; his face had become as small as a small child's; only his eyes remained large. He folded his hands and blew into them. Then he cleared his throat and tried to laugh.

"If someone saw us, they'd think we were afraid. But we're just cold." His voice sounded uncertain, and his teeth began to chatter uncontrollably.

"We could try yelling," I said. "Maybe someone lives right around here, and we can't see their house because of all the snow."

Leo breathed in relief, and we tried it together. We yelled three times, four times, and then we panicked. We yelled into the noiseless night as loudly as we could, until our voices gave out. But silence was stronger; every word died without an echo. Only the dog sat with its ears perked, looking at us. He was the only creature that heard us; as I was looking at him, I realized

the utter uselessness of what we were doing. Without looking at Leo, I turned around and took the lead. It was bright enough for me to see where the wind had scraped the smooth snow like a hungry bird. Cold streamed up from below, and I gulped air through my mouth, since my nostrils were frozen shut with frost. I broke out in sweat. We were walking across a field, and every step was a struggle with the snow. I had to lift my knee up to my chest and push my foot forward. My pants were rustling through the snow like the wings of geese in flight. My feet sank in and touched the stony earth. I took ten steps—fifty—a hundred, then I was through. I was so exhausted, I could barely stand, and Leo was right behind me with big, bright tears running down his cheeks. For the first time in all our months of traveling together, we couldn't fool ourselves anymore: adventure had the best of us. We heard its song, a deep, metallic rumbling, neither soft nor loud; it filled the space between stars and snow. Frost was humming in the telegraph wires.

It was powerful song. Layer by layer it stripped away our arrogance and defiance, until we could look into each other's hearts and recognize our hollowness. We were ashamed of ourselves. "I want to go to work for a farmer, if we ever get out of this one," Leo said. I avoided looking at him and nodded.

While we were resting, we noticed the dog was still with us. He was walking behind us; it was easier going in our tracks. He was a strong, beautiful animal with solid legs and a stocky neck. Once he passed right by us, and Leo petted his head. From then on he stayed beside us. Only when we saw the farmhouse and started for it did he lay down. His bushy tail was thumping on the snow. We knocked on the door, and the dog raised his head, pointing his thin muzzle to the heavens. Leo nudged me. "There," he said. "He's going to howl." But he didn't make a sound. He stayed awhile, then got up slowly, stretched and ran off along the telegraph poles, passing a single juniper on his long way back.

The farmer's door opened.□

Yannis Ritsos

MORNING IN SALERNO, IV

*Translated by Kostas Myrsiades*

In spite of a Sunday idleness, selling and buying continued at the wooden barracks. Large motionless fish shimmered in wide baskets. The salt dried, sparkling on their rosy, grey scales.

One of these winked at me for a moment; its eye opened again; it stared at me, gaping;  
I rejoiced in the guile of the dead, especially in their apparent preference for me—a private affinity perhaps, perhaps they expected their resurrection from me.

The customs' official stood austerely at the door. I pretended not to notice him.

Hands are certainly rapacious animals—they speak with a greater sincerity than lips.

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John Mosier

THE USUAL SUSPECTS:  
EASTERN EUROPE AND THE WORLD. CANNES 1990

The major film festivals have been scrambling to accommodate the changes in Eastern Europe, long a staple producer for global festivals. In 1990 there were eighteen separate feature length films in the various sections at Cannes. Their presence not only dominated the festival, but set its tone, which was quieter, more thoughtful, and less commercialized. The serious and reserved atmosphere was established at the outset, since the festival opened with a new film by Kurosawa, while the new works by Godard, Fellini, Tavernier, and the Taviani brothers, all made for a festival whose theme, if Cannes were suddenly to begin the old socialist tradition, now in disrepute, of having a slogan for itself, might well be: film, always a serious business and sometimes even an art form.

The 1990 festival was dominated by the eighteen Eastern European films showcased there. Additionally, the destruction of the ancient palais means a more constricted *Quinzaine*, which had to share the smaller screening room (Debussy) with the official non-competition section, *Un certain regard*, and the evening press screenings. But the West still managed to wheel out its major talents. The festival opened with a new film by octogenarian Akira Kurosawa, going on to the latest works of Federico Fellini, Jean-Luc Godard, Bertrand Tavernier, and the Taviani brothers. On the Anglo-American side, there was an exciting new film by Clint Eastwood about John Huston, another attempt at a serious film by Alan Parker, and new films by David Lynch, Ken Loach, and John Waters.

For the first time in recent memory, the French struck critical pay dirt: not only was Tavernier's film universally praised by the foreign press, but a new film by Rappeneau, a big budget production of Rostand's *Cyrano de Bergerac*, finally got the French back into the serious literary film arena. Meanwhile, in the non-competitive sections of the festival, there was the usual range of talent from Australia, Great

Britain, Spain, West Germany, and elsewhere. The only area sadly absent was South America. Although some of these films were disappointing, in general this was the strongest year at Cannes in a long time. The biggest disappointments were for the photographers and gossip columnists, who complained bitterly about the relative lack of stars and parties.<sup>1</sup>

The True Prehistory  
of Socialism on Film

In Eastern Europe film has always been a serious business, first on the part of a state that wanted to mobilize the masses toward an acceptance of socialist ideology, and then, after the death of Stalin, by successive waves of artists who wanted to educate the population to the problematic nature of socialist achievements. The tension between the two has produced some of the most interesting works in the cinema, and, implicitly, it has exercised an enormous influence on films made in the West.

At the Cleveland Film Conference in October 1989, speaker after speaker from the Soviet Union emphasized the difficulties film artists were now facing, on the one side, the struggle to find proper themes, now that there was no longer a state ideology to struggle against, on the other side, a growing awareness of how to make films at all, given the decaying studios, the lack of convertible currency, and the inertia of the workers: the film industry was in no way

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<sup>1</sup>And this year the impact of "free" television, i.e., satellite and cable, began to impact the market: "in a market that was exceptionally slow, the jitters in the video business are coming fast," is how the lead story in *The Hollywood Reporter* put it on 19 May 1990. The story also pointed out that there is a severe supply problem: "there simply aren't enough quality pictures to go around" (4). The front page *Variety* headline for the 20 May 1990 festival magazine was "Market Palls as Curtain Falls" (1). All references to trade publications are from those specially published during the film festival; material may or may not be reprinted in other editions.



exempt from the general lack of initiative and allergy to hard work that had been one of the chief achievements of the system.<sup>2</sup>

Although these problems may severely curtail film production in these countries in the near future, now a large group of films has emerged. The collapse of traditional Soviet Style Communism, what the Bulgarian director Georgi Dyulgerov has styled Soc Camp, has been marked by the emergence of a bewildering array of hidden films made by known figures, new films made by known artists, and new films made by new directors.<sup>3</sup> In the official competition section, there was Ryszard Bugajski's *Interrogation*, made in 1981, but only officially released in Poland in 1989; Karel Kachyna's *The Ear*, made in Czechoslovakia in 1969-70 and released in 1990; Andrej Wajda's *Korczak*, just finished but the result of a decade of planning on his part; Pavel Lounguine's debut film, *Taxi Blues*; and Gleb Panfilov's relatively new remake of the previous adaptations of Gorky's *Mother*.

In the official non-competition section, *Un certain regard*, there was Vassily Pichul's second film (the first being *Little Vera*), *Oh Those Dark Nights on the Black Sea*, Vitali Kanevski's *Don't Move*, Waldemar Krzytek's *The Last Ferryboat* (Poland), Sergei Soloviev's *Black Rose, Emblem of Sadness, Red Rose, Emblem of Love*—all new films. In the *Quinzaine*, an outbreak of Soc Campitis: Dyulgerov's *The Camp* and Nikolai Volev's *Margarit and Margarita*, both from Bulgaria, where some of the hottest socialist social criticism in the cinema has traditionally been found; from Hungary, a new first film, Arpad Sopsits' *Shooting Gallery*; and then a trio of Russians: Igor Minaiev's third feature film, *Ground Floor*; Peeter Sim's *The Man Who Never Existed*, from Estonia; and, most important of all, Yuri Illienko's *Swan Lake—The Zone*.

Some of these artists, like Vassily Pichul, who made *Little Vera*, the first real post-Soc Camp

film, are genuine newcomers. Others, like Ryszard Bugajski, are newcomers who were, as was the case with *Interrogation*, quickly silenced by the authorities. Still others, like Dyulgerov and Kachyna, made deeply critical films early on and were then banished to the Soc Camp reserves.<sup>4</sup> They were allowed to make films, but, like reformed alcoholics in an anxious family, were never allowed too close to the liquor cabinet again.

But the collapse of Soc Camp has posed serious problems for the established directors, not just the party hacks, either, nor the ones whose works were always on the margins, men and women whose films were always trying to probe for a crack in the wall, but artists like Wajda and Zanussi in Poland, whose films were open critiques of the state. The inefficiency of filmmaking in Soc Camp has made it difficult to make responses to the situation at hand quickly, and this explains why young nonentities like Pichul have done so well.

But even that success is misleading. Maria Khmelik, who wrote the script for *Little Vera*, had written it as early as 1983.<sup>5</sup> That suggests a gestation period of years, not months, and for the more established directors, the situation is, if anything, worse. *Taxi Blues* was shot very quickly, by Soviet standards, thanks to foreign backing from SACIS, the marketing branch of RAI (Italian State Television), and a foreign crew. Had the project been done domestically, it would still be in pre-production. So the films we are beginning to see now should be thought of as sketches, anticipations of the true history and prehistory of Soc Camp, not the works themselves.

So the *Closely Watched Trains* and *O Bloody Life* of this phase of Eastern European history will be a while in arriving. At this point, we're still unpacking all the reels of shelved celluloid, which leads to the question at hand: quality.

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<sup>4</sup>Dyulgerov's *And the Day Came* (1973) was the first purely philosophical critique of communism. In it he questioned not the achievements of the system, its shortcomings, the way it had corrupted life and distorted history, as was the case with the Polish and Hungarian directors, but its philosophical basis: materialism and class consciousness. Kachyna, on the other hand, with *Long Live the Republic* (1966) and *Carriage to Vienna* (1968), subjected the foundations of postwar Czech socialism, its myths about itself, to scathing analysis.

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<sup>2</sup>I am summarizing and abstracting the opening remarks of Andrei Smirnov, Tatyana Tolstaya, Valentin Tolstykh, and Ales Adamovich. Although the situation varies from country to country, it varies as one might expect: the situation in Czechoslovakia is probably the best, that in Poland the worst. See the survey by Ron Holloway, "Breaking Down the Walls of Co-Production: The View From the East," *Hollywood Reporter* 15 May 1990: S4, S8-12.

<sup>3</sup>In his remarks to his film *The Camp*, as quoted in the Catalogue for the 1990 *Quinzaine des Realisateurs*.

<sup>5</sup>See the biography of her in the Press Kit to *Dark is the Night on the Black Sea*.

How good are these works? With the suppressed, censored, or otherwise shelved works, almost all of which have been released, only two are of any great value: Peter Bacso's *The Witness*, made in Hungary in 1969 and not shown until 1981; and Bugajski's *Interrogation*, made in 1981 and released in 1989.

That sounds like an unfair statement, considering the circumstances underlying the production of these films. Karel Kachyna's *The Ear* is a good example. As the Press Kit puts it: "if this story had not been invented, and had really happened, it would probably have taken place in the Prague of the 1950s, when socialism had already become quite deformed."<sup>6</sup> To be filming this sort of thing in Prague at the end of the 1960s was a courageous act, to film it during the interregnum between the invasion and the final collapse of the government (which didn't occur until April 1970) is heroism to the point beyond belief, and it explains why Kachyna was obliged to spend the next decade making what were essentially children's films.

The subject is one night in the life of a high state official in Prague. Ludvik and his wife, Anna, have gone to a reception, only to learn of the fall from grace of his boss, the minister of construction. They go home, to find that their house has been entered, that there are strange men in their garden, and so, sensibly enough, Ludvik begins to burn anything that might incriminate him, even though he's done nothing, and isn't even sure if anything will happen to him.

But the actual execution of the film is something else entirely. Considered as a film, independent of when and how it was made, *The Ear* is not in the same league with his other work. The constant bickering and quarreling between Ludvik and Anna, her complete refusal to respond to the situation at hand, reduces the main characters to caricatures. Nor is the story told through a series of compelling images; Kachyna relies mostly on the acting. As is too often the case, when Czech (or Russian or Polish) actors work in an intimate, documentarist situational drama, their lack of skill becomes painfully evident. And by limiting the action to the inside of the couple's house, Kachyna has thrown away one of his greatest

assets, the mastery of the wide screen deep shot used to such telling advantage in these other works. It's as though the bigness of the subject simply paralyzed his normal cinematic senses. Or it's possible that he was trying to make a kind of *kammerspiel*, since the emphasis on the two actors, the interiorization of the set, all lends itself to the theater.

Nor does *The Ear* look dated; quite the contrary. The execution is to a high standard, looking better than Nemeč's *Report on the Party and the Guests*, not to mention the numerous Soviet examples, which, like Abuladze's *Repentance*, all look like they were made a very long time ago, when the cinema was a much more primitive affair. One can only wonder at the spooky prescience which inspired Nemeč and Kachyna to do their work in black and white, since it's often the color composition of films that dates them so terribly.

But *The Ear* is a far cry from the brilliance of *Long Live the Republic* and *Carriage to Vienna*, films that Kachyna made a few years earlier (in 1965-66). Stylistically, *The Ear* has nothing in common either with them, or with the "model" film he made immediately afterwards, *I Can Jump over Puddles Again*. The later film is sentimental twaddle, but it's a far better movie.

As a historical and artistic record of the past, formidable, as a film, merely interesting, enough to make one dismiss the whole *oeuvre* of the suppressed films as being nothing more than national and intellectual curiosities.<sup>7</sup> In general, that's the case with much else of what was held up by the censors. While the idea that there were great films that were held up by the censorship is a tempting one, in this, as in most else, the fundamental muddleheadedness of Soc Camp gets in the way. As Soviet critic Andrei Plakhov, who went over all the censored Soviet films, has observed, in many cases it is now impossible to tell why the films were held up; in some cases the reasons were personal, in others whimsical. Josef Skvorecky's claim that the Minister of Agriculture was outraged by the wastage of food in Vera Chytilova's *Daisies* is thus daily confirmed as the paradigmatics of repression.<sup>8</sup>

Then along comes Bugajski's *Interrogation*,

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<sup>7</sup>For a contrary view, see Ron Holloway's review in *The Hollywood Reporter* 15 May 1990: 9.

<sup>8</sup>Remarks by Plakhov made to the author, Oct. 1989. See *All the Bright Young Men* (Toronto: Peter Marin, 1971) 107-09, for the Chytilova example.

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<sup>6</sup>In the original (?) French: "De sort que cette histoire n'avait pas été inventée et si elle s'est vraiment passée, elle se serait probablement déroulée à Prague dans les années 50, où le socialisme était encore très déformé."

which stands the whole idea on its head; made in 1982, and promptly suppressed, finally shown in Poland on the screen in 1989 (it had been shown on samizdat video), and entered in the competition at Cannes, it looks better than anything made in Poland since, and it looks like it was made last week. Nor is there any doubt about why it was shelved. Like *The Witness*, the marvel is that the directors were left to finish the shooting and that there was ever a finished product.

And *Interrogation* is definitely a finished product. The story, set in 1952, is a simple one. Antonia Dziwisz is a minor night club singer and entertainer whose chief assets are her good looks and her vivaciousness. She's picked up by the secret police and questioned because of her alleged relations with a casual friend, Olcha, who is now claimed to be a spy. This was at the peak of the spy hysteria that swept the Eastern Bloc countries. People were disappearing right and left for their alleged subversion. As Witowska, one of Antonia's cellmates (played by Agnieszka Holland), puts it: objectively, I'm an American spy. Her spying activity consisted of serving as guide and interpreter for an American fellow traveler visiting Poland. So there they are. Antonia is abandoned by her husband, tormented by her captors, and constantly exhorted to sign a confession. She refuses, not out of any principles, but simply out of principle.

Although its open denunciation of the operations of the Stalinist inspired terror, and its exposure of the fundamental lawlessness of the state, were quite enough to get it banned. *Interrogation* goes infinitely further than any other previous film on the subject. In other works the principal victims were in some way a part of the state apparatus. Even Peter Bacso's Josef Pelikan, the hapless hero of *The Witness*, was a dedicated communist, while Ludvik is the first deputy to the minister of construction. These people were part of the nomenclature. One's sympathies for them are limited.

But Antonia Dziwisz is as close to a nonentity as one can get, innocent to the point of airheadedness. The state that can lock her up and torture her for months on end, reduce her to a state of despair where she tries to kill herself by biting open her arteries, is a monstrous entity indeed, monstrous because it is so fundamentally wrongheaded. And this strikes at the heart of why Bugajski's film is so deeply subversive. It reveals a sinister and totalitarian

state, but one that is fundamentally incompetent. Not only does it lock up its own faithful and persecute the naively innocent, it does so without any real regard for the ends it is achieving.

This is the subversive idea that links the Polish film to *The Witness*, elevates both above their counterparts, and explains why the directors are probably always going to be regarded with a certain amount of hostility. Orwell, of course, had figured out that the state wants to encourage people to think that there is revolt somewhere in order to unmask potential rebels. He may have had in mind the idea of the "Trust," a counterfeited spy ring which the Bolsheviks used as bait to pick off foreign spies in the 1920s.

But what real aim did the spy mania have? What state secrets could the state have had? The economy of Soc Camp was a shambles from the word go. Its industries were marginal, its armaments copies of Western ones or evolutionary designs made from a handful of originals done by the Germans and the Russians well before 1945. All of this was obvious to the most superficial observer, and it's difficult to believe that anyone in charge of the government believed otherwise: it is a truism that Soviet aims in negotiations only seem rational when one sees them as coming from a perceived position of weakness, and then they are always rational.

The real aim of the spy mania was to provide the population at large with a constant reminder of their success: why else would anyone be trying to steal things? We must have a real economy, with real industries, or why would they always be trying to find out about it? It was in this way that the state provided the population with practical reminders of their achievements which supported the general tenor of a campaign usually described thus: the past is shown as being insupportable to make the present bearable, and to prove that the future will be tolerable.

So Antonia falls into the clutches of something worse than anything Orwell could imagine: a state in which interrogation is an end in itself, in which the torturers observe all the niceties, and are themselves torn between their ideals and their duties—and by their realizations of reality: the story of the interrogator who breaks down, crying out, first it was you, next it will be me, is not part of the Soc Camp Apocrypha.

It is the director's realization of all these

ambiguities that makes the film as complex as it is, because from the very first it is obvious that the police are unable, or unwilling, to pursue their investigations very far. Antonia is tortured, but sporadically and fitfully. One has the impression that her interrogators have no clear idea as to what to do. The chief one, in fact, is almost comically incompetent, while the younger one comes to admire Antonia more and more, falls in love with her, gets her pregnant, and then kills himself.

It's the mixture of all of these things—the terror, the incompetence, the lack of clear purpose—that makes *Interrogation* such a pellucidly clear portrait of Soc Camp, a state enfeebled and decrepit already at birth, whose minions combine muddleheadedness and idealism in bizarre proportions. Like *The Witness*, it wraps the entire history of the Stalinist era up into one precisely framed set of images, all arranged in perfect order. And the films are beautiful complements to one another, since the Polish film is a tragedy and the Hungarian one a comedy.

#### The Slowest Art

In addition to the shelved works newly released, there were three established Soc Camp directors whose works had just been finished: Dylgerov, Illienko, and Wajda. Although *Korczak* is not explicitly a film about the collapse of Soc Camp, there's no better film with which to begin, since it was Wajda who began it all right after the death of Stalin with *Generation*, *Kanal*, and, most important of all, *Ashes and Diamonds*.

And, conveniently enough, the 1990 film festival opened with a film by Wajda (after the "official" opening with the Kurosawa, that is). *Korczak* is based on the true story of a respected Polish doctor who, in addition to being a pioneer for better treatment of children, accompanied his two hundred small charges to Treblinka rather than abandon them.<sup>9</sup> Of all the sad stories of the war, this is perhaps the saddest, and Wajda, still Poland's premiere

director, tells it with a minimum of emotion in black and white (with some actual documentary footage patched in). When films on such subjects make an honest effort to tell the story, which was what one of the survivors of Treblinka wanted, there isn't a great deal that can be said. Wojtek Pszoniak, who plays the title role, is an admirable actor, and, in something rare in the Polish cinema, he neither mumbles nor screams, yet manages to establish the role with his voice.

Wajda is aided here enormously by the camera work of Robby Muller. There's little of the craziness or dramatic flamboyance of Wajda's previous films (all of them), and his ability to make himself invisible is compelling testimony to his stature as an artist: some stories don't need much art, and this is one of them. If the result is inspiring rather than sublime, then that too is a function of the subject, and Wajda has already demonstrated over the course of his career that he can do pretty much anything he wants to do. If this is, as he's suggested, his last film, *Korczak* is certainly not the worst sort of final testament to leave.

Although there isn't much overtly in this film that suggests the great shift in the cinemas of Eastern Europe since the collapse of Soviet socialism, Wajda does tap the two great social tides we can see emerging from the new Soc Camp cinema. Goldszmit described himself as the "Karl Marx of children," and Wajda emphasizes the extent to which the good doctor tried to create a utopian society on earth, beginning with the social order he instituted among the orphans in his charge. *Korczak* didn't have much use for Marxists, either, because he had his own social vision, and that theme, emphasized by Agnieszka Holland in her other scripts, that Marxist-Leninist-Stalinists co-opted or hijacked the genuinely revolutionary and utopian visions of the best minds of the turn of the century, frequently filling the inventors as well, will be one of the dominant themes of the new Soc Camp cinema.

*Korczak* didn't have much use for pre-war Poland either. For the first time, we begin to see an honest and unshrinking appraisal of the national xenophobias that characterized the old Europe. Ironically, the Soc Camp Poland, in its refusal to allow films made about Jewish themes (which went so far that in the unfinished fragments of Munk's *The Passenger* one has the impression that only beautiful silvery blonde Slavs were ever gassed), promoted a curiously

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<sup>9</sup>Born Henryk Goldszmit in 1878, the man who described himself as the "Karl Marx of children" went to medical school and then started writing children's novels under the pseudonym Janusz Korczak. The Press Kit observes that he can lay claim to being the world's first pediatrician, and he is unquestionably one of the world's pioneers in the conceptual breakthrough in the treatment of children, both mentally and physically, as small adults rather than animals.

idyllic view of the world before the war, in which the only hatred was class hatred. This argument—that socialism raised the class war, and class hate, to such a pitch that the structural roots of the historical problems of Eastern Europe, which were often based on race hate, and racial divisions, were completely lost—is the second great argument that all future Soc Camp films will develop.

The third great argument—that of Soc Camp itself, i.e., the state as a shabby subterfuge—had already been developed by the major directors in Poland and Hungary over a period of years. The achievements of the newer artists are simply to turn these criticisms from the world of history and allegory to the world of the present day, to create a genuinely proletarian Soc Camp cinema, what Pavel Lounguine is trying to do in *Taxi Blues*, and what Pichul did in *Little Vera*; instead of talking about how bad things are, as the earlier directors had done, the newer ones show, quite literally, how bad it has gotten. It's one thing to have well-dressed Europeans talking about how socialism has failed and how corrupt things are, how people have given up hope. It's quite another to see shabbily dressed people standing in potholed streets for vodka so they can drink themselves comatose.

This third argument isn't appropriate to Wajda's subject, but he makes some shrewd points about the second one. As the opening scenes of *Korczak* remind us, the Poles practiced anti-semitism on both official and private levels. The adaptation of Stalinist principles by the National Socialists, which resulted in the systematic relocation and extermination of whole peoples, particularly the Jews, were on such a scale as to dwarf the ordinary race hatreds of Germany's neighbors. But a sin is nonetheless a sin. The Poles were scarcely on the side of the angels in this respect. Korczak's successful radio show was taken off the air in 1936, allegedly as part of the government's attempt to placate National Socialist Germany, but the mutiny of his washerwoman, who refuses to wash the underclothing of Jewish orphans, had less opportunistic motives. The reception he gets at Polish Radio by the director's secretary, who can't equate the famous Korczak with the name Goldszmit, makes very clear the drift of Polish society, and the failure of what the French writer Jean Dutourd termed the "men of fifty," the leaders of 1918, in *The Taxis of the Marne* (London: Heinemann, 1957). That's obviously on Korczak's mind when he sees the

lines of defeated Polish soldiers trudging down the street.

So in a curious way Wajda is once again ahead of everyone else, because he's gone straight to the heart of the conceptual shift the artist must now make: there's nothing socially compelling about the story of Korczak, *except the fact that it is only now that it can be told*. That is precisely the point, and one of great relevance. If there is no longer a state against which to struggle, a heap of dead ideas to attack, the artist must turn back into his national past and recover the lost stories, the missing heroes. Wajda's career began with the celebration of another group of denied heroes, the Polish Home Army and the successive Warsaw uprisings. Now, nearly forty years later, he's back in the same setting. In both cases his instincts have been exactly right. One can only speculate at the paradox that the state would allow films to be made about the Home Army but not a Jewish pediatrician. But, as Antonia Dzwisz would say, I understand.

Somewhat the same thing can be said of Gleb Panfilov's *Mother*, a softer, more humanized version of the original story. One says original story, but in 1990 it is difficult to say whether we're talking about the original film or Gorky's novel. Certainly one is conscious at all times of how the original film handled the conflict, and the problem Panfilov has is that he seems determined to ignore the fact that his audience is going to make the comparison.

This is more or less the approach that was taken in the Donaldson film, *The Bounty*, about the mutiny aboard HMS Bounty, and without much more success, in that we end up with an alternative handling of the story which loses its effectiveness because it is so determined to ignore earlier versions of the story. About halfway into the film (far too long at well over three hours), it becomes obvious that Panfilov doesn't have a point of view. He's content simply to flesh out the plot, give it nice footage of Tsarist Russia, and humanize the period and the characters a bit. Pavel Vlassov's relations with his alcoholic bully of a father are more complex, and Panfilov shows how he loses the will to live after his death, and only gradually gets over it. The central figure of the mother, admirably brought to the screen by Inna Tchourikova, is subtler, and much less the prototypical radicalized feminist of Pudovkin's film: here she's more typical of the era, less doctrinaire, content merely to serve the men in her life.

The characterizations are certainly believable in and of themselves, but what gets lost in the script is the fact that for generations of viewers *Mother* was a didactic and emotional film whose great success lay in its ability to convert complex relations and situations into simple and emotionally charged scenes. So Panfilov's film, although the period work is beautifully done, ends up just another one of those Soviet literary adaptations, like all the innumerable ones made of Tolstoy, Chekhov, and even Dostoyevsky.

The defense is that, like the story of Janusz Korczak, such a nonvolatile and even pacifist retelling of such an inspiring piece of revolutionary propaganda could only now be made. Gorky's *Mother* has become such a revolutionary icon of the socialist cinema that tampering with any part of it was obviously unthinkable. But having gone thus far, Panfilov should have gone the whole nine yards.

Bolt and Donaldson pulled their punches in their retelling of the Bounty mutiny. Was Bligh quite different from the sadistically attractive bully that Laughton portrayed him as? Historically, and there's plenty of documentation here, he wasn't.<sup>10</sup> But Anthony Hopkins plays Bligh in such a way that one can't really tell what the point is. You can't simply retell the story as though it had never been told. But that's what Panfilov has done. In the process he's set quite an unintentional precedent: for the first time we have a Soviet film made with the same ahistorical consciousness that is typical of the major Western studios.

*Mother* is a nicely crafted work, however, one of those big, slow moving, nicely acted films that will do well on European television—as it should, since SACIS was the co-producer. And Panfilov's cautious handling of the themes provides us with a good reminder of the practical limits of the possible in Soc Camp: throwing out Stalin and his myths is one thing, throwing out Lenin and his is quite something else. There's surprising circumspection even about the earlier Stalin years. Intellectuals, even inside the Soviet Union, have known for decades that Stalin bears a heavy responsibility for the disasters of June 1941, for example. But when will we see the first Soc Camp film that

begins the true history of 1941?

Not for a long time, and even after we've gone back into the disasters of the collectivization of agriculture in the 1920s and 1930s, the havoc of the forced industrialization and its disproportionately small achievements, there will still be a great moral leap for someone to go back into those *fin de siècle* years and say, this was what really happened. In the meantime, people need their myths, and Panfilov and SACIS are probably right to leave audiences intact with the same heroic account of the struggle for the rights of the workers and the mother's sacrifice. As it is, about as far as the director goes is to give the period a quite unexpected gloss that comes very close to sentimentalizing the pre-revolutionary past.

The reason for his caution, and the root of the problem, as well as the explosive nature of these myths, was quite obvious in Dyulgerov's *The Camp*, an also curiously old-fashioned and elliptical work. Like Jancso, Dyulgerov is interested in the way totalitarian states mold consciousness, getting individuals to substitute ideologically acceptable forms of behavior that involve a fundamental disrespect for human rights.

His youthful couple start off at a pioneer camp on the Black Sea in late adolescence. We see how the camp authorities, themselves quite young, indoctrinate the youngsters into such staples of Soc Camp life as self-criticism, group denunciations, premeditated draft resolutions, and so forth. There's a certain shock value in seeing how thoroughly this is orchestrated, with a seven or eight-year-old girl reading out a complicated resolution to censure her thirteen or fourteen-year-old group leader, and the college age counselors going through the ranks of children and forcing them to raise their hands for the predictable unanimous vote.

Dyulgerov got started making an excellent short film, *The Test*, back in 1971, and the first portion of this newest film is an excellent short. So the second portion, which gives us the same three characters back in the same camp for an obligatory volunteer youth labor exercise, is almost gratuitous, while the director's sense of visual composition, usually his strong point, seems to desert him as well. This part of the film is too much like Jancso's *The Confrontation*: lacking originality, it has nothing much to commend it other than novelty of the specifics of the subject. The director of *And the Day Came* should have been able to do something much

<sup>10</sup>The full complexities of the case were first set down in 1831 by Sir John Barrow, whose *The Mutiny of the Bounty* is a considerably more subtle work than anything since. See Gavin Kennedy's edition of Barrow (Boston: David Godine, 1980).

better than this. It's a disappointing failure, given the high standards of the Bulgarian cinema in explosive political discussions, and the tradition of a visually sophisticated cinema in that country.

The film that one would have liked to have seen coming from Dyulgerov actually came from the Ukraine, with the bizarre title of *Swan Lake—The Zone*. Yuri Illienko's film is more overtly about the true history of the recent past, and it's an incredible work. It was inspired to a certain extent by the experiences of Sergei Paradjanov, who wrote the original script. After the triumph of *Shadows of Forgotten Ancestors* in 1964, Paradjanov, as is well known, ran afoul of the authorities and was finally imprisoned. The script reflects his experiences, and was filmed in the camp where he was incarcerated. Illienko was the cinematographer for *Shadows*, and then went on to make his own poetic Ukrainian folk tales, of which *A White Bird with One Black Spot* (1971) is perhaps the most famous.

Tarkovsky, Shepitko, and Paradjanov all now dead, Illienko is the undisputed master of the Soviet cinema, and there's no comparison between the work of this Ukrainian and the works of his Russian peers. The opening of *Swan Lake* is one continuous long shot, even longer in duration than the one last year that opened *The Harms Case*. Here it's all the more impressive because of the fact that it advances the story line, showing us the prisoner's escape. With this kind of cinematography, Illienko doesn't need much dialogue, and he doesn't use much. The first words occur about three quarters of an hour into the film, and there can't be more than a few pages of dialogue in the script.

What we have is a Tolstoyan parable about a prisoner who escapes from a camp, hides out inside a gigantic hammer and sickle emblem on the roadside, meets a woman and loves her, is caught and sent back to camp. He poisons himself so effectively that the camp authorities send him to the morgue, where an old doctor recognizes that he's alive and gives him a blood transfusion from the driver of the death cart. He rejects the opportunity to escape and returns back to the camp, where the tougher prisoners are horrified by the fact that he's become a blood brother with a guard, and tell him that unless he kills the guard, they'll kill him. Rather than do that, he kills himself.

It was Tolstoy who argued most authoritatively for the Russians that this sort of sacrifice

was the highest kind a man could make, and the internalized mysticism of the central character suggests the later works of the Russian master. But *Swan Lake* is not a literary film in the negative sense: it comes across as an absolute visual tour de force, from the opening long shot of the escape to the surrealistic arrival of the swans in the camp to the idea of the huge socialist emblem itself. Where Illienko distances himself from other directors who like to use symbols is that he can extract the maximum out of the symbol. The hollow hammer and sickle is a place of refuge, an obvious motif for the hollow and rickety state for which it is the cheap symbol. He returns to it again and again, getting out of it what modern theatrical designers are always trying to do with their sets: create a dynamic symbol that will stand in every act.

Because Illienko is able to marshal his symbols so effectively, he dispenses with all the norms of narrative. We move directly from the woman's first sight of the man, his hand dangling from the entrance to the emblem, to the spectacular fireworks of the emblem being rewelded and freshly painted after his capture, all this in a few brief images. How he was recaptured, how their relationship turned to love, why she is trying to buy tickets to leave, all of this is left out.

It's a marvelously confident touch in storytelling, and typical of Illienko's abilities. It's also proof of the wisdom of hewing to the tack of poetic realism. The densely packed images and elliptical and compact narratives of the great Soc Camp masterpieces were not simply an attempt to get around the censorship. They were a legitimate style, and the most revolutionary thing that had happened to the cinema since Eisenstein introduced montage in 1927.

It's either that or the traditional socialist narrative structure used by Bugajski and Bacso. When Soc Camp filmmakers try to make documentaries, or when they try to emulate the models of Neorealism à la FAMU in Prague or NeoHollywood à la Scorsese, they go sadly wrong.

Nowhere was this more evident than in the crop of new Soviet films that have sprung up since 1985. The first of these, Vassily Pichul's *Little Vera*, was the first real post-Soc Camp film, showing the defects of contemporary Soc Camp life as effectively as Eisenstein had delineated the misery of the workers in *Strike* in 1927. It differed from other, earlier attempts at Soc Camp realism, such as Milos Forman's *Black*

*Peter*, in that it shows clearly rather than hints at the collapse of moral values under socialism. This, of course, was the hidden point that could never under previous circumstances be made, but the real achievement of Soc Camp ideology was to destroy the moral fabric of personal behavior.

But aside from the open sexuality of the heroine, *Little Vera* was very much a film of the Czech New Wave of the early 1960s, and, as his second film unfortunately makes clear, deprived of that inspiration, Pichul finds the cinema tough going. *Oh Those Dark Nights on the Black Sea* is too long, the acting is terrible, and the plot is a mess.<sup>11</sup> The heroine is played by the actress of *Little Vera*. Natalyia Negoda has a nice screen presence, but she's not given a very coherent part, and the male actors simply scream over her, just as they ape around her.

Unfortunately, the dominant impression one gets of the new generation of Soviet filmmakers is incompetence. The technical standards of the cinema were never all that great, and over the years, as the equipment has gotten older and older, so have the techniques employed. The younger generation has turned to a hodgepodge of Western models, none of them particularly appropriate. Maria Khmelik's script, which follows the lives of a man and a woman who scarcely know one another, but finally end up locked in a hotel room together, follows a model which seems very standard: it looks and feels like something that was done in the British cinema back in the 1960s starring Dirk Bogarde and Rita Tushingham.

There are only two real surprises. The heroine is surprisingly coy, a kind of throwback to the 1950s, when the bad girls took off their clothes or did steamy sex scenes, but the heroine never did. And Pichul's vision of Soc Camp reality looks a lot like the Mosfilm White Telephone movies of the late 1970s: the film is set in department stores, wedding receptions, restaurants, and, finally, a resort on the Black Sea. One has definitely seen that before in such unforgettable Mosfilm hits as *The Autumn Marathon* and *Married for the First Time*.

It's an unfortunate choice, because those were

the two things that in Pichul's first film revealed him as having some talent. He had a surprisingly good eye for the erotic possibilities of day to day life, a talent nonexistent in Soviet cinematography and exceedingly rare elsewhere in the bloc (Jiri Menzel and Kazimierz Kutz excepted). It was that erotic eye that gave *Little Vera* some old-fashioned cinematic propulsion that none of the Czech New Wave films had, although the subject was the same. And here, when he turns the camera on the blonde shop girl, Zanna, he generates some of that same excitement, even though she has none of the natural qualities that Natalyia Negoda has.

Gussying up the settings is also a big mistake. Although Pichul wasn't the first director to turn the camera on the day to day life dreariness of Soc Camp (that was probably Forman in *Black Peter*), the eye of his camera was much more savage. From the lengthy pan of the industrial wastes and suburbs that opens *Little Vera* to the rioting delinquents around the Mig fighter memorial, we know we're seeing something that hadn't been shown before—not with that intensity of vision. It was that combination of a cynical and scathing camera eye turned on the world coupled with a naturally erotic eye toward people that gave the first film its punch, and, those things absent, Pichul's filmmaking is pretty pedestrian.

Worse was yet to come, however, with Vitali Kanevski's *Don't Move, Die, and Get Up*, which took the prize in all of these categories. Despite a glowing introduction at the premiere by Alan Parker, who claimed personal responsibility for getting the film screened at Cannes, the film is amateurish in the extreme, and in no way deserved the *Camera d'Or* given to it for best debut film. The two child actors scream at one another in the best of the new Russian cinema traditions, and since the sound synching is off, one frequently gets to see them screaming before one actually hears them, which may be just as well.

There are many things that one can forgive a first film, particularly one made in the Soviet Union at this time, and perhaps the problems with the sound are in this category. But when one sees the shadows of the crew in the frame, one's sympathies begin to dwindle. This is filmmaking below the norm of the Fourth World, much less the Third. It's a pity, because the idea is interesting enough: two youngsters who are growing up in the Far East in Stalinist times, the central irony being that, surrounded

<sup>11</sup>The producer of the film for SACIS, Silvia D'Amico, was quoted in *Screen International* as saying that the cut of the film shown at Cannes was the first cut; she had worked out a much better version, but Pichul showed his own (14 May 1990: 4). That may very well be true, but recutting is not going to save this film.



by all the rubbish and hardship of the miserable little village they inhabit, they manage nonetheless to lead interesting and reasonably happy lives. If it weren't for the recurrent and continuous technical gaffes, Kanevski's work could easily make it as a kind of Soviet *400 Blows*, although the squalor begins to wear thin after a few minutes, as does the screaming. As Truffaut noticed, loud children attract little sympathy.

Every new artist in Soc Camp seems in competition to show us how awful things are there, which is the basic problem with Pavel Lounguine's *Taxi Blues*, all too obviously inspired by *Taxi Driver*. The Motherland as the Holy Mother of Drinkers is not particularly new, but Lounguine's unrelieved portrayals of drinking are staggering, even by what was going on in Pichul's film. As one might expect from a nation of self-confessed alcoholics, things tend to be in a mess. People fall down, drunks throw up and worse, no one can find anything, and against this backdrop we see a typical Moscow cab driver, Schlikov, who gets into a curious friendship with a Jewish jazz musician, Liocha. There's something new about seeing Soviet antisemitism on screen so casually expressed, and the views of the seamier side of Moscow are interesting. But the relationship between the two men reads like something that Fassbinder wrote out on a napkin in a bar and then decide to use as a coaster instead.

At least Lounguine's actors don't scream at one another, while he photographed the action with at least reasonable accuracy. And the character of Schlikov is fascinating. Generally when beginning filmmakers start to describe their characters, they describe what they wished had come through on the screen. But that isn't true here, and the portrait is a complex one: "in short, a Russian fascist, not to be confused with the German fascist, nor the Russian fanatic. The German fascist searches for and needs order. The Russian fascist does not require order, but justice, love, and friendship: Russian fascism is the wild cry, the animal cry, from the misunderstood, the unhappy, the burnt soul. . . . The taxi driver is the symbol for all those characters one sees around Moscow, all those warriors, childless, without families, waiting for the mystical trumpet blast to come down into the streets and kill."<sup>12</sup>

Although fledgling directors often make statements about their films that sound better than they play, what's noteworthy here is the

awareness of the double nature of the narrative. The naturalistic camera eye doesn't imply a lack of control over the symbolic structure of the narrative. These young Soviet directors all have that, even Kanevski. He may not be able to make the film that he sees in his mind, but we're left in no doubt as to what the shape of that film is, and what effects he was after. That's in striking contrast to the usual first film efforts one sees, where generally it's the case that the director had no idea of how to assemble his ideas once they became film. In that sense, Lounguine certainly deserved the prize he received for best *mise-en-scène*.

By that standard, all of these young men have promise, although on the basis of what was shown, the only accomplished young artist was Igor Minaiev, whose *Ground Floor* marks a real step forward from his earlier *Cold March*, shown in the *Quinzaine* in 1987. The earlier film looked like it had been filmed underwater, and was almost as awful as Kanevski's. But the newer work, a short black and white study of psychological obsession, has some nice touches. The plot follows a year in the life of two young people. The hero meets the heroine when she's about to be hauled off for hooliganism, and lets her go. They meet again, he's hopelessly smitten, and she's amused by his youth and passion. As their affair progresses he becomes more and more serious, and she becomes less so. Finally, when he realizes he will lose her, he kills her in a fit of anger.

There are some flaws. The young woman, played by Yevgenya Dobrovolskaya, is a far from accomplished actress, but Minaiev has picked up some of Pichul's knack for catching the erotic, particularly now that he seems to have figured out some of the basis of cinematography. He catches the charms of his heroine sufficiently to explain why the young man is so fatally attracted to her, and he handles their growing awareness of their parting with some real sensitivity. True, there are times when she looks distinctly chubby (although maybe not by Soviet standards), but her face has a wistful quality, and her movements are handled well enough to propel the film along.

As is the case with all of these films, we are bombarded with images testifying to the squalor of contemporary Soviet life. In addition to the

<sup>12</sup>From the Press Kit 29, with the punctuation cleaned up and the English translation from the French original amended slightly to make sense.

potholes and the decaying environment, there's the moral decay as well, and Minaiev does a nice job of linking the story of the lovers with the confusion surrounding them. It is this dimension that makes his work better than anyone else's. He keeps the drinking and the squabbling in the background. It is there, and we are constantly reminded of it, but it doesn't begin to swamp the action.

And there's an awareness that he gives the audience as to why there's all this confusion, as the other inhabitant of the girl's apartment keeps reading from the constant revelations in the newspapers about what has been going on since the 1930s. What can you believe? he asks rhetorically at one point; the next thing you know we'll read that actually we lost the war! It provides an important counterpoint to the lovers, making it clear why the young woman prizes her peculiar freedom to be nothing and nobody, and why the young man wants her love so desperately. It's the same theme as *Taxi Blues*: one person becomes so attracted to another that he wants to possess the person totally, but Minaiev is able to handle it more delicately, and he's able to integrate the actions of his characters into what we see of their environment.

Outside of the Soviet Union, there were two interesting if flawed films by younger directors: Irena Pavlaskova's *Time of the Servants*, from Czechoslovakia, and Nikolai Volev's *Margarit and Margarita*, from Bulgaria. The title of the last film is a kind of Bulgarian play on words: Margarita prefers to be called Rita; in school she meets a handsome young delinquent named Margarit. The two of them get thrown out of school, out of their respective homes, and end up trying to make it on their own, but ultimately they're done in by the corruption of the system.

There are some interesting touches to what is otherwise a fairly ordinary story of young lovers and the generation gap. Although the film doesn't try to emphasize this, the first thing that one is struck by is the thin veneer that covers incestuous family relations: when Rita comes home too late and her parents begin screaming at her, her father starts ripping her clothes off; she's quite literally thrown out in the hallway after he's pulled off almost all of her clothing. When Margarit's mother meets Rita she doesn't act like an upset mother; she acts like a jilted lover.

If the sexual undertones are surprising, and made all the more surprising by the fact that they're so ingenuously shown us on the screen,

as though the director himself doesn't know what to make of them, the school situation is bizarre. There's a breakdown of the structure of school life portrayed that would make the most hardened school principal in the United States wince. It's particularly obvious because the school authorities have what appears to be limitless powers. But discipline is nonexistent, there's no instruction going on, and the students openly subvert the feeble attempts to inculcate socialist principles during the classes.

This is one of those films where it is quite clear from the beginning that things aren't going to work out. But Volev has a good sense of how to hand the audience the unexpected, which sustains interest in a way that films like this usually don't. The young couple has a job washing dishes in one of those hotels that caters to foreigners. The dishes pile up while Rita works in the usual indolent socialist style, and at one point the manageress literally starts chasing her around. The girl runs out on the dance floor where some dancers are doing one of the Soc Camp pseudo ethnic dance spectacles, and she starts hamming it up with them. The scene is funny to the point of slapstick, and it moves the film off in a new direction. Rita has talent, and she gets the chance to be a dancer. It's one of those old movie routines from the 1930s, but it's so unexpected here that it works beautifully.

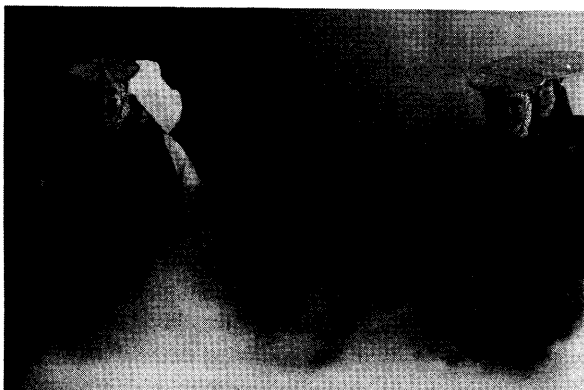
Unlike the younger Soviet filmmakers, Volev seems to have some definite sense of cinematic stylistics, the ability to combine old tricks with new themes. The Bulgarian cinema has always had a surprising affinity for the alienation of youth, going back to films like *Affection*, and although the portrayals have gotten more frank, the world bleaker, there's a good sense of material perfectly controlled here, which is both rewarding and unusual.

There's the same sense of style, although a much different style, in Irena Pavlaskova's *Time of the Servants*. The heroine, Dana, starts off as a pale wallflower of a young woman whose life is shattered when her good-looking boyfriend makes clear that his preferences are for other women. She has the kind of obsessional breakdown where everything is subordinated to settling accounts with her former lover. So she persuades her roommate to let her marry her boyfriend—just for a month.

Up to this point, it's a nice enough film, with an unusually stylish score by Jiri Chlumecky and Jiri Vesely and the usual stylish cinematography one gets in the Czech cinema,

even for first films. It has an almost Western European feel to it, particularly as it seems to be part of the cinema of personal self-indulgence and sexual obsession with which the young directors of Belgium and Germany seem to be so enamored.

But suddenly the perspective of the film seems to open up: it's as though the camera suddenly pulled back and showed an entirely new context for the actions. Dana's husband, Milan, is a weak-willed fellow, and Dana has her



"The Fox Wedding." Kurosawa's Dreams.

hooks into him. They're married for real, and poor Lenka, who was good enough to cooperate with her roommate, is elbowed out into the cold. Dana takes possession of his parent's apartment as well as Milan's life.

In other words, Dana's obsequious little tricks give her power; and once she experiences that power, she's determined to have more of it. In no time at all, she's changed from a little mousey person into a tall and sophisticated bitch who exploits her husband's life as effectively as she can in order to consolidate her own position.

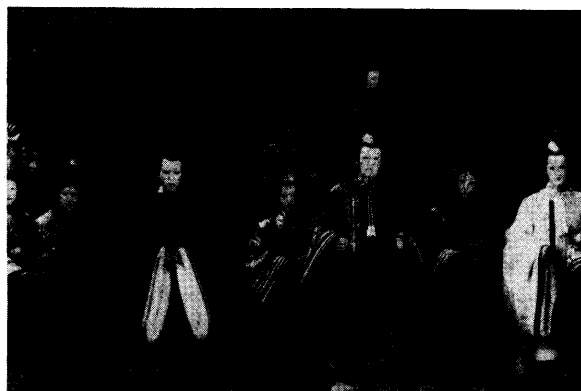
These two films present us with a perfect picture of the moral state of Soc Camp. On the one hand, the admirable are those who, like Margarit, are resolutely defiant. Compromise, pragmatism, all the virtues of normalized Western life, are portrayed as a descent into the abyss. Now we've always seen that with directors like Wajda and Zanussi, but it's always been in a kind of absolute situation, deprived of any real social context. But with Volev we see that the principle works on a day to day basis for everyone. What for Zanussi in *Camouflage* or *The Constant Factor* seemed to be the working out of general philosophical principles is here portrayed as the concrete matter of daily life.

On the other side, we see how, as the state has "paralyzed" society, to use Pavlaskova's terms,

the ordinary responses—paralysis—makes individuals easily controllable by those who are able to manipulate individual weaknesses. Freed of any of the checks and balances of the social organism, people like Dana are able to get whatever they want. In Soc Camp degradation and hypocrisy, then, are behaviors, not sins, *Nana* with a happy ending.

#### Dreams of the Grand Masters

Akira Kurosawa was eighty in March of 1990,



"The Peach Orchard." Kurosawa's Dreams.

a respectably old man, and it is interesting to note that in the last twenty years, he's only made five films: *Dodes' Ka-den*, *Derzu Uzala*, *Kagemusha*, *Ran*, and now, *Dreams*, while over his career, he's made twenty-eight. The contrast with octogenarians like John Huston and Luis Bunuel is interesting, more particularly because *Dreams*, despite its charm, is a falling off. The idea itself is promising: the cinematic recreation of eight of the director's dreams. Although Fellini's obsession with his own autobiography has come close to queering this for filmmakers, Kurosawa's dreams have an immediate interest, since it's hard to think of anyone likely to have more interesting ones.

And the first two, in which the dreamer is a child, are knockouts. "The Fox Wedding" refers to the Japanese folk belief that foxes have their weddings when it rains and the sun is shining. The child's mother tells him not to go and see, and, of course, he does. In the second dream, "The Peach Orchard," the young boy sees his sister's dolls come to life. There's real splendor in both of these: the procession of the foxes (actors with fox masks) through the mists of the forest, the dance of the dolls (also adults). There's the sense of composition evidenced by long continuous takes, the ability to orchestrate complex scenes, the absolute mastery of color

composition, that is the signature of a master.

But then there's a falling off. What started out as Kurosawa's dreams becomes a historical and social tract ending up as a polemic against progress and for nature. In conventional literary terms, it's as though we started out with Blake's *Song of Innocence and Experience* and ended up with Cobbett's *Rural Rides*. Kurosawa as curmudgeon: he starts off being against nuclear power and ends up being opposed to electricity. The thematic unity of the first dreams



"The Tunnel." Kurosawa's Dreams.

disappears, and we end up with a pastiche of diatribes. The unrelieved tales of repentance and woe we see in dreams five through seven are also curiously at odds with the way the young director of sixty handled the urban blight's attempts at the degradation of spirit in *Dodes' Ka-den*. Or perhaps the problem is that when Kurosawa begins to focus on his own private concerns he reveals himself to be, like the rest of us, a rather pedestrian thinker.<sup>13</sup>

How much of this is the old master, and how much is a result of his association with Spielberg (who secured all the funding for this venture), is open to question. Hopefully, Kurosawa will end his career, many years from now, with something more on the order of *That Obscure Object of Desire* or *The Dead*. He deserves it.

But *Dreams* was definitely better than the offerings by Godard and Fellini. As Robert Osborne put it in his review of *The Voice of the Moon*, "Fellini's latest is not one of his better films . . . [it] plays, in fact, like an elongated "Saturday Night Live" spoof of Fellini" (*Hollywood Reporter* 19 May 1990: 5). As in *City of*

<sup>13</sup>Predictably, Robert Osborne, while admitting that the fragmentary nature of the film limited its popular appeal, found these sections the strongest part of the film (*Hollywood Reporter*, Daily Cannes Satellite Edition 11 May 1990: 5).

*Women*, the trip is a kind of dream sequence journey in which the dual protagonists, played by successful Italian comedians (Roberto Benigni and Paolo Villaggio), pursue their twin fantasies. For the younger, Salvino, it's the attempt to win the love of a woman, at first the allegedly beautiful Aldina, but then, later, any pretty girl will do. For the older Prefeto Gonnella, it's the flight away from fears of death and paranoia. Both heroes end up at an industrial disco where the younger tries, à la Cinderella, to match a beautiful foot to his beloved's crystal slipper and the older manages to quiet the rock music down long enough to do a beautiful waltz with his aging paramour.

There are some nice Fellini touches here and there: Benigni finding that the crystal slipper fits all of the girls; an impressive set for the disco; a raucous wedding party in which Salvino's scrawny little friend Nestore celebrates his marriage to the sexually voracious amazon Marisa; a beauty pageant to select a "Miss Farina" to celebrate the annual Gnocchi festival; and a public press conference with state and ecclesiastical authorities that turns into what one of the characters remarks as a "chance for us to demonstrate our perpetual immaturity."

But there's an unrelieved sourness here that is new to Fellini. He's always had an eye for oversized women, and even the attractive ones, like the beautiful redhead in *Amarcord*, have been statuesque, to say the least. But here, for the first time, one gets the feeling that at bottom the director sees women in general as either comically obese or sexually voracious blabbermouths.

Nor is there any of the feel for small town Italy that has been a kind of signature of late. Fellini had a specially designed plaza constructed for the set. It's full of billboards, tour buses, Japanese tourists, and, in the background, a factory spewing forth black smoke. The natives look like street people and bag ladies, and everything has a cheap and tawdry air about it.

The cynical viewer might remark that this seems like an all too realistic portrayal of much of Italy. Fair enough, but it has been like that for years, and Fellini has always managed to celebrate its charm while still showing its warts. So there's a real shock in seeing a portrayal of Italian life by Fellini that has no redeeming virtues at all, that's unrelieved ugliness and distortion. The *Variety* reviewer said, laconically, that viewers may find "the film a little



*On top of the set. The Voice of the Moon.*



*Prefeto Gonnella at the disco. The Voice of the Moon.*

perplexing, so much does it build on the maestro's past work. . . . Abroad, the film will attract the usual Fellini audiences" (19 May 1990: 8).

Possibly, but although one can recognize the usual themes and interests, there's entirely too much of the core of Fellini missing; there are none of those wonderful sentimental moments that he has always managed to insert into his films, for example. *The Voice of the Moon* doesn't so much build on his previous work as distort it, as though the director realizes that he's created a persona that is a kind of straight jacket.

Godard's *Nouvelle Vague* is cut to much the same fit. The thing that is so striking about this film is that it is so resolutely anticinematic. Godard has always seemed to be distrustful of the cinema as cinema. His early writings on the subject, with their constant references to eighteenth-century French literary concepts, fairly drip with condescension toward the idea of film. It's as though there is a kind of dour Calvinism in Godard, who increasingly likes to emphasize his Suisse Romande origins, that makes him distrustful of anything so sensuous and seductive as motion pictures.

So his works attempt to neuter that seductive power in two ways, both of which are powerfully evident here. On the one hand, Godard feels obliged to make all of his points verbally, either through droll bits of dialogue or through intertitles and voice over. His stone-faced and expressionless actors and actresses have little to do in the way of acting, and deliver their lines without the slightest regard for their context. Some of those lines are funny: Godard's scripts are, to paraphrase the *Variety* reviewer's description of this film, "droll, poetic, and resolutely recondite" (19 May 1990: 9). But the effect would be the same if we were watching the actors read the lines aloud on a blank stage, or simply hearing the voices on the radio.

There's a certain intellectual point here in deconstructing the cinema down to an absurd component like dialogue, more or less along the lines of the "deanimation" of a cartoon character which results in one being able to see human hands moving the figure around in a sand box. But there's about the same intellectual point, too.

The emphasis on the verbal wouldn't be so bad if it weren't for the fact that Godard seems now to be resolutely opposed to all of the other parts of the cinema as well. There's no acting, and the scenes are completely static. The montage has become nonexistent, and the

composition of the shots simply bland. The plot produces no powerful emotions, nor any emotions at all, not even the irritation or anger of some of the earlier works. In fact, what we have is a cinema devoid of causes and effects, of interesting techniques and of artistic intentions.

What's the point of it all? In my view, it started out as a very clever and serious game on Godard's part. He realized, as did Truffaut, that he had ideas about the cinema where most French filmmakers had (and still have) none whatsoever. Like Glauber Rocha in Brazil and Pasolini in Italy (and Eisenstein in 1927), he turned to a medium in which he was imperfectly trained and found that the force of his ideas got his work a favorable critical reception. The technical knowledge needed could be gained easily enough: there's the old truism by Woody Allen that you can learn everything you need to learn about cameras and lighting in six weeks. But there's also the other half of the saw, which goes like this: and you still can't make a film like Bergman or Bunuel.

Godard's problem, then, was that his filmmaking was successful just so long as there was a wall of conventional ideas which he could demolish. But at the point at which everyone started doing jump cuts and overlapping sound tracks and the like, at the point where literally anything and everything became fair grist for the cinematic mill, at that point Godard doesn't have a great deal to offer us. Unlike Truffaut, who I suspect really wanted to make movies that large numbers of people saw, and Malle, whose abilities have been of a sort that have never forced him to adapt a set style, Godard has been unable to shift as the art form has shifted. He's still back there in the years of *Sympathy for the Devil*, which was a bit old-fashioned already even then.

As his films have gotten more talky, more static, less and less cinematic, one wonders why he hasn't abandoned it entirely and gone into the theater, since his work looks more and more like *kammerspiel*. But this ignores the fact that Godard, unlike Bergman or Altman, has never been much into that art form either (and it's hard to think of a more closed shop than the world of live theater recently). He is what he is, and his reputation would ultimately be higher if he had made far fewer films, or if, like Jorge Luis Borges, he had confined himself to what he can do very well, which is to take one isolated image and turn it into a cinematic essay. Think of the bizarrely ingenious weightlifting room sequence

in *Aria*. There, for a few brief moments, was a flicker of the master of *nouvelle vague*. If Godard's work was all like that, his reputation would be far higher than it is today. As it is, the current work is simply one of those curiosity pieces which people will go to see because of the name above the title—if they will. The same *Variety* reviewer remarked the "indifferent reception in the US to Godard's recent work." That's the problem.

I've been a Tavernier fan from the very beginning, back when he had just finished *Que la Fête Commence* and was hacking around as part of those obligatory tours for the infamous French Film Weeks that the French Government pushed around the United States for decades. Finally the films got so bad that no one would show them, and most of the directors went back to their real vocations. But Tavernier was clearly the one to watch, and since then he's established himself as consistently the best director working in France. Louis Malle doesn't, Jean-Luc Godard has reclaimed his native Geneva, and François Truffaut is dead. But even were that not the case, Tavernier could still lay claim to the title as one of the best French directors working.

That being said, his latest film, *Daddy Nostalgia*, is an exercise in almost unrelieved boredom, despite the presence of Dirk Bogarde. The premise is that "Daddy," who lives in Southern France with his French wife, has just had a heart attack and an ensuing operation. Juliette, his wayward daughter, whose childhood memories of him always seem to turn around his rejection of her, nevertheless rushes to his side to be with him. The two of them converse back and forth from French to English, and to Jane Birkin's credit, she matches Bogarde's French well.

She may be a good actress, and Bogarde may still be a tremendous actor, but there's nothing in the script that gives them much to do, although Tavernier, who shot the whole thing in cinemascope, tries his best. Tavernier usually chooses his work carefully, but in this case the script, which was written by his ex-wife, is at fault. This seems a terribly unfair identification to use, but both the titles to the film, which repeatedly credits Colo Tavernier O'Hagan, and the Press Book itself make one uncomfortably aware of the fact.

And then there's the equally painful nature of the script, which isn't so much about a somewhat selfish man who's very afraid that he's going to die, as about his talented black

sheep daughter, a successful scriptwriter who's abandoned her husband, Bernard, and, well one gets the point, and all too quickly.

The problem is that there's nothing about the daughter to make her interesting, nothing that indicates she's talented, and nothing that indicates any depth in her relations with her father. And Jane Birkin plays the part as though she's in her forties (which she is). Leave aside the disturbing anomaly of the recent divorce and the young child under the age of ten or so (an older child wouldn't be concerned about having a parent go to PTA meetings). If her parents are in their late sixties, they were young parents when she was born. But they don't act that way, and if her parents are supposed to be older the story doesn't sit right either.

In other words, the idea of the script requires Juliette to be much younger than she is. But she isn't, and "Daddy" as a result is too young. Whichever way you work out the relationship, it rings false. It's schematic, but then the whole script is that way as well. What we have is a pile of assertions, none of which are ever made believable, and a lot of wrangling, which isn't particularly believable either. Nor is it pleasant to watch.

Despite all these things, the film was extremely well received. The in this case undeserved praise makes up, sort of, for the undeserved neglect that both Tavernier and Bogarde have had. *A Week's Vacation* (1980) and *Sunday in the Country* (1984) got nowhere near the attention at Cannes that they should have, although the latter film got Tavernier the prize for best *mise-en-scène*. Although Bogarde has headed the Jury at Cannes, his last appearance there in a film was 1978, in Fassbinder's *Despair*. He's a marvelous actor, as everyone by now knows (twelve years after his last film). It's nice to see two such formidable talents get more recognition. One only wishes the vehicle was tolerable. But film festivals are like that, seldom if ever fair. In the event, Tavernier's work was totally passed over by the Jury, which refused even to recognize Bogarde, in one of those acts of decisive critical judgment that makes the Jury at Cannes still one of the most interesting animals around.

#### From Costume Drama to History

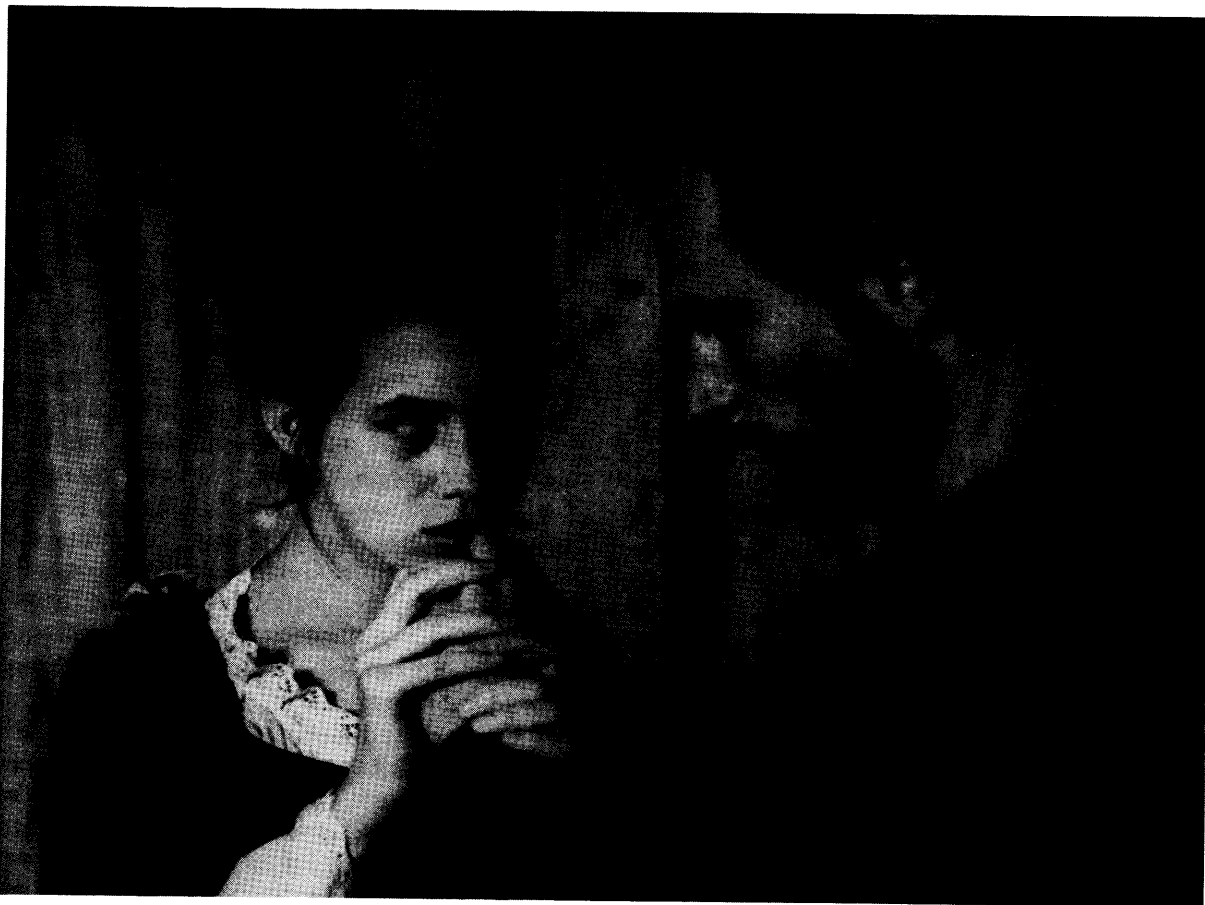
Every year a substantial historical film is produced in Italy by a major director and gets shown at a major film festival. Despite the

different actors, the personalities of the artists, and so forth, they are always the same. It's maddening. Could someone turn the Italian historical film machine off?

The latest example is Paolo and Vittorio Taviani's *Night Sun*, which the brothers fondly suppose is based on a tale by Tolstoy, "Father Sergius." Of course they've transposed it to the Kingdom of Naples in the eighteenth century, but never mind, because if you believe you're seeing the eighteenth century you'll definitely believe you're seeing Tolstoy. After seeing about the seventeenth telephone, telegraph, or

the sloppy filmmaking. The other point is that audiences simply don't notice. But in a film in which, as Osborne points out, "the most lively things that happen include a blossom dropping into a boy's hand, and/or a man looking Heavenward for help," the viewer has plenty of opportunity to notice the slop. Audiences care; it's the directors of the films who don't.

Nor can this sort of mess be blamed on RAI (Italian State Television), because when RAI's marketing arm, SACIS, funded Panfilov's *Mother*, the historical work was to a surprisingly high standard. The real villainy here is on the



As close as they're going to get. *Night Sun*.

electrical line, one wonders: why did they bother to use costume?

There are several answers to this question, reducible to two main points. First, a film like *Night Sun* is let off easily because it is, as Robert Osborne put it, "a pious and leisurely affair about a saintly soul in search of God and serenity" which isn't "too basically different from those innumerable religious epics that flowed out of Hollywood in the 1950s."<sup>14</sup> That may be true enough, but it still doesn't excuse

part of the directors, who like many Italian film artists of the older generation (including Fellini) have just never adapted to the newer standards imposed by synchronous sound and high resolution lenses. The kind of amateurish

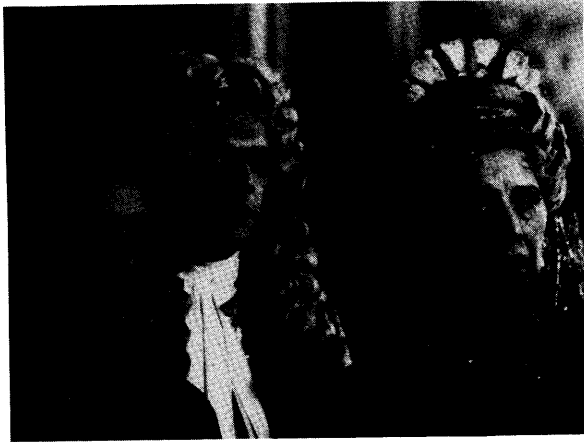
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<sup>14</sup>*Hollywood Reporter* 16 May 1990: 5. The film got a good review in *Variety* 16 May 1990: 8, the reviewer also emphasizing the "particular style and moral obsessions" of the directors, and going so far as to say that the cast is better than in other Taviani films.



costume work of the 1940s and 1950s is entirely too visible now. Ironically, television, which means more people are watching more movies than ever before, is also helping to set this higher standard.

Not that historical details and some careful cinematography are all that is needed to make a decent historical film. *The King's Whore*, directed by Axel Corti, has all that, and it still doesn't work all that well. Corti's film is one of those multi-national co-productions, with an international cast speaking English (and not all that successfully), which turns out to be another



Wigs and Horror show lighting. *The King's Whore*.

costume drama of the same ilk. Timothy Dalton, wearing a most peculiar late seventeenth-century wig, plays King Vittorio Amadeo of Savoy, who's smitten with the wife of his chamberlain (Valeria Golino), and goes through all the usual Hollywood stunts in the process of wooing her.

There's a difference, though: the King is a surprisingly moral lover, and Jeanne is a surprisingly hateful little twit. At the end of the film they've managed to bring everything down around them in ruins without ever really having made the satisfactory trade that the King's British contemporary, Dryden, spoke of when he retitled the story of Antony and Cleopatra, "the world well lost." It isn't Dalton's fault. He's a surprisingly good actor, and, given the sometimes horrific close camera work, comes off quite well.

Valeria Golino is, however, a disaster for the part. She was perfectly photographed in *Torrents of Spring*, but here she looks like a ferret, and some of the shots are so close that one is constantly aware of her surprisingly crooked teeth. Her English pronunciation is peculiar. It's not the way she pronounces words, but her

mannerisms in speaking. Skolimowski cast her perfectly: the kind of young woman a man could become smitten with but then get over when the next interesting woman comes along. It's hard to imagine her as the face that could bring a kingdom crashing down.

It's based on Jacques Tournier's novel *Jeanne de Lys, Comtesse de Verue*, although neither Tournier nor Tolstoy can get the blame for the results. Mark Adams, writing in *Moving Pictures International*, observed that this "is a very good example of what the Europeans do best: high class costume drama" (16 May 1990: 20). But it isn't, and there's no real proof that they do it very well. The number of really good historical films made by Europeans is very small, and when one is made, like Skolimowski's *Torrents of Spring*, shown in competition last year, hardly anyone pays any attention to it.

The lesson is that the whole genre, like the partisan films of the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, have simply been written off as a serious enterprise, with the unspoken rule being to let anyone do it as sloppily as he wishes. The minute you move the clock back a century and pull out the costumes, you can do anything you please. Axel Corti is far from a bad director, and his trilogy *There and Back*, of which the third part, *Welcome in Vienna*, was shown in *Un Certain Regard* some years ago, is one of the best things done in Austria in some time. His cinematographer, Gernot Rolle, is equally talented: he worked with Edgar Reisz in *Heimat*, and he did the photography for *Welcome in Vienna*. The two of them, at the very least, should know better.

The so-called Renaissance of the British cinema, which began with *Chariots of Fire* and ended with Hugh Hudson's *Revolution* and the not unrelated collapse of Goldcrest, has been consistently marked by an inability on the part of British directors to demonstrate any mastery of their subject—not just the subject of the cinema, although in Hudson's case that too is problematic, but rather a mastery of what the film is ostensibly about. This has consistently been the case with Alan Parker, who has moved from one exotic subject to the other, mangling them as he went, whether it was Turkish prisons or the Civil Rights movement.

In every case, whether it is Parker in the South or Puttnam in South America, the same self-indulgent attitude of originality is here, and in every case it is quite undeserved, for the subject of the film is already one that is reasonably well

understood by almost everyone—except the filmmaker himself, whose ideas about what really happened turn out to be dangerously unformed and comically ingenuous. But underneath it all there's a surprising undercurrent of the old British prejudices, particularly against the Yanks.

So Alan Parker's *Come See the Paradise* is yet another of his silly historical excursions into Yank bashing. The subject is the incarceration of the Japanese Americans on the West Coast after the outbreak of WWII, which forms the background for a love story between an American labor organizer and a young Japanese American woman. Like *Mississippi Burning*, there's something offensive here, although it's hard to identify just why. The reason lies in a combination of factors. Any one of them might pass muster, but when they're all present at once, the result is simply too much to swallow.

The factors are, basically, the pretensions at originality, the lack of any historical feelings about the subject, and the thinly disguised racism underlying the treatment of the subject. Parker seems under the strange delusion that no one in the United States is aware that when the Japanese attacked the United States by bombing Pearl Harbor without declaring war, the United States rounded up all of the Japanese Americans and put them in camps. In hindsight, almost everyone has agreed for decades that this was probably a mistake.

There is the crux of the first problem: Parker seems to feel that he's breaking new ground here in some way. But the new ground was broken decades ago. By this token, the next thing that Parker will discover, and promptly make a film about, will be the fact that the Cavalry massacred the Indians at Wounded Knee. It's not the fact of the subject, but the pretentiousness with which the film announces its coverage of the subject (and the pretentiousness with which the film's makers announce that fact).

The second and more serious problem is that Parker doesn't seem to have much awareness of the historical context, or any willingness to operate as though there is any such thing. The internment of enemy aliens during wartime had been a standard practice, certainly by the British, who had practiced it with a good deal of enthusiasm in 1914. That doesn't make it right, but it doesn't make it anything out of the ordinary, either. In this specific case, there were two other factors. One of those was the

universal belief among the general public that we were the victims of fifth column activity, enemy agents who had taken advantage of our democracy, infiltrated our territory, and acted as saboteurs.

The British of course had been obsessed with this in the years immediately before 1914, and the folklore of that unhappy war is full of tales of sabotage and enemy agents. Few of those were in any way true, but they were powerful ideas in 1941. One of the reasons that the American planes at Pearl Harbor were destroyed so easily on the ground was that they were parked out in the open to make them less accessible to the mythical saboteurs who were popularly supposed to be skulking around our bases. In retrospect, of course, very little of this is true. Our initial defeats were suffered not because of fifth column Japanese agents and saboteurs, but because, as Herman Kahn pointed out a long time ago, we were not prepared to deal with an enemy who was able to do a good job in attacking us.

With the Japanese, of course, our blindness was tempered, even shaped, by racism, which made us discount the ability of the Japanese to produce a first-rate navy and naval air forces. Embarrassingly enough, the Japanese forces that threw the British out of Malaysia were outnumbered by their opponents, whose confidence in their abilities was, purely and simply, the result of racism. The reports of the British air attaché from Shanghai make for interesting reading.<sup>15</sup>

Notice that in each instance the attitude at hand has its origins in British behavior. It was the British who invented the concentration camp, during the Boer War; who began the practice of wholesale internments; whose intelligence assessments were nothing more than thinly disguised exercises in racial prejudice. In fact, as V. S. Kiernan observes in *The Lords of Humankind*, it was the British whose class attitudes during the nineteenth century gave rise to a racism as appalling as it was gratuitous, and their attitudes are haunting us today. Every major racial war or tribal war since 1945 has been a result of British policy before the war and because of British inabilities afterwards: India and Pakistan, Nigeria, South Africa, Jordan and Israel, Uganda, not to mention the

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<sup>15</sup>See the relevant chapters in Ernest R. May's *Knowing One's Enemy: Intelligence Assessment before the Wars* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1984).

two great holdouts, Northern Ireland and South Africa.

So Parker's lack of historical perspective is somewhat offensive not only in its fundamental ignorance of the historical contexts, but in its thinly disguised anti-Americanism. And for all that, what we really have is a rather pedestrian love story between a beautiful young Japanese girl and Dennis Quaid. The romantic parts are nicely done, but they don't sustain the film, particularly since the girl is completely passive. That story could have been set anywhere. Why not in South Africa during the Boer War? The young Japanese girl could be Afrikaans, Dennis Quaid British.

There is a very good reason why not, which the screening of Ken Loach's *Hidden Agenda* made quite clear. A film made in Great Britain that was an exercise in Brit bashing would never have gotten any funding, and, if it got made at all, as Loach's film did, it would have immediately been attacked as nothing more than Brit bashing by a sizeable section of the British press. Sound farfetched? That's exactly what happened at the press conference after the film, which degenerated into a squabble amongst the various contingents of the United Kingdom (and Ireland).

The gist of the problem is that while Loach's film makes a sort of under the table attempt to be "objective" in its coverage of the struggles in Northern Ireland, the viewer ends up more or less among the opposition, since the British government's acts of violence against Human Rights investigators is the ostensible trigger of the film. The film is not a blatant piece of IRA propaganda, as was charged, but it does put too much of the usual anti-government spin on things. One says usual, because after all these years of Conservative Party rule in Great Britain, it appears to have become more or less an article of faith among many British intellectuals that their government is somewhere in the neighborhood of Ceausescu's.

This is the sort of argument that finds little support among Rumanians, and, given the fact that they still do have elections in Great Britain, it may fairly be said that the government in power is pretty much what the majority of people voted for. Of course, as is the case in the United States, many people don't vote, and so one hears that any given party or leader does not really represent the will of the majority of the population. True enough. Consider a country where there are reasonably free elections and

voting is compulsory, so everyone votes: Argentina.

Robert Osborne, in a reasonable and favorable review in *The Hollywood Reporter*, argued that the film "spares neither the Irish or [sic] the Brits. . . . There is, in fact, finger pointing in all directions. . . ." (17 May 1990: 5). This, however, isn't really true. Loach and his scriptwriter, Jim Allen, have loaded the dice considerably, throwing in as assumptions some very problematic conclusions. For example, the film simply assumes that there was a serious high level plot to discredit the previous "liberal" regimes of Heath and Wilson by the two intelligence services. Yet this is a claim that Peter Wright basically dismisses in *Spycatcher*, a book that the present "far right" government of Great Britain went to lunatic lengths to prevent from being published in that country. While the contention may be true, it's the sort of sleight of hand that won't dispose any objective viewers to feel that the film is particularly honest.

Of course one doesn't judge films like this just as pieces of political analysis, although it is true that one of the reasons why films like *The Battle of Algiers* are as good as they are is that their analyses are inherently objective, and that objectivity doesn't keep them from being controversial, but simply makes them better films. *State of Siege* is an extremely doctrinaire piece of leftwing filmmaking. But it's also an extremely effective work, because Costa Gavras can set up effective action scenes and make them support his narrative.

Loach can't. The critical dogfight set off by the screening is the most interesting thing about *Hidden Agenda*. There is the usual pretentiousness about its originality, but this has to be taken with a large grain of salt. In addition to *The Long Good Friday* and *A Prayer for the Dying*, both which dealt more effectively with the polarization of the population at large, there was a recent Home Box Office production loosely based on the Stalker investigations, which obviously form the factual backdrop for *Hidden Agenda*. Finally, as the *Variety* reviewer noted, the production itself is poor: with a "talky screenplay," while the "camerawork is flat and the sound mix occasionally fuzzy." The whole film, in short, lacks "big-screen impact" (17 May 1990: 10).

"What rankles," as Toby Young said of a different set of artists, "is the suggestion that it is by virtue of their craft that writers like John Mortimer and Margaret Drabble possess some

special insight into contemporary politics which is denied to the rest of us. . . . This belief is clearly just a form of professional vanity."<sup>16</sup> But at least Drabble has earned the right to her vanity. Loach and Parker haven't.

### Deconstructing the Classics

The Press Kit to Jean-Paul Rappeneau's creative and zestful adaptation of Edmund Rostand's *Cyrano de Bergerac* is formidable, with its interminable discussions about the difficulties of doing a film with the dialogue in verse. That's a good example of how film artists (and their cohorts) go astray. The people at Cannes who receive press kits and bother to read them are well enough aware of just how many films they have suffered through where the dialogue was in verse, or, quite recently, entirely set to music as performed as an opera (Oliveira's *The Cannibals*). Claiming that this is a novelty is either an insult to the intelligence of the readers or a telling comment on the literacy of the writers, much like Alan Parker's preposterous claim that he was the first person to lay bare the plight of the *nisei* during World War II.

That aside, the film is formidable, the best historical and literary work seen at Cannes in recent years. The film is recognizably still the play, but done right. Rappeneau has opened it up, changed it around, and generally turned it into a film. It's not a filmed drama, nor a piece of the theater tightly adapted. The fencing sequences between Cyrano and his hundreds of adversaries are done with the right degree of swash, the settings perfectly suited to the feel of the piece.

And, more importantly, the casting is right. Gerard Depardieu has never been my favorite French actor, chiefly because he generally moves through a film like he's sleepwalking. But here, where he's had to get an enormous amount of poetry down right, he turns in an amazing performance, clearly the best of the actors at Cannes this year. He wears his nose with impeccable self-consciousness, and he is an absolutely perfect Cyrano. More importantly, the actress who plays Roxane, Anne Brochet, is able to put just the right amount of naiveté, sexual repression, and breathless intelligence into the role. She comes across not just as the beautiful

young woman, but as the intelligent young woman who prepares to be wooed by words. Vincent Perez, who plays Christian de Neuville, is the perfect foil for all this: handsome enough to be fatally attractive for Roxane, brave enough to manage Cyrano, and intelligent enough to realize his limits.

Literary purists will wince because this is an adaptation: there are clearly places where the lines have been shifted, and Jean-Claude Carriere, who did the script with Rappeneau, was charmingly frank about the changes. He also points out that Rostand's verse, with "its disjointed lines, odd meter, and fancy enjambments," can easily sound like prose, and this is a most necessary observation. One of the reasons why Shakespearean films fail so miserably is that the people who do them can never shake the idea of "great poetry," when an awful lot of what Shakespeare wrote doesn't call that sort of attention to itself at all; rather it's a perfectly sensible way of advancing the plot and furthering revelations of character, the kind of thing Godard would find that he would have to depend on if he stopped depending on the magic of celluloid and magnetic tape.

Rappeneau's problem is, that, like Eric Rohmer in *Perceval*, once he gets his poetical engine going, he can't bear to turn it off, or maybe he can't bear to waste all those gorgeous sets. Whatever, the film is too long at nearly two and a quarter hours. Like Rohmer, it would play better to wider audiences if it were cut. As it is, despite Depardieu's surprisingly deft recitals, the intensity of the poetry begins to wear you out. In a live theatrical production there wouldn't be that much to look at: we would need all that poetry simply to keep things moving along. But in a film visually this rich, there's a risk of overkill, and Rappeneau is just too close to it.

But as historical filmmaking and as an adaptation of a literary classic, the film is world class, something that is getting harder and harder to say about historical films.

I recently saw *The African Queen* again, and I was struck by how different it was from my memories of it. Despite much of it being shot "on location" in Africa, it had a curious studio air, a kind of theatricality that was surprising. It was also, where I had remembered something dramatic and romantic, peculiarly funny. The resolute anti-historicity was perhaps unintentionally funny, but the pawky humor in this tale of two warring eccentricities was

<sup>16</sup>In his review of Ian McElwan's *The Innocent*, in *Punch* 15 May 1990: 32.

startling. I found myself liking it all over again, but for the wrong reasons. The impression was made all the stronger by having just read Katherine Hepburn's personal account of the filming, which made very clear just how ambitious the project was and just how cavalier its director was when it came to the script.

What kind of a man would mount such a pioneering effort in Africa and then turn it into a series of blackly comic endeavors? Certainly not the John Huston whose recent work and



*Black Hunter, White Hunter. White Hunter, Black Heart.*

appearances at Cannes had been a series of disappointments, a man who seemed to have an interest in the literary (as witness his adaptation of Lowry's *Under the Volcano*) but entirely too literal a bent to accomplish it.

But the man that Clint Eastwood produces from the pages of Peter Viertel's *roman à clef* *White Hunter, Black Heart* is absolutely the Huston of that earlier period. The result is quirky and insightful, sure to displease virtually everyone, in other words, a definite winner. Right off there's the shock of seeing Eastwood play Huston. It's disconcerting to hear a surprising facsimile of that high arrogant voice, that flamboyance, if only because we're so used to seeing Eastwood as Eastwood.

That's scarcely fair to an actor who, like Sean Connery, established himself so well in a role that audiences perpetually blend the two. Eastwood's performance is good. It's the shock of it, of seeing a movie in which, yes, they really are down there in Africa getting ready to make a movie that, well, by golly, it has this boat, and this woman who looks remarkably like Katherine Hepburn, and this newly married young couple who could easily pass for the Bogarts . . .

That's the root of the problem. Viertel, who went with Huston to Africa to rework the script,

ended up not only with the rewrite but with a novel about their experiences. He changed the names around, but there's never any doubt what the book was about. In a movie it doesn't work: changing the names simply makes things needlessly coy.

Worse, it mangles the only persuasive film yet made about that strange creature: the Great American Artist. Eastwood's film is that good.<sup>17</sup> And for people who can get past the effrontery of it being made by Harry Callahan, of the



*"Huston" and "Viertel." White Hunter, Black Heart.*

effrontery of portraying Bogart and Hepburn (and then putting them far in the background), not to mention all those people who will be outraged at the portrait of Huston, the film is a small masterpiece. And it definitely answers my question.

Viertel's argument (he also gets a script credit on this film) is that men like Huston are obsessed, not only with being artists, but in being men, not only in being macho, but in being upwardly mobile and successful men of the world. They're driven to all of these things, and it makes them seem (or become) self-destructive. Some of them, like Hemingway, do become failed artists at one level. Others, like Huston, live to ripe old ages despite their obsessive smoking and drinking and hell raising.

Everyone can talk about this type in the usual clichés. The trick is, first, to be willing to argue that they're the reality of the American artist, and second, to bring those clichés to the screen so that we end up with people. In contemporary America, where such values are currently

<sup>17</sup>Duane Byrge, writing in *The Hollywood Reporter*, Daily Cannes Satellite Edition 12 May 1990, gave it an early rave review, saying "Eastwood bags a big one. . . . Eastwood's legions of serious cinema fans . . . will be enthralled by this deep and penetrating story" (5).

unfashionable, the unabashed acceptance of a man who brags about his debts, is only interested in bimbos, chain smokes and stays drunk a good deal of the time, gets into public fights, and wants to do manly things like big game hunting in Africa makes the film problematic.

But there we are. Otherwise, how do we explain these artists? And of the group—Hemingway, Fitzgerald, on down the line—Huston's is the most disturbing case, because he managed to do all of these things and not destroy himself; because unlike these other artists he stayed successful from his first great films like *The Maltese Falcon* and *The Treasure of the Sierra Madre* to his last, perhaps even greater work, *The Dead*; because, unlike those others, he didn't kill himself, or drink himself to death, or end up in his own lifetime regarded as a failure; because he didn't support himself as an insurance agent during the day and moonlight as the great American artist; because, although he didn't believe in pandering to an American audience, he acted as though there was one out there, and his works spoke to the central core of our experiences.

#### A Few from the Heart

One of the most interesting things about Cannes is that each year films are shown there that, while not judged as bad, are more or less ignored. These films are not obscure works in strange languages starring amateur actors; rather they are respectable mainline works from Italy, Australia, or even the United States. And the lack of attention is a curious form of benign neglect. Take Tornatore's *Cinema Paradiso*, shown in competition at Cannes in 1989. Most critics felt that it was about the average level of a film shown in competition that year, and it split the Special Jury prize, an award whose significance has never really been explained very well, with Blier's *Trop Belle pour Toi*.

Not a bad form of neglect. The point is that there's an enormous disproportion between the way the film was received at Cannes and the way it was received in the United States, where it has been a sort of *Chariots of Fire* for intellectuals. A year after Cannes, when it has been resigned to the same limbo where all films of this type end up in the critical mind, one is surprised to find people speaking of it as though it were one of the great Italian films of the decade.

This syndrome has by now become so established that one of the minor speculations at Cannes is to try to identify the minor film at the festival that will reduce intellectuals to emotional jelly as they leave their local movie theater. Perhaps it will be Tornatore's latest film, *Everybody's Fine*, a work which, as one was observed after the press screening, makes *Cinema Paradiso* look like something by Bresson.

Or perhaps it will be Lynch's *Wild at Heart*, the



Pay First? *Wild at Heart*.

surprise winner of the prize for best film this year. Actually, given that Bertolucci was the president of the jury this year, Lynch's victory should in retrospect have been obvious. Not only was *Wild at Heart* the only film in competition with any sex in it, but it uses the same tricks of combining the artful and the banal that Bertolucci used in his famous *Last Tango in Paris*. Not that Lynch's film is an imitation; to put it more accurately, Lynch's work is in its entirety so derivative that it would be difficult to single out any one influence. But both directors share a singular ability to deflate the eroticism that they spend so much of their energy portraying, just as both of them share a talent at getting away with bringing the sexually explicit to the screen.

And, one might add, just as both of them share a fundamental kind of directorial muddle-headedness. *Wild at Heart*, for all its arty shots and closeups, is just another one of those interminable great American car chase and rampage movies of the sort that populate late night television. Lynch does some interesting technical things with the genre, but he neither redeems it nor puts it to some higher use. But then one could say the same thing about *Last Tango in Paris*. If one subtracts the dialogue and

some technically spectacular camera work, one is faced with the old standard of soft core, the sexual initiation movie.

But in defense of Bertolucci, when he did it, he did it first, and he did it in a much different climate. One can't say the same in 1990, where we've already had *Angel Heart*, *Nine and One Half Weeks*, *Two Moon Junction*, and dozens of other works that skirt the fine line between the erotic and the explicit, the trashy and the culturally sophisticated. So *Wild at Heart* was a curious choice. But it was one that got Bertolucci off the hook, so to speak: faced with a group of unpalatable national alternatives from France and Italy, and no obvious neutral European choice, he opted for left field, validating what some observers had started to see as an unwritten rule that the jury's president gets to determine the grand prize. So as Wenders went for *sex, lies, and videotape*, as Forman went for *When Father Was Away on Business*, both films close to the tastes of the two jury presidents, so Bertolucci went for his own spiritual soulmate, Lynch.

The film about the really wild at heart is definitely not something that will be showing up on anyone's art house list in the near future. Victor Gaviria's *Rodrigo D. No Futuro*, although hailed as an entirely new film for Colombia, and, implicitly, for South America as well, is in reality nothing more than another *barrio* or *favela* film. These go back certainly to Luis Bunuel's *Los Olvidados*, and, in the more recent past, to Ciro Duran's *Gamin*, which was also shot in Colombia, and the much more well-known film by Heitor Babenco, *Pixote*. Like the main character of *Pixote*, who was subsequently shot and killed by the police, three of the characters in *Rodrigo D.* had bought the farm within eight months of the shooting.

So much for the originality of the concept, but the film itself is curiously interesting. Although it comes across as one of those hybrid documentaries, Gaviria has a way of never seeming to try to tell a story, which is original. Latin American films, documentary or no, are all too often trying to preach. This is particularly the case with films about the poor. But *Rodrigo D.* follows the lives of a group of young men and women in desultory fashion, relying mostly on their own fractured Spanish for the strength of the narrative. Most of the story is in what we see, and that too is a first: Latin American films with a social conscience are generally way too busy trying to tell us what we've seen.

But Gaviria doesn't seem interested in making those points. Rodrigo is completely alienated from the world around him. His only apparent ambition is to get a drum set and start a punk rock group. He has numerous headaches, loafs about, and finally throws himself out of a window. He has the jitteriness of the habitual coke user, and, as all of his friends are pushing drugs, the deduction seems reasonable.

But it is a deduction we have to work for, not one that Gaviria is giving away. Unlike his friends, Rodrigo seems to stay out of real trouble. He doesn't deal drugs, steal cars, commit armed robbery, or kill his friends. His inaction generates a certain audience sympathy, and this is a shrewd touch. The one time he actually does anything is when he plays the drums. Although talent may not be the right word for punk rockers, Rodrigo doesn't seem to have much of it, even by what one presumes would be the modest standards of Colombian groups, even though he's tone deaf, and has the jittery rhythmic fidgets of a rock drummer.

So the portrait is a surprisingly complex one, as is what we see going on around the main character. Although the ostensible message here is despair, the striking thing about what we actually see is people who are carving their lives out of nothing. They live in the dreadful shanty towns that surround all the major Latin American cities, what the Brazilians call *favelas*, and one could easily be tempted into using another Brazilian term, *marginalizada*, to describe their status. Although these terms may be appropriate, one is mostly struck by the vitality of life. An enormous number of people in the film have lawful jobs, and they seem to have lives. Rodrigo's sister tries to keep a clean house (the mother is dead), and the film is full of touches illustrating the ways in which human beings can accommodate to the worst situations and still live.

So in a curiously unformed way, the film is almost optimistic, even in its portrayal of lawbreakers, who have taken control of their own fate. Although Gaviria doesn't in any way emphasize this, his images do remind us of that proverbial sympathy the well-off have for the poor when they turn to crime. Their motives are so perfectly understandable.

Perhaps this American vitality is only by contrast with the scores of contemporary Eastern European films that begin to reveal the real achievements of socialism. As the Press Kit for Wajda's *Korczak* remarked, when he wanted to

film the horrible conditions of the ghetto that the Governor General forced the Jews of Warsaw into, it wasn't as though he had to build it: he went into a workers' suburb, found a street, threw up a fence at either end, and there it was. There's nothing in the *favelas* of Medellin that Gaviria photographed that can match the cumulative awfulness of the Moscow we see in

Pavel Loungine's *Taxi Blues*, nor the wretched Ukrainian highway scene of Yuri Illienko's *Swan Lake—The Zone*. There too, socialism was far ahead of the best that developing capitalism could produce.□

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Laureano Albán

THE CREATION OF BIRDS

*Translated by Frederick H. Fornoff*

The bird on the branch was not born:  
the rain creates its wings, passes.  
The sun tries out distant dawns  
in its plumage.  
Then the flower rises up to beak and tongue,  
takes aim at invisibility.

Ah, and the wind, alone for an instant,  
alone in the flame of vertigo, carving  
the hesitant diamonds of flight  
with the point of anxiety.

The bird on the branch is being born:  
yellow gift, motionless sign  
that something mortal is rising,  
gaining transparence,  
that it's possible to feed shadow  
with other brevities,  
or be a lone encounter with chance  
ever called forth by the air.

Take away your hands.  
Let invisibility converge  
in the apex of pine skies  
and create the tiny eyes of the air.

Do you know fire  
stores its burning coins  
in the breast of the bird,  
that daylight imparts pale labyrinths,  
that moss, sunken in silence,  
is preparing a fright ditch  
to drink its wings?

The bird on the branch is dying:  
the color the star left  
woven in the air  
is april.

A weightless ash sifts down  
from each exhausted feather.  
The rain steals off with the wings.  
The sun drags away the plumes  
laden with dusks.  
And an invisible flower falls from the beak  
like a day that burned away.

Ah, now the wind pierces  
the slight body. It falls loudly,  
pure fleetingness.

The moss drinks down  
the vanquished heights.  
Each thing gathers in  
a portion of wonderment  
that touched the star.

And in the tree  
echoes resound, it's oblivion  
chirping, the glad chirps weaving  
and unweaving the air's music,  
making birds.

The bird on the branch was not born.

George Angel

THE DARK

There are two children, in the darkness there. In the darkness, there are two children. Within the dim rustling, the sun has let loose fragments. See one pass the other without sparking in the shade. The silence leaves another fabric. The trunks of the trees rise, extensions of the shadowed dirt. Their green tops become dust-colored beneath the sun. The two children are moving there in the darkness like the sun's loose fragments. One child draws the other, simply by moving. The taller child is exhausted by the orchard. Lost within it, the smaller child digs stones out of the ground, filling his pockets. An area of light and their bodies become visible and then fragmented as they pass. The tight air holds one to the other, there beneath.

The soundless world has exhaled all its breath. The empty places are filled with some recalcitrant mystery; and yet the children move freely within it, denying it. The broadcloth of midday is plush with it. Perhaps this is the nest of memory. I see your face and then you move. For that instant that I see your face, the shadows accommodate its contours. How is it that these children are as still as stones beneath water.

As if gathered, the leaves lie grey in warm shadow, gathering the cold. There is ash on the small child's fingertips. Two dappled figures walk upon the solid earth. The ground is whole, and the passing minutes turn palm upward. The orchard holds the children. In and out of shapes of mosquitoes and filtered light. The shadow is green. The silent rows of trees touch each other, there above.

The children's legs are brittle in the sea of dark, and the words they spoke earlier seem to linger like pockets of a sour smell. These words they have dug up out of their pockets with which they have covered the ground. They have passed these words between them, like bruises, since

each first realized the other was there. The words and speaker no longer mattering, just so that the movement in the words was there.

The children move and are lost to view behind the trunks of the trees. The orchard is empty. The trees hold the silence within the shadow. Small sounds are sealed to their origins by the dark. The orchard is full with dark. The trunks of the trees give off the last of the light. The two children come into view. The smaller child is somehow radiant. The taller child runs his hands over the trunks of the trees.

Alone, these children cannot help but be brothers and they are. Children are giants and they know it. My foot catches on something and the whole world falls with the impact. It lies tipped on its ear, waiting for me to grunt. The green world where it is dark. I leave the world tipped until it cannot hear the thud anymore. Then I lift the fallen pillar that is everything.

The children move their giant arms and hold the world by a blade between their giant lips. Their slow movements are seen and heard by the small imaginary faces beneath them. All children can fly in the dark. The two children walk in their soft place. There is no direction, only filling the small spaces with familiar steps. Above the orchard, the sun is like a scribbled out word. Two children walk in the nestled darkness.

Like vessels, their faces float beneath the motionless branches. Perhaps the children are translucent in the sunlight. Perhaps their faces ring upon the light like bells. This place is a bed of shadow. It is a stone in a dark pocket and the submerged part of a wheel. They stand within the still trees.

The children pass through the silence, and first the seasons and then the years impose themselves on each other in the orchard.□

FROM SCREWBALLS TO CHEESEBALLS: COMIC NARRATIVE  
AND IDEOLOGY IN CAPRA AND REINER

When Rob Reiner's film *The Sure Thing* appeared in 1985, it was greeted by many reviewers as a welcome intervention in what Richard Corliss called "the acne rash of teen movies."<sup>1</sup> The film was likewise praised because Reiner's avowed attempt to revitalize romantic comedy not only managed to avoid the crude horseplay of the typical teenpic, but also seemed cinematically sophisticated with its campy references to on-the-road movies, hitchhiker horror pics, screwball comedy, TV magic shows, and even to Reiner's earlier film *This is Spinal Tap*. The film is thus in its own right a good test case for a study of current Hollywood comedy, but it accrues even richer implications as a social text if one reads it as an 80's version of Frank

Capra's 1934 film *It Happened One Night*. Though Reiner denies that he ever saw the Capra film, the parallels are remarkable.<sup>2</sup> Indeed, they earned Reiner the praise of several reviewers. Janet Maslin of the *New York Times*, for example, saw the film as an enjoyable "recasting" of *It Happened One Night*, and Nigel Floyd, in *Monthly Film Bulletin*, commends Reiner for updating and adapting the conventions of screwball comedy.<sup>3</sup> None of the reviewers, however, pause to examine the implications of these adaptations, which, we will argue, reveal a significant shift in the narrative mode of ideological containment and wish-fulfillment, and thus a shift in the form and cultural function of comedy.

Theorists of comedy such as Frye, Bakhtin, and Kenneth Burke agree that the genre, with its ending in a marriage festival, narrates a utopian vision of tolerance, integration, and participation; as Frye claims, the purpose of comic narrative has traditionally been "to include as many people as possible in its final society."<sup>4</sup> The form thus readily serves a democratic or even revolutionary agenda. But generic forms, since they create a particular imaginary relationship to the real, also operate as ideological structures. Thus Fredric Jameson's theory of narrative stresses that the utopian visions expressed through traditional forms are ultimately repressed: narrative "gives and takes alike in a kind of psychic horsetrading, which strategically arouses fantasy content within careful symbolic containment structures which defuse it."<sup>5</sup> Seen in this light, the happy

<sup>1</sup>Qtd. in Jerome Ozer, "The Sure Thing," *Film Review Annual* (Englewood Cliffs: Jerome S. Ozer, 1986) 1325.

<sup>2</sup>Ron Alexander, "Rob Reiner Makes a Comedy of Youthful Manners," *New York Times* 24 Feb. 1985: B21. We see the following parallels: In both movies a bickering pair is thrown together on a cross-country journey, an experience which prompts the heroine to transfer her affections from a previous attachment to her traveling companion. The hero in each film acts as what we might call an "instructor in democracy" to the heroine. In both films, a subplot involves the hero in a quest for success as a writer: Peter Warne of *It Happened One Night* hopes to capture a headline-making story, and Walter "Gib" Gibson wants to write a praiseworthy essay for his freshman composition class. Beyond this basic situation, many incidents from the Capra film are paralleled by Reiner. In both films, the romantic pair goes through complicated machinations in order to peaceably share hotel rooms. Both couples give money to down-and-outers. Both couples run out of money in the course of their journeys. Each heroine encounters a lecherous stranger—a rapist in *The Sure Thing*, a persistent flirt in *It Happened One Night*—and is rescued by her traveling companion. In both movies hunger forces the heroine to eat food she had originally disdained. In both movies the hero teaches the heroine new ways to eat—Ellie learns to dunk doughnuts; Alison learns to "shotgun" beer. Both couples hitchhike. Both find rides with singing drivers. However, it should be noted that the Reiner movie draws its title from an incident that has no parallel in *It Happened One Night*: Gib is traveling to California to meet a gorgeous blond, a sexual conquest that, his best friend promises, will be a "sure thing."

<sup>3</sup>Janet Maslin, rev. of *The Sure Thing*, *New York Times* 1 Mar. 1985: C12; and Ozer 321.

<sup>4</sup>Northrop Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1957) 165.

<sup>5</sup>Fredric Jameson, "Reification and Utopia in Mass Culture," *Social Text* 1 (1980): 141.

marriage of traditional comedy offers the anodyne of a symbolic and individual solution to tensions that are actual and social.

Since high modernist literary practice has largely rejected these traditional generic forms, in the twentieth century this ideological operation is particularly evident in mass culture texts (Jameson 136-37). Thus, while film historians usually regard *It Happened One Night* as the initiating screwball comedy, its roots in traditional comedy are clear.<sup>6</sup> Its story fits Frye's schema quite closely: conventional blocking characters are defeated or reformed as the romantic couple join in marriage. This outcome is prepared for in a version of what Frye calls "the green world"—a journey in this case—which teaches the heroine and hero how to choose the partner that will best integrate them into society. The comic narrative is thus clearly a political and utopian text. The class tensions that the plot negotiates are made evident by Capra's placement of his spoiled heiress, Ellie Andrews (Claudette Colbert), in the ordinary environment of everyday America—greyhound buses and cheap motels. The desires informing this social dreamwork were urgent: in 1934, America was emerging from the depression, when the chasm between those with jobs and those without, those with food and those without, was still enormous. This desire for social change, however, is contained by the sentimental, individualist closure of the marriage between an unemployed newspaper reporter (Peter Warne, played by Clark Gable) and a millionairess arranged by none other than Ellie's father—revealed as benevolent capitalist and democratic soul after all.

*The Sure Thing*, in spite of its many parallels with *It Happened One Night*, offers its audience neither the same *kind* of utopian expression nor the same *kind* of containment. In this film, comedy is not a symbolic narrative enacting an "attitude towards history," but rather an acquired commodity that is propagated on several deliberately didactic occasions.<sup>7</sup> A turning point in the film, for example, is the hero's (Walter "Gib" Gibson, played by John Cusack) stogy defense of mooning, in which he

evidently persuades the heroine (Alison Bradbury, played by Daphne Zuniga) that this trite prank is an exhilarating, liberating, and hilarious act of comic spontaneity. In another climactic, ostensibly romantic moment, he asks Alison what kind of person her current lover is. When she answers that he is hardworking, ambitious, etc., Gib replies that this is not what he wants to know. His follow up questions reveal what the essence of personality is: "I mean what kind of beer does he drink? Is he funny?" The crucial question to ask about one's match in life thus becomes "Does he make you laugh?" Accordingly, *The Sure Thing* does have its laughs; in fact the script is self-consciously studded with clever one-liners. Comedy, however, is neither an integral part of the narrative structure nor the means of imagining a wish-fulfilling participatory society: instead the emphasis on one-liners makes the film a story with detachable jokes rather than a comic narrative. The result is a distortion of the inevitably political import of the comic narrative into its near opposite: exclusionary and dismissive throw-away one-liners—a kind of collapsed narrative—about the political.

Class differences are the butt of several of *The Sure Thing's* most mean-spirited jokes. One scene in particular makes the trivialization of comedy's traditional social text clear. The romantic couple find themselves in a bus station full of down-and-outers. Gib's reaction to this situation can easily be read as fear of *declassament* since the momentary identification he senses with these unfortunates is almost instantly defused by a series of one-liners about them like "I wonder what those guys majored in." When a bum asks Gib for a dollar, he agrees to give it only if the bum has change for a five. The fact that the beggar can indeed break a five underscores the Reagan-era assumptions at work in these jokes: the belief that class standing is purely a matter of choice—a matter of working reasonably hard to finish college, of choosing the right major, or, for the less studious, a matter of taking up a sly begging routine and making sure one has the right change. This scene culminates in a speech in which Gib announces his intention to hitchhike the rest of the way to California in order to "see the real America" and "really relate to the people." Alison immediately forces him to admit that the real reason is that he hasn't brought enough money for a bus ticket, thus exposing this speech as histrionic blustering. As his

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<sup>6</sup>Thomas Schatz, *Hollywood Genres: Formulas, Filmmaking, and the Studio System* (New York: Random House, 1981) 152.

<sup>7</sup>Comedians, Reiner claims, "are the most dazzling people on our planet" (Alexander 21).

fearful jokes about the bums reveal, the last thing Gib, let alone Alison, wants to do is "relate to the people." Whatever "relating" that does occur has no consequences beyond a laugh. By contrast, in a similar scene in *It Happened One Night* when Ellie Andrews gives most of her money to a hungry child, the audience gets comic pleasure from Ellie's impracticality, but the moment is no joke. It is instead a consequential episode in the comic narrative of Ellie's learning about the existence and misery of the depression's victims, and this learning changes her.

The best illustration of the difference between a comic narrative and a story with jokes is that presented in the comic seduction routine with which Reiner's film opens. The sales-pitch quality of Gib's patter is emphasized by a voice-over effect as the camera first pans across the night sky and then focuses on him and his baffled target. The speech ends with a punchline that is hilarious because it is so ridiculously impossible: "Imagine a sexual encounter so intense that it might conceivably change your political views." As the girl dances off, the audience laughs, confirming the foolishness and unworkableness of such a proposition. The line at once expresses and laughs away the same utopia that the entire narrative of *It Happened One Night* indulges and explores; after all, what is Ellie Andrews' encounter with Peter Warne but a sexual experience that changes her political views?

While the Reiner film does not narrativize political tensions in the traditional way the Capra film does, both films center much of the narrative interest on the experience that the heroine gains on her travels. However, the difference in the kind of experience each heroine needs is one of the key differences between the two films. Ellen Andrews is socio-economically naive; at the beginning of the film, she cannot function in ordinary American society because she has never before encountered it. Alison's naiveté is purely psychological: she is, we are told, repressed. This narrowing of the realm of experience from the social to the individual is of course a crucial one, but what is most interesting is that in the 80's film even individual experience is fragmented into fleeting "unrepressed" moments which take on the compressed and isolatable qualities of the one-liner.

In *It Happened One Night*, every event in Ellen Andrews' adventure, a journey which takes her from her father's yacht to a honeymoon in an

ordinary motel, foregrounds the question of class. Although Capra's depiction of workaday life is sentimental and unsubversive, it still provides an education for his heiress. Ellie, though sophisticated in appearance, doesn't know about bus schedules or standing in line; she hasn't been allowed to be alone with a man, and she hasn't even been given a decent piggyback ride, since, as Peter cantankerously maintains, no rich person could ever be a decent piggybacker. Ellen's bodyguards and her wealth have kept an intense experience at bay. In short, the basic premise and source of laughter in *It Happened One Night* is that all experience is mediated or filtered by class. This uncomfortably radical insight, however, is sanitized by the standard comic narrative, and finally distilled into the trite message that the rich are unlucky because they are sealed off from real people, real experience, and real community. However, the force of this ideological containment is balanced by the film's presentation of communal experience, perhaps best evoked in the charming scene on the bus, where the heiress happily sings "The Man on the Flying Trapeze" with the other passengers.<sup>8</sup>

While Ellen Andrews tumbles willy-nilly into her erotic and political education, Alison Bradbury is explicitly advised to become more experienced by her writing teacher. With her Germanic accent and her concern for her student's sexual well-being, Professor Traub is something of an Ivy League Dr. Ruth—perhaps our therapeutic society's replacement for the conventional blocking character. Early on, she describes Alison's writing as "up-tight"; the remedy she advocates is to "loosen up, have fun, sleep when you feel like it, not when you think you should, eat food that is bad for you, at least once in awhile, have conversations with people whose clothes are not color-co-ordinated, make love in a hammock." "Life," the professor portentously, and one would think tautologically concludes, "is the ultimate experience and you have to have it in order to write about it." This explicit advocacy of experience can only mean that it is seen not as something inevitably contiguous with our

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<sup>8</sup>Stanley Cavell, in *Pursuits of Happiness: The Hollywood Comedy of Remarriage* (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1981), reads this choice of popular song as "an expression of social solidarity" not only in the film itself, but also because it reaches out to the audience in its very familiarity as "the ground on which any American can meet any other" (249-50).

conscious existence, but rather as something special, like a sensation, a commodity, a vacation. To a certain extent, the same may be said with regard to *It Happened One Night*—indeed one could argue that this understanding of significant experience as a kind of holiday from one's normal sphere is the essence of the "green world" of romantic comedy. But in *The Sure Thing*, as one can deduce from the professor's admonishments, experience becomes something far more concocted and instrumental. While not completely stripped of socio-economic implications, these prescriptions restrict the different and more fulfilling set of manners and values depicted in Capra's film to objects and styles, to the consumption of inferior commodities—junk food and mismatched clothes. Experience thus conceived cannot effect any radical change in social and class attitudes: it must remain a break, something that you do only "once in a while"—perhaps as therapy for better grades. The stasis that this kind of experience reinforces is made most clear in *The Sure Thing's* parallel to *It Happened One Night's* communal sing along. Significantly, in Reiner's version the hero and heroine sulkily refuse to sing along with "The Age of Aquarius"—a song which goes beyond mere familiarity in its utopian expression of desire for the kind of social solidarity represented in *It Happened One Night*.

Alison's erotic education, then, is specifically designed to preclude the social and political. She gets cold and wet, but this state is easily remedied by the discovery of a credit card which will be paid by her father. She talks to a lady in an unfashionable hat, but only to tell ridiculous lies about her feigned pregnancy. While these things are happening Alison does seem to change—she apparently becomes less repressed, so much so that once in California asks her boyfriend to take her to Disneyland so that they can "do something pointless, something totally crazy." However, not even this supposed transition from repression to fun-loving liberation can explain how this proposed adventure differs from the visits to Graceland and to the mock UN that the repressed Alison had savored. The difference, in fact, amounts to little more than behaving the way Gib and Professor Traub think she should behave: a sort of compulsory spontaneity. Alison's adventures are like the jokes which pepper *The Sure Thing*: concentrated narrative capsules that foreclose

any plotted development of the utopian wish for real change. They could happen in any order and they have no cumulative consequence beyond the growing attraction between the two main characters. While Ellie, in line with the traditional movement of comedy, changes her values in the course of her journey, Alison and Gib persist in their original attitude toward the heartland and its people.<sup>9</sup> Thus, their retreat to an elegant hotel and restaurant "in the middle of nowhere" is filmed as a romantic moment that redeems their trip together.<sup>10</sup> In *It Happened One Night*, on the other hand, Ellen Andrews' decision to eat breakfast at the Plaza Hotel in Jacksonville is one of her early, untutored mistakes redeemed later by her more "experienced" choices.

In romantic comedy, the nature and extent of the heroine's education is best measured by the suitor she finally favors. On this score also, the difference between the comedy of the 30s and 80s is telling. As the parallel plots would demand, there is some similarity between the two rejected suitors. Both Ellie's playboy husband, King Westley, and Alison's lawyer-to-be lover, Jason, are presented as being insufficiently democratic, but each film conceptualizes the democratic norm from which these two deviate very differently. In the Capra film it is by no means accidental that King Westley is called "King": the film's objection to him is based on issues of class and social

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<sup>9</sup>The heartland is depicted with a logic similar to that of the narrative: it seems both spatially and chronologically ill-defined. In the Capra film, Peter and Ellie follow a specific route from Miami to New York, and the audience always knows where they are. The bus driver announces the location of stops, and Peter and Ellie talk about these places. While the details of the locations may not be realistic (indeed it is quite easy to see that the film was shot on a set), there is nothing preposterous about the route they follow; the pair is never "in the middle of nowhere." Gib and Alison, on the other hand, twice use this phrase to describe their plight, and visually, the audience is forced to take this cliché literally. The vast stretch of country between their unnamed eastern college and UCLA alternates between surrealistically barren landscapes and outmoded tacky interiors. The regional characteristics of the places they enter in what logically must be the midwest are a hodgepodge of hillbilly and cowboy motifs. The one time we are given even the vaguest clue as to where they are is when they consider boarding a bus whose first stop en route to Los Angeles will be St. Louis. In this unnamed town, east of Saint Louis, the people Gib encounters in a bar are cowboys!

<sup>10</sup>In fact, Reiner conceived of this incident as the "centerpiece" of the film (Alexander 21).



pretension. With his cane, tails, bow-tie, and self-satisfied demeanor, he clearly represents old money; he is a lounge lizard, reeking by 1934 of the departed glamour of the 1920s. Further, he is a celebrity aviator, a man of style who would make the silly gesture of arriving at his wedding in an autogyro, a trick which earns him the scorn of the "real men" of the film, Peter Warne and Mr. Andrews. Significantly, this concern for style is shown to be matched by a lack of concern for conventional morality. King's interest in Ellie is ultimately revealed to be purely materialistic, since he allows her millionaire father to buy him off. Peter, on the other hand, conducts himself as an honest man of the people: he demands from Mr. Andrews not the \$10,000 reward he could claim, but only the scrupulously accounted for \$39.60 that he spent during the trip. The audience thus readily feels Westley's demise to be inevitable and right—possibly since he so clearly corresponds to a stock figure in the tradition of romantic comedy: the inappropriate suitor. Representing an older generation, and an older socio-political dispensation, he will be legitimately and almost inevitably replaced by a man of a new, more vital, and more just order.

In *The Sure Thing* neither political nor moral issues seem to be at stake in Alison's choice of Gib over Jason. Both are of the same generation and both are students at elite colleges. If anything, Jason is more "moral" than his rival: he already knows that "love isn't something you order like pizza," a form of ignorance which Alison strongly holds against Gib. Nevertheless, he is presented as being somehow undemocratic. According to one of Gib's speeches, there are guys with names like "Nick," your buddy, who drinks beer with you, and guys with names like "Elliot" who eat paste. Jason, he tells Alison, probably eats paste. Whether he eats paste or not, though, he definitely doesn't eat junk food, he thinks Disneyland is for children, and he disapproves of burping. He prefers to choose among brands of tea rather than among brands of beer. Unlike King Westley, who is rejected because he has a life-style, Jason is rejected because he has the wrong life-style. These distinctions become all the more arbitrary and invidious when one considers that Gib shares Jason's yuppie dream of restoring a Vermont farmhouse and owning basset hounds. Likewise, Gib disapproves of his best friend's excessive display of bottles of imported beer. The behavioral code according

by which the film doles out rewards, punishments, and membership are meticulous, but finally empty, somewhat like the nearly indistinguishable dos and don'ts of *Glamour* magazine's style manuals. Democracy, too, is another narrowly defined choice of "style."

Just as Ellie gradually learns to prefer Peter Warne, the more democratic suitor, Alison, too, must end up with the ostensibly more democratic Gib. Nevertheless, *The Sure Thing's* plot resolution marks the most significant alterations of the comic conventions that Reiner effects. The marriage of Peter and Ellie is a fantasy resolution of class struggle, and the film shows all levels of social participation in this marriage: the pair is reconciled with Ellie's millionaire father, and they decide to return to the road to consummate their marriage. Significantly, in the final scene we don't actually see the couple, but rather the innkeepers who have been included in the famous wall of Jericho game. One presumes that the newspaper stories that so breathlessly kept an eager nation informed about Ellie's doings also report her rejection of the lounge lizard and her marriage to a newspaper reporter, a provider of and participant in the very stories that join them together. The ending of *The Sure Thing*, on the other hand, offers the audience no such participatory fantasy—there is no marriage, and the class text of the movie is in no way altered by the improved sex life of two Ivy Leaguers. Gib and Alison return to school and their composition class, where Gib finally writes a good paper. The resolution of this subplot is instructive. Gib's subject is the journey we have just seen. His trip evidently constituted one of those experiences one must have "in order to write," for Professor Traub reads his narrative of it aloud as an exemplary paper. In it Gib describes his meeting with the California dream girl. "To arrive at this moment," he writes, "he had traveled vast distances, enduring many hardships: abject poverty, starvation, show tunes—you name it." That Professor Traub praises this sardonic exaggeration as the expression of genuine experience is not nearly so interesting as the classroom audience's reaction to it. As the teacher reads the conclusion, in which it becomes clear that Gib rejected the *Sure Thing*, the students—except for Alison—yell that Gib is a traitor and pelt him with wadded up pages of their own compositions and notes; the class at this point seems over, and students get up to leave.<sup>11</sup> The audience of this story,

already literally and figuratively much smaller than that of *It Happened One Night*, thereby further fragments itself and its storytelling medium, and rejects its supposed hero and heroine. The last thing we see in this movie is Gib and Alison kissing in the solitude and forbidden territory of the library roof. The 80's version of this story thus leads to an isolated, purely sexual experience barely intense enough to reinforce, let alone change, one's political views.

This analysis thus far has constantly reverted to two concepts: commodification and fragmentation. We have argued that in the romantic comedy of the 80s, comic narrative is subordinated to the comic moment, that experience as unavoidable life history has been replaced by experience as a sensory moment, and that democracy as unifying value has become democracy as self-defining choice of style. In fact, in Reiner's film, experience, comedy, and democracy are constantly associated with an omni-present and over-determined commodity: junk food (including beer). All of these themes surface in Gib's defense of mooning, and one of Professor Traub's recommendations for liberation is that Alison "eat food that is bad for [her] once in awhile." While Peter Warne's class affiliation and experience as a journalist qualify him as Ellie's "instructor in democracy," the signal difference between Gib and Alison at the start of the film is that he is already an aficionado of this sensory slumming—as is amply evidenced by his pepperoni-stained essay on how to eat pizza. The gradual rapprochement of the romantic couple is signaled as Alison, in the course of the trip, agrees to nibble on cheeseballs or porkrinds, learns to shotgun beer, and even burps loudly. Food and drink, of course, have traditionally assumed an important symbolic function in comedy. Shakespeare's greatest comic character, for example, is the bibulous glutton Falstaff, and his blocking characters, like *Twelfth Night's* Malvolio, sin against the tolerant spirit of comedy by banning "cakes and ale." In Rabelais the sensuous delights of the feast (no less gross than those glorified by teenpics) represent the utopian conviviality and

egalitarianism of the carnival. However, a comparison of *The Sure Thing* with *It Happened One Night*, where references to food also provide a crucial symbolic configuration, demonstrates that once again *The Sure Thing's* differences from this comic tradition are more important than its surface similarity.

Capra's film opens with the rebellious Ellie refusing the food her father offers her, and in the course of her travels she learns to dunk a doughnut and to accept from Peter her first raw carrot. So pervasive is food in this film that Stanley Cavell suggests that it be seen as a film about hunger: hunger for food, but also the utopian hunger for a better life that such narratives typically express (91-95). In *It Happened One Night*, in other words, food is not merely food: the carrot that Ellie eats is clearly imbued with meaning. As raw food taken from the earth, not prepared by servants, it is Capra's symbolic (and therefore in a sense reified) expression of the natural, and, somewhat paradoxically, also an expression of authentic democratic culture. The symbolic operation here is a relatively direct synecdoche: the consumption of plain food represents an identification with a plain, democratic way of life.

Reiner's symbolic use of junk food, on the other hand, relies on tortuous mystifications and contradictions that hint at the aporia of his apolitical notion of democracy. One sign of this mystification is that both Gib and Professor Traub associate the consumption of this mass-produced, absolutely *standardized* product—junk food—with spontaneity. Further, though *The Sure Thing* valorizes the occasional consumption of junk food, the worst fate its characters can conceive of is to be involved in its production. This fear of *declassament* is expressed in one of Gib's routines, yet another example of the suppressed class text emerging in a comic moment: in order to convince Alison to go on a study date, he describes himself failing their composition course and flunking out of college, with no alternative but to work in a fast-food restaurant. Without her help, he jokingly laments, he may work himself up from making milkshakes, to making burgers, to operating the French fry machine. From there, he could only die or descend further into the underclass, get busted on a drug deal, lose his teeth, and end up in the gutter drinking generic paint thinner—no longer Heineken or Bud. In *The Sure Thing* democratic ideals thus remain mysteriously

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<sup>11</sup>David Edelstein, reviewer for the *Village Voice* and one of the few critics who disliked this film, describes a similar experience while watching it: "the horny kid's decision is so preposterous (and so gracelessly written) that even a reasonably sympathetic audience almost force-fed the projectionist with the last reel" (Ozer 1326).

crystallized in the product, but cannot be extended to the producers; the food is not, as in the Capra film, or as in Shakespeare and Rabelais, synecdochically indicative of a way of life. Instead, eating is an almost literal figure of the ideological remake of our traditional masternarratives into a postmodern display and consumption of commodities.

Capra, of course, is also engaged in a process of mystification. One could hardly argue that Capra's carrot, let alone his vision of America, was ever the real thing, that it was not an ideological construct. Indeed, Capra set out to create "songs of the working stiff," a sort of concocted folk culture.<sup>12</sup> Reiner's symbolic packet of porkrinds, however, is in a sense *pre-produced*; the significance of the object is constructed outside the film. When Reiner's characters advocate the consumption of junk food as an authentic, spontaneous, and democratic experience, they are deploying and repeating a symbolic production already effected by advertising: TV images in which real guys drink beer, and to cite one further example from the script, in which outdoor types use biodegradable toilet paper. In fact the film is crammed from beginning to end with advertising clichés. The script alludes to the riboflavin contents of snacks, to Tang—the drink of the astronauts—to liquid soap, and so on. The pre-credit sequence, with its palm trees and beach blonde, is deliberately made to resemble a suntan lotion commercial, and although the film ultimately undercuts this hackneyed California dreaming, it offers as an alternative only a different ad. The hero rejects the girl who represents the cluster of commodities surrounding the Malibu beach house (the swimming pool, the bikini, the Hawaiian shirt) in favor of the girl who represents the commodities surrounding the Vermont farm house (the L.L. Bean parka, the flannel sheets, the basset hound).<sup>13</sup>

Reiner's film would seem to provide a perfect illustration of Adorno and Horkheimer's claim that mass cultural forms finally amalgamate

with advertising. (And the recent use of the doughnut dunking scene from *It Happened One Night* in a Nike commercial can only add further credence to their point.) Yet Adorno and Horkheimer were writing about mass culture not in the 80s, but in the age of Capra, an age in which they claimed the sound film itself was the "most characteristic" product of the culture industry.<sup>14</sup> Indeed, they seem to be talking about *It Happened One Night* when they rail against the predictability of what they call cinematic "details" (125). Yet we still see a change in the form of comedy since Adorno's time. Where Adorno and Horkheimer see predictable "details" in the 30's film, we see a version of a masternarrative. And as Jameson points out, narrative—whether it take the form of a mass culture film or a classical novel—does ultimately represent the triumph of the reigning system. Thus when Adorno and Horkheimer see the art form merging with advertising to the point where both are "a pure representation of social power," they are in a sense seeing the narrative element common to jokes, advertisements, films, novels, etc. (163). What we see, however, in the fifty years that separate us from Adorno, and Reiner from Capra, is the art form, *because* of the loss of even the logic of predictability in its comic narrative, mirroring the techniques of advertising in a much more literal fashion than Adorno and Horkheimer imagined, and we are not even talking about films like *E.T.* and *Bull Durham*, which pad their budgets through "product placement."<sup>15</sup> Whereas John Cassavetes can measure the cultural power of the earlier filmmaker by suggesting that "there may have been no America, only Frank Capra" (Quart 178), and Rober Sklar can write a book about the film industry called *Movie-Made America*, we can no longer make this kind of broad statement about the influence of the movies, let alone teenpics.<sup>16</sup> While Capra's film derives much of its meaning from the intertextual codes of the comic tradition, as the first screwball comedy it also forms a unique and historically significant

<sup>12</sup>Qtd. in Leonard Quart, "Frank Capra and the Popular Front," *American Media and Mass Culture: Left Perspectives*, ed. Donald Lazere (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1987) 178.

<sup>13</sup>The reviews of the film which describe Alison as a "Land's End model" or "Breck shampoo girl" implicitly recognize Reiner's symbolic borrowing (Ozer 1323; Maslin C12).

<sup>14</sup>Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, trans. John Cumming (New York: Continuum, 1986) 126.

<sup>15</sup>See Michael F. Jacobson, "The real game in 'Bull Durham,'" *Raleigh News and Observer* 30 Dec. 1988: A17.

<sup>16</sup>Robert Sklar, *Movie-Made America* (New York: Vintage, 1976).

narrative response to contemporary social problems from these codes. It is difficult to claim that this film is *merely* advertisement: emerging at a time of scarcity, when social ills could hardly be ignored, it could not simply celebrate commodities or the status quo. On the other hand, the very fact that Reiner's film is an unacknowledged, or even unconscious remake, suggests that he is not the master ideologue that Capra was. Indeed, perhaps he cannot be, since in today's cultural marketplace, his teenpic must target rather than shape an audience. He operates in the cultural realm of what we might call ad-made America, the "capitalist realism" which repetitively broadcasts the ideology that commodities themselves are the readily available solution to problems, congealed narratives of always already contained utopian

desire.<sup>17</sup> The message, which seems to foreclose the need for a narrative fantasy about a different order, emphasizes the ever-present moment, as if to say, in the words of the Michelob commercial: "It doesn't get any better than this."□

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<sup>17</sup>Michael Schudson, *Advertising, the Uneasy Persuasion: Its Dubious Impact on American Society* (New York: Basic, 1984) 209-33.

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Sue Owen

MY DOOMSDAY SAMPLER

- A** There is no way to argue  
with you. I have seen  
your pride. I will stitch  
you into this cloth so  
that you point to the mirror.
- B** I will stitch you round  
with greed and your two bellies.
- C** I will call you the mouth  
that calls for trouble.
- D** I will dare to divide you  
with the moon  
and still see your dark light.
- E** You say you were blown east  
by the ill wind, but I  
will stitch in your lust.
- F** I can find no better way  
to stitch you than to  
follow your arms  
that point left to all fear.
- G** You are the gulp after  
the swallow of gluttony.  
So I will stitch you as you are.
- H** I have seen your desire  
to be a fence, to be two  
poles that hold a clothesline,  
but no, I will not reward  
your envy. I will stitch  
you only as an H.
- I** You think you are what I am,  
but you are wrongheaded.  
I will stitch you  
without a head.

- J I have seen you jump for joy,  
but I do not believe  
you are joyous. I will  
stitch a lid on your jump.
- K I want to be kind to you  
though you kill. I want  
to stitch you into this cloth  
so that you will keep  
your two hands off my neck.
- L You live the life of low  
thoughts and are lower than  
a snake and a brother to evil.  
I will stitch you with  
my dark thread as a snake.
- M Maybe you are as magnificent  
as a mountain, but I don't  
believe it, or make  
me believe it.
- N No one understands your slide  
from nothing, or why you lean.  
I will stitch in  
your look of sloth.
- O You open your mouth to say  
nothing like a fool.
- P Please let me off your hook.  
Let's just say I stitched you  
with a big lip and pouting.
- Q You break a circle  
the same way you break in here  
like a thief. I will stitch  
you hanged with your tongue out.

- R Reason is with you, but  
you rule it out. You are  
rude and stubborn. I will  
stitch you to stay  
where you planted your feet.
- S I see the silly river you  
are that has changed its mind.  
My stitch will sink your fish.
- T You stand for trouble.  
I cannot get by you without  
pricking myself  
with this needle. I will  
stitch my pain into your T.
- U Watch out. You have left  
your begging hand open.  
The slap of anger is not money.  
I stitch you and the
- V as vulnerable.
- W Watch out. There are deadly  
sins everywhere and cut-  
throats, liars, cheats.  
Don't change. I don't want  
to stitch you in wrong.
- X You are the crossroads  
here between good and evil.  
I will stitch you in  
as the X that marks the spot.
- Y I have seen your remorse.  
I will stitch you as  
the two hands before prayer.
- Z You end what was begun  
with a sleep or  
the sneeze of a doomsday.  
I will stitch you last  
with the dark star of a knot.

Steven R. Johnson

## RAPTURE: NATURE, RELIGION, AND AN ACTRESS NAMED PATRICIA GOZZI

*Some rapture in my rags awakes;  
I lift void eyes and scan  
The skies for crows, those ravening foes  
Of my stranger master, Man.*

—Walter de la Mare, "The Scarecrow"

When *Rapture* was released in September of 1965 by Twentieth Century-Fox, it met with no remarkable critical response. *Time* magazine seemed to appreciate it, others found it a mediocre movie notable for its acting; Brendan Gill in *The New Yorker* was plain rancorous. Although it shows up from time to time on midday and late-night television, the film was quickly forgotten; even Thomas and Solomon's *The Films of 20th Century-Fox: A Pictorial History* (Citadel Press, 1979) regards it no more than casually ("An unusual and very tragic romance").

And yet the film holds up and, with careful consideration, reveals several layers of understanding not apparent on first viewing, and may even be read as a key work in the career of a little-covered director, Britisher John Guillermin. Known chiefly for his skillful and efficient jobs on expensive action-adventures, Guillermin here takes a disarmingly artful and low-key turn with much softer material than usual. (Indeed, many aspects of the production make it seem like a major studio's big-budget attempt to break into the art-film market, from its extreme reticence and detachment, "lyrical" love scenes, severe angles, and at times unbearably slow pace, to the enlisting of Gunnel Lindblom from Bergman's acting stable.)

*Rapture* shares with other Guillermin dramas primarily in its concern with the conflict between nature and civilization. Like Agnès, his main character here, the director demonstrates his affinity with the film's Brittany coast locations, with their flat countryside, dramatic cliffs, and restless seaside. Many of his films have made extensive use of the outdoors, and more than a few of them have featured

characters such as Agnès who are closely allied with nature and their surroundings—the 1976 *King Kong* remake, for instance, and even its notoriously awful sequel, *King Kong Lives*, as well as *Sheena*, and a couple of Tarzan movies he did in the fifties and sixties. Although it is only a part of the rich and deeply moving whole of *Rapture*, the theme does provide an excellent reference point for a more rounded analysis of this sadly neglected work.

The story, freely adapted by Stanley Mann from the novel *Rapture in My Rags* by Phyllis Hastings, concerns the transition into maturity and rationality of a lonely and more than slightly odd young woman, as played by Patricia Gozzi (in an interesting turnaround from her role three years earlier in *Sundays and Cybele*, in which she played a relatively stable twelve-year-old who helps a disturbed young man back into society). Agnès, a fifteen-year-old who has been convinced by most of the people around her that she is mad when she seems merely withdrawn, is frequently found engaged in a slightly retarded fantasy life involving her doll, some seagulls, and the seaside itself. In her previous film, Gozzi played Earth Mother to a downed pilot; here, she is again a child of nature, lying in the grass, cavorting on the beach, standing in the rain, wearing primitive clothing (and no makeup), and tearing at her food like "a savage."

While daydreaming one day, Agnès imagines herself a scarecrow and decides to construct just such a figure herself. "I want something of my own—my very own," she says, and her words remind us of the similar sentiments of many teens who find themselves pregnant; and indeed she is experiencing an awakening sexuality, as



we see in an early scene in which she caresses herself roughly while Karen, the maid (Lindblom), carries on upstairs with a friend (in one of a couple of aspects reminiscent of that same year's *Repulsion*). She makes the effigy out of her father's clothes and, in one of the film's truly suspenseful moments, sees him come to life when a fugitive from the law (Dean Stockwell) appropriates the clothing for a disguise. The scene suggests the creation sequence in James Whale's *Frankenstein*—with driving rains and harsh winds and Stockwell lurching about as though newly reanimated (when, in fact, he is wounded and near death)—and bolsters the effect of the girl's fantasy as his "creator." Agnès, of course, is in love with him from the start.

Presiding over all of this is the grim figure of her father, l'Arbeau (Melvyn Douglas), a former judge who had some years earlier fallen from grace with himself and brought Agnès to this self-imposed exile. Resentful and ashamed of his backward daughter, he treats her scornfully through most of the picture—an attitude which we later find is rooted in his guilt over an episode involving his late wife, when he falsely accused her of infidelity and made an attempt on the life of her imagined suitor. Questioning his own capacity to judge other people, he becomes obsessed with "justice" and also becomes taken with the fugitive Joseph, seeing him as a victim of the same kind of justice-gone-wrong he rails against in the broadsides he prints in his study (which he distributes among the townspeople even though he knows they go unread).

This position as judge, as well as the Biblical rages he is prone to, indicates him as a sort of self-loathing God. Accordingly, he is often found looming in discovery of characters caught in forbidden acts (as when Agnès and Karen steal the suit of his Agnès is to stuff to make her scarecrow), meting out judgment ("None at all!" he declares, in reference to Agnès's alleged similarities to her mother), and administering punishment (the beating he gives her when he discovers she has spent the night with Joseph). The setting itself is very much an extension of his brooding mind, for this is an angry God, and the gothic extravagances of the stark interiors and the crashing waves are constant reminders of this. His omnipresence extends far beyond his seeming to appear around every corner when characters do wrong; his moodiness pervades every frame, his exile casting its guilty and

isolated pall over the entire landscape, thus making him, also, one with the elements. (In her role as creator, Agnès shows her own godlike qualities as well, although hers is a gentler nature.)

Joseph, then, in his position as the judge's surrogate son (he is, after all, made in the father's image, out of the old man's clothes), is given to represent the figure of Christ. The scarecrow from which he was "made" is built upon a cruciform frame and hung on another cross for support; one particular lap dissolve reinforces this image when it takes us from a shot of the framework into a church scene, and another scene, shortly before the film's tragic ending, fixes both the cross and Joseph conspicuously in the same frame. His appearance (on a Sunday, no less), besides the "Frankenstein" resonances of its *mise-en-scène*, also implies a resurrection (coming down from the cross), the fugitive being nursed back to health by Agnès and Karen (who is a sort of sluttier Mary Magdalene). The outcast status which brings him to the l'Arbeau house (a sailor arrested for brawling with civilians, he becomes more desperately wanted as one of the policemen wounded in his escape comes closer and closer to death) also reinforces this likeness, and emphasizes the theme of exile which further bonds him with the father.

All of which would probably add up to a lot of hokey were it left at that, for a Christ figure needs someone to redeem. So, in a recapitulation of an earlier sequence in the film in which l'Arbeau throws Agnès's doll from a cliff and we see it shatter on the rocks, at the end of the movie, when the gendarmes have finally caught up with Joseph, he leaps from the same cliff, presumably in a last ditch effort to escape by swimming to safe cover ("The tide is out!" Agnès calls, as she had to her doll in the earlier scene), and he, also, smashes upon the rocks, blood streaking his face like the striations on her doll's face. When Agnès rejoins her father afterward, all is *forgiven* between them, and the girl has now assumed a caretaking role: Joseph's death has freed her—from her fantasy world and, ostensibly, from the earthly, physical world of which she was so much a part—and brought her closer to her father; at the same time, the death unites that father with the gentler, compassionate counterpart he had earlier expressed a yearning for. So, though the water rushes in to cleanse Agnès, it is really l'Arbeau who receives the redemption.

This Christian undercurrent blends with the film's natural concerns in a couple ways. On one level, it ties in with the idea of earthiness and primitivism, the idea that the one closer to nature and the elements—the noble savage—is closer to God (the earlier allusion to l'Arbeau's "Biblical rages"—in the novel, the connection is less subtly drawn—is itself a suggestion of a ruder, more primitive time and character, a time when men were more governed by their natures and their religions than today). The church also figures prominently at least twice in the story (the most prominent buildings in the film, in fact, seem to be the church, the house, and an asylum), one example being the previously noted transition between Agnès's scarecrow and a service the next day.

The church also appears in the very beginning, however, and is instrumental there in telegraphing, early on, this connection between religion and nature, and how these purer elements clash with the rest of "civilization." As the titles roll over a sweeping tracking shot of the family car on its way across the countryside to other daughter Genevieve's wedding, Georges Delerue's bittersweet romantic theme music traces them to the church and inside, where we join the service in progress. The free and pastoral score, tying together the scenes and reflecting a sense of tenderness, security, and great open space, is brought to a crashing close as the wedding band's cymbals take us from the spacious and uplifting church interior to the noisy and crowded reception hall, signalling the contrast between, on the one hand, the freedom of the country and the spirituality of the religious service, and on the other hand the bustle and claustrophobia of society.

This reception sequence is one of Guillermin's most impressive set pieces and offers much information at an early juncture about the relationship between Agnès and that society. In one long tracking shot that recalls the celebrated ballroom sequence in *The Magnificent Ambersons*, the camera twists through the crowd from the head of the buffet to the darkness of the back room, glimpsing many familiar wedding scenes along the way—dinner guests gorging piggishly; someone slipping food into a purse; a child sticking his fingers in a pie; celebrants dancing and flirting ("Not now!"); the traditional wedding band playing; the bride and her father ("Genevieve, you know I do not dance," he relents)—until it locates a Lothario rebuffed in his invitations to dance, who

discovers Agnès back in a dark corner of the cloak room; the camera only cuts when he tries to kiss her, and she breaks away.

When Agnès flees the reception hall into the city streets, that fluid rhythm is fractured as the continuous, dollying camerawork is replaced by a jaggedly edited handheld style. The chaos of cars and lights and people and horns (the noises themselves isolated and distinct, intruding upon the soundtrack as into her mind) shows us not only the girl's alienation and asocialization, her oddness and her backwardness (she has been kept to the family's back room, as well), but also how antithetical it all is to her nature. (The sequence also introduces Delerue's other main musical theme, this one connoting fear and unrest—an inner turmoil to contrast with the expansive feel of the romantic theme—employing that eerie sort of soprano vocalizing popular in film scores at the time.) The scene ultimately resolves itself by returning us to nature and the comforting rolling of the seaside, where Agnès plays in the water barefoot in her rude, sacklike dress, the child of nature at last back in her element.

Few movies are able to handle gracefully the transition from one carefully delineated locale in which we've spent a great deal of viewing time to another, and *Rapture* faces just such a problem when Agnès later returns to the city, with Joseph. In a couple of sequences which recall the post-wedding street scenes, we get more of the intrusive noises and crazy angles (every shot in these later scenes is presented on a tilt), quick cutting, claustrophobic closeups, and general unrest; these are complemented by increasingly unblissful scenes of domestic life, beginning with "Hiroshima, Mon Amour"-style romantic interludes and ending with a violent outburst from Joseph. The effect of this jagged, arrhythmic episode is, of course, to counterpoint the easy, relatively stable flow of the seaside setting, as well as to illustrate the deteriorating relationship of the two lovers.

This relationship acts as a socializing force on each of them from the start. Agnès, still thinking Joseph is her scarecrow come to life, tells him at one point, "I can teach you many things now that you can hear and see, and you can teach me, too," and indeed they do learn from each other, as he coaxes her from her shell and she in turn changes him from a reckless and hedonistic young man to someone who is able to focus his attentions and love (to the extent that, in the end, he risks and sacrifices his life to be with

her). On their own ground, perhaps, they may have continued to grow and adjust, for, the film suggests, it is not so much her instability or the "forbidden" nature of their romance (she seems nearly half his age) which destroys their happiness, but the city, the very antithesis to the character of Agnès and the purity which that character represents, that precipitates the tragedy. We also note that it is the smug, automaton-like police (who likely come from the city themselves), symbols of repressive civilization and order—the "man-made," uncompassionate law against which l'Arbeau hurls his diatribes—who deal the ultimate blow to Agnès's romance, and sense that the asylum orderlies glimpsed in one scene are to crazy Agnès what the gendarmes are to fugitive Joseph (constant threat of imprisonment), as is the decidedly middle-class Genevieve, who tries to have Agnès locked away, and whose similarity to those gendarmes extends even to her name.

The paradox of the ending, however, is that Joseph's death, while being for Agnès the final stepping stone to maturity and helping her to reestablish ties with her father, also serves to finally sever her from this purer, more natural state. When she whispers over his dead body, "I always knew you were real," while we are given to believe that perhaps now, amid her loss, we may see hope for her emergence into the real world, on reflection it's more complex than that. On the most obvious level, her innocence and isolation have been romanticized such that the real world doesn't seem so inviting anyway; even deeper is the realization that this loss has been, for her, comparable to her father's loss of his wife—except that, where the loss for him meant the fall from his middle-class grace of comfort and society to the crudity of his life on the coast, Agnès's loss of grace symbolizes a fall out of that primitivism and purity into a less pure state.

Nowhere is the force of the mother's loss felt more clearly than in what is also one of Guillermin's most effective set pieces in the film, occurring midway through it. In it, the four principle characters are seen watching home movies taken approximately ten years before, at the judge's stately former home, where the children are dressed attractively and playing on the lawn in the brilliant sunlight. The silence of the images, their randomness, the whirr of the projector, and the rapt faces of the spectators, all lend the pictures a surreal, almost mythical

quality: the existence on the screen is so far different from their lives now that it seems an idealization of the earlier times rather than a document. The father watches proudly, Agnès with wonder; they both turn serious when the mother appears. When Karen tells Agnès, "You're so like your mother," she grins, but her pleasure is cut short by l'Arbeau's stern contradiction: "She's not in the least like her." They argue, and Agnès runs to the screen and clutches it, as though clutching the memory of the mother itself. (There is a disturbing shot of her face as the film plays across it macabrely, an indication of the violent activity within, the play of these memories upon her mind, and of the marks such circumstances leave upon us in our formative years.) It's a stunning and alarming scene for Miss Gozzi, made all the more panicky by the ghostlike image of the mother drifting toward us on the screen, illuminated by the brilliance of memory. Agnès ushered out of the scene by Karen, l'Arbeau freezes the image and denies any resemblance; Joseph, with characteristic honesty, admits to some similarities.

This device of the home movie serves much the same purpose as did the photograph in Polanski's *Repulsion*, though with far greater resonance: here we see the roots of the conflict, still unresolved, still being screened in the backs of these people's minds. The scene indicates very forcefully the presence and power of memory, and the power an individual can have over us in that memory; watching her floating so slowly forward, we realize how prominent that ghostly figure has been throughout the movie, how severe an influence she has been on the lives of Agnès and her father. By the time he reveals his Guilty Secret to her ("Your mother died," he tells her, after recounting the story of his misjudgment of her, "without ever having loved me"), it's almost anticlimactic in terms of their relationship—we've already come to recognize the tenderness he has lost and is trying to cling to by dominating his daughter; the explication can't demystify that loss.

Interacting with Agnès throughout the film are the seagulls which serve to represent her bond with both the natural world and her imaginative life. Early in the picture, Guillermin's camera looks down upon her from a literal bird's-eye view as she reaches up cooing to a flock of gulls circling above her, she imagining, apparently, to be one of them. Both of these implications (of nature, and the

imagination) are commented upon, then, in a penultimate shot from the same perspective: Joseph dead, her father gone into the house to await her attention in her newfound role as his caretaker, Agnès hears the gulls' cries while heading homeward, and looks up to them. They are circling as before, but, as we see from our bird's-eye view, her look is one of vague disinterest rather than the childlike psychic and emotional connection she evinced in the earlier shot. And so we see that her transformation is complete: her time of innocence, imagination, and close communion with nature is over.

These seagulls serve a dual purpose, however, when we regard the soundtrack, which is muted throughout and punctuated by environmental noises that intrude upon the foreground, emphasizing the characters' intense isolation. (The sound work is by Jo de Bretagne and Gordon McCallum.) The gull cries, in particular, serve as constant harbingers, accompanying the appearances of the gendarmes at the l'Arbeau house, the approach of the orderlies at the asylum, the father's discovery of Agnès's suitcase when she is preparing to run away, and Agnès's announcement to Joseph that the gendarme he wounded has died. We also hear their screeches simultaneously with gunfire, first as Agnès proposes the construction of her scarecrow while her father takes shots at some birds, finally as Joseph (the scarecrow incarnate, who was supposed to scare the birds away) himself is shot, and at one point in between as Joseph evades the police.

The birds' cries serve as sympathetic reflections of Agnès's alarm, coming primarily when her happiness or security is threatened. (A complementary note is sounded when a foghorn blast signals Joseph's—the sailor's—alarm at discovering Agnès has followed him onto the boat.) This sympathy is contrasted by the city scenes, where blaring horns, cacophonous voices, jackhammers, train screeches, a shattering vase, and shattering plates come instead as assaults upon her senses (the plates a symbol—as is a light bulb which won't stay lit—of their domestic tranquility); where Agnès is shown to be in harmony with nature, the city noises are specifically unnatural—foreign and exterior—acting against her rather than in sympathy. The contrast is further reinforced by the constant ambient sounds lingering in the background back home: in quieter moments we hear the lapping of the seashore, twittering birds, or a dry wind (in the scene in which

Agnès is caught in the attic stealing her father's suit, pigeons sit gobbling in the rafters like the activity in the judge's unquiet mind); at more excited times, there may be rain or thunder, or the pounding of the waves upon the breakers.

Agnès's moods, also, are prone to sudden contrast. If she is most often as peaceful as the landscape, she is also given to uncommon savagery, as when she demands to use her father's suit for her scarecrow and then lashes out at him when he refuses. And when she discovers Karen in the blockhouse making love to Joseph, the rage she flies into is truly elemental: seething like an animal, she locks herself in with Karen alone and goes after her with a spade, nothing on the soundtrack but the controlled clanging of her weapon, the sound of Joseph's attempts to bust down the door, and the dry wind outside.

The basic quiet of the film serves not only to emphasize the isolation of the characters, but also to build an uncommon intimacy between us and the figures on the screen (there's little else to distract us from them). Guillermin also develops this rapport through his handling of the actors: they seldom explain themselves through dialogue or make exceedingly overt gestures, but they do at times convey non-verbally sometimes vital information about their roles in revealing yet ambiguous closeups. It's a directorial shorthand we see demonstrated in such scenes as the titles sequence, where bride-to-be Genevieve breaks out into an inexplicable giggle suggesting not only a mockery of Agnès, but also her difference from the sullen and withdrawn others and her delight at being free of them at last. (Other such scenes include a dinner over which Karen, l'Arbeau, and Agnès all eye Joseph tellingly, and one in which the father scolds his daughter and turns away in anguish—or remorse—for his treatment of her, her oddness, and for his own responsibility for her condition.)

What may seem at first like somewhat ponderous understatement (and may yet owe too much to Guillermin's European and Scandinavian art-house forbears) at the same time maintains a firm emotional logic. For a movie which concerns itself so much with interior action, with the psychological movements of two severely withdrawn main characters, it is essential: the inexplicitness of the passive camera's observation reinforces both the naturalism of its subjects and the interior nature of their existence. If we correctly read the

brooding landscapes and forbidding architecture of the film as a manifestation of the godlike judge's mind, then the scheme of these scenes and the way that scheme forces you to work to understand the characters can, if you get into it, interiorize you, the viewer, as well.

This relationship between viewer and screen reminds us, also, that the heart of a romance is always its characters, and the allure of the actors who portray them; the more closely we can get to them the more deeply we can feel their raptures and regrets and come to know, too, something about the nature of love—how we love, why we love, or even simply that we love. More than simply being a parable of nature and the civilized world, the film is also a meditation on human nature (the foremost philosophical concern of the judge's broadsides) and the will to love. Romance, by its own nature, appeals primarily to our most basic, primal selves in an often irrational fashion (as most Surrealists would attest); as a result, it is all the more important that the actors appeal to us directly and with a wholly unaffected technique (if only to match the directorial construction of scenes such as the above).

In the role of l'Arbeau, then, the fallen man, Melvyn Douglas abandons the tongue-in-cheek suavity of the roles which marked his career as a younger man for a well thought out and more private characterization, communicating not only the hardened and obsessive side of the old man but the conflicting emotions beneath that exterior, as well. In his scenes with Dean Stockwell, his enthusiasm at having an audience tells us something about the loneliness which troubles him, and in a few of the scenes with Gozzi he reveals his tenderness toward her, his secret dependence, and his inexpressible anguish over her condition. The force of his wife's loss echoes throughout his performance, so that the fear we feel toward him is tempered by the recognition of his hurt; in our sympathetic eyes the desolation in his appearance when Agnès returns to him absolves him of all wrongdoing.

As the brooding intellect of the movie, he stands in direct contrast to the openness and instinctuality of Joseph. This pairing and contrasting is communicated in an early scene (recapitulated later on), in which l'Arbeau discusses with Joseph his theories on "human understanding and the law." They are placed in a single low angle shot which pits either of them on opposite sides of a mirror, l'Arbeau's stern,

almost Biblical harshness making him the very image of the Law itself, and contrasting with the tender, non-judgmental openness of the fugitive. Between them, on the bureau top, stand a bronzed, somewhat militaristic statue (suggesting the judge) and a soft focus photo of his late wife (suggesting Joseph's gentleness). "The law is meaningless unless it is compassionate," he tells the young man, with an insistence that implies his own lost innocence and compassion (suggesting also Joseph as the image of l'Arbeau in his greener days).

This bonding scene is recalled when l'Arbeau discovers Joseph in the commission of covering up a theft. In trying to disguise his own disappointment, l'Arbeau begins pacing and speaking distractedly about the book he is writing, which Joseph pretends to have been reading. "The law on that level is behind me, now," he tells Joseph. "Oh, you can search for its shortcomings, but it's a man-made instrument. It's the men who fall short and fail," he concludes (as though he can no longer hide his upset), as the camera locates both of them in the mirror—the judge who has failed himself, and the "son" who has failed the father. Joseph approaches and takes his place in front of the mirror opposite the old man, their positions reversed from the earlier scene, and the judge demands of him, "Haven't I tried to show you compassion?" (In the mirror, the statue on the bureau seems to be regarding the wife's photo—as does the stony l'Arbeau—as though contemplating this mercy.) Thus, the enthusiasm he showed earlier has turned again to disillusionment; soon he will turn to violence and, ultimately, resignation.

Stockwell, who is now enjoying somewhat of a vogue akin to his friend Dennis Hopper's, also succeeds in a difficult and disarmingly complex role. His flight from the gendarmes for little cause, his fling with Karen in spite of Agnès's obvious infatuation, his theft from l'Arbeau and betrayal of his trust (and general thoughtlessness in the commission of all of these acts), add up to a character who would otherwise be hard for audiences to warm up to or to regard so uncritically. But Stockwell's unactorly approach to the role emphasizes his character's natural, unaffected attitude; he's hard to dislike, because the ambiguity about him is that there is no ambiguity—he's all on the outside. His role is practically built upon those boyish good looks as well as this genuine thoughtlessness: not governed by intellect or morality, he is the

physical element of the film, acting according to his instincts. (When he returns to the l'Arbeau house, he's like a dog finding his way back home.) Where he comes across strongest, however, is in conveying the total yet not unworldly honesty of his character. He demonstrates this candor and rather disinterested compassion in several scenes with each of the three inhabitants of the house: with the father, he gently contests some of the old man's harsher assertions about his daughter; with Agnès, he refuses to play her games and encourages her to face reality; with Karen, in a more limited capacity, he offers a companionship she can't find in the others or in her somewhat loutish boyfriend. It is this very openness that provides the key to the likability and desirability of the character despite his more questionable attributes, and reflects warmly on Stockwell's own professed disinterest in acting on the whole: not governed himself by ego or insecurity, he brings to the role the very unaffected attitude needed to make Joseph "work."

However, any discussion of *Rapture* should inevitably close with a meditation on the phenomenal portrayal of Agnès, the soul of the film, by Patricia Gozzi. In her hands, all the most unusual facets of the character—her "savagery," the games she plays, the almost canny prop of her fantasies—emerge as utterly familiar; anyone who has known such a maladjusted or asocialized young woman will recognize her in Gozzi's Agnès. So seamlessly has she inhabited the role that she turns herself and Agnès into not only a child of nature, but a veritable force of nature, as well; when her dementia takes literal form in the story (her belief in the scarecrow-come-to-life), it's believable partly because we are seeing it take place right there in her acting, in her own unquestioning, unreserved immersion in the drama. (When she clutches the lifeless Joseph at the end and confesses, "I

always knew you were real," the effect of her performance is such that the spell is still unbroken; it's like a confirmation for the audience that the characters themselves were real, as well.) Her rawness and her candidness permit us to get so close to the character that her love is personalized, made painfully real to us; her emotional honesty is such that if we honor and trust her and the film we will know a little of what it is to be loved in a way that few of us ever actually experience (her need is so great), and know, too, what it is to love greatly, and to be a big enough human being to be able to turn that love into something more than even love in its loss.

For if in love we become something more than ourselves, then in *Rapture* we see an actress become something more than a character: her personification of this elemental creature takes us to the emotional heart of the film and to the heart of romance itself, in both the generic and the literary senses of the word. In her realization of Agnès, we come to understand in some way the very need to love, a need so strong that it can, by the force of its own will, actually create the object of its desires, and find something meaningful and renewing in its loss. It would have been a good enough film without her, but it would be hard to imagine a more effective, a more personal—a more romantic movie. And it would be self-promoting and false to say that *Rapture* is all hers, but it might be truthful, yet, to say that *Rapture* is all her—for, as the embodiment of the very nature and purity the film deliberates upon, she creates an indelible new life within the viewer, an awareness of and regret for our own lost innocence, for our disconnection from our own stabilizing and free imaginative selves, from our own lost nature. □

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Frantisek Halas

FIRST RIDDLE

*Translated by Don Mager*

Maybe, just maybe a small maiden  
M hastens into the cottage  
here she dances in her slippers  
clutching a soft pin-cushion

Later a certain miller's boy  
flies in a straight yet not so straight line  
to the small village nearby  
to taste the honey of the lady-queen

SECOND RIDDLE

The moon forms a comma-stroke  
T where only darkness touches a man  
there an angel awaits in the dark  
not even brushing up against him

At dawn again the comma-stroke  
laid up against the creamy gold  
pouring heaven's butter crock  
upon universally gray crowds

THIRD RIDDLE WITH ITS SOLUTION

The first has slender legs  
T the second has them too  
formidably they entice us

one leers and clicks his tongue  
wants to grab at everything  
letting it drop into the river  
Leave it all be it's just nostalgia

There There  
they are only bees, kittens and mud

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From the Anthology *A co basnik*, by Frantisek Halas.

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Jeffery Alan Triggs

A MIRROR FOR MANKIND:  
THE POSE OF HAMLET WITH THE SKULL OF YORICK

This essay proposes to discuss what I shall call the pose of Hamlet with the skull of Yorick as a motif of special significance in poetry and art. My sense of "motif" here is similar to what George Steiner has called a "topology of culture." Drawing metaphorically on "the branch of mathematics which deals with those relations between points and those fundamental properties of a figure which remain invariant when that figure is bent out of shape," Steiner argues that there are also such "invariants and constants underlying the manifold shapes of expression in our culture."<sup>1</sup> This notion of cultural topologies grows out of Steiner's sense that culture is to a large degree "the translation and rewording of previous meaning" (415). The motif of the pose of Hamlet involves in its different manifestations all three of Roman Jakobson's categories of translation: intralingual, interlingual, and especially intersemiotic.<sup>2</sup>

A version of the *vanitas* or *memento mori* motif, the pose of Hamlet can be seen in three distinct though interrelated forms: a man or woman contemplating a skull, a man contemplating the head of a statue, and a woman gazing at a mirror. The skull and mirror function interchangeably as truth-tellers and reminders of time and death. The heads of statues, contrasted to the living heads of the observers, are essential skulls. A second division of the motif occurs along religious and secular lines. Saints are reminded of the death of the body by skulls from which they look away. Secular characters, on the other hand, contemplate the objects of vanity directly. A third and possibly a fourth division have to do with traditional and modern instances of the motif and its use in tragedy or comedy. Like the

modern use of certain traditional symbols, the modern use of the *vanitas* motif is characterized by a fluidity which abstraction from the original cultural matrix enables. Tragedy and comedy, of course, involve different ultimate aims, though they may use the same images or language.

I begin, not with *Hamlet*, but a scene in Dekker's *The Honest Whore* (Part I), written four years later, where Shakespeare's motif of a man contemplating a skull is reprised to comic effect.<sup>3</sup> The Duke of Milan has faked his daughter Infelice's death, rather in the manner of Friar Lawrence, with the intent of preventing her marriage to the melancholy Count Hippolito. Hippolito, having made a "wild" show at Infelice's funeral, remains distracted at the thought of his beloved's death. His friends, who trick him into visiting a brothel, cannot console him, nor can the "honest whore," Bellafront, whom he berates at length, and who answers him by falling in love with him and immediately repenting her sinful ways. Sometime later, alone in a room of his house, or rather trying to be (he is continually interrupted), he contemplates suicide as a means of being reunited with his beloved.

The stage directions call for various props suggesting a still life of the *memento mori* or *vanitas* variety. On a table Hippolito's servant has placed a skull, a picture of Infelice, a book, and a taper. Hippolito first takes up the picture. Admiring the artist's skill, he turns quickly to a favorite stock subject of the Elizabethans, the "painting" of women:

'Las! now I see,  
The reason why fond women love to buy  
Adulterate complexion! Here, 't is read:  
False colours last after the true be dead.

(4.1.45-48)

"Painting" is one of the vanities of man,

<sup>1</sup>George Steiner, *After Babel: Aspects of Language and Translation* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1975) 425.

<sup>2</sup>Roman Jakobson, "On Linguistic Aspects of Translation," *On Translation*, ed. Reuben A. Brower (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1966) 233.

<sup>3</sup>Thomas Dekker, "The Honest Whore, Part I," *The Chief Elizabethan Dramatists*, ed. William Allan Neilson (Cambridge, Mass.: The Riverside Press, 1911).



sustaining as it does the fiction that man may overcome or at least disguise his fate. As such, it suggests the opposite of the skull or the mirror, both of which tell man the inexorable truth about himself. It is interesting that Dekker links makeup here with the higher art of portraiture. We should remember that until the time of the renaissance, secular portraits were themselves considered a form of vanity. It is not long before Hippolito conjectures that the picture, "a painted board," is no substitute for the real thing, having "no lap for me to rest upon, / No lip worth tasting" (4.1.56-57). At this point, Hippolito takes up the skull and addresses it (just what the skull is doing there is never made clear):

Perhaps this shrewd pate was mine  
 enemy's:  
 For all his braves, his contumelious breath,  
 His frowns, though dagger-pointed, all his  
 plot,  
 Though ne'er so mischievous, his Italian  
 pills,  
 His quarrels, and that common fence, his  
 law,  
 See, see, they're all eaten out! Here's not left  
 one:  
 How clean they're pickt away to the bare  
 bone!  
 How mad are mortals, then, to rear great  
 names  
 On tops of swelling houses! or to wear out  
 Their fingers' ends in dirt, to scrape up  
 gold!

Yet, after all, their gayness looks thus foul.  
 What fools are men to build a garish tomb,  
 Only to save the carcass whilst it rots,  
 To maintain't long in stinking, make good  
 carrion,  
 But leave no good deeds to preserve them  
 sound!

And must all come to this? fools, wise, all  
 hither?  
 Must all heads thus at last be laid together?  
 Draw me my picture then, thou grave neat  
 workman,  
 After this fashion, not like this; these  
 colours  
 In time, kissing but air, will be kist off:  
 But here's a fellow; that which he lays on  
 Till doomsday alters not complexion.  
 Death's the best painter then: they that

draw shapes,  
 And live by wicked faces, are but God's  
 apes.  
 They come but near the life, and there they  
 stay;  
 This fellow draws life too: his art is fuller,  
 The pictures which he makes are without  
 colour.

(4.1.63-94)

Hippolito is now interrupted again by his servant, who introduces Bellafront, come once more to woo Hippolito, and the comedy moves on its way.

Taken in its rather gratuitous context, Dekker's scene reads like a hilarious parody of *Hamlet*, as well as other Shakespearean plays ("What fools these mortals be . . ."). But parody, of course, is one indirection by which we may find direction out. Hippolito's rather overwrought soliloquy takes up and plays, for all a knowing audience knew they were worth, the basic themes of Hamlet's address to Yorick's skull. The motif of a man holding up and addressing a skull was irresistible material to Dekker. The theme of *memento mori*, here in a comically painless form, is perhaps most obvious: "And must all come to this?" All life, surely, is as brief as Hippolito's taper. But Dekker presents this theme, more pellucidly than Shakespeare, as being linked to the theme of art and its presumed conferment of a kind of provisional immortality. This is suggested in a number of ways: by the still life setting of the stage props, by the portrait of Infelice, by the introduction of the "painting" motif (an art through which we disguise our mortality a while), and finally by the consideration of death as an artist, "the best painter." The skull, then, is a supreme work of art, challenging with its permanence our own transient existence. Fools and wise, we read in it, as in a mirror, the truth about ourselves. And as a work of art, it overcomes our mortal weakness of being locked in the limited perspective of time. The skull, of course, represents the past, but Hippolito, a creature of the present, reads in it not merely the past, but the future as well: he, too, will come to this. The skull, therefore, involves past, present, and future in a continuum of experience (which may be predicated also on enduring works of art), testing the timeful limitations of the human imagination.

As I suggested above, the interwoven themes of mortality and art are present also in

Shakespeare's use of the motif in *Hamlet*, and as we shall see in a number of diverse works in the European tradition that draw their strength from this motif as well. I have begun with Dekker rather than Shakespeare because the motif in Shakespeare is more thoroughly subjugated to his dramatic purpose, and therefore less obvious in itself. But it is audible even in his more subtle application.

The graveyard scene has long been recognized as one of the most significant in *Hamlet*. As Maynard Mack suggests, "here, in its ultimate symbol, [Hamlet] confronts, recognizes, and accepts the condition of being man."<sup>4</sup> The scene provides us with "the crucial evidence of Hamlet's new frame of mind," which will enable him, finally, to engage in the "contest of mighty opposites" awaiting him at court (Mack 62, 63). Cast in a sober prose rather than the heated verse of the earlier soliloquies, the scene objectifies Hamlet's resignation to the human condition through the *vanitas* motif of a man holding a skull.<sup>5</sup> Hamlet and Horatio watch as the gravedigger throws up one skull after another. At first Hamlet responds with wittily ingenuous questions:

There's another. Why may not that be the skull of a lawyer? Where be his quiddities now, his quillities, his cases, his tenures, and his tricks? Why does he suffer this mad knave now to knock him about the sconce with a dirty shovel, and will not tell him of his action of battery?

(5.1.91-96)

The focus of these questions is the absence of willed action and volition; life lost is suggested by the loss of the power to will and speak. "That skull had a tongue in it, and could sing once" (5.1.71-72). The meditation is generalized at first, but takes on a horrible particularity when Hamlet is informed that one of the skulls belonged to Yorick, a person of his acquaintance. He now takes up the skull:

Alas, poor Yorick! I knew him, Horatio, a

<sup>4</sup>Maynard Mack, "The World of Hamlet," *Twentieth Century Interpretations of Hamlet*, ed. David Bevington (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1968) 62.

<sup>5</sup>William Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, ed. Willard Farnham (Baltimore: Penguin Books, Inc., 1969).

fellow of infinite jest, of most excellent fancy. He hath borne me on his back a thousand times. And now how abhorred in my imagination it is! My gorge rises at it. Here hung those lips that I have kissed I know not how oft. Where be your gibes now? Your gambols, your songs, your flashes of merriment that were wont to set the table on a roar? Not one now to mock your own grinning? Quite chapfall'n? Now get you to my lady's chamber, and tell her, let her paint an inch thick, to his favor she must come. Make her laugh at that.

(5.1.172-83)

Like Hippolito's speech, Hamlet's turns also on painting (there is a rather chilling echo here of his earlier upbraiding of Ophelia, whose death occasions the scene), and thus on the futility of human art, indeed all human endeavor, before death. Death, for Hamlet too, is the greatest and most ironic painter. Wit, songs, and makeup, jester, queen, or world conqueror, all end alike in the silent verity of the skull. "To what base uses," Hamlet continues, "may we return, Horatio! Why may not imagination trace the noble dust of Alexander till 'a find it stopping a bung-hole" (5.1.190-93).

In *The Third Voice*, Denis Donoghue makes a useful distinction between "the unit of poetic composition," which "is necessarily verbal," and the situational unit of theatrical composition, which

is not encompassed within the verbal realm. If one isolates a moment from the thousands of contiguous moments in a play, one should regard as the unit of theatrical composition everything that is happening at that moment, simultaneously apprehended. Words are being spoken, gestures are being made, the plot is pressing forward, a visual image is being conveyed on the stage itself.<sup>6</sup>

To consider the graveyard scene in *Hamlet* in this light is to be aware most powerfully of the visual image of a man gazing at a skull he holds in his hand. Our method of interpretation, therefore, is not simply verbal or linguistic, but emblematic. Like Hippolito, Hamlet gazes at the skull as into a mirror, showing him at once past

<sup>6</sup>Denis Donoghue, *The Third Voice: Modern British and American Verse Drama* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1959) 7.

and future, and signifying at once verity and vanity, that he too must come to this favor. The motif Hamlet enacts functions, of course, as part of the plot which is pressing forward, but at the same time it establishes emblematic connections with other works of art that make use of this motif as part of the human way of knowing.

The contemplation of a skull is a common motif in paintings of the period. Often a saint is depicted with a skull, suggesting his awareness of the vanity of human endeavor. Cavarozzi's painting of St. Jerome, for instance, portrays the scholarly and ascetic Jerome at his writing table watched over by a crucifix and two angels.<sup>7</sup> On his table are several old books, religious beads, a sandglass, and in the foreground a skull facing outward. These images suggest at once the bearded saint's holiness and his humanity. The crucifix, the angels, and the beads guide and guard him, or rather his immortal part. The books represent his characteristic erudition, the toil of human wisdom. The sandglass and the skull, however, are symbols of human vanity, the glass reminding us of the time-bound human condition and the skull reminding us of death. That Jerome keeps these articles on his desk suggests also his own awareness of time and death. The skull, placed on a book and facing outward, echoes by its position in the painting the bald head of the saint. Positioned between the head of Jerome and the skull, the glass serves to conjoin the two; this head, given the passage of time, will become that skull. Even the light, lingering on the two foreheads, implies their identity. A significant difference between the image in Cavarozzi's painting and the image in *Hamlet* is that, unlike Hamlet, Jerome does not contemplate the skull directly. As a tragic hero, "crawling between earth and heaven," Hamlet is very much the ordinary mortal with little "relish of salvation" in him. For Hamlet, as I have noted, the skull is in effect a mirror of his humanity, into which he gazes with all possible scrutiny. Jerome, on the other hand, pursues his characteristic work, which involves primarily the contemplation of divinity (one of his open books contains what might be a *pieta*). He is aware of the impending death of his body, as the skull suggests, but this affects a part of his consciousness only and by implication. The painting, though it involves *memento mori*, does not dwell on this, but celebrates Jerome's

human activity.

Similarly, Ribera's portrait of St. Francis depicts the saint holding a skull in his hands but gazing upward at the vision approaching him from heaven.<sup>8</sup> Already marked with stigmata (a hole in his garment and a mark on one hand reveal this), Francis seems ready at this moment to leave behind the travail of his body and to become one with Christ in mind and heart. The position of the skull in Francis's hands suggest, however, that in the moments before the heavenly vision he was contemplating the skull directly, directly contemplating the vanity of earthly life very much in the manner of Hamlet. Interestingly, the fissures in the skull, which form a sort of rough cross, echo the stitchings of the saint's rag garment. The skull and the garment of rags, taken together, suggest the earthly trappings of the soul, from which it would escape. The cross on the skull reminds us that even Jesus' human body could not avoid the experience of death. If the skull is a mirror of Saint Francis's human life, however, it is a mirror from which he looks away toward salvation. *Vanitas* is merely one constituent of the religious experience being presented.

Georges de La Tour, in his painting *Magdalen with the Lamp*, also makes use of the skull as an image of *vanitas*.<sup>9</sup> The Magdalen sits at a table holding a skull on her knee. On the table is another still-life setting: a glass oil lamp (the painting's only light source), two books, a scourge, and a wooden cross. Her right hand rests on the forehead of the skull, while her left hand supports her chin in a gesture of melancholy meditation. Once again, the saint's meditation is not directly on the skull; she gazes away from it, as it were, through the lamp's tall flame into the darkness of the background. Her thoughts are on the salvation possible only in another world. The light, however, flows from her hand to the skull, joining them in effect, while the position of her left forearm connects the skull with her own head. The end of earthly life, as the skull, the scourge, and indeed the cross remind us, is death. As T. Bertin-Mouroit has pointed out, "the theme of the Magdalen in meditation is a synthesis of . . . Melancholy and Vanity. . . . La Tour's is the mystic feeling of this

<sup>7</sup>Bartolomeo Cavarozzi, *St. Jerome* (before 1625), The Pitti Gallery, Florence.

<sup>8</sup>José Ribera, *St. Francis* (1663), The Pitti Gallery, Florence.

<sup>9</sup>Georges de La Tour, *Magdalen with the Lamp* (between 1625 and 1633), Louvre, Paris.

poignant dialogue between the penitent and God, in the contemplation of Death."<sup>10</sup> La Tour's mysticism, therefore, asks us to go beyond Hamlet's human meditation. Hamlet, contemplating death as the certain end of all human life, throws down his skull and turns to act out the life remaining him. The Magdalen, like the other saints discussed in this context, looks through her death toward a salvation made possible only by the human oblivion of the skull. The mystic, reminded of death, is essentially uninterested (certainly the scourge suggests this) in the life she is to leave behind.

In secular works, however, the implications of the *vanitas* motif are more chilling. As I have suggested above, the skull is effectively a mirror, revealing to the subject his future at the same time that it reveals the past. A literal mirror is also commonly used in exercising the motif. Titian uses both a skull and a mirror as images of *vanitas*. There are two similar versions of the Magdalen subject that depict the saint gazing upward toward heaven, while an open book lies before her on a skull. In both versions a black ribbon drapes the skull, suggestive of the human vanity she is leaving behind. Other Titian *vanitas* paintings make use of mirrors. A painting attributed to Titian and entitled simply *Vanitas* shows a woman at her toilette gazing into a mirror held aloft by Cupid.<sup>11</sup> This painting is quite similar in theme and composition to the famous *Toilette of Venus*.<sup>12</sup> Here two cupidons assist the goddess, one holding the mirror and the other a garland for her hair. Venus wears pearls in her hair, earrings, costly bracelets and rings, and (partially) a rich robe of fur and gold embroidery. Gazing at the mirror, however, she sees not her own youthful face and body, but those of an old woman. In *Vanitas* too, the image in the mirror, though here the difference is not so striking, appears to be that of an older woman. The suggestion of both paintings is that old age and of course death are the favors to which all human beauty must come. Interestingly, though his subject is a Venus, Titian ignores the

traditional ascription to the goddess of eternal youth. This suggests of course a devaluation of the Greek myth in a Christian century; the goddess is depicted in effect as a secular figure, and her vanity proposes itself therefore as something essentially human. Whether we wrap ourselves in costly furs and jewels, or "rear great names / On tops of swelling houses," or indeed "paint an inch thick," this is the end of human beauty, love, and life. Like the skulls in *Hamlet* and *The Honest Whore*, Titian's mirrors suggest also the vanity of art and what E. R. Dodds once called "the offensive and incomprehensible bondage of time and space."<sup>13</sup> The images in the mirrors are *framed*, or delimited in space as if they were works of art. This implies, of course, the reasonable but limited confines of human activity. And the images in the mirrors, like the skulls, suggest an inescapable future time as well as the past (for do we not become in the future like those human Yoricks we once knew?). The *vanitas* motif, in its secular form, involves a human confrontation with the boundaries, in time and space, of human endeavor. The truth-telling skulls and mirrors, from which, mere mortals, we cannot take our gaze, remind us forcefully of these limits.

Before proceeding to some typical modern instances of the *vanitas* motif, I will consider one more version from the seventeenth century: Rembrandt's moving image of *Aristotle Contemplating a Bust of Homer*.<sup>14</sup> Dating from 1653, a time when Rembrandt's later style was beginning to be noticeable, the painting depicts a contemporary looking, bearded Aristotle gazing at a bearded sculpture of the fabled epic poet. Aristotle's left hand rests on his hip; his right hand is extended and rests on the head of the sculpture. The light passes from the sculpted head to Aristotle's face along the extended arm, which is clothed in a voluminous white sleeve. In effect this joins the two heads, as does the similarity of their beards. Rembrandt's image, while different from either the skull or the mirror images we have considered, combines in essence the elements of the *vanitas* motif present in both of them. Like the skull, the sculpted head suggests a lifeless image from the past. It is an

<sup>10</sup>Qtd. in Jacques Dupont and François Mathey, *The New Developments in Art from Caravaggio to Vermeer*, trans. S.J.C. Harrison (New York: Skira, c.1951) 36.

<sup>11</sup>Tiziano Vecelli (Titian), *Vanitas*, S. Luca Gallery, Rome.

<sup>12</sup>Tiziano Vecelli (Titian), *Toilette of Venus* (around 1550), The Hermitage, Leningrad.

<sup>13</sup>E. R. Dodds, *The Greeks and the Irrational* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1957) 102.

<sup>14</sup>Rembrandt van Rijn, *Aristotle Contemplating a Bust of Homer* (1653), The Metropolitan Museum, New York.

essential skull, and in gazing at it, Aristotle confronts the vanity of even the most brilliant human endeavor. This head had a tongue in it once and could sing. It represents also Aristotle's future, for at some future time his physical being will be similarly silent; like his famous pupil, Alexander, Aristotle may find a new calling stopping a bunghole. And Rembrandt's painting suggests quite forcefully that the sculpted head is a kind of mirror. Both men are bearded and similarly featured. The sculpted head, however, speaks of death, and carries with it the burden of the past, which is, of course, the burden that the future must learn to bear. The anachronism of Aristotle's contemporary dress suggests that Rembrandt had in mind a more universal relation of living man to dead than simply the special subject of the two Greek thinkers. The future, the time of his own death, which Aristotle sees in an image of the past, is Rembrandt's time, and by extension our own. The anachronistic dress, along with the *vanitas* motif itself, scorns the artificial distinctions of time, which is actually a continuum imprisoning us all. That the sculpture is palpably a human work of art introduces more obviously than we have seen elsewhere the notion of art as a provisional confrontation with mortality which ultimately must confirm it. Like Hamlet, therefore, and unlike the saints, Aristotle confronts and—as his sober look suggests—accepts his own mortality.

The *vanitas* motif, as I have discussed it so far, might seem simply a phenomenon of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Indeed, all the works used here to round out the theme were produced between 1550 (the earliest ascribable date for Titian's *Toilette of Venus*) and 1653 (the date of Rembrandt's painting). Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, which was most probably written in 1600, appeared roughly in the middle of this period. The *vanitas* motif is an important and well-known ingredient of the *Zeitgeist* under which these artists worked. What I shall now try to demonstrate is that this motif is also important, though less formally worked out, in our own country. It is certainly visible among the fragments our artists have used to shore against their ruins, and if anything its grim message is grimmer still in a century when saints are mostly silent and religion is steadily on the wane.

One of Picasso's most fascinating paintings is the *Girl before a Mirror* of 1932, now at the Museum of Modern Art in New York.<sup>15</sup> Like

many of Picasso's paintings of this period, it makes use of multiple images to suggest movement or the passing of time in a medium whose traditional convention was of temporal stillness. The girl stands before what might be a cheval glass at once in profile and facing forward. The left profile of her face rests in an oval, full-face outline, in which the features of the right side are extended in a different color. A similar ambiguity attends the depiction of her legs and belly; there may be one or two legs, depending on how one views a line running down the middle of the figure, while a circular shape may suggest the frontal view of the belly or an interior image of the womb. From the stylized emphasis on her breasts and belly, it appears that she may be pregnant. Her arms are extended in the act of adjusting the glass, and one arm, therefore, interacts in terms of color and design, with the mirror image. As Alfred Barr notes, there is an "intricate metamorphosis of the girl's figure—'simultaneously clothed, nude and x-rayed'—and its image in the mirror."<sup>16</sup> This metamorphosis expresses itself in terms of oppositions of color and design which suggest the opposition of life and death. As in Titian's mirror paintings, the mirror image here both reflects the figure and comments on the figure through its variation. The most obvious variation is that of color. The stripes suggesting the girl's clothing are differently located in the mirror; what is nude is clothed in the mirror. The colors in the mirror are generally much darker than those of the girl herself. Her hair, as well as part of her face, is yellow and is set in what seems to be a white radiance, shaped almost like a bridal veil or halo. The face in the mirror, on the other hand, is composed of a silvery gray marked with reds, purples, green, and black, which flows into a heavy outline; the hair is green, outlined, and surrounded by what seems to be a bluish veil. Where the girl's face and hair suggest the sun and daylight, the mirror's face suggests the moon and night. Its color, grayish and blemished as it were with purple, creates a skull-like image. This is reinforced by the fact that while an eye is drawn in the girl's profile face, the face in the mirror has only a dark shape suggesting an empty eye-

<sup>15</sup>Pablo Picasso, *Girl before a Mirror* (14 Mar. 1932), The Museum of Modern Art, New York.

<sup>16</sup>Alfred H. Barr, Jr., *Picasso: Fifty Years of His Art* (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1946) 176.

socket. Even the long oval of the cheval glass has about it, in Nabokov's phrase, "the encroaching air of a coffin." This deathly air is enhanced by the stylized shape of the girl's neck, which is drawn as an Egyptian pyramid. Thus the striped clothing of the girl in the mirror may suggest the wrappings of a mummy.

The major opposition of the painting, very much in the *vanitas* tradition, is of life and death. Picasso combines the *vanitas* images of the mirror and the skull and involves the related theme of art (the cheval glass could also seem a portrait on an easel, a painting within a painting). But Picasso's use of the *vanitas* motif is modern in sensibility as well as style. The fact that the girl is seen both in profile and in full face suggests that she is at once contemplating the image in the mirror and looking away from it. Unlike a saint, however, she does not look away toward her own salvation, but turns toward us. Modern human kind, as Eliot reminds us, cannot bear very much reality. Her *memento mori* is thus ours also in a direct and uneasy way. Her seeming pregnancy, suggestive of the human life cycle and the human urge to continue the chain of life, is still involved in the imprisoning continuum of time. For the modern artist, Hamlet's mortal gaze is more familiar than St. Francis's or the Magdalen's.

Eliot himself includes a "Girl before a Mirror" scene in the "Game of Chess" section of *The Wasteland*.<sup>17</sup> This is, of course, the famous parody of Shakespeare's description of Cleopatra's barge. The woman with bad nerves sits before her vanity combing her hair: "Under the firelight, under the brush, her hair / Spread out in fiery points / Glowed into words, then would be savagely still" (lines 108-10). As Eliot's many allusions suggest, this woman may be taken as a modern and ironic composite of a number of death-marked women from history and myth: Cleopatra, Dido, Eve, and Philomela. All of them are unlucky in love, and in this respect the woman with bad nerves certainly belongs in their company. The comparisons are ironic, however, because where Cleopatra and the others have *acted* greatly, as it were, have given all for love, the modern woman remains simply frustrated, another of the "uncommitted ones" who populate the "Limbo" of the modern world. Unwilling to risk "the awful daring of a

moment's surrender," she glows into empty words that suggest merely the breakdown of communication with her lover:

"What is that noise?"

The wind under the door.

"What is that noise now? What is the wind doing?"

Nothing again nothing.

"Do

"You know nothing? Do you see nothing?"

Do you remember

"Nothing?"

I remember

Those are pearls that were his eyes.

"Are you alive, or not? Is there nothing in your head?"

(117-26)

What the lover remembers, via Ariel's song, is the drowned Phoenician Sailor, who, as we later learn, "was once handsome and tall as you" (321). This thought is literally, therefore, a *memento mori*. But as the woman's response implies, they are themselves already among the living dead, neither truly alive nor dead, and as the repeated "nothings" of the passage suggest, essentially empty. Her identity, of course, is blurred with those of the dead queens; her future may be read in their past. Indeed, hers is in effect Hamlet's quandary on confronting Yorick's skull. The setting of the scene reinforces my sense of it as a modern reworking of the *vanitas* motif:

The Chair she sat in, like a burnished throne,

Glowed on the marble, where the glass  
Held up by standards wrought with fruited vines

From which a golden cupidon peeped out  
(Another hid his eyes behind his wing)  
Doubled the flames of sevenbranched candelabra

Reflecting light upon the table as  
The glitter of her jewels rose to meet it,  
From satin cases poured in rich profusion . . .

(77-85)

What we have here—cupidons, jewels, and all—is the pose of Titian's *Toilette of Venus*. This mirror, however, tells the woman not merely of time and death, but of her own emptiness and living death (the mirror is described as reflecting

<sup>17</sup>T. S. Eliot, "The Wasteland," *The Complete Poems and Plays: 1909-1950* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc., 1971).

the objects of the room, but interestingly not her image). The *vanitas* motif, as Eliot invokes it, echoes the central condition of *The Wasteland*.

Something more akin to Rembrandt's use of the motif occurs in the *Mythistorema* sequence of George Seferis.<sup>18</sup> As the title suggests, these poems are concerned with myth, history, and story, and attempt to express, as Seferis himself puts it, "circumstances that are as independent from myself as the characters in a novel" (261). One of the major concerns is clearly the burden of the past as represented by myth, history, and story. The third poem of the sequence expresses this burden through the image of a man holding the head of a statue in his hands:

I woke with this marble head in my hands;  
it exhausts my elbows and I don't know  
where to put it down.

It was falling into the dream as I was  
coming out of the dream  
so our life became one and it will be very  
difficult for it  
to separate again.

I look at the eyes: neither open nor closed  
I speak to the mouth which keeps trying to  
speak  
I hold the cheeks which have broken  
through the skin  
I haven't got any more strength.

My hands disappear and come toward me  
mutilated.

(5)

The speaker here is very much in the pose of Hamlet: a living man confronting the image of the past and finding in it his own identity ("so our life became one"). The sculpted head, as in Rembrandt's painting, suggests an essential skull with eyes "neither open nor closed" and cheeks breaking through the skin. It "keeps trying to speak," but it is locked in the silence of the past. The speaker senses and would maintain a connection with this past, but the effort for the living man is exhausting, indeed, mutilating. The world of the dead, of history, is a presence which must be confronted and remembered. In part because of this, it threatens to overwhelm the living person. He does not

<sup>18</sup>George Seferis, *Collected Poems: 1925-1955*, trans. Edmund Keeley and Philip Sherrard (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1967).

know where to put the statue down and resume his life: "it will be very difficult for it to separate again." Though it proposes itself as a waking experience, the poem is clearly nightmarish, an experience of life in the grip of time and death. It suggests no saintly escape from the condition of mortality, nor even Hamlet's return, after confronting death, to the work of living. The body's surreal dismemberment in the final lines argues rather that the self is bound to and lost in the past. Like the other moderns, Seferis's *vanitas* experience reverberates in a void of lost values.

I began with an example from comedy, and I return finally to a famous comedy of the twentieth century, Hugo von Hofmannsthal's *Der Rosenkavalier*.<sup>19</sup> Near the end of the first act of *Der Rosenkavalier*, Hofmannsthal interrupts the opera's merriment with a scene replicating Titian's image from *Toilette of Venus*. Having set in motion a comic plot that will end in the loss of her youthful lover, Octavian, the Marschallin is left alone for some minutes in her boudoir. The thought of the buffoon, Baron Ochs, taking a young bride disturbs her by reminding her of her own youth and marriage. Taking up a hand mirror, she gazes into it and meditates:

Wo ist die jetzt? Ja,  
such' die den Schnee vom vergangenen  
Jahr!  
Das sag' ich so:  
Aber wie kann das wirklich sein,  
dass ich die kleine Resi war  
und dass ich auch einmal die alte Frau sein  
werd.

Die alte Frau, die alte Marschallin!  
"Siegst es, da geht die alte Fürstin Resi!"  
Wie kann des das geschehen?  
Wie macht denn das der liebe Gott?  
Wo ich doch immer die gleiche bin.  
Und wenn er's schon so machen muss,  
warum lasst er mich zuschauen dabei  
mit gar so klarem Sinn? Warum versteckt  
er's nicht vor mir?  
Das alles ist geheim, so viel geheim.  
Und man ist dazu da, dass man's erträgt.  
Und in dem "Wie"  
da liegt der ganze Unterschied—

(42)

<sup>19</sup>Hugo von Hofmannsthal, *Der Rosenkavalier* (London: Fürstner Limited, 1911). English translations used here are my own.

(Where is she now? Yes, / seek out the  
 snows of yesteryear! / That I can say: / But  
 how can it really be / that I was little Resi /  
 and that also one day I will become an old  
 woman. / The old woman, the old wife of  
 the Fieldmarshal! / "Look, there goes the  
 old Princess Resi!" / How can that happen?  
 / How can the dear Lord let it be? / Yet I  
 am always the same. / And if He must do it  
 like this, / why does He allow me to look  
 on / with such clear senses? Why doesn't  
 He hide it from me? / All this is mysterious,  
 so very mysterious. / And one is here but to  
 bear it all. / And in the "How" / there's the  
 whole difference—)

Whereas in Titian's painting a young woman  
 looks in a mirror and sees the image of an older  
 woman, the Marschallin is actually an older  
 woman and presumably sees a proper likeness  
 of herself. On a psychological level, however,  
 she does not feel like an older woman. Her sense  
 of self is still that of the young Resi, and  
 therefore the image in the mirror is strange and  
 shocking to her. The "I," who is "immer die  
 gleiche," sees a different, older self in the mirror,  
 one clearly subject to the ravages of time. The  
 mirror shows her a future that on a  
 psychological level she did not know had  
 already happened, and the passing of time, of  
 course, threatens to continue. She feels herself  
 slipping irrevocably into the past. Hofmannsthal's  
 image—and it involves here words, gesture, the  
 stage setting, and indeed the gorgeous music of  
 Richard Strauss—presents the *vanitas* motif in  
 the fullness of its lineaments. The reference to  
 Villon's famous poem about the fading of earthly  
 beauty merely deepens the aura of this tradition.  
 What is more modern here, though it bears indeed  
 a key relationship to the mood of Hamlet, is the  
 questioning of the God who would subject human  
 beings to such a painful consciousness of their  
 fate. A secular character, the Marschallin does  
 not look away in the manner of a saint toward  
 mystical salvation, but concentrates like Hamlet  
 on her own ageing and approaching death. But  
 like Hamlet also, she turns stoically to the  
 business of enduring life, the graceful "how"  
 of things suffering the imprisonment of time,  
 which, as she puts it, makes all the difference.

Comedy may remind us of death, and often  
 forcefully, but its ultimate motive is the  
 celebration of life as it is lived and passed on  
 in the chain of time to the ever-changing young. It

recognizes the continuum of time as something  
 neither to overcome nor to mourn, but to  
 celebrate: a continuity in flux. This is the  
 mystery that the Marschallin, like Hamlet in his  
 own way, recognizes and accepts. When  
 Octavian returns at the end of the first act, he  
 notices but does not understand her sober  
 mood, and she attempts to interpret it herself:

Die Zeit, die ist ein sonderbar Ding.  
 Wenn man so hinlebt, ist sie rein gar nichts.  
 Aber dann auf einmal, da spürt man nichts  
 als sie.

Sie ist um uns herum, sie ist auch in uns  
 drinnen.

In den Gesichtern rieselt sie,  
 im Spiegel da rieselt sie,  
 in meinen Schläfen fließt sie.

Manchmal steh' ich auf mitten in der Nacht  
 und lass die Uhren alle, alle stehn.  
 Allein man muss sich auch vor ihr nicht  
 fürchten.

Auch sie ist ein Geschöpf des Vaters, der  
 uns alle  
 erschaffen hat.

(46)

(Time is an odd, curious thing. / When one  
 just lives, it seems like nothing. / Then  
 suddenly one senses nothing else. / It is  
 around us and inside us too. / It trickles in  
 faces, / it trickles in mirrors, / it flows in  
 my temples. / . . . / Sometimes in the  
 middle of the night I rise / and make the  
 clocks, yes all of them, stand still. / But also  
 one must not fear time. / It, too, is a  
 creation of the Father who created us all.)

Secular man may be, in Matthew Arnold's  
 phrase, a "chafing prisoner of time," or he may  
 be an accepting prisoner of time. With a rather  
 touching naiveté, the Marschallin makes her  
 case for acceptance. For her, as for the Hamlet  
 who came to see a "special providence in the fall  
 of a sparrow," the *vanitas* experience ends in a  
 kind of humility before death and life. The  
 confrontation with time as it flows in mirrors,  
 in statues, or indeed the temples of skulls is a  
 spiritual preparation for the act of living ones  
 limited days.□

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 Dictionary, directing the American reading program.

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Katherine Soniat

THE NEXT DAY

**T**oday the sun's a simpler silver.  
The field is cut,  
the corn laid down.  
Crows pick the earth  
plucked to its finest pitch:  
the day after,  
when all is suddenly less.  
Nothing can be forgotten.

Heat fogs from the parted  
dirt. The sun presses  
to the heart of a cloud.  
What does not suggest itself?  
Wet bulls breathe steam in the brook,  
purple blossoms going under at their feet.

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Blanca Elena Paz

## THE LIGHT

*Translated by John DuVal and Gastón Fernández-Torriente*

**Y**ou're worried. Your husband has changed a lot in the past few months. It isn't that he's stopped loving you. Actually, he's never been so tender. It's just that at certain moments you notice that he's distant, off somewhere else. Now that you really think about it, the day he began to change was when that woman came looking for him, the one who was pregnant. Another doctor had come to relieve him, and he was just about to go off duty when she showed up. She burst out crying when she saw him and fell on her knees. And, well, you know how your husband is. He let himself be talked into something. It was about a man with a bullet wound. Your husband extracted the bullet, stitched up the wound, and did not fill out a report for the authorities. After that, even though he didn't tell you, you knew the woman had come looking for him again. Yes, that was the day. That was when he started changing. Some days he comes home so tired he doesn't want to do anything but sleep. And you can't sleep unless you read some first. You leave the bedside lamp off until he goes to sleep. Then you read. Since the curfew went into effect, the nights have been long and tedious. The television is unbearable: just westerns and military reports, so you turn it off. Well, at least you've still got that right: if they censor you, then you'll censor them! What you wouldn't give for a cure to this damned insomnia. Late into the night, when the hands of the clock are marching toward morning, the city becomes peopled with a weird and menacing orchestra. Trucks patrolling, brakes squealing, tommy guns rattling, boots. . . . And you know, though you don't want to talk about it, what's going on in the streets. You've wondered if your husband has had anything to do with this mess. No: he's never cared for politics, although it's possible that now that he's started changing. . . . You yourself have been changing. He's asleep. Asleep.

It's better not to think about things and sleep. Put out the light, sleep, and not think about the noise of footsteps in the street. In your street. You want to get up and look out through where the slat's missing in the Venetian blinds and see what's going on. No. Better not. Because the boots are getting closer. The house next door? You think about the brass plate on your door, with the M.D. on it, as if that plate made your house inviolable. Yes, it's better to turn out the light and not know. After all . . . you? . . . what can you do? You can't change the world. You throw up your hands because you've realized the boots are coming toward your house. Did you leave the door unlocked? No. But you feel it opening. Your left hand reaches toward your husband's body. With your right you fumble for the light switch. Someone on the other side of your bedroom door is turning the knob. And at last you put out the light, because you realize, too late, that the only refuge left you is the dark.□

Laureano Albán

CLOSE-UP OF DEATH

*Translated by Frederick H. Fornoff*

—Eduardo Mondello Techera

*Uruguayan. Professional photographer, thirty years old, an active member of the Socialist Party of his country. He was arrested on the 6th of March of 1976, in Piriapolis, along with his father. He was tortured, and four days after his arrest his body was returned to his relatives and they were forbidden to open the coffin. Disobeying this order, his family and friends discovered numerous lesions resulting from the torture. These were the cause of his death. He was denied an autopsy.*

Look this way, slowly,  
L with the still violence  
of a shadow watching.  
Turn a bit to the left,  
like that—never—and let  
the twilight turn in you  
and run its rain-sword  
through your eyes.

Take one step back, returning,  
as if absence's light  
were giving way in you.  
Now drop your annulled arms  
alongside your body,  
as if the borders of night  
were covering you.

Throw back your forehead  
with its profound violation  
so that all the silences  
can grow huge above it.

Listen, faraway something deep,  
deep is coming for your escape  
and you know it,  
something that seeks out from the shadows  
only what is human,  
something going back and forth  
spinning, hollowing out our abysses.

But now, slowly,  
hold still for your death  
in the impossible frame of words  
and voyages.  
Lower your eyes slightly:  
there should be no flight  
in your crushed face.  
Let's wait for the wind:  
it will cover your death  
with restless stops  
and bury the freshness of its lamps  
in your wounds.

Don't move any more now,  
transparency is approaching.  
Its pale blasts  
will cross your memory.  
You will stay  
in the instant limit of death,  
looking back at blood's  
flown world.  
Transparence is almost here:  
where pain ruled  
it will be distance.  
Where flame exploded  
it will lay out its meadows.  
Where fear shook its avid needles  
it will lay the clear balm of air.

Wait, wait, no one  
must know that yesterday  
you were no longer here.  
Nor that memory  
has faraway functions.  
Now, don't move:  
shining against your death  
now, solitary with blood,  
transformed into an instant,  
stands the word.

Eugene J. Devlin

SCHOLARLY DISINTEREST OR DISINTERESTED SCHOLARSHIP?  
TOWARD AN EVALUATION OF THE DRAMATIC CONTRIBUTIONS  
OF THE EUROPEAN JESUIT SCHOOL THEATRE OF THE LATE  
GERMAN RENAISSANCE AND BAROQUE

Even a mildly disinterested observer of the dramatic scene in seventeenth-century Europe would come away with the impression that by and large, the influence and productivity of the Jesuit school theatre of that period deserved a better fate than it appears to have received at the hands of literary historians. As early as 1784 Herder expressed surprise and regret that an objective and complete history of the dramatic accomplishments of the Order had not yet been written almost a century after its golden age.<sup>1</sup> A century later his plea seems still to have gone largely unheeded. It wasn't until the turn of the last century that the curtain of silence which seemed to have fallen on the baroque humanist theatre in general and the Jesuits in particular appeared to have lifted, however slightly.

It will come as no surprise that the religious and political turmoil of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries gave birth to a number of partisan movements. The emergence of the Jesuits was only one of the many possible reactions to the tensions of the epoch.<sup>2</sup> An explanation of the causes for this particular reaction can best be left to the professional historian. What is of importance here is the choice the Jesuits made of education and notably of their drama to exercise a considerable influence on the fortunes of the contemporary post-Tridentine Reform.

Early Jesuit educators bore the stamp of the

philosophical and theological training which they had received from the University of Paris.<sup>3</sup> Like their Protestant counterparts they came to find in the humanist school movement an instrument ready to be used in the service of their own brand of "propaganda fidei." Similar in many respects to the educational code of Melancthon and other pioneer Protestant schoolmen theorists, the Jesuit *Plan of Studies* adopted the intellectual and esthetic content of contemporary humanism and sought more or less successfully to "baptize" it in the doctrinal waters of the Tridentine Reform.<sup>4</sup>

Earlier *Plans of Study* tended to consider the contribution of the drama to the Orders' educational objectives only peripherally, as a means to achieve a practical expression of the humanist goal of "eloquence." The *Constitutions* of the Order say little about the drama and certainly nothing about its use as a polemical instrument in the arsenal of the so-called "Counter-Reform."<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup>Jean-Marie Valentin, *Le théâtre des Jésuites* (Bern: Lang, 1978) 1: 206-07. Valentin's work represents a comparatively recent study of the theatre of the Jesuits in German-speaking areas of the baroque epoch. The author has elaborated the pioneer studies of Duhr and Müller and has analysed significant articles and works which have appeared on this relatively unresearched backwater of German literary history.

<sup>4</sup>*Ratio Studiorum et Institutiones scholasticae Societatis Jesu*, ed. G. M. Pachtler (Berlin: Böhlau, 1887). The 1599 *Plan of Studies* became the definitive educational program of the Jesuits. An English translation is available by T. Corcoran in *Renatae Litterae saeculo a Christo xvi in Scholis Societatis Jesu stabilitae* (Dublin: Finneran, 1927).

<sup>5</sup>Mario Barbera, S.J., *La Ratio Studiorum e la Parte Quarta delle Costituzioni della Compagnia di Gesù. Traduzione con Introduzione e Note* (Padua: 1942).

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<sup>1</sup>J. G. Herder, "Terpsichore," *Sämtliche Werke*, hrsg. von Carl Redner, bd. 27 (Berlin: Schönfeld, 1881).

<sup>2</sup>Jesuits or *Society of Jesus*, an organization of Catholic religious founded by Ignatius of Loyola and officially recognized by Paul III in 1539. The Order became influential during and after the Tridentine Reform mainly through its revised and updated humanist educational system.

The definitive *Plan of Studies* of 1599, like its predecessors, also warns against excessive enthusiasm for drama and formally restricted productions to one or two major performances annually, usually on the occasion of graduation and prize award ceremonies. With the rapid expansion of the Jesuit educational enterprise all over Europe, the importance of the theatre as an apologetic instrument in the service of the ancient faith began to be recognized. Nor were the political leaders of the areas threatened by the Lutheran Reform slow to recognize the advantages of gaining to their cause the support of the new educational force.

The early history of the Jesuit schools was a period of intense competition with local humanist schools for students and financial support. At best, regarded as interlopers by the local educational establishment, the Jesuits were obliged to prove their mettle. The college stage provided them with an exceptionally apt showcase. From relatively simple "dialogs" and "declamations" their college theatre soon became more competitive as the door was gradually opened for more formal dramatic productions.

At first their repertoire was made up largely of tragedies and comedies in the classical humanist tradition. As the sixteenth century wore on, however, interest shifted from golden-age Latinists to Seneca, Plautus, and Terence.<sup>6</sup> With the growing success of the Tridentine Reform the schoolmen writers came to find in the stage a more effective instrument than pulpit and pen and turned their attention to subjects drawn from history, legend, and sacred scripture.

Under the influence of Peter Canisius, a progressive superior of the Order in Germany and Switzerland, the Swabian Jacob Gretser (1562-1625) became one of the most prolific of the early baroque Jesuit dramatists. With the encouragement of Canisius, he turned his attention to the heroes of Swiss legend and history. Plays on the life of Bishop Nicolas, Ida of Toggenburg, and the venerated hermit figure Brother Klaus flowed from his pen and were performed on the important stages of the Order or in the public squares of Lucerne, Fribourg, and Solothurn.<sup>7</sup> Gretser became one of the first Jesuit dramatists to experiment with a new dramatic genre, the conversion play. This type of engaged theatre remained popular for the next

half century and gradually supplanted earlier plays on Biblical and moral themes. Its popularity is amply attested to in reports which speak of difficulty in accommodating spectators and frequent demands for repeat performances (Duhr 1: 345-50).

Nowhere more than in the traditional residence cities of Munich and Vienna did the Jesuit theatre find the soil more conducive to development and expansion. The hesitation and experimentation which marked their early dramatic period was now definitely behind them and a new self-conscious theatre along more typically baroque lines began to emerge. Abandoning the relative isolation of the college enclave the schoolmen began to compete effectively with a highly professional secular stage whose profane influence they set out to counter and in some places eventually succeeded in eliminating.

A large measure of this newfound popularity can be attributed to the ability of the schoolmen dramatists to empathize with the needs and religious aspirations of contemporary audiences. Their public rapidly outgrew the confines of the college stage to cut across all levels of baroque society. Putting aside the simple humanist goal of imparting poise and eloquence to student actors, the Jesuits now embarked on a grandiose attempt to forge a link between ruler and subject in a culture which had become largely dominated by the triumphalistic spirit of rejuvenated Catholicism. More and more their writers were inclined to transform the drama into a liturgical rite celebrating a common faith and common political objectives (Valentin 1: 429-34).

For over thirty years the capital city of Bavaria remained the single most important arena of Jesuit theatrical activity. The active support of Archduke Albert V enabled the new educational institute to acquire a virtual monopoly on educational activity in the Bavarian state. With the subsequent decline of Bavarian humanist schools and their once flourishing school theatre, the Jesuit college became the single most important non-professional dramatic institution

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<sup>7</sup>Bernhard Duhr, *Geschichte der Jesuiten in den Ländern deutscher Zunge* (Freiburg im Br.: Herder, 1907-28) 1: 341-42. Duhr's *Geschichte* is an acknowledged sourcework for the history of the educational activities of the Jesuits in the German-speaking world. Its preparation and publication occupied a good part of the author's later years and was encouraged by the General of the Order.

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<sup>6</sup>Johannes Müller, *Das Jesuitendrama* (Augsburg: Filser, 1930) 1: 11-12.

of its epoch.

Jesuit playwrights shrewdly chose to join forces with the new theatrical impulses emanating from Italy. They were able to profit substantially from the operatic and musical innovations which arrived from that country. It was largely due to this unlikely alliance of amateur and professional that the schoolmen were able to carry out the experimentation which eventually led to the creation of a new dramatic genre, the *fêtes munichoises* or "spectacle" play (Valentin 1: 429-39). Under the continued patronage of the Wittelsbach ruling house, the Jesuits of Saint Michael's college in Munich drew at will on a well-equipped professional court theatre for technical and material assistance.

An important key to understanding the highly successful development of the *fêtes* was the political and religious outlook of the Bavarian ruling family. From the moment of its entry into Bavaria, the new educational institute was invited to play an important role in the political and cultural ambitions of the country's rulers. It was the firm political will of Archduke Albert and William, his successor, which brought into existence a grandiose and typically baroque concept of the state as a synthesis of religion, politics, and art (Valentin 1: 429-30).

For Albert and William the post-Tridentine Reform became a providential opportunity to regain control over a strongly Protestant religious and political opposition and to initiate a political, educational, and cultural reform which was to terminate in their own concept of the "ideal" state. The ultimate success of the project was due in large part to the political vision of the Wittelsbachs and the pragmatic flexibility of Jesuit religious superiors.

Despite strong opposition from local churchmen, Albert vested in the young Order control over the University of Ingolstadt and its important school of theology. In Munich, he founded the College of Saint Michael, which in size and magnificence was compared, with pardonable local enthusiasm, to the Escorial in Spain (Duhr 1: 341-42). In rapid succession followed the foundation of a whole series of colleges throughout Bavaria. Under the Wittelsbachs the Jesuits gained considerable influence over the dramatic and cultural life of the Bavarian state which they maintained successfully for well over a century. This fortuitous symbiosis of religion and state also brought with it financial independence and

political support which enabled the college theatre of the Order to complete its experimental phase and formally identify itself as an important element in the stream of contemporary baroque theatre.

The production of *Samson* by Andreas Fabricius in 1568 gave the College of Saint Michael its first real opportunity to establish an independent reputation. Fabricius, though not a Jesuit as had been generally supposed, was a friend and confidant of the Order from his Louvain days.<sup>8</sup> His play was presented in connection with the wedding festivities for William V, son and future successor to Albert V, and his bride Renée of Lothringen. In describing the royal wedding one awed chronicler speaks of tourneys and mock battles between Moors and Christians. This was an allusion to the ever-present menace of Turkish expansion in Europe. There were also processions, parades, and elaborate arches erected in the public square (Duhr 1: 35-36).

Much of the architecture on hand for the wedding festival was incorporated by Fabricius into the *mise-en-scène* for *Samson*. The author was confronted with the almost herculean task of introducing a momentary sacred note into the three-day secular celebration. In writing his drama Fabricius chose the Biblical episode of Samson and Delila and applied the fable to the royal wedding in terms of the relation between church and state. It was the author's chance to present his own view of men and events. His interpretation of the Biblical episode in terms of a baroque "mirror" of princely virtue is perhaps more significant for its dependence on the ascetic teaching of Saint Ignatius than for any convincing scriptural exegesis.<sup>9</sup>

The prolog begins on a restrained polemic note. It is a panegyric on constancy to religious convictions. Archduke William is acclaimed for refusing to choose a bride from "aliens and strangers to his Bavarian religious heritage." This is a not too subtle historical allusion to the practice of contemporary Catholic royalty who sometimes chose Protestant consorts for political advantage.

The music for the numerous ballets and

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<sup>8</sup>A. Fabricius, *Samson tragoedia nova et sacra* (Coloniae: 1569) prologus: 119-20.

<sup>9</sup>David Fleming, *A Contemporary Reading of the Spiritual Exercises* (St. Louis: Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1980) 136-49.

interludes of this spectacle *al fresco* was written by the Wittelsbach court composer Orlando di Lasso. Costumes from the secular celebration, the festival architecture, and even crowds of the curious were pressed into service in an ambitious attempt to unite players, ruler, and audience into an integrated theatrical rite. Contemporary chronicles speak with admiration of the sumptuous staging, the orchestral passages, and the choreography with its mythological and Biblical themes (Müller 1: 19). For Fabricius and his Jesuit collaborators, however, the *Samson* was intended to be something more significant than a mere adornment to a secular wedding celebration.

The author develops his ballet themes in the fashion of a Greek chorus, blending pagan mythology with Christian values. A scene in the first act compares Samson to Hercules triumphing over the lion of Nemeia while the ballet interlude interprets the hero as a figure of Christ overcoming the demon (1.5). The dance of the "night birds" (4.3) and the prophecy of Amphaeus (5.1) point to the eventual death of the hero and are interpreted by the dancers as a prefiguration of the passion of Christ. Whatever the circumstances that gave rise to the performance, the author clearly intended *Samson* to be more than just another comedy in the popular Italian manner. For Fabricius it was a public affirmation of the Jesuit vision of men and events.

In the drama itself Samson is a figure veiled in mystery. Moved by the spirit, the son of Manué takes on the role of a Nazarite charged with the task of purifying a corrupt world. From the first act on he becomes avenger, missionary, judge, and redeemer. Fabricius reads into the Biblical text some startling correspondences to the life and mission of Christ. Like Christ, Samson is mocked and humbled by the Philistines (2.3-4). The crowd insults him in words identical to those used against Christ on the cross. He is sold two times. Delila's kiss of betrayal is rewarded with a handful of gold which the author sees as a sign of the betrayal of Christ by Judas (4.3). The death of the hero results in the collapse of Dagon's temple which is interpreted to prefigure the death of Christ and the destruction of the temple of Jerusalem (5.5).

*Constantinus Maximus*, a play written by Georg Agricola in 1574, sets out to dramatize the ideal Christian ruler who somewhat belatedly emerges from behind a heavy panoply of Roman trappings.<sup>10</sup> The villain of the piece is Maxentius,

a figure sufficiently well recognized in history for acts of brutality and oppression. The author, surprisingly enough, bypasses some of the emperor's more blatant acts of cruelty to focus on what for his times might be considered a somewhat commonplace act of villainy, the violation of Sophronia, the virtuous wife of the governor of Rome. The attack on Sophronia causes an uproar among the citizens of the imperial city (1.1-2).

Agricola reads a deeper significance into what might at first sight appear to be nothing more than a passing foible of a tyrant. He interprets it as an attack on the social fabric as such (2.7). This particular violation of human dignity then becomes a common denominator for all the emperor's acts of impiety, and the author traces its source to the ruler's insatiable desire for possessions. To restore the social balance, Agricola finds it necessary to skate on what was, for the times at least, the admittedly thin ice of revolution.

In defending the justice of his revolution, already approved in the play by the senators of Rome (2.3-4), the Jesuit does little more than formulate in dramatic terms the theories of his more famous confrere Robert Bellarmine, a political writer of the seventeenth century who had acquired unholy fame for his attacks on tyrants (Valentin 3: 1386-89). Perhaps to rescue the play from the threat of censorship, Agricola portrays Constantine less as a revolutionary than a ruler missioned by God to intervene in the affairs of man. He draws a protective parallel to the Bavarian royal house to justify the political direction his plot has taken (5.5). Not surprisingly, the Jesuit dramatist defends the right of God to intervene in the fortunes of men and a corresponding obligation on man's part to discern then accept the divine will. The quasi-legal procedure of the Roman senate in the second act curiously reflects the process of Ignatian "discernment," a linchpin of Ignatian asceticism (Fleming 74-75).

The *Triumph of Saint Michael* (1597) belies its title and is in fact a global reflection drawn from a single moment of history, the "fall" of Lucifer and his cohorts. It appears to have been a joint effort of Michael Rader and Jacob Gretser.<sup>11</sup> The

<sup>10</sup>G. Agricola, "Constantinus magnus de Maxentio victor," *Codex latinus monachensis*: Nr 573. Cited hereafter as *CLM*.

<sup>11</sup>M. Rader and J. Gretser, "Triumphus divi Michaelis archangeli," *CLM* 19757. 2: 561-714.



drama was performed as part of a dedication ceremony for the rebuilt church of Saint Michael in Munich and took place on the public square fronting the church. The play is an attempt to interpret contemporary political events in the context of a global, providentially inspired plan.

The archangel Michael is cast in the role of Protector of Bavaria and leader of the militant community of the Counter-Reform (Prolog). The plot abandons the contemporary scene to present a series of dramatized tableaux which trace salvation history from the fall of Lucifer to the redemption won by Christ. Much in the style of the *Religio Patiens* of Fabricius and the *Ecclesia Militans* of Michael Hiltprandt, the theme is developed through an analytical and comparative technique which apparently owes its inspiration to the philosophical theories of the baroque Jesuit savant Suarez.

The plot development is an imaginative interpretation of the visions of John of Patmos in his Apocalypse. It portrays a series of trials endured by early Christian communities which culminates anachronistically in the outbreak of the Lutheran Reform. The first two acts dramatize the presence of evil in the world which the author ascribes to the vengeance of Lucifer for his lost paradise. The battleground of Lucifer's revolt is transferred from heaven to earth. Reminiscent of the "Two Standards" meditation of the Ignatian *Spiritual Exercises*, the forces of evil are given the mission to sow deceit and discord in the world. The action of the drama at this point is maintained by several allegorical scenes which form part of a historical panorama which tries to identify the effects of original sin in the world from Adam and Eve down to the present.

In the third act the machinations of the forces of evil receive contemporary significance from the iconoclasts of the second century to the peasant revolt in Germany. The fourth act has the almost impossible task of trying to synthesize the foregoing in theological terms. First on the agenda is an attack on the Lutheran theory of faith against good works. The author sees in this a denial of personal liberty. The primacy of the redemptive act of Christ is affirmed and the essential role of human free will and consequent responsibility is defended—not very dramatic themes, it must be admitted, but the author knew how to spice the dry bones of theology with rhetoric and the illusions created by the machinery of a well-equipped royal theater.

The final act heralds the restoration of the ancient faith and the extension of its power to the universe, not excluding the newly discovered lands of the Americas. In the closing scenes the stage is strewn with a convincing assortment of dead tyrants and agents of discord who have tried in vain to obstruct the triumphal progress of religion (5.7).

The final tableau presents a harmonious vision of the future through the accomplishments of the Tridentine Reform. The rebirth of unity is likened to the shining appearance of Phoebus on a stage surrounded by rays of light. A figure from the ancient church is seated on a throne surrounded by virtues and an angelic host which must have numbered in the hundreds. Choir, orchestra, and processions project a grandiose view of a world in which conflicts have been resolved and the glory of God revealed in the triumphant accents of the Catholic Reform (8.8).

In terms of contemporary theatre practice the Jesuit school drama in Munich at the turn of the seventeenth century had reached a relatively high level of development, but it was in seventeenth-century Vienna that Jesuit dramatic effort attained its highpoint. The epic consolidation of Habsburg power and the gradual emergence of a new politico-religious synthesis known as the *pietas austriaca* provided a fertile field for dramatic experimentation along bolder lines.<sup>12</sup> As in Bavaria under the Wittelsbachs the Habsburg royal family was not slow to accept the aid of the new religious Order to help achieve its own grandiose project for unification of faith and fatherland.

With the arrival of Nicolas Avancini the Austrian Jesuit theatre found itself in possession of a first-class director and a prolific playwright (Müller 2: 32-34). In Vienna, however, the Jesuits found themselves confronted with a formidable opponent in the person of a respected religious and secular stage. The modest success that the players of the Vienna college of the Order had acquired up to Avancini's arrival was largely the result of experience and skills imported from Bavaria and the somewhat uncritical enthusiasm of local patrons. Avancini was to prove the catalyst which integrated the uncertain efforts of an earlier phase into the relatively advanced dramaturgy of the newly established imperial

<sup>12</sup>Anna Coreth, "Pietas Austriaca," *Ursprung und Entwicklung Barocker Frömmigkeit in Österreich* (München: Oldenbourg, 1959) 5-14.

capital.

Profiting from a long and varied dramatic experience acquired in the provincial cities of the empire as *choragus* (director of drama) and professor of Rhetoric, he brought to the capital a sure sense for eloquence, subtlety of style, and a penchant for brilliant stage productions which quickly put the Order's secular and religious competitors in the shade. He was influenced to a considerable extent by Italian art and dramatic form, particularly by the theories of his Jesuit colleague Tesauro (Valentin 2: 883-84). This enthusiasm for contemporary Italian dramatic form encouraged him to develop a typically baroque dramatic genre which broke with previous rigid humanist categories in the schools and brought to the college stage of the Jesuits the more advanced techniques of opera and choral music drama.

Even a superficial analysis of Avancini's productions will lay bare the complex system of forces and tensions at work in his "dramatic poems," as he liked to label his dramas. He underwent a long struggle to strike a credible balance between the conflicting demands of style and content. The majority of Avancini's dramas fit more or less into the category of tragedy and generally have for their goal the restoration and sometimes ostentatious glorification of the religious and political values of the Tridentine Reform. Recurring themes are the conflict between the claims of authority and the needs of the individual; the tension between a divine plan and human free will; the opposition between the rights and privileges of rulers and their responsibility for the "*salus civium*" (Müller 1: 95-96).

Despite the troubles of his age, Avancini wrote in a decidedly optimistic vein. His remarkable optimism in human nature was based on a strong belief in the providence of God and the acceptance of divine intervention in the affairs of men, as well as the Biblical mission of the Christian to work for the good of society. A pragmatist by nature Avancini by preference selected certain moments of history where human ambition had produced a serious rift in the social fabric of the earthly Jerusalem.

His protagonist, whether ruler, saint, spouse, or patriot, often succumbs to the fatal defect of pride and falls prey to temporary loss of faith in which state he is brought to deny the existence of a divine providence. Often victims of unjust decisions, court intrigues, or family misunderstandings, his protagonists leave

behind them a wake of violence before passing through a period of ultimate purification in which they come to accept the necessity of a providential order at work in the affairs of men (Valentin 2: 895-97).

Unlike some of his Jesuit contemporaries, Avancini pays scant heed to the dramatic unities of Aristotle and has a disconcerting tendency to construct his plots on the natural flow of events. A kind of common denominator which runs through his works is the conviction that the ultimate source of the evil which provides the inspiration for contemporary human drama can be laid at the door of the "temples of power," his cryptic designation for the royal court. His severest criticism is reserved for the prince who, in defiance of a providential task to bring order into society, becomes a baroque mirror in reverse of violence, envy, intrigue, ambition, and assorted evils. Poison, daggers, and swords are an inevitable complement of the murderous arsenal (Valentin 2: 896-98).

Yet, somehow, despite his preoccupation with human evil, Avancini never abandons his optimistic belief in the inherent goodness of man. His protagonists are pilgrims doomed to fall from the outset. However, with faith in divine providence and responsible use of free will, they will eventually be able to establish a just and non-violent social order. The problem for Avancini, like that of so many of his Jesuit contemporaries, was how to combine the conflicting claims of good and evil into a credible tragic experience.

The highpoint of Avancini's dramatic repertoire is the genre labeled *ludi caesarei* (imperial plays). Basically the *ludi* were an austriacization of the earlier Bavarian *fêtes munichoises*. The Austrian branch of this type of dramatic revue had its own long and honorable past in the work of the "*Sodalitas danubiana*" of Grumpech, Chelidonium, and Celtis which reached from the days of Charles V and Maximilian (Valentin 2: 898).

Avancini did not create the *ludus caesareus* but he chose the genre and clearly developed it into a showcase of Jesuit dramatic art in the seventeenth century. What characterizes this genre in his dramatic repertoire is its almost total involvement with the royal house of Austria and the religious-political dimension which the *pietas austriaca* engendered. The imperial play almost by definition demanded the physical presence of the emperor or his representative as symbol and acclamation of a

society united in political and religious ideals.

In its technical aspects the *ludi* aspired to the same level of complexity as the contemporary court opera. Chorus, interludes, ballets, and ornate tableaux were typical of the genre. Only in Vienna and Graz was the Jesuit *choragus* in a position to find adequate resources in terms of costume, choreographic, scenic, and musical effects to produce a work of this type. Much of the music and choreography for the Avancini productions were the result of the close collaboration that existed between the Jesuits and the masters of the imperial opera and ballet (Valentin 2: 898-900).

The Munich *fêtes* and the Viennese *ludi caesarei* owed much of their popularity to a successful integration of stage and society. They were also, however, a concrete expression of a political and social thesis which the Jesuit Order had made its own in Tridentine Europe. Through the medium of dramatized symbols these plays presented an ideal social plan for an earthly Jerusalem and provided a basic political and religious program for the Reform in Bavaria and Austria. Jesuit dramatists of the epoch had reluctantly accepted the political reality of the baroque absolute state but they proceeded to baptize it in Tridentine waters.

The *fêtes munichoises* and the *ludi caesarei* viewed their stage world in the framework of a typically baroque social structure. The allegorical tableaux, the processions with ministers, counselors, corporations, guilds, and ecclesiastics were intended to be a symbolic illustration of what the dramatist believed a truly humane society and state should be. Behind the elaborate stage sets and bric-à-brac à l'italien was the concept of an ideal world where church and state met and coexisted peacefully in a framework of mutual respect. The "spectacle" was intended to be a public profession of faith and political purpose.

With its undeniable baroque penchant for grandeur, richness of decor, and mass scenes, in which actors often number in the hundreds, the Order's dramatists had brought theatre from the narrow confines of a pedestrian humanist stage to the open forum with the streets and boulevards of Residence or Hofburg serving as a panoramic background. Through the medium of processions (*Josephus, Constantinus Maximus, Hester, Franz Xaver, Michael*); court and banquet scenes (*Hester, Josephus, Curae Caesarum*); to triumphal civic arches (*Pietas Victrix, Michael, Theodosius Magnus*), the Jesuit stage was

transformed into a vital communal celebration which became a microcosm of contemporary baroque society.

Was it all a monster charade merely to impress their royal patrons? No one can deny the immense propaganda value of the "fête" or the "imperial" play. It must be admitted at the same time, however, that these plays were also credibly oriented to the interests of the contemporary community. Despite their structural and technical imperfections in terms of modern theatre they were a concrete expression of a dramatic philosophy which owed much of its vitality to the intimate relationship it forged between stage and society. It may seem an exaggeration to hail the Jesuit college theatre of the seventeenth century as "custodian of an esthetic tradition" or even as "exemplar of stately theatre for the world."<sup>13</sup> There can be no question, however, that Jesuit dramatic productions dominated the contemporary non-professional theatre for over two centuries until the suppression of the Order in 1773.

The question remains valid why a dramatic phenomenon hailed for duration, geographical extension, and popularity has been so long relegated to the back waters of critical interest with little more than a casual footnote to acknowledge its existence. A more fundamental question might be whether, given the emotional religious and political climate in which the Jesuit humanist theatre came of age, it will ever be possible to evaluate its productions as anything more than hopelessly engaged literature or the sterile byproduct of late humanist learning (Müller 1: 92-94).

When Goethe made his superficial comment on the technical merit of the Jesuit stage in Regensburg, he broke a silence of over a century.<sup>14</sup> Though the remark seems to have value today only in terms of his search for dramatic archetypes, it was at least an indication of awareness. Herder and Schlegel, despite some enthusiasm for the popular seventeenth-century Jesuit dramatist Jacob Balde, can find little more to praise in him than a poet whose patriotic effusions happen to coincide more or less with their own enthusiasm for an emergent national

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<sup>13</sup>W. Harring, *Andreas Gryphius und das Drama der Jesuiten*, diss. (Halle a.S.: Königsberg, 1907) 56.

<sup>14</sup>J. Goethe, "Italienische Reise" (3 Sept. 1781), *Hamburger Ausgabe* (Berlin: Herder, 1950) 11: 10-11.

literature.<sup>15</sup>

Friedrich Nicolai was the first literary scholar to offer what approached a critical evaluation but apparently gave up the effort because of a growing disenchantment with baroque drama in general, which he considered puerile and anachronistic.<sup>16</sup> His pointedly negative criticism of the Jesuit theatre for this reason may well be dismissed as emotional and inconsequential. For him it appears that any drama written by religious, merit apart, would seem to have fallen under the general ban which a subsequent and perhaps intellectually snobbish age chose to impose on its predecessors.

Valentin raises the more valid question whether German drama in the epoch between the end of humanism and the high baroque can ever be considered as any more than a relatively trackless desert (1: vii). He qualifies this opinion, however, with respect to the Catholic regions of Germany and Austria where he believes drama developed to a remarkable degree among the religious orders such as the Benedictines, Oratorians, Piarists, and Jesuits. Valentin's comment apart, a more basic difficulty for subsequent scholarship has to be the relative dearth of original manuscripts, especially in the case of the Jesuits where important handwritten collections were often permitted to gather dust in provincial archives.

Even after the valuable and scholarly compilations of Sommervogel modern scholarship continued to adhere to the view that the Jesuit theatre was not a development in its own right but a regrettable, if more or less necessary, prelude to the birth of a German national literature.<sup>17</sup> After the work of Bolte,<sup>18</sup> who was primarily interested in the archaeological features of the Jesuit stage, Willi

Flemming published significant research on the *mise-en-scène* of the Jesuit theatre.<sup>19</sup> Unrealistically, it seems, the German scholar attempted to force the Jesuit dramatic experience onto the Procrustean bed of his own preconceived categories.

Johannes Müller was one of the first to concentrate his research on individual dramatists and to evaluate their production from a literary standpoint. He makes a laudable attempt to situate the Jesuit theatre in a play of opposition between Renaissance-Baroque and Renaissance-Tridentine dramatic currents and courageously refuses to remand the entire troublesome category to the imprecise catchment area of "engaged" literature (Müller 1: 89-94). As a consequence of Müller's research it now seems valid to ascribe to the Jesuit theatre a history of its own. McCabe comes closest to an outright validation of the Jesuit dramatic phenomenon as a theatrical entity in its own right.<sup>20</sup>

In the framework of contemporary society and culture the dramatic activity of the Jesuit college often filled the void which existed between the humanist theatre of the late Renaissance and an emerging literary-dramatic school of the high baroque which brought Neo-Latin drama to the dawn of a national theatre. The Jesuits, by claiming as their own the themes of martyr and tyrant, noble victim and ruthless persecutor, constant virtue and human frailty in the face of personal crisis, provided a fertile source from which Gryphius, Hallmann, Birken, and Lohenstein drew more than passing inspiration (Harring 2-5). By their enthusiastic support for a revitalized Neo-Latin theatre, threatened alike by successive waves of Reform and Counter-Reform, the Jesuit schoolmen kept alive popular interest in dramatic elegance despite progressive deterioration in theme and content of the secular stage.

The preoccupation of Jesuit playwrights with didactic and Biblical themes differed little from contemporary humanist and baroque dramatic practice. In an age of profound religious-political tension contemporary literature was largely concerned with instruction, reflection,

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<sup>15</sup>J. Herder, "Kenotaphium des Dichters Jakob Balde," in *Sämtliche Werke*, hrsg. von Carl Redlich (Berlin: Fackelträger, 1881) 27: 3.

<sup>16</sup>F. Nicolai, *Beschreibung einer Reise durch Deutschland und die Schweiz in der Jahre 1781* (Berlin-Stettin: Bernhardt, 1784) 3: 563-65.

<sup>17</sup>C. Sommervogel, *Bibliothèque de la Compagnie de Jésus* (Bruxelles-Paris: Oldenbourg, 1890-1900).

<sup>18</sup>J. Bolte, "Jesuitenkomödien um 1600," *Zeitschrift der historischen Gesellschaft für die Provinz Posen* (1888) Nr 3: 231-50.

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<sup>19</sup>W. Flemming, *Geschichte des Jesuitentheaters in den Landen deutscher Zunge* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1965).

<sup>20</sup>W. McCabe, *An Introduction to the Jesuit Theatre*, ed. L. Oldani (St. Louis: Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1983) 67-68.

and the elaboration of a code of civic and moral virtue. "*Civium salus*" and "*bonum commune*" are as important to Avancini in 1654 (*Curae Caesarum*) as they were to his baroque contemporaries. The return of the Muses hailed so eloquently on the Jesuit stage of Lucerne in 1597 came perhaps a century late, but it was a heartening response to the lament of Ziegler over the state of the humanist theatre of an earlier period (Valentin 1: 11-12).

In a period when drama was becoming increasingly secularized the Jesuits succeeded in staging popular productions which were largely founded on the principles of Christian dogma and church authority within the framework of the Tridentine Reform. The sharp dichotomy between spiritual and secular values which emerged in seventeenth-century areas outside the influence of the Tridentine Reform was to a large extent bridged in Jesuit drama. The troublesome and puzzling opposition between an earthly and a heavenly Jerusalem which proved to be such a stumbling block for rationalist thinkers of the epoch was largely resolved by Jesuit authors who blended effective concern for personal salvation with affirmative Christian involvement in the welfare of their terrestrial Jerusalem.

An earlier dilemma which compelled contemporary Christian neo-stoic dramatists to choose between abandonment of a corrupt world or involvement in its fate was resolved by Jesuit authors in the framework of the Ignatian ascetic with its accent on inner conversion and positive social involvement. With varying degrees of talent or boldness the Order's dramatists continued to proclaim adherence to a viable social order which had as its principle and foundation a mutual respect for ruler, state, and church. The glorification of the person of the ruler in the *fêtes munichoises* or the *ludi caesarei*

only emphasized what the Order considered an important principle of unity at work in the type of Christian social order envisioned by such Jesuit political theorists as Bellarmine, Suarez, and Mariana (Valentin 2: 960-61).

True to its distinctive religious orientation the Jesuit college theatre never ceased to affirm its adherence to the medieval principle of the *memento mori*, but at the same time it situated its message in a balanced perspective of action and social responsibility. Not the least of its accomplishments in this respect was the successful fight that it waged for the legitimation of religion as an essential element of drama in a truly human society. This inflexible orientation was more than once destined to bring down on its head the charge of obscurantism in more enlightened times.

In the final analysis it may be the hitherto largely unexplored connection between Jesuit drama and the legacy of the *Spiritual Exercises* which may have significance for the scholar of today. There can be little doubt that the Ignatian ascetic profoundly influenced Jesuit dramatic production in its philosophy, selection of subject, and *mise-en-scène*. Research into these areas might well have the added advantage of avoiding the pitfalls of previous subjective interpretation and, quite possibly, provide a sorely needed stimulus toward a more positive evaluation of the contributions of the Jesuit college theatre to the pages of European literary history. □

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Kevin Hearle

EPISTLE

Music coming from an open window. Sitting in the courtyard—  
an abundance of windows, a square of blue, a tree—

the wind, the sunlight, and your fingers  
flashing like the scissors in my hair. On my bare shoulders

the hair falls, fragrant as leaves in pools. Linda,  
wherever you are, your name means *beautiful*;

someone should have been in love with you  
who cut our hair for a rose and a first-class stamp.

I'm sending this *general delivery/world* to tell you  
today I trimmed my beard

the water washing the short hairs off my arm  
was like the wind in sunshine

surprised, I saw my mouth open in the mirror:  
my tongue and two lips blossoming

into *Linda*.

## Andy Solomon

### SILVER SEASON

At first, I am confused. When you called, you said to meet you where we first made love. Now the woods are gone, only the fringe oaks are left. The elms are all cleared away. But they would be dead now, of course. It is best they have been cleared away before they died.

Once, squirrels played here. I see no squirrels now.

I arrive before you and wonder where you will appear. It is Sunday, a bit past noon, and all here is as quiet as it was twenty-five years ago on an October night. The spot where I first made love with you is now a high school.

Your car turns from California Road into the school lot. I have not seen you in twenty-three years, but I know it is your car. I used to tease you that you drove like a man. Your dimples would deepen and you would say, you bet. We were in your car that night, the green '62 Impala, and when you turned off California Road and eased into the woods you said it was time to be a woman—you were now eighteen. It was time, too, for me to be a man. But it was years before I understood that that night did not make me one.

It is a silver car now, and a Subaru, and your hair is short but still you wear bangs and have mischief and adventure in your grin. Your daughter has just finished college and left to have her life. And we are back in this village where we scraped our knees as small children and where you used to sing to me on summer nights. After twenty-three years I have driven five hundred miles in one night to meet you here.

You lock your car. You say nothing as you get in beside me and look over and up and I see slips of wrinkles beginning around your eyes. Your hair is still chestnut and your eyes look greener even than I remembered them. The little wrinkles strike me as beautiful, but it hurts that I was a country away, no part of your life, when they began. We have lost many seasons. Maybe all of them. Your smile yanks my stomach quickly throughout my body and I find I cannot talk although I know I can grin, and cannot stop.

I have a special place, I say, a short ride from here. A place I never took you. My father took

me there one Sunday when I was six. White ducks swam in the stream and waded onshore and we fed them bread and I fell asleep with my head on his lap. As he drove me home, I thought I might never spend a happier day. I remember how you loved him. The three of us went to baseball games, then drove across the city to the all-night coffee shop and we felt like a family. You would not have wanted to see the way he died last year in Florida, I think, but I know you would have wanted to be there to hold his hand as it grew colder. I think soon I will tell you about it. I wish I had known where to find you, wish I had known that the man after me was gone and no others had followed him. I thought of that stream where the ducks are when my father died. And I thought of you. Now, at last, we can go there.

Still, you say nothing. But your smile remains, and that says enough. You touch my cheek. I love the softness of your fingers, softer now even than they used to be. I think I can love better now. While you were miles and years away I learned that we lose everything and must love it fiercely and swiftly before it is gone. I am not certain I can do that even now, but I know it is the only way. If we don't, we let the value slip out of our lives. I need to tell you I've learned that.

The Cross County Parkway has changed. It would be hard to love this winding road for the first time now, and I must landscape it with remembered birches and spruce. Why have they stripped the trees everywhere?

But the Bronx River Parkway has not changed. Some ducks, we find, are still there, prettier, less swaggering than they used to be, now far outnumbered by Canadian geese and mallards. And the twin willows are still there. I am sure they are the ones I lay under with my father, only they look smaller. I take your hand and lead you to them, feeling your hand fit as naturally into mine as if I'd held it every day of my life. I want to hold your head in my lap a while, then put mine in yours. We must earn our way back to that.

So, you say, no one ever asked you to marry

them. I thought you might never marry.

I could have asked them too, I say.

You answer, that was not your way.

You are right. It was not my way. Now it might be my way, only I do not love anyone and the season for children has passed.

We are not alone at the stream. A woman, maybe twenty-five, wearing torn jeans and a yellow blouse, plays with a little girl, also wearing yellow and blue, the colors of summer. On their blanket is a plastic bag filled with bread. I think the little girl will never forget this day, or if she forgets this exact day will never forget that there were such days.

On the other side of the water are four teenagers, two boys and two girls. One boy says something and the girls both slap him in play. The other boy looks away as if concerned about something that is not really there. The first boy seals the top of an open bottle of 7-Up with his hand and shakes it and sprays the girls' tee-shirts. I chuckle, almost sadly. Then you touch my hand, sitting beside me, and I look at you and feel it, brief but sharp in my stomach, the terror. I remember what I would have had to give to keep you then, and I wonder if, even now, having never given it to anyone, I could give it even to you. Yes. Yes, I think I could. It would cost more not to give it.

Tell me about the years, you ask.

I tell you, and am struck once more by their emptiness. Your leaving for Phoenix. My finishing Princeton, law school, and moving to Ohio to practice with a friend. I have helped many people get divorced, get or sadly lose their children, draw up their wills. Soon, what felt like a huge Shaker Heights mortgage felt manageable, and eventually small. I have done some good for many people. I have been to every continent but Antarctica, sometimes not alone. Now that you are here again, though, I feel I have been alone for twenty-three years.

Was he good to you, I ask.

He was a good man, you say, a good father. He is still a good father. He is probably still a good man too, you suspect, but now he is a good man with a twenty-four year old lover. She was his assistant, even a guest in your home, and when he went to Dallas she went with him. Not in your place, you insist, as you no longer wanted it. You did not know that until he was gone. You had shared some good years and made a happy daughter and you got over your anger quickly. I loved him, you say, almost as much as I loved you.

I look at the girls in their wet tee-shirts and try to believe the sudden thrill I feel comes from that. At forty-three I cannot stop playing games completely, but now I play them mostly with myself. I am ripened some and think I could give you what you wanted if you still wanted it.

The mother in yellow gives bits of bread to the little girl. She shows the girl how to hold it out to the ducks. A duck takes bread from the mother. She speaks to her daughter, and the little girl holds out a piece of bread. Three ducks scoot toward her and quack demandingly. The little girl runs away. The mother runs after her and catches her and kneels on the ground and holds her. She leads her back to the ducks. Soon, the little girl does not seem afraid.

Once, I thought the white ducks almost magical. Now the variegated geese with their many lines and tones seem far more interesting.

We sit cross-legged, Indian-style. When I look at you, you are blurry. My eyes must be wet. It is windy today. After a moment, you clear.

Why did you leave me, I ask.

You left me, you say.

No, I stayed right here.

Just your body. The rest of you left me, you say. I always thought I'd be devastated if you left me. But you left, and I lived through it.

I'm glad you learned you could live without me, I say. But it does not feel true. I wish you had never learned that.

You pick up a dandelion and hold it at the side of my mouth, the side nearer you. I turn toward you and blow the dandelion bare.

You were too brave for me, I say. We would sit in the car in the woods after love and I would tell you things about me that I thought were true and you would go past my truth to deeper places in us both and you were never afraid of the monsters that sometimes lurked there. Wise, you said, was just another name for slicing through the layers of self-deceit. You made me see myself honestly many times, and I found too much pain in that. You knew that. You had the courage to look honestly. I shrank back. When I tell you this, you say you are glad I know it now. It is not too late.

I stretch my legs out. The afternoon sun brings light streaks to your hair. I cannot tell if they are gold or silver through the glint. Our closest friend from high school practices law three miles away. A full partner. Five years ago he said I would always be welcome to join him if I ever came home. The word "home" confuses me. Can such offers stand after five years? It is hard to



believe they would.

The prettiest thing I've seen in all my life was you in a black dress dancing with me on a New Year's Eve long ago, and I have been to all the continents except Antarctica.

I loved dancing with you that New Year's Eve, I say.

You smile. You say, I still like to dance. Do you?

I'm not sure, I answer. It's been years. We used to dance at the club where Mark played guitar. He said he always began to play better when we came in. But he always played well. The next year he went to Southeast Asia and his name is on the wall in Washington. Too few people know how he played guitar. I am glad we will never forget it.

When we'd leave Mark's club we would drive up the parkway just past us now. Your hair would blow about, splayed and floaty in the breeze. You wore black eyeliner beneath the thin white. We would get to the diner a little past midnight. You would order a grilled cheese and I two eggs with pancakes. And endless coffee for us both. Endless quarters for the jukebox. You would talk of the houses you would design. I wondered if we would live in one. You would stretch your slender legs under the table and put your feet on either side of me and I would take your shoes off and rub your feet and one night I pulled you onto the floor. You pretended to be angry. You said I had mangled your backside. I made up for it later, parked down your street where I rubbed it a long time until you said it was all better and you liked me again. And when the sun came up I took you home.

We could go to the diner when we leave the stream today. Somehow, though, I fear it might feel too sad.

I ask about your daughter. You show me her picture. I knew it would not be a graduation picture but one you had taken yourself. Her hair is black and her eyes brown, not your green, yet something in them echoes the eager pair I used to gaze at in a diner. Maria. You picked her name. I have never seen her but she could have been mine if I had been brave.

Have many boys loved her, I ask.

Many have wanted her, you say. A few may have loved her. No one has been willing to pay the full price. You are not at all unusual.

I sense, staring at her picture, that she would be worth any boy's full price. I know I would feel that if she were my daughter. A man in Dallas has been very lucky and I feel no anger in

my envy.

The mother and daughter and the teenagers are gone. Except for an elderly couple we are alone. She works crossword puzzles while he reads a newspaper. Every few moments she touches his leg. Sometimes he pats her hand.

Do you know when I knew for certain I was in love with you, I ask.

I always knew, you say.

Yes, but do you want to know when I first knew?

Yes.

One night, I say, I was lying on my bed listening to music. I think it was *Conversations with Myself*. The room was dark. You still loved me. We had been out all night the day before. I felt sexy and thought of you. I realized that when I felt sexy I always thought of you. I grabbed my notebook, and in the dark I wrote *You know you are in love when the woman you fantasize about is the same one you sleep with*. I meant to show it to you. I meant to do a lot of things.

Do you know when I first knew I was in love with you, you ask.

No. When?

The night we had the awful fight about Elaine. It is so silly to think about now. You said she looked better in blue than I did, she with her wavy blond hair. I wanted so much to always be beautiful to you, and that night was the only time I didn't think I was. I slammed the door in your face. I knew you wouldn't call that night. It was so late and my father was terribly fussy about calls. Then in the morning I found your note taped to my window. I knew you must have gotten cut on the rosebush, and when I saw you you had scratches all over your arms and even one on your cheek. When I saw them I knew I loved you. The scratches were still there when we made love the first time.

The elderly man puts down his newspaper and stretches and yawns. He stands up. The woman puts away her puzzles and rolls onto her hands and knees. She tries to stand but has difficulty. The man reaches down. She takes his hand and with his help stands easily. They walk to the edge of the water. Each walks along the edge, separating, always coming back together.

Do you want to know why I had to go away, you ask.

I am not sure if I want to. I say nothing. Words scare me now. No one's words could ever hurt me the way yours could. I seemed to always be doing something wrong and not knowing what

it was. I think I've come to know over the years that it was always the same thing, something to do with not risking enough, not entrusting it to you, being a coward. And it was my not really being with you, just asking you to be with me.

You look at me and I know I can hear about why you had to go. You are back now, at least for today. Tell me, I say.

It was the last night at the diner. I told you that I had heard there are two types of marriages: those where the wife quotes the husband and those where the husband quotes the wife. You said that sounded silly.

I don't remember, I say. But even as I say it the night is coming back to me.

You say, I remember very well. You said that made it sound like all love affairs had to be unequal, but certainly a man and a woman could respect each other equally.

Yes, that's true. I still think so, I say.

I think so too, you say. But I realized that you had never quoted me.

Yes. Yes, I did, I say.

No. You whistled. You said I was a good dancer. You said I had beautiful feet. You said I made you happy. But always, I quoted you. I loved you, but I couldn't stay anymore. Soon, there would have been nothing left of me. You'd have had none of me left to love, just a reflection of you.

But we made love that night. I remind you that we did.

I still loved you, you say. It seemed a sad and beautiful way to say good-bye.

I look at the elderly couple. They must be at least seventy. I wonder why I feel I am closer to death than they. Then I understand why.

I am filled with terror, I say. I could not have said that to anyone else I have ever known.

Yes, you say. I know.

It isn't the same terror. It is the other side of it, the price of not doing what used to terrify me. I feel a wave of exhaustion even thinking of it.

Yes, you say. I know. Being alone is new to me. Perhaps that's why I am not scared yet. Perhaps I will be. It is not new to you.

I don't know if it will scare you, I say. I think nothing can scare you.

Things can scare me, you say. I am not twenty years old anymore. Being alone does not scare me, though, at least not as much as being alone when another person is with you.

Was it like that at the end?

I suspect it always is, at the end, you say. It's over, no need to talk about it now.

Yes, there must be something else to talk about. There is everything else to talk about. Perhaps about our coming here. About dancing. How you feel about the houses you've built. Maria. About how to make fewer and less costly mistakes in the last half of life. I ask, where are you staying tonight?

With my mother, you say. I'll be with her for a week.

In a week, my partner would have to handle many of my wills and divorces. He could manage. I can stay here a week. Many weeks. I watch the elderly couple brush leaves from each other's clothes. Even that brings them close before they walk to their car. I think of them dancing next New Year's Eve. I wonder if they have a special diner or baseball team or coffee shop. No doubt, and many other special things. I say, I haven't seen your mother in a terribly long time. Is she well?

Pretty well, you say. She asked me to send her love.

Are you too old now to be pulled under a diner table, I want to ask, but I know that isn't the question I'd be asking. I'd be asking the ones behind it. Did we die, or did just part of our time together die? Will I ever be really alive? Which do I ask, then, the diner question or the ones behind it? I say nothing.

The ducks wade into the water.

I think of dying a lot now, I say.

Silly, you say. Think of living.

I've just started, I say. You're with me now.

I'm here for today.

Only today?

Today is the only day I want to think about, you answer.

I glance toward where the sun is setting and suspect it is time to leave the stream. We have been here all afternoon.

Only, where do we go?

I ask, it's getting late, may I take you to supper? Oh, but your mother? She must be expecting you.

You reach for a sandal. You run a hand through your hair and look at me and smile. Your smile makes organs inside me begin to tremble.

I gaze at you silently. I think of my living room, how big it is. My house is always neat. A woman cleans it three times a week. Almost no one comes to disturb the neatness. I go to ball games with my partner now, and sometimes his sons. I go to the gym three times a week and play tennis, and they know my name in several

restaurants. My life is neat and comfortable. I was never brave. After you left, my life took on more and more of a grey neatness. It could have been much worse. It could have been much better.

I stand. I reach down and take your hand and you stand easily beside me and I let your hand go. I don't want you to give any sign of any kind. No taking my hand. No kiss. No invitation. No move to leave. As I look at you I know you understand this.

Do you think the diner is still there, I say.

I imagine, but it is probably changed now, you say.

We could take a look, I say.

Yes.

And if it's not there, I'm sure there are new diners, I say. I take your hand. We walk between the willows toward the car. I will hold onto your hand as long as I have enough courage. Even now the fear is rising on both sides of me. I see a wave of neat grey. It is neutral, but it is still the wrong color for this season. I grip your hand a bit tighter.

You smile at me and your lips brush my cheek, as if you could hear the silent urging inside me: *I will not be afraid, I will not be afraid, I will be brave until I die.*□

## FEATURED ARTISTS

**Laureano Albán** was born in Costa Rica in 1942 and is currently Costa Rican ambassador to Israel.

**George Angel's** work appears in *Southwest Review*, *StoryQuarterly*, *Caliban*, and elsewhere.

**Ron De Maris** teaches English and Humanities at Miami-Dade Community College South.

**John DuVal** is director of the translation program at the University of Arkansas.

**Gastón Fernández-Torriente** is Professor of Spanish and Chairperson of the Latin American Studies Program at the University of Arkansas.

**Frederick H. Fornoff** is Professor of Spanish and Creative Writing at the University of Pittsburgh at Johnstown.

**Frantisek Halas** is distinguished from his contemporaries for the personal integrity of his tragic vision.

**Kevin Hearle** is the poetry editor of *Quarry West*.

**Hans Lipinsky-Gottersdorf** lives in Cologne, West Germany. He has authored over a dozen works of fiction.

**Don Mager** is Assistant Professor at Johnson C. Smith University. His translations have appeared in *Chicago Review*, *Practices of the Wind*, and elsewhere.

**Carlo Marcucci** studied painting with Nona Trythall and sculpture with Peter Rockwell. He has paintings in private collections in Europe and the United States.

**Kostas Myrsiades** is Professor of Comparative Literature and Chairperson of the Department of English at West Chester University. His publications include five books of translations of modern Greek poetry and folk drama and two books on Greek literature.

**Edward Nobles'** poem "Fortune" is the opening poem of *The Undressing*, a twenty poem sequence. His writings have appeared in *Boulevard*, *Crazyhorse*, and elsewhere.

**Sue Owen** won *The Journal Award* (Ohio State University Press) for her second book, *The Book of Winter* (1988).

**Blanca Elena Paz** was born in Santa Cruz, Bolivia, in 1953, and studied nursing in La Plata, Argentina. She is completing her first collection of short stories.

**Yannis Ritsos**, having begun painting, playing the piano, and writing poetry at the age of eight, is today one of Greece's most popular and prolific poets.

**Andy Solomon** is a frequent contributor to the *The New York Times*, *Atlantic*, and elsewhere.

**Katherine Soniat's** *Notes of Departure* won The Camden Poetry prize.

**David Vandenberg** received the American Translators Association's Grant-in-Aid for his work on Hans Lipinsky-Gottersdorf's collection of short stories *Just Before Christmas*.