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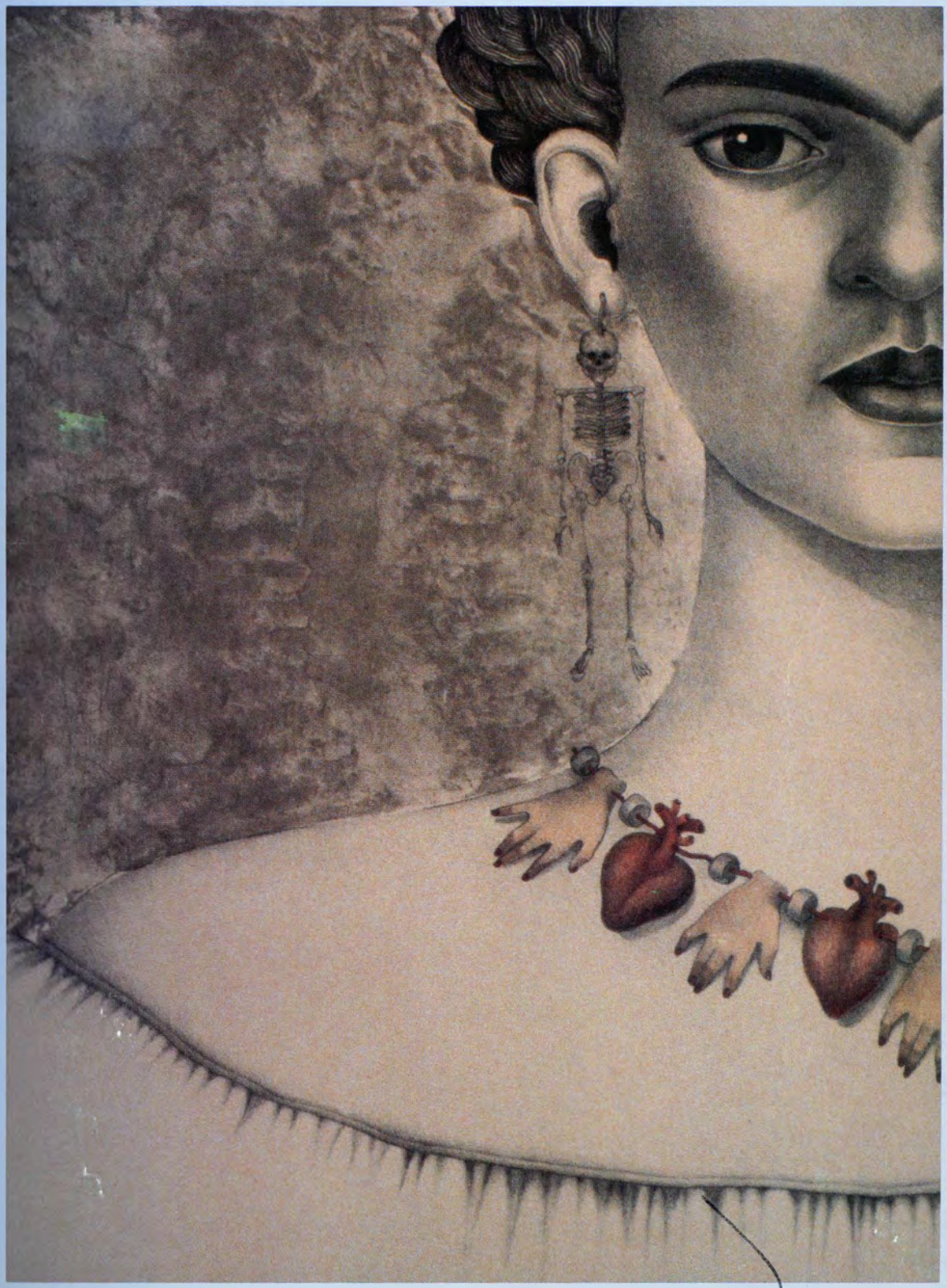

New Orleans Review

Spring 1989

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NEW ORLEANS REVIEW

SPRING 1989 VOLUME 16 NUMBER 1

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Wheeler Winston Dixon

THE EARLY FILM CRITICISM OF FRANÇOIS TRUFFAUT

Translations by Ruth Cassel Hoffman

Recent collections of articles from *Cahiers du Cinema*, one of the most important journals of cinema theory and practice ever published, do a great deal to shed light on the formative years of the *politique des auteurs*.[1] However, these two collections, ably edited by Jim Hillier, which cover the decades of the 1950s and 60s at *Cahiers*, are curious in that they seemingly seek to substantiate the Sarrisinian Directorial Pantheon formulated by that critic in the Spring of 1963.[2] All the selections chosen by Hillier for inclusion in this volume deal with films that have become, through the years, "recognized classics" of the cinema. What Hillier omits is any criticism which deviates from the now-established canon. But there are other selections, previously untranslated, which demonstrate that several of the principal *Cahiers* critics, including François Truffaut, were interested in a far greater variety of filmic expression than is generally believed.[3] *Cahiers* editor André Bazin in fact encouraged his reviewers to see all kinds of films, and his editorial policy allowed Truffaut the greatest possible latitude.

Cahiers has been translated only fitfully into English; for a short time, *Cahiers du Cinema in English* was published, but it never replicated the success of the French original. Thus, Truffaut's writings have only been sporadically translated into English, and while his seminal "Une Certaine Tendance du cinema français,"[4] as well as a condensed interview with Jean Renoir (conducted with the assistance and collaboration of Jacques Rivette),[5] a short piece on the film *Dr. Cyclops*,[6] a review of Lang's *The Big Heat*,[7] and other occasional pieces have been made available to the English-speaking public, a large number of untranslated articles remain.

One cannot help but think that this is extremely convenient for those who might wish us to ignore Truffaut's "deviant" writings. Perhaps a few of his resurrected thoughts might clash uncomfortably with what has come to be the accepted view of *Cahiers*' real critical position in the journal's early years. In Hillier's two volumes,

[1]Jim Hillier, ed., *Cahiers du Cinema: The 1950s; Neo-Realism, Hollywood, New Wave* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 1985); and *Cahiers du Cinema: The 1960s; New Wave, New Cinema, Reevaluating Hollywood* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 1986).

[2]Andrew Sarris published a first draft of his book, *The American Cinema*, in *Film Culture* 28 (Spring 1963). Sarris subsequently revised his text, and it appeared in 1968 as *The American Cinema: Directors and Directions (1929-1968)* (New York: E.P. Dutton and Co., Inc., 1968). In 1986, Sarris brought out a revised edition of the work.

[3]Jean-Luc Godard, often writing as Hans Lucas, also wrote frequently and persuasively for *Cahiers du Cinema* on American films. Much of his writing has been translated in *Godard on Godard: Critical Writings by Jean-Luc Godard*, Cinema Two Series, eds. Jean Narboni and Tom Milne, introd. Richard Roud (London: Secker and Warburg; New York: Viking, 1972), originally published as *Jean Luc-Godard par Jean-Luc Godard* (Paris: Editions Pierre Belfond, 1968). However, a good deal of Godard's work on the American "B" film has yet to be translated into English. Future scholarly work on Godard's criticism might profitably examine these writings.

[4]François Truffaut, "Une Certaine Tendance du cinema français," *Cahiers du Cinema* 6.31 (Jan. 1954): 15-29; translated as "A Certain Tendency of the French Cinema," *Cahiers du Cinema in English* 1 (Jan. 1966): 31-41; also translated in Bill Nichols, ed., *Movies and Methods* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1976) 224-37.

[5]François Truffaut and Jacques Rivette, "Entretien avec Jean Renoir," *Cahiers du Cinema* 5.34 (Apr. 1954): 3-22; translated as *Renoir in America*, in *Sight and Sound*, New Quarterly Series 24.1 (July-Sept. 1954): 12-17.

[6]François Truffaut, "Notes sur d'autres films: Dr. Cyclops," *Cahiers du Cinema* 5.25 (July 1953): 58; translated as "Dr. Cyclops," in W. Johnson, ed., *Focus on the Science Fiction Film* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1972) 48-49.

[7]François Truffaut, "Aimer Fritz Lang," *Cahiers du Cinema* 6.31 (Jan. 1954): 52-54; translated as *Loving Fritz Lang*, in Leo Braudy and Morris Dickstein, *Great Film Directors* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1978) 607-10. The translation in the Braudy/Dickstein volume is by Sallie Iannotti.

only a few pieces by Truffaut are favored with translation. These articles are on more "mainstream" films, such as Nicholas Ray's much canonized *Johnny Guitar*, or Jacques Becker's *Touchez pas au grisbi*. The selections (by other writers) in the two *Cahiers* anthologies discuss films such as *The 400 Blows*, *The Lusty Men*, *Rebel Without a Cause*, *Hot Blood*, *Bitter Victory*, *Beyond a Reasonable Doubt*, *Rear Window*, *Angel Face*: "A" films all. This revisionist strategy leaves many questions unanswered.

What about the fact that Godard dedicated his first film as director, *Breathless* (1959), to Monogram Pictures, that archetypal "B" studio?[8] How did Truffaut (who, after all, wrote the brief scenario for *Breathless*) feel about the potential worth and value of the "B" film? How did Truffaut approach a critical appraisal of the "B" film, or even the "A" melodrama, as he did in his piece on Henry Hathaway's *Niagara*, which will be discussed later in this article? How much did he reveal of *himself* in these hitherto unavailable writings? Can one see in this early work some of the concerns which were mirrored in his later work as a director? Why was he attracted to the "B" film, the *genre* film, the serial, the crime film, and films of sexual obsession (certainly evident in Truffaut's lifelong love-affair with the films, and themes, of Alfred Hitchcock)? It seems to me that all of these questions may be profitably explored. However, the corpus of Truffaut criticism now available attacks these queries only tangentially, while, as will be seen in this article, Truffaut himself confronts his obsessions (theoretical, social and sexual) head-on.

The fact is that Truffaut wrote extensively about "B" films, and, like his mentor Jean Renoir, he often prized the "B"s above the "A"s. In an interview Truffaut conducted with Jacques Rivette in the April 1954 *Cahiers du Cinema*, Renoir was quite emphatic on this particular point. Speaking of the production of his film *Woman on the Beach* (RKO, 1947), Renoir spoke of the American "B" producer Val Lewton, who produced an extraordinary series of gothic thrillers during the 40s, and who served as Renoir's producer during the pre-production of *Woman on the Beach*.

> I'll say a few words about Val Lewton, because he was an extremely interesting person; unfortunately he died, it's already been a few years. He was one of the first, maybe the first, who had the idea to make films that weren't expensive, with B-picture budgets, but with certain ambitions, with quality screenplays, telling more refined stories than usual. Don't go thinking that I despise B-pictures; in general I like them better than big pretentious psychological films—they're much more fun. When I happen to go to the movies in America, I go see B-pictures. First of all, they are an expression of the great technical quality of Hollywood. Because, to make a good western in a week, the way they do at Monogram, starting Monday and finishing Saturday, believe me, that requires extraordinary technical ability; and police stories are done with the same speed. *I also think that B-pictures are often better than important films because they are made so fast that the filmmaker obviously has total freedom; they don't have time to watch over him.*[9]

At this point in his career, Truffaut was only a critic and writer, some five years away from the creation of his first feature, *The 400 Blows* (1959). However, he certainly agreed with Renoir's thesis, and in the following selections from Truffaut's early critical writings, one can easily see that the American *genre* film, in particular the American crime and action thriller, had a great influence on Truffaut's later work as a film director.

In researching this article, I was immeasurably aided by Eugene P. Walz's excellent *François Truffaut: A Guide to Reference and Resources*, which, for the first time, offers an extensive bibliography of Truffaut's writings not only in *Cahiers du Cinema*, but in the now-defunct journal *Arts*, and other small but influential critical magazines which flourished in France in the early 1950s.[10] Using this resource as a guide, I located the texts for a number of critical articles, which have not, until this time, been available in English. These texts appear here for the first time in translation since their original publication in French in the early 1950s. I am grateful to *Editions de l'Etoile* for permission to translate the original texts of those pieces which originally appeared in *Cahiers du*

[8]As noted in Wheeler W. Dixon, "Cinema History and the 'B' Tradition," *New Orleans Review* 14.2 (Summer 1987): 65-71.

[9]Truffaut and Rivette, "Entretien avec Jean Renoir," trans. Ruth Cassel-Hoffman; emphasis mine.

[10]Eugene P. Walz, *François Truffaut: A Guide to References and Resources* (Boston: G.K. Hall and Co., 1982).

Cinema. For those additional articles which appeared in other journals, I thank the respective copyright owners for their assistance in making these works available to the English-speaking public.

As these writings make clear, Truffaut was extremely egalitarian in his appreciation of American filmmaking. If anything, he sided more with those artists who worked on the fringes of the cinema, than directors who had the double-edged "advantages" of major studio backing and/or distribution. Not that Truffaut was uncritical of the *genre* film. In the collection of his early film criticism (*The Films of My Life*) which Truffaut compiled in 1975, Truffaut includes a short paragraph on William Beaudine's *The Feathered Serpent* (Monogram, 1948).[11] This brief, jocular piece effectively outlines the defects of the film: the inadequacy of Roland Winters in the principal role (detective Charlie Chan), and William Beaudine's indifferent direction.[12] Even in this short notice one sees that Truffaut is well acquainted with the other films in the *Chan* series. He is also obviously aware of the work of director Norman Foster, who directed some earlier *Chan* films which Truffaut felt superior to Beaudine's efforts.[13] What follows is our translation of the piece, which first appeared in *Cahiers* under the title given the French release of the film, *Charlie Chan in Mexico*.

Charlie Chan in Mexico, American film by William Beaudine

Open letter to Mr. Chan, Chinese private detective, Beverly Hills, California.

Mr. Chan, please to open investigation with honorable Number 1 Son and honorable Number 2 Son to find out why Charlie Chan series always worse. Warner Oland much talented, Sidney Toler little talent, Roland Winters no talent at all. Norman Foster honorable director, William Beaudine not honorable—always botched-up work. Is written on Jade tablet, "Craziness sister of genius," yet each day Charlie Chan series less crazy than before. Quickly send explanation. Find payment in Chinese dollars. May Confucius be with you.[14]

Certainly this Beaudine film deserves little more than a cursory dismissal. Yet, even when considering a director so obviously mired in the twilight world of the small American "program-picture" studios (Monogram, PRC and other small companies), Truffaut is capable of treating each Beaudine film as an individual entity, rather than dismissing, as most critics have (and with some justification, it must be said), Beaudine's work in its entirety. In his review of Beaudine's *Tuna Clipper* (Monogram, 1949) (released as *The Fatal Bet* in France), Truffaut praises Beaudine's *mise en scène* as "completely creditable," and singles out the actress Elena Verdugo as one of the film's principal attractions.

The Fatal Bet, by R. L., American film by William Beaudine

Here is a little film from "Monogram," that modest company that said "no" to the crisis and decided to double the number of its productions.[15] A scenario whose charm lies in its modesty and honesty: a captivating tuna-fishing expedition. William Beaudine's *mise en scène* is completely creditable, as we would have liked it to be for the same director's *Charlie Chan*. We are drawn by the one-and-only female actor with the promising bodice, not generous, nor willing, I'll say it, that bodice: still well-behaved, friendly also and sort of hospitable, promised to the most deserving one, the nicest one. Let us recall together the name of this delicate personage: Helena [sic] Verdugo.[16]

[11]François Truffaut, *The Films in My Life*, trans. Leonard Mayhew (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1978; London: Allen Lane, 1980), originally published as *Les Films de ma vie* (Paris: Flammarion, 1975). It should be noted here that this collection lacks precise attribution on the works it includes. Generally, the year in which the work originally appeared is given, but never the journal, issue number, page number, or any other data to assist the researcher. This makes Walz's book all the more indispensable.

[12]See Wheeler Winston Dixon, *The B Directors: A Biographical Directory* (Metuchen, N.J. and London: Scarecrow Press, 1985) 39-45, for an overview of Beaudine's long career.

[13]See Dixon, *The B Directors* 182-84, for more information on Foster's work.

[14]François Truffaut, "Notes sur d'autres films," *Cahiers du Cinema* 5.26 (Aug./Sept. 1953): 59.

[15]Truffaut here refers to the cutback in Hollywood production in the early 1950s due to the inroads of the early days of television.

[16]François Truffaut, "Notes sur d'autres films," *Cahiers du Cinema* 5.29 (Dec. 1953): 58.

Several things here are immediately apparent. First, the article is signed not by Truffaut, but rather a mysterious "R.L." These initials stand for Robert Lachenay, Truffaut's best friend during his high school years, with whom he often played hookey from school. Later, Lachenay would work as an assistant on Truffaut's first short film, *Les Mistons* (1958), and his name would pop up, assigned to various characters, in several later films by the director.[17] While we cannot be certain as to the reason for this pseudonym, there are probably two factors which dictated its use. First, Truffaut was remarkably prolific as a critic: Walz lists more than five hundred articles in his complete bibliography, exclusive of interviews.[18] As one of the more prominent contributors to *Cahiers*, perhaps Truffaut (or editor Bazin) felt that he should be a little less conspicuous.

Secondly, many of Truffaut's articles are polemical, or at least highly idiosyncratic. This brief review is certainly proof of Truffaut's highly personal style, one which seems as interested in the details of Ms. Verdugo's "bodice" as it is in Beaudine's *mise en scène*. Further, there is no mention of the nominal star of the film, Roddy McDowall, nor any other of the cast members. In short, while Truffaut obviously is taken by the film (which was certainly a "B" film: it was shot in a mere twelve days), his reasons for favoring the film seem nearly evanescent.[19] One cannot help remarking that, as a writer for *Cahiers*, Truffaut was being given an enormous amount of freedom in his work. Bazin's editorship of these pieces seems lenient in the extreme. Nevertheless, it is clear that Truffaut applies the *auteur* theory here as equally as he applies it to all the other films he considers in his reviews. Beaudine is seen as the *author* of the film. Though smitten with the "hospitable" bodice of Ms. Verdugo (and, by implication, tagging her for "bigger things"), Truffaut sees *Tuna Clipper* principally as a work by Beaudine, which is worthy of a slight, but real, consideration. It is interesting to note that this brief commentary on *Tuna Clipper* is the only non-trade review the film received, and that once again, *Cahiers* emerges as a conscientious, almost fanatical critical journal in its desire to cover every film it possibly can.[20]

The last consideration here, it seems to me, is Truffaut's attitude towards women, which might most charitably be called "pre-feminist." A mitigating factor in the obvious sexism displayed in this piece might be Truffaut's forthrightness in declaring his fascination with Elena Verdugo's chest.[21] Nevertheless, this insistence on viewing the female body as an object, a locus of male desire, can become quite disconcerting in other of his critical writings. Nowhere is this tendency more pronounced than in Truffaut's long, elegiac celebration of Marilyn Monroe's anatomy as displayed in Henry Hathaway's steamy melodrama, *Niagara*. In this piece, Truffaut abandons a consideration of the film almost entirely to concentrate on the details on Marilyn's wardrobe, her legs and her undergarments. What emerges from the following paragraphs is a fetishistic obsession with the details of constructed sexuality. Truffaut's style, at times willfully lacking in conventional syntax (as seen in the piece on *Tuna Clipper*), here becomes a succession of stuttering pronouncements. It is as if Truffaut's sexual frustrations overwhelm his critical sensibilities to the point where one wonders, with justification, whether or not this "review" should properly be considered film criticism, or inspired automatic writing.

Niagara's Underpinnings, by Robert Lachenay

"High heels were fighting with high skirts
So that depending on the site and the wind
Sometimes ankles shone, too often
Intercepted—and we liked this fool's game."
—Paul Verlaine

The essential thing is not Niagara, nor Hathaway, nor yet the scenario, nor even the admirable Technicolor, as one might suspect. Let's not play for nothing this most useful of games. Once we have blamed the producer for his role in the scenario, admitted that the *mise en scène* is short on ideas, but "knock-knock"—that is, each blow meets its mark, but the blows are predictable; invention plays no part in it—

[17]See Walz 2.

[18]See 153-247.

[19]*Motion Picture Production Encyclopedia, 1950 Edition (1945-49)*, ed. Audrey Kearns (Hollywood: The Hollywood Reporter Press, 1950) 490.

[20]Other than Truffaut's review, the most perceptive analysis of the film appears in, of all places, *The Hollywood Reporter* 10 Mar. 1949.

[21]I am indebted to Gwendolyn Foster-Dixon for this insight.

The image of constructed sexuality:
Marilyn Monroe in Henry Hathaway's Niagara *(1953)*

let's approach "*her*," from the front or from the back, or even better in profile.

A prisoner in a too-narrow skirt, one knee escapes and moves forward, provocatively; lips that one feels were reddened but a moment ago, half open as if to promise heaven, already called to witness by the shoulder-shrug of two breasts whose entire mystery has been unveiled by the reprinting of the famous calendar.

No doubt here: Marilyn is definitely the girl she is said to be: plastically irreproachable and more, from her toes—on which the morning dew, reddened by the blood of her victims, reposes—to the very tip of her golden hair, displayed prominently enough to make you die.

It would be good if one day soon a conference on Erotomania were held in Paris, in order to reach an agreement about eroticism in the cinema. I would probably surprise Cecil Saint-Laurent—who recently, in *Cinemonde*, compared (to his own advantage) the adaptations of *A Whim of Dear Caroline* and of the *Diary of a Country Priest*—if I declared that there is more eroticism (to my way of thinking) in the three minutes of the *Ladies of the Bois de Boulogne* when Elisa Labourdette, all dressed up, seated in a chair, raises her bare legs one after the other in order to better slip over them those silky pre-nylon stockings, and her garment is then covered over with the ingenious raincoat—more eroticism, I say, than in all of *Caroline*, beloved, capricious, and dry as a desert.

What is more dangerous than the association of ideas? When Martine Carol—some do not hesitate to call her the French Marilyn—takes a milk bath, the milk overflows and I think of butter, good butter of course, then of the word "cheese," which becomes a catastrophe. . . . But there is no cheap plastic flesh on Marilyn, pink, she is beautiful and here and real, and censorship which has long been known to arouse talent—even genius—gives us those beautiful pictures where, naked beneath the sheets, Marilyn plays with her legs in a skillful and promising way. What is round is fun; what is angular is less so. Marilyn is certainly not a pimp's girl. Comedy is soft and smoky, but tragedy is sharp-edged.

We agree willingly that she is not made to be a vamp, nor a *femme fatale*, any more than Maria Casares is made to play the characters of Paulette Dobost. This is the main error of Marilyn's bosses. There are others. When they ask Marilyn, "What do you put on when you go to bed, Miss Monroe?" and she answers, "Just my alarm for nine o'clock," I agree. To heck with these pajamas worn by girls whose purity I don't believe in, which just annoy me. But I get very angry about the publicity on the absence of underwear, not about the publicity, but the absence of underwear.

So, beneath those skimpy skirts—which save the supposed reverse shots from a likewise supposed immorality, since slipping even the shadow of a hand would be absolutely impossible—well, beneath those skimpy skirts, those bosoms heaving (with joy), there is said to be nothing, no underwear. But what is this Sunday eroticism that is ignorant of the subtle play by which the trained eye learns the appropriate angles to reveal the fabric, the color of the bra, and thereby the life itself of that bosom? A face may pretend, modesty be false, virtue simulated, the bra doesn't lie. Sharp angles, sharply caught when an arm is raised to arrange a curl. Drawings on the diagonal, panty edges revealed by the walk: their humbleness or their pride are thus known by all. Because of a leg crossing or uncrossing, we are delighted by the pretty lace on a slip. And the complicated patchups, the idyllic intertwinings, the mysterious bonds that link all these little patterns of silk—what are they? Stupidly revealed by the hateful transparent blouse, as ridiculous as a man wearing sock garters, we would rather guess at them, as if by chance, mysteries long observed—knowledge acquired in the long run being the best reward.

We are a long way from Marilyn Monroe's hips, farther yet from Niagara Falls,[1a] but luckily *Niagara* was not made from outtakes. What is important here [is]: "Please, Marilyn

[1a] Some colleagues—completely competent ones—assure me that I know nothing about film criticism and that I am cheating the reader out of the "review" that he has a right to expect. Therefore I will call attention to a completely new use of Technicolor, the weakness of the scenario, the technical competency of Hathaway, the use of numerous transparencies, but not too many, and the acting, most notably Jeanne Peters, the shorts she wears under her skirt at the end of the film—let's stop here.

put on some underwear."

This review is illustrated by a still from *Niagara*, which Truffaut has captioned: "Jeanne Peters (left) and Marilyn Monroe are not rivals in Henry Hathaway's *Niagara*, but they incarnate two completely different forms of feminine seduction. The discreet, distinguished charm of the former is the opposite of the loud, tacky "sex-appeal" of the second. Something for everyone's taste. . . .[22]

Whatever one might think of the foregoing, the quote from Verlaine which precedes Truffaut's commentary is certainly appropriate. Verlaine, the *maudit*, was one of the early apostles of artificially induced "ecstasy," whether through sex, drink, drugs, or the "fool's game" this framing quote describes. It is a game which Truffaut himself obviously indulged in. One thinks immediately of *The Man Who Loved Women*, Truffaut's dark 1977 film, in which Charles Denner obsessively chases every woman he meets, until he meets his death accidentally while chasing an enigmatic young woman through midtown traffic. Certainly this is a "fool's game," which in *The Man Who Loved Women* results in a fool's death. It is a death without meaning or resonance, a cap to life filled only with momentary pleasures, which collapses under the reality of shared intimacy. What Truffaut here is "celebrating" is not Marilyn, nor her imagistic construct, but rather his own sexual voraciousness, which seems deeply rooted in childhood fears and fantasies. In her perceptive essay on Edgar Ulmer's "B" film *Detour*, Tania Modleski quotes Melanie Klein's *The Emotional Life of the Infant* to telling effect, in her discussion of *Detour*'s sexual dialectic:

> In *Detour* the heroine's early abandonment of the hero may be seen to correspond to the child's unwelcome discovery that his mother has a life independent of his own. Psychoanalysis documents the impotent rage engendered in the child by this knowledge. Melanie Klein, who extensively studied the psychoanalysis of small children, tells us that the frustration experienced by the child at this stage gives rise to the paranoid position in which the child, unable to cope with his or her ambivalent feelings, projects them onto the mother. As a result, she is split into two, and from the child's point of view there develops an antithesis between the "good breast" and the "bad breast." The frustrating (bad) object is felt to be a terrifying persecutor, the good breast tends to turn into the "ideal" breast which should fulfill the greed, desire for unlimited, immediate and everlasting gratification.[23]

These same comments might be profitably applied to both the *Tuna Clipper* review and the article on *Niagara*. It seems that Truffaut has not progressed beyond the infantile stage of "unlimited, immediate, and everlasting gratification," and while he is aware that his desire is impossible, he has yet to come to terms with this fact. Instead, he rattles the bars of his self-imposed sexual prison, reducing Monroe to a series of attitudes and poses, and denying utterly her cinematic, or real, humanity. While it may be further argued that Monroe was a willing participant in her own objectification (and it seems that this must be true to some degree), nevertheless by playing into this artificially composed web of "attractions," Truffaut has consigned himself to the fool's game, and does not seem likely to rise above it. Tangentially, while *Niagara* is indisputably an "A" film in budget, I would argue that it is "B" in spirit, as well as in execution. Marilyn's performance in the film, ineluctably mediated by the interplay of light and shadow which Hathaway clearly delights in, is really a "rehearsal." Discovering that Monroe tended to become mechanically repetitious and artificial doing multiple "takes" of the same scene, Hathaway began filming the camera rehearsals for each scene without Monroe's knowledge, and then doing one or two takes "for real" simply to cover up his deception.[24] This lends a documentary air to the film, while the narrative strains against any attempt at verisimilitude with a plot which is simultaneously outrageous and conventional. What has attracted Truffaut to this film, it is obvious, is not Hathaway's skill as a designer of images, but the image he constructs of Monroe. It is an image that both Hathaway and Truffaut conspire to create, working (within the confines of Truffaut's article) as unconscious collaborators. It is perhaps significant that Truffaut again

[22]François Truffaut, "Niagara's Underpinnings," *Cahiers du Cinema* 5.28 (Nov. 1953): 60-61.

[23]Tania Modleski, "Film Theory's Detour," *Screen* 23.4 (Nov./Dec. 1982): 76. The quote from Melanie Klein is taken from "The Emotional Life of the Infant," *Envy and Gratitude and Other Works 1946-1963* (London: The Hogarth Press and The Institute of Psycho-Analysis, 1975) 64.

[24]See Dixon, *The B Directors* 235.

assigned this "review" to the pseudonymous Lachenay.

In his review of *Sudden Fear*, Truffaut indulges in the same discursive style he brings to his observations on *Niagara*. While he skirts around the film itself, Truffaut here is more interested in explicating his critical platform (as he did in "Une Certaine Tendance du cinema français") than in any obsessional iconic reveries. In his checklist of Truffaut's works, Eugene Walz notes: "Ostensibly a review of *Sudden Fear* by David Miller, this is more like a personal manifesto in which almost all of Truffaut's critical concerns are laid out."[25]

Extremes Meet (Me), by François Truffaut

SUDDEN FEAR, American film by David Miller. *Screenplay*: Fred Benson, adapted from the novel by Edha Sherry. *Photography*: Charles Lang, Jr. *Music*: Elmer Bernstein. *Set Design*: Edward G. Boyle. *Cast*: Joan Crawford, Gloria Grahame, Jack Palance, Bruce Bennett, Virginia Huston. *Production*: RKO, 1952.

Sometimes they make films in the streets of Paris. A few extras [are there], more gapers, but no stars.

Concerned that you not be mistaken for one of the Boetians [people from the rue de la Boetie] who are hoping for the arrival of Suzy Carrier or Philippe Lemaire, you spot an assistant. You explain to him that you are not who he thinks you are. You directed a public debate at the Cine-Club de Chamalieres in Puy-de-Dome on *pure* cinema before at least eighty people, there is nothing you don't know about the theme of failure in John Huston, or about the misogyny of American cinema.

Supposing this first or second assistant hears you out, you ask him about the ritual question: what are you filming? To which he replies—what *could* he reply? —"We're filming a linking shot."

For that's French cinema: three hundred linking shots to end, one hundred ten times a year.

If Aurenche and Bost were adapting *Journey to the End of the Night*, they would cut sentences, even words: what would remain? A few thousand suspension points; that is, rare angles, unusual lighting, cleverly centered. The notion of a shot in France has become concern for clothing, which means following fashion. Everything happens to the right and to the left, *off* the screen.

This preamble, in order to introduce a film which is completely different. An American film. David Miller is the director of *Sudden Fear*. He made *Treasure Hunt* and *The Woman from Nowhere*. Before that he assisted in the series *Why We Fight*.

While respectable, nothing in his recent career led us to suspect that David Miller would give us the most brilliant "Hitchcock style" known in France.

Outside of two very short but fairly unpleasing sequences (a dream and a planning sequence in pictures), there is not a shot in this film that isn't necessary to its dramatic progression. Not a shot, either, that isn't fascinating, and doesn't make us think it is a masterpiece of filmmaking.

If the audience laughs when it isn't suitable to do so, I take that as a sign of daring, of finish. The public has lost the habit of intensity. Twenty years of adaptations which are guilty of excessive timidity have gotten the public accustomed to golden insignificance. Filming Balzac has become impossible. Put into pictures, Grandet's deathbed agony reaching for the crucifix would cause gales of laughter in the same people who swoon with admiration when a legless cripple hurtles down a street at fifty km an hour.

The "in" public, the public of the Cine-Clubs, is hardly any different. Although they may allow *Ladies of the Bois de Boulogne* (no doubt because of Diderot and Cocteau), they are ready to burst out laughing at all of Abel Gance's films. What Cine-Club has shown Nicholas Ray's *They Live by Night* or Robert Wise's *Born to Kill*—the most "Bressonian" of the American films?

As for the films, films of psychological anguish, laughter is a form of revenge of the spectator on the auteur of the story, which he is ashamed to have believed in. Yes, twenty years of fake great subjects, twenty years of *Adorable Creatures*, *Return to Life*, *Don Camillo*, and others like *Minute of Truth* have created this blasé public, whose sensibilities and judgment alike are alienated by the base and despicable "fear of being duped," denounced by Radiguet.

No doubt it is this attitude of the public

[25]See 163.

that has made Hitchcock pretend not to believe in the subjects he is dealing with by introducing into his films that element of humor—English, so they say—that is useless in my opinion, and which Hitchcock's detractors claim is the "tithe" through which the auteur of *Strangers on a Train* will be able to claim a right to the purgatory of bad filmmakers of good will.

Red Skelton.

Then Gloria Grahame became Mrs. Nicholas Ray and made *The Lusty Men*, with Humphrey Bogart as co-star, under the direction of Nicholas Ray himself.

Gloria is no longer Mrs. Ray, as far as we know, and is filming in Germany under the direction of Kazan. We will see her again even sooner in Cecil B. DeMille's *Greatest*

Jack Palance and Joan Crawford in a deliciously atmospheric scene from David Miller's Sudden Fear *(1952)*

A weekly journal that no one is obliged to take seriously affirms that Joan Crawford herself financed *Sudden Fear* with half of her personal fortune: half a million dollars. No matter.

The casting: it is permissible to have forgotten *Crossfire*, [but] not a young blond woman who was better than an intelligent extra: as a prostitute, she danced in a courtyard. Even professional critics noticed the dancer; it was Gloria Grahame, whom we saw again in *The Movie Ace* playing opposite

Show on Earth.

It seems that of all the American stars Gloria Grahame is the only one who is also a person. She keeps from one film to the next certain physical tics that are so many *acting inventions* and which can only be vainly expected from French actresses. Let's be serious (we are required to, since a production hangs in the cinematographic balance); Edwige Feuillere, Madeleine Robinson, Danielle Delorme, Michele Morgan, Dany Robin opposite the

[production] that proposes among a hundred others Lauren Bacall, Joan Bennet, Susan Hayward, Jennifer Jones, Gloria Grahame? It took all the genius of Renoir, Bresson, Leenhardt, Cocteau to make Mila Parely, Maria Casares, Renee Devillers, Edwige Feuillere appear to have any [genius]. From one film to the next, on the other hand, Gene Tierney, Joan Bennet, Susan Hayward equal themselves. That and the bill for American cinema, often perfect right down to "Series Z" films, upset the hierarchy which could not be the same in our country where the only things that count are ambitious screenplays and the producer's quote. In reality there are no directors of actors in France, except those four names whose praises can never be sung enough: Renoir, Bresson, Leenhardt, and Cocteau. Gloria Grahame's acting is all in correspondences between cheeks and looks. You can't analyze it, but you can observe it. Let us make ours the definition by Jean George Auriol: "cinema is the art of doing pretty things to pretty women," and let us wager that as he wrote that he was thinking more of Jean Harlow than of Lisette Lanvin.

Jack Palance has been known to us since a good film of Elia Kazan's, *Panic in the Streets*. His character here is that of a young man with unusually fine physical qualities and who, by his exceptional charm, acquires the favors of women whose experience with men has made them less demanding and, at the same time, more so.

Joan Crawford? A question of taste. She takes her place in a category that I label rather crudely the "Raimu/Magnani tradition." But if it's really true that we owe the existence of this film to her . . .

Each follows his own path. The one that Jack Palance and Gloria Grahame have chosen will lead them to death.

Joan Crawford's path is also the San Francisco street that seven years of American cinema from *The Lady from Shanghai* to *Passengers of the Night* have made familiar to us. An ingenious screenplay with a fine strictness, a set more than respectable, the face of Gloria Grahame and that street of Frisco whose slope is so steep, the prestige of a cinema that proves to us every week that it is the greatest in the world.[26]

Certainly, it seems to me, one must agree with Walz's brief assessment of this piece, and one must also wonder why it has never been available in English before. Indeed, if *Une Certaine Tendance* . . . accurately notes the strictures and shortcomings which hobbled French cinema after World War II, this piece, with the strictest economy, shows us why Truffaut valued American filmmaking so highly. Further, in comparing David Miller to Hitchcock, Truffaut directly calls into question Sarris's American interpretation of the critical canon employed by *Cahiers*. Sarris's own appreciation of David Miller and *Sudden Fear* is considerably less enthusiastic. In *The American Cinema*, Sarris notes:

> How a David Miller cult ever got started is one of the unsolved mysteries of underground criticism. Miller's *Billy the Kid* was actually superior to Vidor's without being particularly distinguished in its own right. *Flying Tigers* proved that no one could plagiarize from Hawks's *Only Angels Have Wings* without equaling the master, *Love Happy* that the Marx Brothers have always needed Leo McCarey and a good script, *The Opposite Sex* that George Cukor was indeed inimitable, and *Back Street* that Douglas Sirk was indeed irreplaceable. Not much is left after the parrot pictures are removed. *Sudden Fear* and *Midnight Lace* are ambitious lady-in-distress thrillers, more aggravating than suspenseful. *The Story of Esther Costello* is notable only for the Rossano Brazzi shock treatment, and *Lonely Are the Brave* is worth mentioning only for the presumption of its producer-star, the estimable Kirk Douglas, who deigned to give discriminating American audiences an honest-to-goodness art film from Hollywood, and then found us all unworthy of the privilege. The basic question remains: Who is David Miller?[27]

Sarris's brief consideration of David Miller skims over his work in rapid, summary fashion, dismissing nearly all of his films as exercises in manic plagiarism. Perhaps he can't tell "who" David Miller is, and perhaps he can't understand "how a David Miller cult ever got started," but it seems that the least he owes the director is a careful examination of the works in question.

[26]François Truffaut, "Les Extremes me touchent," *Cahiers du Cinema* 4.21 (Mar. 1953): 61-65.

[27]See 261.

Failing this, he simply sweeps Miller's career under the rug. One must wonder how different cinema history would be if *Sudden Fear* were now a canonized "masterpiece," or if Robert Wise's excellent *Born to Kill* (which Truffaut mentions in passing) were similarly valued? Here, unlike his brief notice on Beaudine's work, it is clear that Truffaut values Miller very highly: "Not a shot, either, that isn't fascinating, and doesn't make us think it is a masterpiece of filmmaking." Further, Truffaut links the audience's failure to take the film seriously to a complacency which has crept over the general public, extending even to the "Cine-Clubs." These "clubs" can take *Ladies of the Bois de Boulogne* seriously, Truffaut feels, but for all the wrong reasons, simultaneously rejecting the films of Wise and Ray, by implication, as commercial product, and not works of personal vision. When Truffaut considers *Born to Kill* "the most Bressonian of American films," the directness of this assertion, particularly in view of Truffaut's often elliptical syntax, makes his evaluation all the more credible. *Born to Kill* is rarely revived; *Sudden Fear* is remembered only because of Crawford. Yet both are excellent films: why have they been deleted from cinema history? This is more than a case of one film or filmmaker being elevated at the expense of another's work. It is an excision with little justification, which has since shaped the way we view film, *and* the canon, or orthodoxy, which supports this perspective. In contrast to this didacticism, Truffaut finds Crawford "a question of taste," but admits that "if it's really true that we owe the existence of this film to her . . ." and then trails off, reluctant to assign too much credit to the actress. If Truffaut is rather hard on Maria Casares, who delivers a brilliant performance in *Ladies of the Bois de Boulogne*, attributing her success entirely to Bresson and Cocteau (in his litany of the then-top-box-office actresses in France), perhaps this can be seen as a corrective measure, in a critical milieu which undervalued Gloria Grahame so shamefully. Parenthetically, what of Roger Leenhardt, whom Truffaut mentions as one of "those four names whose praises can never be sung enough," and whom he links with Bresson, Renoir and Cocteau? Given the date of this article, Truffaut must be referring to Leenhardt's work as a critic and maker of short films, who then had only one feature, *Les Dernieres Vacances* (1948), to his credit. Going even futher, what of Cocteau, whose star has been in decline in this country for quite some time now? Is it that Bresson is still working, or that Renoir proved himself an artist beyond genre? Not that these two artists don't deserve whatever acclaim they have garnered: both are deserving of only the highest admiration of their work. But I submit that Cocteau and Leenhardt are properly placed by Truffaut in this critical pantheon, and that the undeniable qualities of Bresson and Renoir do nothing to detract from Cocteau and Leenhardt's *oeuvre*.

In his "manifesto," as Walz puts it, Truffaut clearly demonstrates that he holds the "B" film, even the "Series Z" film, in high regard, and states that these so-called program pictures, which he feels are "often perfect" (an important point to remember), have "upset the hierarchy . . . in our country," which indeed they had, with *Cahiers'* help. Again, there is the strongest sense in this article that Truffaut sees the American low-budget film as a liberating influence, and has the greatest suspicion of those films which Sarris might well have grouped under the category of "Strained Seriousness" in *The American Cinema*. These are the films which France revelled in during the late 1930s through the late 1940s, the "twenty years . . . of golden insignificance" Truffaut mentions early on in this article. They are films based upon literature, films which are "adaptations," "guilty of excessive timidity," films which seem afraid of the kinetic power of the cinema. Because of these "excessive[ly] timid" productions, "filming Balzac has become impossible." The public no longer takes seriously these films which announce their importance so aggressively, so ponderously, in every frame. "For that's the French cinema," Truffaut exclaims. "Three hundred linking shots end to end, one hundred ten times a year": an editorial structure which simply seeks to explicate the narrative. In this context, it is interesting to consider how Truffaut might have felt about the recent rash of ponderous, videotaped *Masterpiece Theatre* productions which have recently proliferated in Britain, and which have found such favor on PBS in the United States. Channel 4 in Britain, on the other hand, the backers of such newer films as *My Beautiful Launderette*, *Caravaggio*, and other modest yet fluid works, might have been seen by Truffaut as the newest and most promising force for cinematic expression. Once again, Channel 4's productions illustrate the validity of Truffaut's dictum: smaller, less pretentious and more naturalistic works often stand a better chance of being artistically successful. The proof of this is perhaps the fact that while the *Masterpiece Theatre*

productions form the backbone of PBS *television* programming in the U.S., the Channel 4 productions are of such quality that they can be released theatrically to considerable profit and critical acclaim in the United States, and elsewhere. If these newer, smaller, often 16mm feature film productions demonstrate anything, they show that elephantine exposition eventually strangles the creative impulse. For Truffaut, the "Series Z" film was performing much the same function in the France of 1953: clearing away the dead wood of adaptational reverence. Truffaut finds Miller's *Sudden Fear* "completely different." Indeed it was, and in his review of the film, Truffaut intensifies this "difference," simultaneously celebrating the film, and correctly locating the film's impulse towards the primacy of the non-illustrative visual.

Nowhere, however, is Truffaut's insistence on the reordering of existing priorities more evident than in his June 1953 essay in *Cahiers, From A to Z*. Here, carefully and lovingly analyzing two American "B" films, *South Sea Sinner* and *Mystery of the Chicago Express* (the American title of this second film is *The Narrow Margin*), Truffaut presents his reasons for appreciating those films which are made under obvious economic and temporal contraints. If a few of his facts are wrong (*South Sea Sinner* was actually released in 1950 in the United States, and produced in late 1949; the date he gives is the French release), Truffaut effectively juxtaposes the stylistic and thematic concerns of Alfred Hitchcock and Orson Welles with Tay Garnett and Richard Fleischer, once again decrying the snobbism which has prevented these two "exquisite" "B" films from reaching a wider audience. Truffaut underlines the importance of remembering that one must not hold the commercial aspect of the cinema against itself, and that there is no crime in work for profit. "We must not forget that Balzac wrote for lack of money" he admonishes the reader, and therefore that "it is incumbent upon us, then, as lovers of cinema, *to refute by ceaselessly revising it* [my emphasis] a scale of values that belongs to business people," who judge a film by its stars and budget, or, inversely, by the lack of these things.

From A to Z, by François Truffaut

South Sea Sinner, American film by Bruce Humberstone. *Screenplay*: Joel Malone and Oscar Brodney. *Cast*: Luther Adler, Fran(c)k [sic] Lovejoy, Shelley Winters, MacDonald Carey, Helena Carter. *Production*: Universal, 1952. (Actually 1950.)

Mystery of the Chicago Express, (*The Narrow Margin*), American film by Richard Fleis[c]her, [sic]. *Cast*: Charles McGraw, Marie Windsor, Jacqueline White. *Production*: Universal, 1952.

A mystery that is certainly going to have to be opened up like a boil some day is the mystery of hierarchy or the sense of measure.

Not the least merit of the art we are concerned with here is that of making beauty bloom on branches that are almost always ugly.

We must not forget that Balzac wrote for lack of money, for money.

It is incumbent upon us, as lovers of cinema, to refute by ceaselessly revising it a scale of values that belongs to business people and which would seek to force us to admire *The Snows of Kilimanjaro, The Small World of Don Camillo*, or *The Wages of Fear* more than *Masks Off, Diary of a Love Affair*, or *Rue de l'Estrapade*.

* * *

Insofar as the mental level of a film can be measured by the audience for which it is intended, it is very clear that the intellectual values of such and such a film can be appreciated more by the small number of spectators who will see it than by the roughness of that audience.

The proof is that the great films, or the ones that have that reputation, are addressed to all (*Don Camillo, Gone with the Wind, The Wages of Fear*) while, if *Last Vacation, Devil in the Flesh, Les Dames du Bois de Boulogne*, and *Born to Kill* had just one point in common, it would be that none has a dubbed version in any language and none, probably, has reached one million spectators.

At a time when Buñuel and De Sica divide up the festivals and showings of *Los Olvidados* and *Miracle in Milan* bring out sparkling audiences dominated by mink, the films of Roger Leenhardt, Douglas Sirk, Robert Breeson, and Elmer Clifton enjoy the moral solitude of traitors and heroes.

Nonetheless, it would be ludicrous to conclude that films about misery and poverty bring in the money while the more moral

ones about riches and their vanity fail. So I won't say it.

Instead, I'll sing about the *avant-garde* which seems to me to be wholly contained in the gentle *pastiche* humor of *South Sea Sinner* and in the virile allure of *Chicago Express*, which is charged with very moral nitroglycerine, but confers a grace that any sweaty driver of a heavy slow-moving vehicle might envy.

* * *

South Sea Sinner is an exquisite little film, a very faithful remake of a film by Tay Garnett with Marlene Dietrich, *The House of Seven Sins* (American title: *Seven Sinners* [Universal, 1940]). It is proof that American cinema should pastiche itself rather sharply, in order that Monsieur Paviot might not hurry and might learn to use a movie camera.

On the high seas, sailor Smitty has an attack of appendicitis; he refuses to allow an operation, so the ex-pharmacist bargain-basement doctor, Doc Mason, has to anesthetize him with his fists. Then they put the patient ashore on Oraca Island. How does the singer at the "Port of Good-Hope" (Shelley Winters) learn that Smitty is accused of spying and fall in love with him? How do they fall out of love? How, finally, will the couples fall together? My respect for this charming story commands me to keep that a secret.

Richard Fleischer's The Narrow Margin *(1952)*

Well, that's the sort of film they call "category Z."

South Sea Sinner has scarcely more than 4 sets, a love scene played on a beach of 15

square meters, and, again for economy, the soundtrack music is exclusively classical music; for an hour and a half you can hear a dozen Chopin preludes, Beethoven's "Moonlight" Sonata, and large excerpts from Liszt's "Dreams of Love."

What makes this little film so rich is the "tone" in which it is handled. The *auteurs* tell us a serious story from the point of view of the humor of situations, and that is a very precious thing, for it seems that they've made us smile (and sometimes moved us) against all odds with a standard story in which parody—which would have been the easy solution—plays no role.

Will I be told that I'm blaspheming if I assure you that Shelley Winters here is so charming, funny and moving that we forget to miss Marlene?

If by chance *South Sea Sinner* pops up in your pathway, go on in; they're drinking county fair foamy: it sparkles more than the Lido's.

* * *

I'm not aware that anyone knows the names of Charles McGraw, Marie Windsor, and Jacqueline White, the three actors in *The Mystery of the Chicago Express*, for which Richard Fleischer, known in France for *Le Traquenard* (*The Trap*) and *Sacre Printemps* (*Damned Spring*) is the *metteur-en-scene*.

As for the scriptwriters, they know their classics as well as Richard Fleischer. We find again in this film the pace of *The Lady Vanishes*, a variant on the theme of the exchanged murder from *Strangers on a Train*, the fat killer from *Journey into Fear*, and the phonograph in the same film.

Hitchcock and Welles are good people to refer to, and that's the case here, if you possess a sense for the "fascination" of the one and the "sentimental humor" of the other. The action takes place entirely on a train. A policeman is assigned to escort the widow of a gangster and to help her escape from a search undertaken by her husband's "colleagues," who have decided to kill her in order to prevent her from handing over to the court the list of "accounts settled." But the suspicious police replace the widow with a woman from the police, while the aforementioned widow travels on the same train without hiding. Those who reproach American cinema for its naively moralizing side will see here the Hollywood filmmakers taking liberties that we might envy them, since the police employee gets killed while the gangster's widow, safe and sound, pursues the perfect love affair with the policeman—and all to our greater joy, since the police lady was as vulgar as a gangster's woman and the criminal's widow is more distinguished than a lady cop could ever be.

The wanderings of the fat bodyguard in the train corridor are the delicious leit-motiv of the film, for everyone must step aside to let him pass. The film ends with a charming line by this charming obese person: "A fat man is loved only by his tailor and his grocer." Let us note the cameraman's merits, since this film is full of special effects of all sorts and particularly of photographic effects. So, a film to be included in the "Cinema of Special Effects."

* * *

The two films have no dubbed version; that says all on the brevity of their career. *South Sea Sinner* came out in a little theater on the place d'Anvers, and the exclusive showing lasted only a week. No critic saw fit to take the trouble.[1b] *The Mystery of the Chicago Express* has just come out at the Champs Elysees, but I strongly doubt that it will do any better than that. If the expression "film maudit" (accursed film) ever meant anything, I think it would apply more to these two films than to some neo-realist social pamphlet or some erotic delirium in which the symbol kills the filmmaker beneath its weight.

[1b] And yet, that's not true. Paule Sengissen, in *Radio Cinema Television*, writes the following: "Poorly acted, poorly set, this film will interest only those cinephiles who find that bad cinema is cinema." Mlle Sengissen seems not to know that Bruce Humberstone is also the *metteur-en-scene* for *If I Had a Million*; she doesn't know that *South Sea Sinner* is the remake of a film by Tay Garnett. *Mise en scène* must be Mlle Sengissen's strong point, so I would ask her, if I had the chance to see her, to explain to me in what way *South Sea Sinner* is badly set.

Finally, I express the wish that we not too often be duped by the modest appearance in which good works sometimes, with elegance, like to adorn themselves.[28]

[28] François Truffaut, "De A jusqu'a Z," *Cahiers du Cinema* 4.24 (June 1953): 53-55.

In this comparatively lengthy essay, Truffaut "open(s) up like a boil . . . the mystery of hierarchy," and finds that the reviews of the then-established critics (such as Paule Sengissen) judge a film almost entirely on external physical characteristics, while failing to explore at all the thematic core of the work in question. If Elmer Clifton, Sirk, Bresson, and Leenhardt "enjoy the moral solitude of traitors and heroes," it is because they work in a pre-damned cinema, a cinema as sure of critical and public neglect as "A" films are certain of general acclaim. If Truffaut clearly prefers *South Sea Sinner* and/or *Chicago Express* to *Wages of Fear* ("the virile allure of *Chicago Express* . . . confers a grace that any sweaty driver of a heavy slow-moving vehicle might envy") it is precisely because these small films lack the pomposity of those works which announce their importance with each new frame. Truffaut sees nothing wrong in remakes, and even suggests here that, heretically enough, a modest "category Z" film may well top the original film it is based upon, and that one might find Shelley Winters "so charming, funny and moving that we forget to miss Marlene" (Dietrich, in the original). The film may have "scarcely more than four sets," a small strip of sand for a beach, and for "economy [have a] soundtrack . . . exclusively [of] classical music," but these budgetary restrictions have obviously, in Truffaut's view, been turned to a good account by the filmmaker. If a soundtrack of Chopin, Beethoven and Liszt is cheaper to use than a big-scale Hollywood score, so much the better for the film. Truffaut might well have added here that much of this music is played on a single piano, on the set, further increasing the economy of the production. (It should be noted parenthetically here that the pianist in question is Liberace.) Truffaut notes that "what makes this little film so rich is the 'tone' in which it is handled," and adds that Humberstone has had the grace and dignity to avoid the easy solution to such inherently melodramatic material, which would be to burlesque it. "They've made us smile . . . against all odds with a standard story in which parody—which would have been the easy solution—plays no role." For incorporating all these virtues, Truffaut finds this "Z" film "wholly" *avant-garde*, and prefers it to "some neo-realist social pamphlet or some erotic delirium in which the symbol kills the filmmaker beneath its weight." In this, Truffaut is clearly still ahead of his time.

"Finally," Truffaut says, "I express the wish that we not too often be *duped* [my emphasis] by the modest appearance in which good works sometimes, with elegance, like to adorn themselves." It is clear that unlike those critics who fail to "take the trouble" to see these economically modest films, which, in Truffaut's view, often outstrip the "A" counterparts, Truffaut delights in "ceaselessly revising" his canonical values, and is unimpressed by the external gloss automatically imparted to every "A" production. We have yet to learn this lesson. If there is a single characteristic which prevents the serious analysis of such films as *Detour, Attack of the Crab Monsters, Bluebeard, Killers from Space, The Enchanted Forest*, it is that each of these films was forced to compromise its physical production because of limited time and/or money. *Detour*, for an obvious example, was made for $20,000 in 6 days, with two leading actors who commanded little in the way of salaries (Tom Neal and Ann Savage). The enormous cost of an "A" film mitigates against that film doing anything risky, or revolutionary, simply because the producers want to get their money back. "B" films afford a certain artistic freedom to their *auteurs*, but if *Detour* is to be made, it had to be made under certain conditions, which assured it a "cheap" look. I have commented upon all this before, but it bears repeating that the most superficial manner of judging a film is by its external characteristics, yet this is still precisely what most theorists continue to practice.[29] Even Tania Modleski, in her essay on *Detour*, mentioned earlier, states that "*Detour* . . . has achieved a certain cult status and is admired today *even* [my emphasis] by practitioners and theorists of the avant garde" (72). There is no "even" about it: *Detour* rests squarely with the tradition of the *avant-garde*, and it is still ahead of the pack. This is why this film made in 1945 still has resonance today, because it continues to tell us truths about ourselves now, as well as then, while such "A" films as *The Best Years of Our Lives* (Samuel Goldwyn, 1946) win contemporaneous honors yet seem today both simplistic and soporific.

Having isolated in the preceding pages a few of Truffaut's major critical strategies with respect to "B" films, I would like to present a number of shorter reviews by the director in the pages that follow. Most of these articles are a paragraph or two at the most. Considering Truffaut's perspective view of the American "B" *genre* film, the concerns of these pieces should come as no

[29]See *The B Directors* 1-4, and "Cinema History and the 'B' Tradition" 65-71.

surprise. It should be stressed, however, that even in such brief notices, Truffaut refuses to be bound by any canonical conventions as to directorial reputation, considering each film on a case-by-case basis. He remains an *auteurist*, certainly, advocating that one view these individual works within the context of an overall career. Yet he recognizes, as always, the existence of mitigating circumstances in any medium so inherently tied to commerce.

There is another factor which should be considered here: the ineluctable pre-judgment accorded all *genre* films, simply because they belong to certain generic groupings (westerns, musicals, horror films, science-fiction films, etc). As the following piece demonstrates, Truffaut was not entirely above such pre-judgments himself. He obviously is no great fan of science fiction (his generally favorable remarks about *Dr. Cyclops* being a notable exception), and his summary dismissal of Jack Arnold's work in this *genre* seems without any discernible foundation. However, although he dislikes *It Came from Outer Space* (Universal, 1953), Truffaut still refuses to straightjacket Arnold as an *auteur* with the tag of "science-fiction director." Here, Truffaut praises Arnold's work on the little-known *Girls in the Night* (Universal, 1953), which, he tells us, leaves him in "an intermediary state between surprise and delight."

Girls in the Night, by R. L.

Girls in the Night, American film by Jack Arnold.—Unless I am mistaken, Jack Arnold was unknown here before the appearance of *The Night Meteor* (American title: *It Came from Outer Space* [Universal, 1953]), which hardly incited one to wish to learn more about its author, and *Girls in the Night*, which belies that first unfavorable impression.

Let us leave aside the first film (science fiction in polaroid relief and black, no less!) and get right to *Girls in the Night*, which leaves us in an intermediary state between surprise and delight.

It's a story of a few young boys and girls who live on New York's East Side, and who hope to escape from that miserable neighborhood.

Through the author's tenderness for his youngsters (and without sentimentality), through the incredible violence of the fight scenes, through the dynamism of the whole, the beauty of the relationships among the characters, the tone of this film swings between Becker's *July Rendez-Vous* and Nicholas Ray's *Alleys of Misfortune* (*Knock on Any Door* [Columbia, 1949]). Each scene, whether it is the first (the very lively election of Miss 43rd Avenue in a neighborhood movie theater), the last (a very carefully controlled chase), or yet a prodigious dance scene in a sleazy club, makes us think that it was the one that the author treated the most lovingly; the directing of the actors (all newcomers) is perfect. Jaclynne Greene and Don Gordon make such a convincing pair of rascals that when, after the word END which follows closely after their death, they get up to greet us with a smile, we don't fail to feel that a great weight has been lifted from our shoulders.[30]

This slight piece of writing is nevertheless informed by a carefully rigorous critical impulse, which highlights the more successful scenes in the film, and seeks to liberate Arnold from the generic prison he would soon, unfortunately, be left in. If Arnold's later films, particularly his films in *The Creature (from the Black Lagoon)* series (1954-56), are indeed laughable hack work, Truffaut here is quite willing to ignore the shortcomings of Arnold's science-fiction films to carefully examine *Girls in the Night*, which might well (along with *The Glass Web* [Universal, 1953]) have led the director to a different sort of career altogether. While Arnold is no David Miller, and is remembered today (he is all but retired) primarily as a fantasy filmmaker, even in this minor addition to his critical writing Truffaut demonstrates that he is consistently able and willing to look beyond superficial labels and first impressions to find works of genuine quality. Unaffected by then-contemporary critical estimations, which elevated *It Came from Outer Space* over *Girls in the Night* (in part because of the Ray Bradbury short story *It Came from Outer Space* was nominally based upon), Truffaut again demonstrates that one must continually be open to new experiences, to re-evaluations, and that cinema history, and cinema criticism, must entertain a process of continual self-renewal.

In another brief commentary, Truffaut again appears as a prognosticator, accurately predicting the later prominence of Richard Brooks, who many years later would score a considerable

[30]François Truffaut, "Girls in the Night," *Cahiers du Cinema* 6.32 (Feb. 1954): 51-52.

commercial and critical triumph with his sharply clinical *Looking for Mr. Goodbar* (1977), not to mention such earlier successes as *The Blackboard Jungle* (1955), *In Cold Blood* (1967) and *Elmer Gantry* (1960).

Deadline, by F. T., American film by Richard Brooks

Here is a film that succeeds by force of talent in proving to us—and in making us believe—that journalism is "the finest trade in the world."

Isn't the task of a work of art to solve the drama rather than expose it?

That's why I prefer this film to the *Pit of Monsters* or *Starvation* in which the baseness of journalism are painted with a-uh, *journalistic* objectivity inadmissible in art.

The screenplay of *Deadline* and the characters that it places on stage don't lack for real greatness, but the merit of Richard Brooks lies more in his knowing that cinematography is the art of petty details which do not strike one, and to prove it through constant invention.

There will be more talk of Richard Brooks, who was also the screenwriter for *Crossfire* and for *Brute Force* and producer-writer for *Crisis* before he became the sole author of *Deadline*.[31]

This short, prescient notice once again demonstrates that Truffaut was eager to seek out new talent, and that he had a firm grasp of cinema history, correctly giving Brooks' earlier credits as a basis for his possible (then) future fame. While the review fails to note that Brooks himself had considerable background as a journalist, principally as a sports reporter for the Philadelphia *Record*, Truffaut by implication isolates the near-documentary impulse of this work, which "succeeds by the force of talent in proving to us—and making us believe—that journalism is 'the first trade in the world.'"

Ed Begley, Sr. (center) and Humphrey Bogart (right) in Richard Brooks's Deadline U.S.A. *(1952)*

[31]François Truffaut, "Dead Line," *Cahiers du Cinema* 4.23 (May 1953): 63.

As is generally known, the early 50s marked the rise of the first time of television as a commercial and aesthetic force in commonplace existence, and audiences at the movie theaters began to dwindle as more people stayed home to watch the "free" entertainment on TV. Hollywood producers, understandably alarmed at this decline in revenues (and, by extension, cultural influence), sought ways to regain their hold upon the collective public consciousness. CinemaScope was one avenue actively pursued by the major producers, starting with 20th Century Fox: A panoramic/anamorphic recording/reproduction device which had been first theorized in 1860, patented in 1898, and successfully "developed and demonstrated" by Henri Chretien in the late 1920s.[32] Public response to such early CinemaScope films as *The Robe* (1953) proved that, at least in the short run, the public was superficially impressed by the invention. Most filmmakers and aestheticians, however, were extremely displeased with the long, narrow, CinemaScope format (Fritz Lang once remarked it was fit only for "snakes and funerals"),[33] and such publications as *Sight and Sound* devoted several issues in 1954/55 to an examination of the practical implications of CinemaScope.[34] In the issue of *Sight and Sound* for Spring 1955, in particular, the editors of that journal offered a public forum for directors to comment on the new process, and almost all of their comments were derogatory: Carl Th. Dreyer was a surprising exception to this. Truffaut's essay on CinemaScope, "En avoir plein la vue," is impressive because Truffaut demonstrates that even in the face of a new and controversial process, he is willing to examine the format with a dispassionate, detached eye, and in doing so, he is generally favorable to the process.[35] Walz summarizes the piece thusly: it is an essay "about CinemaScope, which (Truffaut) favors because it breaks down the arbitrary limits of the screen."[36] Inasmuch as this essay does not directly touch upon the genre film, the province of this paper, I will not translate it here.

I have, however, entered into this brief digression on CinemaScope to frame Truffaut's July 1953 essay on the binocular 3-D films, and more specifically the Natural Vision process, which was the other method by which Hollywood hoped to recapture audiences. If Truffaut felt generally sanguine about the implications and impact of CinemaScope, he was considerably less impressed with Natural Vision. His review of *Man in the Dark* (Columbia, 1953) is really more interested in an analysis of that process's shortcomings than in explicating director Lew Landers' visual style, which he only tangentially examines. This piece indicates that even in mid 1953, when the Natural Vision process was relatively new to both critics and audiences, there had already been considerable debate on its merits and/or defects.

Man in the Dark, by François Truffaut, American film in binocular 3D (Natural Vision process) by Lew Landers

It has become a commonplace as well as a truth to note that 3D films (Polaroid glasses) wind up with the opposite result from what was intended: these 3D films give us a new sensation—of the flat—and, while aiming for a heightened realism, introduce us to a naively unaccustomed universe, a perfectly imaginary one.

It is perfectly clear that, in life, we don't see "in relief"; our sight adjusts to whatever is our concern at the moment, and seeing clearly both backgrounds and foregrounds, whatever their depth, is all the more disconcerting. This excessive clarity gives us the painful sensation of "cutting on the dotted line."

Paper cutout figures standing out against the decor: we will have to rediscover blurs, otherwise credulity wouldn't make sense.

It is amusing to note that the only effective scene from the point of view of subjectivity is the scenic railway, shot with an ordinary camera with the help of a transparency.[37]

[32]Ephraim Katz, *The Film Encyclopedia* (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell, 1979) 239.

[33]Fritz Lang plays a character much like himself in Godard's *Contempt* (1964). The quoted remark comes early in the film, during a sequence in a screening room.

[34]Richard Kohler and Walter Lassaly, "The Big Screens," *Sight and Sound* 24.3 (Jan./Mar. 1955): 120-26.

[35]François Truffaut, "En avoir plein la vue," *Cahiers du Cinema* 5.25 (July 1953): 22-23.

[36]See Walz 163. It is important to remember, as well, that Truffaut shot his first three films (*The 400 Blows* [1959], *Shoot the Piano Player* [1960] and *Jules and Jim* [1961]) in Franscope, the French equivalent of CinemaScope. Existing "flat" prints offer only an approximation of the visual richness these films have to offer.

Landers was an American director with more than 100 feature films to his credit, both "A" and "B" films, including a number of entries in the Boston Blackie series, the Jungle Jim series, and the peculiar *Mask of Diljon* (PRC, 1946), starring Erich von Stroheim.[38] It is perhaps, then, some indication of Hollywood's own estimation of the Natural Vision process that they would hire a journeyman director such as Landers, who was regarded as a reliable professional but little more by most critics, to direct *Man in the Dark*. Further, the accuracy of Truffaut's central assertion that "these 3-D films give us a new sensation—of the flat" is further proven by the fact that Warner Brothers would hire Andre de Toth, their only one-eyed director, and perhaps the only one-eyed director then working in Hollywood, to oversee *House of Wax*. As Truffaut notes, "It is perfectly clear that, in life, we don't see 'in relief,'" but perhaps the exaggerated stylistic constructs Natural Vision requires are better schematised by one who cannot normally see in depth. The aggressive compositions in *Man in the Dark*, *House of Wax* and nearly all other 3-D films might be seen as attempts to compensate for this "flatness" inherent in cinematic representations. Truffaut here indicates that Natural Vision really doesn't work, and, by implication, that its days as an active cinematic agent are numbered. The correctness of this position is obviously borne out by the fact Natural Vision was dropped by Hollywood in late 1954, and has been revived only sporadically since, with equally dismal results.

Even with distinctly minor talents, such as the aforementioned Andre de Toth, Truffaut is generous, finding something to like even in the most modest of films. De Toth's *The City is Dark* (also known as *Crime Wave* [Warner Brothers, 1954]) is primarily an entertainment, just as Truffaut says. Here, as in many of his other writings, it is the details of *mise en scène* which continue to constitute for Truffaut the essence of the cinematic contract. This short paragraph manages to praise de Toth's "pleasant . . . nobility," while at the same time sardonically taking to task those censors who would force their views upon the public in the name of conventional morality.

The City is Dark, by R.L., American film by Andre de Toth

> A one-eyed director, Andre de Toth of Hollywood would be king if Hollywood were blind. Nothing is farther from the truth, thank God, and de Toth doesn't keep his Cyclops eye in his pocket, but acts like the lynx. A pleasant man, de Toth makes nice movies that are not without nobility, since he is a man with a prefix ["de"]. *The City is Dark* is one of those films, very easy to watch and which furthermore has the merit of showing us side by side, sleeping with one and the same sleep, lying in the same bed, an American couple composed, as you know, of two individuals apparently of opposite sexes, belying in one fell swoop the terrible, backbiting and imported legend according to which there is supposed to be, on the other side of the Atlantic, some code of modesty which is supposed to stipulate that two movie spouses, twin beds, seventy centimeters, etc., etc.[39]

Even with a film which he doesn't really like, Truffaut resists the urge to completely dismiss the work. His review of Christy Cabanne's *The Mummy's Hand* (Universal, 1940) is a perfect example of Truffaut's restraint in the face of a film which is resolutely a program assignment, and not a very competently handled one, at that. Cabanne (pronounced Cab-an-AY) was a Hollywood old-timer at the end of his career when he made this film. As Truffaut mentions, Cabanne had started with Griffith, first as an actor in 1910, later an assistant, and finally a solo director in 1924, with *The Dishonored Medal* (Continental Films).[40] By 1940, Cabanne was simply a tired journeyman director whose career was essentially over. As Walz notes, Truffaut finds *The Mummy's Hand* "surrealist in spite of itself," and in his brief notice of the film, there is a genuine if grudging affection for both the *Mummy* series, and for the straightforward absurdity of the plot and characterizations.[41] Nevertheless, Truffaut draws the line at artificially elevating the film to the realm of true artistic endeavor: it is, he notes, "very boring."

[37]François Truffaut, "Man in the Dark," *Cahiers du Cinema* 5.25 (July 1953): 59.

[38]See Dixon, *The B Directors* 298-303, for a discussion of Landers' life and work.

[39]François Truffaut, "*La Chasse au gang (City of Dark)*," *Cahiers du Cinema* 7.38 (Aug./Sept. 1954): 55.

[40]See Dixon, *The B Directors* 96.

[41]See 164.

Sterling Hayden (on right) holds gun in Andre de Toth's Crime Wave *(1954)*

George Zucco (center, rear), Peggy Moran (reclining), and Tom Tyler (as the Mummy) in Christy Cabanne's The Mummy's Hand *(1940)*

Once again, Truffaut seems more interested in the size of the "Egyptologist-American's bust" than in any of the detail of Cabanne's *mise en scène*.

The Mummy's Hand, by François Truffaut, American film by Christy Cabanne

> The mummy in question is no slouch. Having lived for 3000 years under the influence of a fluid, Kharis—a mummy who is neither male nor female—jealously guards the tomb of Princess Ananka (17th dynasty of Pharaohs), which is precisely the thing the American Egyptologists would like to have a look at. Preoccupied as I was with the size of the female doctor-explorer-Egyptologist-American's bust, I completely forgot to pay attention to the story, but what does it matter? This lady marries her travel companion, who, in recompense, gets named "Director of a large museum."
>
> Let's not forget to say that this film, made by a pupil of Griffith—demi-angle of the "Triangle"—is very boring, and that only the Benayouns, the Kirous, and other Adonises will be able to monopolize it in order to puff up the very thin (in spite of itself) files of surrealist cinema.[42]

Yet reviews in which Truffaut can find nothing positive to say are few and far between. Perhaps this is because he only chose to review those films he admired; perhaps it is because he reserved his real critical scorn for films which he felt were pretentious . . . the quality he despised most in the cinema. His paragraph on *This Damned Family* (American title: *Room for One More*) (surely the French title is preferable) finds Truffaut praising as a "masterpiece" a film which he simultaneously excoriates as having "the most hypocritical scenario, the basest demagoguery" that he has ever witnessed in a Hollywood film. Even when he is being emotionally manipulated, and is fully aware of it, Truffaut is still moved by the film, so much so that his tears "punctuat[ed] the changing of the reels." "This rare enterprise is saved from infamy . . . (by) an astonishing *mise en scène*," made all the more astonishing by director Norman Taurog's usually faceless direction, which here rises to or surpasses the level of the hysteric script. Taurog had won an Academy Award for his direction of *Skippy* in 1931 (a film based on the popular comic strip character by Percy Crosby), but his later work lacks a distinctive visual signature. This makes him at once the perfect contract director, and a frustrating example of what happens when a filmmaker emotionally removes himself from his work.

Perhaps Truffaut's reasons for liking *This Damned Family* are cynically perverse. One wishes that he had been more specific in isolating exactly those aspects of the director's style which impressed him. Nevertheless, Truffaut's review here has at least one historical virtue: it is practically the only favorable review this film received, other than in the trade papers *Variety* and *The Hollywood Reporter*. If Taurog's later work is ever re-examined, one will have to grant Truffaut the distinction of having been the first to recognize the success of Taurog's direction, at least with this particular work. Truffaut quotes Genet: "An action is only despicable if it is unfinished." Perhaps what Truffaut most appreciates about this film is that once having decided upon its true intent ("an apologia for adoption"), it never strays from pressing that point upon the audience.

This Damned Family (American title: *Room for One More*), by François Truffaut, American film by Norman Taurog, 1952

> Should we keep silent or brave the ridicule that may be directed at us if we point out an admirable film and recommend it several months after its release? This is surely the most hypocritical scenario, the basest demagoguery, the most boy-scoutish, that has ever been written in Hollywood. An apologia for adoption, for generous care of others, for nice feelings; and yet our tears fall ten times, punctuating the changing of the reels. "An action is only despicable if it is unfinished," said Genet. Since it leads each scene to its ultimate development, each situation to its height, each gesture to its end, this rare enterprise is saved from infamy, and astonishingly played with an astonishing *mise en scène*. Let's go again to weep over the comi-tragic adventures of Cary Grant and his wife, Betsy Drake, and let us feel no remorse about it. Certainly form doesn't take precedence over content, but justifies it, and if necessary even rehabilitates it. All in all, a masterpiece.[43]

[42]François Truffaut, "The Mummy's Hand," *Cahiers du Cinema* 5.25 (July 1953): 59.

[43]*Cahiers* 5.29: 58.

Cary Grant in Norman Taurog's Room for One More *(1952)*

In his short notice on George Cukor's *My Own Life*, Truffaut is dealing with a director who has a considerably greater reputation than Cabanne, Miller, Taurog, or most of the other directors we have considered here. Nevertheless, this piece belongs with Truffaut's other work on genre films. For Truffaut, Cukor is a man "who makes, out of every five films, one masterpiece, three other very good ones, and the fifth is still interesting." *My Own Life* (American title: *A Life of Her Own* [MGM, 1950]) is surely a minor addition to the Cukor canon, but still Truffaut prefers it to David Lean's *Brief Encounter* (1946), simply because Cukor's film aims for less, and so accomplishes more. For Truffaut, this is a film about beauty: "the beauty of Cukor's work," as he notes, but also the imagistic construct of Lana Turner's face, entering into the film "straight off from the very first image." This film seems more *maudit* than most Cukor projects: Ray Milland and Lana Turner make a very odd couple indeed. Yet Truffaut still places this film with *Vacation* (*Holiday in America*), *The Philadelphia Story* and *Little Women*, by implication citing these films as some of Cukor's most accomplished work. Most critics would find the inclusion of *Little Women*, as well as *My Own Life*, in Cukor's "short list" as somewhat aberrational. Perhaps it isn't so peculiar at all, and this "admirable film" should be granted a second look within the context of Cukor's career.

My Own Life, by François Truffaut, American film by George Cukor

Lana Turner and Ray Milland are the heroes of this film, united and disunited by an impossible love. Whether or not their physical appearance is described, Madam de Mortsauf, the Princess of Cleves, Albertine are immediately beautiful. Fie on *Brief Encounter*. It took us a good hour and a half to admit that an ugly woman could be likeable. *Brief Encounter* ended at the very moment when we were about to agree to the ugliness postulate. Here beauty enters straight off from the very first image; the beauty of Lana Turner, the beauty of the

story, finally the beauty of Cukor's work, that extraordinary man who makes, out of every five films, one masterpiece, three other very good ones, and the fifth is still interesting.

We must place this admirable film beside *Vacation, Philadelphia Story,* and *Little Women.*[44]

In the same series of brief reviews from this issue of *Cahiers,* Truffaut considers two films which he finds distinctly less "admirable": Robert Stevenson's *Scandal in Las Vegas* (American title: *The Las Vegas Story*) and William Dieterle's *The Turning Point.* These two films get decidedly short shrift from Truffaut, who still praises William Holden for his work in the second film.

Scandal in Las Vegas, by R.L., American film by R. Stevenson, produced by Howard Hugues [sic]

Everyone in Paris has already been talking about this car-helicopter chase. Is it necessary to make a special trip for this last quarter-hour, and for that quarter-hour, endure four more of equal dullness? I don't think so. Virtuosity isn't enough and its gratuity here is more than self-evident. After all, was the *Banished* a good film? Nothing is less sure, and unfortunately we will never be able to decide about it since the film is withdrawn from distribution according to Mr. Hugues's [sic] express desires.

The Turning Point, by R.L., American film by William Dieterle

Dieterle is the sort of *metteur-en-scene* on whom one cannot count: capable of the best but also of the worst. *The Turning Point* seems to me far and away the best film of the unfortunate *auteur* of *Salome.* The presence of Horace MacCoy in the screen credits should count for a great deal in its success.

Holden, discovered in *Stalag 17,* is confirmed here as one of the three great American actors of tomorrow.

(58)

[44]François Truffaut, *Cahiers* 5.29: 58.

Robert Stevenson's The Las Vegas Story *(1952) with Victor Mature (center) holding sheet of paper*

Those who may feel that Truffaut systematically sought out "B" films for critical adulation will find this review of *Shoot First* instructive. *Shoot First*, also known as *Rough Shoot* (and really a British/American co-production rather than simply being "shot in England," as Truffaut asserts), contains "not a single idea" as far as Truffaut is concerned. "Some of [American "B" films] are atrocious," he admits at the beginning of this piece, and he displays uncharacteristic enthusiasm for his task, as he viciously ridicules Parrish's film, which was produced by Stanley Kramer. Perhaps the movie deserves it: the "bluff, faked . . . effects" it traffics in are part and parcel of the Kramer style. While some may believe that this film, "which breathes of the English countryside," "corresponds to the idea that half-witted critics have about Hitchcock, the 'master of suspense,'" for Truffaut, the film is an unrelieved failure. It might also be noted that he is ahead of his time in noting that Kramer "sometimes has a rather bad influence" over the films he has a hand in. Reading somewhat between the lines, one gets the impression that Truffaut felt that the "English soberness" this film displays is used to cover up a rather stiff approach to the material.

Shoot First, American film by Robert Parrish

One should definitely not believe that we systematically defend and praise American "B" movies. Some of them are atrocious. Yesterday it was *The Fourth Man*: today it is *Shoot First* by Robert Parrish, whose rather flat *In the Mouth of the Wolf* we have recently seen.

The film corresponds to the idea that half-witted critics have about Hitchcock, the "master of suspense." Here, all is bluff, faked, unseemly effects. Shot in England, this film breathes of the English countryside, English soberness, English humor, English flatness, English nonexistence. Not one invention, not one detail, not a single idea. Evelyn Keyes's pretty face remains impassive and indifferent to Joel McCrea's supposed torment. Producer Stanley Kramer, whose every film is praised by the critics before they see it, sometimes has a rather bad influence.[45]

It's also interesting to see that Truffaut's work as a critic is often at variance with the generally accepted historical view of his aesthetic sensibility. Douglas Sirk is routinely lionized in the late 1980s as a stylist on a par with Max Ophuls: Rainer Werner Fassbinder's well-known acknowledgement of the impact of Sirk's work on his own films has further ensured Sirk's posthumous reputation. Truffaut places Sirk in a modest critical position: below Hitchcock and Rossellini, yet still a director of "sincerity and intelligence." As he notes, "others take Jean Dellanoy for a mystical moralist," which Dellanoy certainly is not. Though Truffaut feels that Sirk's vision has distinct limitations, he is still impressed, almost in spite of himself, with this transcendent yet minor work.

Thunder on the Hill, American film by Douglas Sirk

Sometimes, the police are fooled by the church. Sometimes the servants of God beat the cops at their own game, that of earthly truths. Such situations delight the Christians that we are and come along at the right moment to remind Sunday churchgoers that their worship of God was born out of the violation of a law, amid the roars of the gladiators in the arenas. This is perhaps the only common point between *Europe 51*, *I Confess*, and *Thunder on the Hill*. If Douglas Sirk doesn't have the genius of Rossellini and Hitchcock, the sincerity and intelligence of his directing make him worthy of it. Others take Jean Dellanoy for a mystical moralist.[46]

Even more surprising is Truffaut's evaluation of William Nigh's *I Wouldn't Be in Your Shoes* (Monogram, 1948), which was first released in France in 1953 as *The Condemned Man in Cell Five*. The change in title is unfortunate. As Truffaut notes, the film concerns an innocent young newlywed, who "throws his shoes out the window [and] that's all it takes to get him accused of murder and condemned to death." Cornell George Hopley-Woolrich (a.k.a. William Irish)'s novel was adapted by Nigh into a tight little 70 minute film with a shooting schedule of only eight days (Kearns 490). The best known actor in the film was certainly Regis Toomey, always a "sidekick" figure in "A" productions. *I Wouldn't Be in Your Shoes* was Nigh's second to last film as a director, in a career that had started in 1911, and

[45]François Truffaut, *Cahiers* 5.26: 57.

[46]*Cahiers* 5.26: 57.

covered more than 80 films before his retirement in 1948 (Nigh died in 1955).[47] Most of Nigh's works are "B" films: many are perfunctory. Here, however, Truffaut finds Nigh's work of great interest and genuine quality, and calls the film "one of the best . . . if not *the* best . . . of the detective films that can be seen at the moment in Paris."

The Condemned Man in Cell 5, American film by William Nigh

A young man, a newlywed, throws his shoes out the window and finds them, the next morning, with a nice fat wallet in one of them. That's all it takes to get him accused of murder and condemned to death.

It all gets sorted out in the last reel, the murderer being none other than the detective in charge of the investigation, who put on the shoes thrown out the window in order to commit his crime.

This quite unusual scenario is very intelligently adapted from an excellent novella by William Irish, unpublished in France.

The Condemned Man in Cell 5 is one of those films you go see while expecting the worst; it's the strength of American cinema to hold out a couple of nice surprises of this sort fairly regularly.

This one is a series C film, with no known actors, shot rather quickly with a tiny budget, and yet the work is more than respectable: we find no errors of taste; the directing of the actors, dialogues, *mise en scène* work together excellently to bestow maximum effectiveness on this good story.

So here is one of the best—if not *the* best—of the detective films that can be seen at the moment in Paris.[48]

This article appeared in *Arts*, a small journal Truffaut occasionally contributed short pieces to, and is signed F.T.

In another issue of *Arts*, Truffaut takes to task Victor Saville's *I, The Jury* (1953) (inexplicably titled *Throwing It All Out* in France; in view of Truffaut's opinion of the film, perhaps not a bad idea). Based on the novel by Mickey Spillane, the film is, for better or worse, a faithful reproduction of the novel, with all the routine violence predictably intact. Truffaut here really doesn't fault Saville's direction. What appalls him is the Spillane *mystique*, which for him consists of "multiplying by ten the things that make the *film noir* popular." He is right, of course: the Spillane strategy is overkill. Truffaut also demonstrates here that he can tell the difference between an ingeniously made low budget detective thriller (*The Condemned Man . . .*), and an action film which is "abysmal, of course, but . . . not boring for a second."

Throwing It All Out, American film by Victor Saville

Let's hope that the vogue for Mickey Spillane novels won't cross the Atlantic. There's nothing more hackneyed than this story of an amnesia victim whose only response to the police is, "I don't remember nothing." All the more so because what follows is predictable and expected: the amnesia victim is innocent and proves it.

The Spillane formula consists of multiplying by ten the things that make the *film noir* popular: so it is that a critic counted no fewer than thirty-four kisses in *Throwing It All Out*, each more passionate than the last. One man, four women, a few killers. Punches and gunshots must number more than a hundred. The four ladies are pretty nice. One of them is named Vera, but which one? Not only can the hero of the film, suffering from amnesia, not figure out which one of his four women used to be his wife, but, what's more, she changed her face in the meantime under the scalpel of some Yankee quack.

All this, for better or worse, gets untangled at the end, after a quarter-hour of hair-raising and unintended avant-garde, intended no doubt to make up for the absence of money, sets, and means. Abysmal, of course, but let's admit it, not boring for a second.[49]

There is a great deal of additional material that we could consider in this article. Truffaut wrote a great deal, and the number of pieces he dedicated to the spirit and freedom of the "B" film is quite considerable. However, for the final

[47]See Dixon, *The B Directors* 390-93.

[48]François Truffaut, "Autres Films," *Arts* 486 (20-26 Oct. 1954): 3.

[49]François Truffaut, "Autres Films," *Arts* 491 (24-30 Nov. 1954): 5.

Biff Elliott as Mickey Spillane's fictional detective, Mike Hammer, in Harry Essex's film of I, The Jury *(1953)*

selection in my survey of Truffaut's early critical work, I choose his review of Arch Oboler's *Five* (Columbia, 1951), which Oboler wrote, produced and directed. Truffaut recognizes *Five* for what it is, an *avant-garde* amateur film which reveals both the naiveté and ambition of its author.

Earth, Year Zero, by François Truffaut

Five, American film by Arch Oboler. *Scenario*: Arch Oboler. *Pictures*: Sid Lubow. *Music*: Henry Russell. *Cast*: William Phipps (Michael), Susan Douglas (Roseanne), James Anderson (Eric), Charles Lampkin (Charles), Earl Lee (Mr. Barnstraple). *Production*: Arch Oboler (1952). *Distribution*: Columbia.

Here, at last, a work among those that legitimize the *Cinema d'Essai*.

There is no doubt, in fact, that *Five* would have found no one to distribute it, if *Cinema d'Essai* had not put it on.

We must recall that *Five* is Arch Oboler's first film; the following one was the first 3D with polaroid glasses: *Bwana Devil*. Arch Oboler, like Orson Welles in times gone by, is a radio man. Author of 400 [radio] plays, he has swept away all the radio awards.

* * *

Five is a very typical avant-garde film, if we accept such a label for a film conceived and made apart from all commercial considerations, with the means available to amateur films, based on a highly non-commercial subject and clumsily made, as is fitting.

No doubt, the "16 mm spirit" that Cocteau praises so highly presided over the making of this film, whose technical conception is close to that of *After Sunset Comes the Night, Silence of the Sea* and other American avant-garde films; but it doesn't have the crazy pretentiousness of some, the backward aestheticism of others—faults which a great generosity of spirit alone justifies.

A film of great honesty, of even-handed sincerity and genuine naiveté, *Five* imposes upon us the notion of getting along with people, which is very pleasant in our times when hating your mother is a proof of

elegance, killing your father makes the biggest headlines, a time also whose moralists have no other conduct to recommend to us than to walk through life with a serpent in our fist.

* * *

Five takes as its subject the survival of five people on earth after the explosion of the atomic bomb. Three of them die and the history of the earth begins again with the couple.

Having lived in the atomic age is their original sin, and the film closes with the theme of Adam and Eve, or, if you prefer, that of Noah, survivor of the first flood and as such, purifier.

It is well known that this sort of story is the very archetype of the false "good" scenario. Beginning with the original idea, everything has to be invented and we must be able to resist the temptations that a universe free of all convention does not fail to offer.

Here, better than anywhere else, it is appropriate to recreate the world and to know "how far is too far" to go.

Arch Oboler has succeeded in constructing his scenario perfectly, to the point of rendering it believable. The extreme fast pace of the scenes and their excessive soberness make them completely effective. Difficulties are never swept under the rug, and I remember nothing so terrifying as that scene when insanity grabs hold of the mountain climber when he sees on his chest the signs of deadly radiation poisoning: he shouts and goes off staggering among skeletons scattered here and there in the dead city and disappears in the "first street to the right."

We must call attention to the great beauty of the heroine whose joys and sorrows are written on her face, giving this film an air of news according to the atomic age. There, in any case, lies the miracle of this film; at no moment does one think it is a reconstruction; the film seems truly to have been made after the "explosion" with props and film miraculously saved.

Everything that characterizes amateur cinema is found in the *mise en scène*: blurry and grainy photography, pale faces (due to the use of floods instead of stage lights), shaky dolly shots, strange framing, odd angles, slow pace, "very 16 mm" and rather limited acting almost devoid of invention.[1c]

[1c] Specks on the film reveal that sometimes they neglected to clean the lens!

Here are, indeed, the defects that keep us from taking seriously 16mm or 35mm experiments in which overstated commentary and scores borrowed from Bach and Vivaldi never remedy the poverty of inspiration (almost always pederastic, psychoanalytical, disproportionate in relation to the limited means of production).

But in this film, whose modesty is all its charm, it seems that these limited means alone could assure its success, and we think with a chill of the failure that this enterprise would have been, conceived and made according to the norms of American production which becomes mediocre and pretentious as soon as it tries to escape from the traditional themes which it knows how to handle royally.[50]

Compare this review, willing to recognize all the film's defects, but still granting to it genuine passion in its construction and execution, with any of the daily reviews of the period, and you will find that Truffaut was once again going against the established critical grain. Today Oboler is primarily remembered as the person who produced and directed the first independent 3-D theatrical feature, *Bwana Devil* (distributed by United Artist, 1953), (as opposed to de Toth's *House of Wax*, the first major company 3-D release). Truffaut sees that *Five* is, and must be, a commercial enterprise, but he is moved by it, respects it, refuses to dismiss it on the grounds of its "amateur . . . *mise en scène*." Though specks may indeed cover the lens in several sequences, this is really nothing to be concerned about. Truffaut values, above all, integrity. He reviles "scores borrowed from Bach and Vivaldi [which] never remedy the poverty of inspiration" in other "16mm and 35mm experiments," but in this film, "modesty is all its charm." "A limited means alone could assure its success," Truffaut reminds us; in the hands of a major studio, with the creative constraint that an "A" budget brings in terms of front-office interference, "this enterprise would have been . . . mediocre and pretentious." Truffaut does not even mind that the acting is

[50] François Truffaut, "Terre année zero," *Cahiers du Cinema* 5.25 (July 1953): 55-56.

"limited [and] almost devoid of intention." For him, the film is a success, in part because it follows one individual vision instead of being made by committee, as so many "A" films are. In its present incarnation, Truffaut finds the film "completely effective," and feels that Oboler "has succeeded in constructing his scenario *perfectly*" (my emphasis). That one word sums up Truffaut's view of the "B" film: capable of perfection despite the superficial imperfections of indifferent acting, shaky shots, "blurry photography," and limited financing.

What is surprising is that it has taken so long for Truffaut's early writings to be taken seriously, even by those who write for *Cahiers*. Only in 1985/86 did *Cahiers* launch its first extended history of the "B" film in America, *Series B and After* by Charles Tesson, which ran in several issues, most importantly in *Cahiers* Numbers 379, 380 and 381.[51] It seems very much as if the films of Hitchcock, Welles, Ford, and other "Pantheon" directors had to be "mined out" before any serious consideration of the American "B" could begin. Having reached a finite depth in these works, critics have turned to the "B" with new interest.

Signalling a new direction in film study, Dana Polan's recent book *Power and Paranoia* considers all American films of the 1940s on equal footing.[52] Polan extends the same careful analysis to such disparate films as *Notorious* and *The Enchanted Cottage*, viewing them as equally important exemplars of the period. It is true that Polan views film more as a cultural artifact than a creative medium at times, and one might argue that what really interests him in film criticism and theory are the intricate series of latent behavioral codes woven into all films, rather than the themes which the films themselves choose to address. Truffaut is more romantic: he views a successful film primarily as an individual creative act, as poetry. His work on the American "B" genre film is some of the first writing which seriously considers these long maligned works. In Truffaut's system of valuation, William Nigh can be capable of a excellent film, and so can Max Ophuls. This possibility still seems to elude most critics. But, if we will simply follow Truffaut's lead in this area (granting his work a double resonance because of his later brilliance as a director), cinema history will open up a whole new body of important, engaging and enlightening work, which has been ignored for too long simply because, as Truffaut states in his review of *South Sea Sinner*, "no critic saw fit to take the trouble." Truffaut *has* seen fit to take that trouble. If his work in the "B" film opens up this area to further research, he will have discharged his critical mission with great distinction.□

[51]In these three issues, this multi-part article by Charles Tesson discusses the works of Joseph Lewis, Reginald Le Borg and the PRC studio, one of Hollywood's smallest yet most interesting "B" production companies.

[52]Dana Polan, *Power and Paranoia: History, Narrative, and the American Cinema, 1940-1950* (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1986).

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Robert T. Klose

COTILLION

Tell me again that it's true
That he sees best who travels farthest

And what is it that Bliven said?
I don't feel like an old man
I feel like a young man with something
the matter with him

It all comes from waiting
you know
The traveling
The growing old

Standing still would be too much to bear
It's not like the fiddler crab
Who stops to readjust
Cracking at his horny seams
Saying goodbye to a skin with
the marks of love and age on it

He zips it off
Shivers a bit
Then moves on
To try again

So when shall I come back to you?
Is there some sign?

A small lamp in the window perhaps
Or a dropped hanky

And who will speak first
And how will one word reach the other
When air and water and earth
Have closed between us
Allowing us to believe
Without even trying very hard
That somehow it was meant to end like this

Lisa Zeidner

FEEDING TIME

I met Haze Swift at the zoo, where she was feeding a puma at eleven at night. I do mean Haze Swift the fashion designer, but I didn't know the name then—a Haze Swift dress was not yet worth more than a year's tuition at private school.

I had just quit my job as a designer for a hospital where all of the doctors wanted new office suites. That in itself was not a complete waste of my expensive architecture education, and it was certainly better than my last job, drafting for a firm that slapped up fake colonials. The problem with the hospital job was my boss, a stupid despot who was not above screaming for an hour about my incompetence when I gave him working drawings that he was, in fact, holding upside down.

My husband, a trial lawyer, had begun to get the lawyer's look of glazed concern whenever I complained about my boss, which was far too often. I wanted to quit my job and have children, but Paul, who wasn't having an easy time either, said I wanted them for all the wrong reasons.

Paul was defending a pair of potters against loan sharks who had provided money for a crafts shop, then stolen all of the merchandise and threatened to break the potters' hands. The loan sharks were Mafia-connected. Beefy men in trenchcoats followed Paul home from work.

None of this was funny then—not my boss fuming until strands of his oily hair stood up and waved, not Paul in the attic, in the dark, watching for men in long cars. But these dramatic dissatisfactions were not why I thought I was in trouble. My craziness was quieter, more domestic.

For example, I would stand before the bathroom mirror and pull out gray hairs. This brought the same kind of physical satisfaction as plucking the lint from a dryer filter. I'd isolate the gray hairs by their coarser texture, then yank them as close as possible to the root. In the toilet, the hairs would be visible against the white of the bowl only by their shadows. I'd realize I had been pulling out gray hairs for forty minutes, an hour.

I decided I needed a desk job, something unchallenging and undiverse that would allow me to design two chairs I'd been dreaming of and wanted to enter in an international furniture competition.

One chair had a back over eight feet high and items attached that you could play with like worry beads if you were sitting idly or talking on the phone—also a pull-out writing surface like the ones in lecture halls. The other chair had a mesh door you had to open to sit down—the door was, of course, partly inspired by zoo cages, although the effect I wanted was more delicate and whimsical, like the veil on a 1938 ladies' hat. I would have preferred to be designing objects less ornate. In an illogical attempt to compensate, my drawings were getting smaller and smaller. One version was almost postage-stamp sized. I started drawing enlargements of details in circles, as on a map.

The zoo job was a fluke. Usually you have to take a test, demonstrate financial need and get on a waiting list, but the woman who takes care of the nocturnal mammals was about to go on maternity leave, and I happened to apply on a day when the head of personnel was in the kind of jubilant mood that makes you want to break rules.

The job was supposed to be a good source of dinner party jokes and a sort of eccentric artists' grant in which I'd work on my chairs. The responsibilities were not overwhelming. I had to feed the aardvark its ants, the brush-tailed phalanger and long-eared elephant shrew their browning lettuce. Most of the animals slept all day and in any case were by no means a noisy lot,or a popular one. Visitors tended to pay their respects on their way to the gorillas or lions, so there wasn't a great deal of distraction, especially in winter.

The Small Mammal House was done up Art Deco pink and gray tile. Outside, in full sun, it looked like an elegant old Florida hotel in a time warp—I always expected to see marcelled blondes being helped from Studebakers. Approaching the cages from behind the scenes, I'd feel like a stagehand. The fluorescent light glinting off the glass fronts of the dark enclosures was also cool and unreal—a perpetual day-for-

night.

Overall, the Small Mammal House smelled like a pail of baby's diapers, although when the cages were clean the nice smells of the animals themselves crept through. I particularly liked the scent of the gray fox—sawdust, roasts on a spit, cedar. Our Sri Lanka sloth bear, which preferred termites but settled for any insects, honey or fruit, also had a smell of Indian food, probably because it was so hot in the building that the apples and raisins released their juices.

For most of the day I'd draw in the back room, pausing for breaks to tour the animals' cages. I was particularly fond of the Slow Loris. I could stand for a very long time waiting for the Slow Loris to move.

My associations with the zoo should not be so summery. I began working there in late fall; for most of my time there it was snowing, and very cold. Maybe zoos simply remind me of childhood, or maybe the fact that I was just stopping over for a couple of months—that the zoo was no more my destiny than the jobs I'd had for summer vacations in college—made me less threatened and thus warmer, lighter. It's the difference between waiting for love or inspiration, those old watched kettles, and just sitting there, alive to possibility but not expecting very much. In any case I was happy at the zoo and happiness drifts me towards a long dusk, a bright cotton dress, grilled lobster, my hair copper from the sun.

So I always have to reverse the negative when I think of Haze Swift, because winter was so much a part of meeting her.

* * * * *

It was a Monday, the coldest day of the coldest winter since 1913. The trees hunched palsied in the wind like lifers with shaved heads pacing in an exercise yard. In late afternoon it had begun to snow. A travelers' advisory was in effect and I was afraid to drive home, so I decided to spend the night at the zoo and get some drawing done.

I meant to enjoy myself. Before the concession stands closed, I'd gotten a hot dog and fries to heat up for dinner in the employee microwave. There was a small TV in the lounge; I was anticipating something silly, with a laugh track, and curling to sleep fully dressed on the daybed.

But by nine o'clock, Paul was not yet home. He was not at the office, and he had not called me. I imagined him dead on the highway or killed by the loan sharks, his car pushed over a cliff; worse, I imagined him having an affair that had been going on for years, many of his difficult cases inventions that bought him time to lounge around with a lover. *Then why is he staying with you, for your money?* I scolded myself, but as I called him every five minutes, I became completely convinced that something was wrong. By now I was crying as I tried to visualize the clean white paint of my new life. I didn't want a fresh start. My life with Paul—the cognac snifters shimmering in golden light, the copper-bottomed pots, the emerald couch—was the best life I was going to get, and it was over.

The certainty with which I knew this was frightening, and strange, like a child's moon: a full moon, all the nooks and crannies clearly visible, but because the moon is out in daylight, you also don't quite believe it. I've read about people who dream about not being able to move their arms and legs and wake up paralyzed. I've always believed in those dreams. If it's true that nothing that ever happens to you is ever lost, that all memories survive in your brain in places that can be stimulated with electrical prods, then maybe the future is up there too, can be known as clearly as the past, with the right kind of concentration. Besides, with the present divorce rate, you have a 50% chance of being right if you say a relationship will end—about the same chance of guessing the sex of a baby.

This was about how I was thinking as I cried, and paced. There was no one there to talk to. Most of the employees had left early; I had accepted some extra watches as favors. Around eleven, I went to check the lion house, and that's when I saw Haze Swift feeding the puma.

* * * * *

I didn't have to wonder how she got in the building. The door had been left open for me.

She stood in front of the cage, feeding the puma Chinese food from a cardboard carton, with chopsticks. She stuck the food through the bars—pepper steak, I think—and the puma sniffed the food, licked it off the chopsticks gingerly, just like a cat.

On top of the obvious bizarreness of this scene was her clothes. She wore a long magenta cape and a scarf that had objects dangling from it like my chairs: vending machine-sized plastic babies, a war medal, dice.

She turned as I approached and said, at once, in a calm voice, "What's wrong?"

My eyes get very red and swollen when I cry.

As she asked the question her hand, with the chopstick and the next bite of food, froze in front of the cage, and I screamed, "Stop!"

The puma growled. She backed off, the food falling from the chopsticks.

"You scared him," she said.

"Are you crazy?" I asked.

She had opened her alligator handbag—neat and elegant, like her hair pulled back into a Catherine Deneuve bun—to get a tissue for the spilled food.

"Yes," she said.

"Look at your hand," I said.

The hand holding the tissue was red, cracked, bleeding in places.

"I'm glad I covered my face with the scarf," she said. "I lost my gloves. The other hand was in my pocket." She held the bad hand up and examined it, Lady Macbeth-fashion, flexing the fingers as if they didn't belong to her. Then she smiled—a dazzling, lucid, blue-eyed smile so inappropriate that it occurred to me she could be the kind of crazy person who sneaks into museums to icepick the eyes of Michelangelos. She might have a gun in the bag, and I'd be dead meat. They'd find me in the morning, mauled beyond recognition by the lions.

"Come on," I said. "I'll make you some tea, and you can stick your hand in front of the space heater."

She smiled again and nodded, docile now, and followed, carrying her handbag and the Chinese food, her heels—you could tell just by looking at them that these were remarkable shoes, Italian, very expensive—clicking on the concrete.

* * * * *

Haze Swift had walked to the zoo, she told me, from Chinatown, where she had eaten dinner alone, despite the fact that she'd made arrangements for the evening with two different lovers. She wore a red dress, with enough buttons to make an epic of seduction. The walk had taken three hours. Her hands, knees and toes were cold. During the walk she had attempted to remember how she had wound up with two lovers and a husband. She had begun to have trouble telling them apart, remembering which man took cream in his coffee, which sugar, which took coffee black. She had counseled friends that there was really no reason to have an affair; any person you turned to only brought you up against the same problems. She knew that. But for a while, she said, she had felt her mind slipping the way a slip shows—just a bit, no big deal, yet it felt very sloppy.

"Distinctions have dangerously thinned," she said. "For example, I've always taken my tea weak, with one sugar. I noticed that I've begun to drink the tea weaker and weaker, until I basically drink sugar water that is identical in color to the rubbing alcohol I almost slugged once as mouthwash."

"I know what you mean," I said, and told her about my gray hair-pulling routine.

"If it's quiet in the house," she said, "with Frank at work, I more *see* the quiet—like an eyelash snagged on the edge of a movie screen. Or if it's cold, if I've forgotten to turn on the heat, I taste the cold behind my teeth. And I'll find myself thinking about all of this as if I'm discovering something important about the elemental divisions of air, water, fire, and earth—that the square root of all experience is one, so how different in the end are flying or sailing away, burning to death or being buried alive?"

"Are you suicidal?" I asked.

"Maybe. Or maybe just philosophical. I think about how the seasons, in some regions of the world, weld themselves into a weather that is always smooth and mild, like the baby food they feed astronauts. So it's the same, I'll think. All cultures throughout history have managed to invent some kind of hat, some form of pasta. Except lollipops do *not* taste the same when broken, and a gerbil in a hatbox with a snake is not going to live long enough to write a sonnet about the experience in Latin."

I didn't know what to say.

"You see the trouble," she told me.

I wondered what a psychiatrist would make of such talk if Haze were being evaluated for possible commitment to an institution. I wondered what a psychiatrist would ask: probably not, first thing, whether she'd been abused as a child—more likely what she did for a living, her husband's name, where she grew up. So that's what I did. We had a fairly neutral conversation then, the kind you have with people you have just met. She rubbed her hands before the space heater or gripped her mug of hot tea as she listened. I told her things about the zoo: that the woman who sold plastic snakes, pinwheels and pretzels at a concession stand outside the gates earned over $40,000 a year. How one zoo worker had been angry about his wife's infidelity, and had slammed his fist through the plastic-painted backdrop of forest against which the lemurs slept—the animals had woken up,

startled. The lions, I told her, were all donated by local banks. Their names were Isis, Jambalaya, Akimbo, Charmian. I gave her a tour of the nocturnal mammals, showed her the vampire bats and bushbabies, the long-eared elephant shrew and a Slow Loris named, unfortunately, Doris. We waited patiently for the Slow Loris to move. When it finally did, it was so slow you could almost see the trail of the muscle, as in multiple-printed movies about dance.

Then I showed her my chair designs. She was very impressed.

My husband called me eventually, and she called hers. We told our respective spouses we were fine, enjoying a snowed-in slumber party, and by that point it was almost true. Paul claimed to have been working in another part of the building. By the end of the night Haze and I knew a great deal about each other, although I wouldn't say we became fast friends, as in one of those disaster movies in which strangers survive a plane crash or are trapped together in a high-rise during a blackout. We did exchange phone numbers, but neither of us called for a long while.

* * * * *

A year later, she phoned to ask if I'd be interested in designing sets for the opening of her fall collection in Paris. I said yes. By then I had quit the zoo job and was working on a pregnancy. While I had assumed my pregnancy would occur as reliably as feeding time at the zoo, these things do not always happen quite as effortlessly as we imagine they will. But my husband had not been killed by the Mafia, was not (so far as I know) having an affair, and Haze Swift had not, evidently, lost her mind. In fact, as everyone who reads the paper knows by now, she has done quite well.

Before she left the zoo the night we met I recommended to Haze Swift a psychiatrist I had seen myself in difficult periods: a tall, slim, long-legged woman who smoked long, thin cigarettes. As part of my transference I had switched to my psychiatrist's brand, and then the psychiatrist and I had quit smoking together. It was a very chummy and supportive kind of therapy, not at all grave or hardcore, but it appears to have worked in any case, as well as any of these therapies work. I've read that all methods of therapy—Freudian, Jungian, behaviorist—have about exactly the same success rate as do the various methods of quitting smoking. I don't know whether Haze ever called the therapist. I haven't seen the therapist in quite a while; now most of the specialists I consult concern themselves with fertility, not sanity.

The first sets I designed for Haze were for a collection of clothing that featured a punk safari theme, so the zoo backdrops fit in nicely. We even built my chairs for the set. It was quite rewarding to see the chairs actualized. The chairs were positioned on the runway, and the models would sit in them, or drape themselves against them, in intriguing ways. For the spring collection, which featured many icy pastels, I designed a winter in the tropics scene—polar bears in sunglasses, flamingoes in snow.

The fashion set work opened other doors for me. As well as continuing to work for Haze, I am now collaborating with a well-known architect, whose residential dwellings feature wire, sheet metal and other prison materials, on a set for a modern dance company. These mixed-media events are very hot in the art world now: famous architects and painters designing sets for dancers and musicians. I have had a call from a movie artistic director and will go to L.A. to speak with him, after the middle of the month, when I will be at home, working on my baby.

The baby has engendered many inside jokes between Paul and me. If this keeps up for much longer, we have decided, we will have to get a pet instead—perhaps an interesting pet, a python or goat. I have read that many people have started to keep pigs. Pigs are not petite creatures; some weigh in at five or six hundred pounds. Sometimes Paul gets home from work and finds me waiting at the door for him in a sexy negligee, in a somewhat parodic attempt to make our arduous work more amusing. We have amassed quite a collection of goofy lingerie, some designed by Haze Swift herself. Each morning, before I get out of bed, I take my temperature. This was very annoying at first, but I've gotten used to it.□

John Mosier

FROM PEREDISHKA TO EUROFLOP: CANNES 1988

Thow Shalt Not Kill is the kind of film that in the West would scarcely attract much attention at all.[1] A young man wanders the streets aimlessly, hails a cab, directs the cabdriver to take him out in a deserted area, and then brutally murders him. He's easily caught, since he tries to take a pretty young neighbor of the cabbie for a ride in the cab, is quickly tried, and promptly executed. He's defended by a young lawyer, Peter, who's just been admitted to practice, and who goes to the prison to talk to Jacek just before his execution. The personal brutality of the murder of the cabbie is matched by the administrative brutality of the state's execution. Both are shown in gruesome detail.

What's new here is not simply the fact that the film is made at all (although that counts for something, since traditionally in socialist countries such crimes, while not positively held never to occur, are never openly talked about). What is new is the fact that the young man's murder is shown to have some of the same sort of social causes that we accept in the West. Jacek is bored, alienated, and suffering from intense guilt caused by the fact that he was instrumental in the death of his younger sister. In other words, he feels that he has done something terrible, and he is determined to do something for which society will really punish him. This last, the personal and psychological part, we don't learn until the very end in his conversation with Peter.

Aside from the novelty of seeing this in a Polish situation, there's little of any real depth in the film by Western standards. There's the recurring Kieslowski interest in chance and coincidence: the young lawyer realizes that he was in the same bar as Jacek while he was looking for his victim. But Kieslowski doesn't do much with this other than simply throw it in.

The photography is striking. Much of the film looks as though it were shot through a filter made of rotting cheese, and Kieslowski seems to have gone out of his way to make things look grim and drab, as though he had in mind all those 1950s Western clichés about what socialist countries looked like. The thing he's added, which has been the staple of the best Polish film for some time, is the extent to which this is a deeply corrupt society in which life on the fiddle is life. The choice of a taxi driver for the victim is particularly apt, because taxi drivers, who have access to foreigners, and the chance to make money on the side, might be supposed to be unsympathetic characters, and this is certainly true here.

The emphasis on the portrayal of a grimy underbelly of proletarian life, photographed as dismally as possible, seems to be a characteristic of the films of perestroika. It's certainly the case with the *Quinzaine*'s entry, Igor Minaiev's *Cold March*, about a Soviet technical high school out in the middle of nowhere. Again one is struck by the predominance of a kind of filthy rotting green luminescence permeating the interior scenes, while Minaiev's exteriors are striking evocations of just how desolate and dark things are. There is an enormous literature describing how terrible life is in the provinces of Soviet Russia, which corresponds with the enormous body of literature describing how awful things were under the tsars. It isn't Minaiev's point to call attention to this. He's mainly interested in showing us how this environment transforms young men into gangs of savages only concerned with protecting the other members of the group.

Intellectually, this is a much more conservative film than the Polish one: the various members of society that we see—teachers, the local police chief, the headmaster—seem to be simply honest and put-upon civil servants trying to do the best job they can in absolutely depressing situations. It's hard to say whether or not Minaiev is anything out of the ordinary as directors go, and, on the basis of this film, what sort of work will start to emerge from the Soviet Union in the near

[1]Shown in competition. Although passed over by the official jury, it drew very high ratings from the foreign critics, and has continued to do so since.

future.

There certainly is none of the style that one finds in Teimouraz Bablouani's *The Migration of the Sparrows*, a short black and white Georgian film apparently shot in 1979 that is just now being released (it was shown in the *Semaine*). The first part of the film, set inside a third class railway compartment, is one of those slices of life segments. What's striking about it is the sense of visual style. Bablouani has collected a real group of characters, so much so that just looking at them tells you volumes. He also has a sense of how to make what is in this part a very talky film visually interesting.

Jacek strikes out: Short Film About Killing

The second part is a prolonged knockdown, drag out fist fight between the central character of the compartment and his foil, a foppishly dressed painter who passes himself off as a globe-trotting and world famous singer returning to his village. Although the fighting is clumsily staged, this part too is not without interest. Bablouani is an intriguing artist. This was his first (or second) film, depending on how you unscramble the chronology of his career. Unfortunately, his work has the sense of visual style that Minaiev's doesn't. One only hopes this difference is strictly a function of the abilities of the artists. Otherwise, once all the suppressed films are shown, students of the post perestroika Soviet cinema are going to be in for a pretty dull time of it.

That is certainly still the case in China, where filmmakers have mastered the art of opening up the political discourse but not how to make a lively film. *The Well*, done by Li Yalin, and also shown in the *Semaine*, has all of the intellectual components to make it a powerful work. Zhu Shiyi is smitten with the heroine, a talented chemist whose "bourgeois" family background has reduced her to washing bottles in the chemical factory he manages. He marries her. There's one catch: his mother, who expects Xu Lisha to be a household slave in the best traditions of Chinese society. When she resists, they take advantage of the events of the cultural revolution to make her buckle down. As events change, she becomes famous in her work, but she is never able to escape her marriage, and finally kills herself in the well that she has been made to carry water up from to her mother-in-law's house. The point is that the party line was used to intimidate talented people, and, further, that communism in China has done very little to free women from the tyranny of the older society. Women are twice oppressed, Marx observed: once by capitalism and once by the patriarchy. Li

Death of the Cabdriver: Short Film About Killing

Yalin's observation is that in socialism women are also twice oppressed: once by the party and once by the patriarchy.

This could be a deeply moving film, but it never gets past the schematic level suggested by the summary of the plot. It's an extremely static film where almost everything of importance is accomplished by talking. The actress who plays the heroine may be an excellent actress, and she is extremely beautiful, but the director never gives her anything to do.

One has the suspicion that what one is watching is a sort of updated sob story in which the beautiful young wife is tortured to death by her husband's family. The only place in the film with any sort of enthusiasm is when the director wants to signal that it is now 1984. The numbers come on the screen in dramatic fashion. Rousing music is played. We see what looks exactly like one of the old Stalinist newsreels of factories rising, heavy trucks on the move, parking lots full of cars. The parking lot full of cars gives it away: what we are seeing is all the excesses of the old Stalinist cinema, when Siberia was supplied with jammed parking lots.

This is the sort of film that one wants desperately to like, but can't. Finally, it's not a

very good film, certainly not one that is redeemed by its message, however sobering and frank that message is.

Neither the Hungarians or the Bulgarians were having much truck with the new wave of socialist cinema this year. Lyudmil Staikov's *Time of Violence* was yet another beautifully photographed and interminable epic about the resistance of the Bulgarians to the Turks. One has the faint suspicion that the subject of this film fits perfectly into the current needs of the Bulgarian state to remind everyone of how the Turks historically treated the Bulgarians, since the fate of the Turkish minorities in Bulgaria is very topical right now. On the other hand, the Bulgarians have a lot to be sore about. Bulgaria was the last European country to be freed from the Ottoman Empire, and it suffered perhaps the most as a result.

this director, there are striking images, and he has a wonderful way of moving from reality to the past with the utmost fluidity. But the film is too long, as it stands, to sustain any interest. Unfortunately, in some senses it's not long enough. The film tries to follow two separate groups: the Bulgarian Christians who are about to be exterminated, and the Turkish rulers (some of whom are kidnapped Bulgarians who have been brought up to be Janissaries). As a result there's enough plot here for two separate movies, and Staikov never really makes them mesh.

The Hungarians, like the Bulgarians (only more so), have been making films that were deeply critical of socialist reality for two decades or more. So Istvan Szabo, like Staikov, can pretty much ignore what's current. The problem with *Hanussen*, however, is that it's simply more of the same old Szabo. We have Klaus Maria Brandauer

Hanussen at work

Nor do the Bulgarians have any particular need to jump on the bandwagon, as there have been deeply critical Bulgarian films out for over a decade. So there's no need for Staikov to try to follow the current Russian fashions here.

What there was a need for is some editing. If *Time of Violence* had been cut from its two and a half plus hours down to under two hours, it could be an interesting work. As is often the case with

again as a trapped *mittel-europäisch* man of feeling. We have the rise of fascism. We have the fall of the weak hero. We have an international co-production. We have a film that goes on for hours. We also have some very sloppy work.

Although in places this is the best work Brandauer has done on camera, the dubbing into German is so bad that it's often impossible to watch the figures in closeup. Time and time again

one is aware of the fact that the film was put together very badly. Extras clap politely and the soundtrack roars with their applause. In the brief opening combat scene, soldiers fall with no wounds, and out of synch with the sounds of the firing. Many scenes were obviously filmed and then left in the final cut even though their original purpose had been lost.

Szabo and Brandauer together can be quite formidable. There's a scene near the beginning of the film where Brandauer, recovering from a head wound in a military hospital in WWI, begins to discover his psychic powers. He talks a wounded soldier out of blowing himself up, actually hypnotizing him. It's a marvelous scene, and there's another one in Karlovy Vary, where, as the clairvoyant Hanussen, he's being tried for fraud. And, in general, Szabo's work here is gentler, more controlled, than in anything he's done.

But a few marvelous scenes don't make a movie, particularly when, as happens after the first hour, we realize that we're seeing the same old tired Szabo script which we saw being used in *Mephisto*, and even in *Colonel Redl*. If one could combine the best qualities of these last two films, one could get a nice movie. Brandauer's work here is better, and the location work is much better. But everything else is terrible.

The Silver Globe, shown in the *Un Certain Regard* section, was originally one of those epic Polish films that was scrapped in 1977 because, according to its director, Andrzej Zulawski, "the newly appointed Polish cultural minister was much smarter than his predecessor. He understood that, beneath the mask of this absurdist science-fiction film, we were debating the spiritual and moral issues of present-day Poland."[2] If so, the minister was an extremely astute film critic as well as a paranoid bureaucrat, because the fragments that had been shot scarcely add up to a coherent narrative, a criticism made all the more damning by the fact that for this version Zulawski provided a voice-over narration to describe the missing scenes.

Although the double facts of censure and subsequent re-release are reminiscent of the situation that prevailed with Skolimowski's *Hands Up*, the differences are no less instructive. *Hands Up* was an original and quite coherent (although now somewhat dated) critique of Stalinism that was suppressed only after its completion. Like Tenghez Abuladze's *Repentance*, which it preceded by many years, its handling of the subject, although absurdist in treatment, was quite clear: hardly anyone who saw the film could have been puzzled as to what it was about, or to where the director's sympathies were.

On the contrary, after seeing this reconstructed film, both its message and its director's real aims remain unclear. What emerges in Zulawski's two hour and forty minute reconstruction is a highly derivative work of occasional visual brilliance which is finally overpowered by the philosophizing, although the idea behind the plot has great promise: a group of astronauts who land on a stange planet repopulate it, and their offspring proceed to recreate all the disasters of human history.

Given the cheerfully pseudo-scientific ways that Marxism-Leninism interprets history, this is a great subject, particularly if one ends up with Stalin all over again. But what it ends up with is a considerable muddle, lacking even the clear flashes of topical relevance that one got in *Repentance*. Perhaps this is because Zulawski felt that he was engaged in some kind of original discourse about humanity. But that's doubtful, and even so, it's highly derivative. The use of science fiction motifs to talk about the present was so widespread in Eastern Europe that by this time (1977) even the Bulgarians had done it (Staikov's *Third from the Sun*), not to mention Tarkovsky and *Solaris*.

One can't help but get the feeling here that Zulawski had some sort of megalomaniacal belief that he was conducting the same sort of discourse about all the major issues of our time as Tarkovsky was doing with *Stalker*. But Zulawski simply doesn't have the sort of measured tonality that allows ideas to come through, that controlled sense of quiet discourse which Tarkovsky was a master at employing in the cinema. The minute the characters start ranting at one another, which is all that the dialogue consists of here, all sense of philosophical discourse vanishes.

Visually, the film is also a disappointment. Frankly, it too seems very derivative. By this point in Eastern Europe we had seen an impressive set of non-narrative films where virtually all the traditional ideas of socialist cinematography were shattered, and not a few of those held elsewhere as well—to name only a few of those distributed in the West: Wajda's *The Wedding*, Jancso's *The Red Psalm* and Dyulgerov's *And the Day Came*. All these films come before *The Silver Globe*, so it is not as though Zulawski was breaking new ground in the formal aspects of the

[2]As quoted in *Screen International* 12 May 1988: 55.

cinema.

What is intriguing is the idea of the astronaut's camera as the recorder of all that has passed. This technique seems to result in far too limiting a subjectivity to work throughout the flim, and sure enough, Zulawski abandons it after about forty minutes. But the first forty minutes or so are quite intriguing, because hardly anyone has stuck to this point of view so consistently as we see it executed here.

The result is curiously constricting, and dizzying as well, since much of what we see is the result of 360 degree pans, swishes and tilts, all seemingly done by a hand-held camera. Although certainly not radical departures by 1977, even inside the straight jacket of Socialist cinematographic technique the result is an interesting exercise, precisely the sort of diploma film that one wishes Polish film students had been allowed to make.

Unfortunately, they weren't, and the result has been very bad for Polish cinematography. Outside of an occasional segment in Wajda, almost the only consistently visual director working in Poland has been Kazimierz Kutz, so in that sense one can see Zulawski as trying to break free of the conventions of Polish filmmaking, and one has to sympathize with his attempt. But one also has the feeling that here is a classic case of the sort of artistic overreach that has become commonplace in the cinemas of Germany, France and Scandinavia (come to think of it, in much of Europe), where the directors are much better at producing press kits and interviews expounding on their ideas than they are in making the films that might support either their ideas or some sense of cinematic art.

The big surprise of the group was Karel Smyczek's Czech film, *Why?*, a quasi-documentary which details a June 1985 rampage by the young partisans of the Sparta soccer team. It seems that hundreds of young fans got on a train, spent the night in transit to the game, and thoroughly demolished the passenger cars. Finally, at the end of the line, the police arrested most of them, and a handful were brought to trial. By American standards, what we see on the train scarcely gets past the standard of a wild homecoming weekend on fraternity row. But historically one was more apt to see disruptions of public order in Switzerland than in Czechoslovakia, so the shock value of what happened is considerable for Czechs themselves. The film doesn't give much of an idea as to whether the sentences, which ranged from six months in detention for the minors to two years in ordinary jail, were unusually stiff or not.

The nominal issue the film deals with is why this handful of people were singled out, since obviously many others were involved. The authorities felt they had to make an example, but it is far from clear in the film how Smyczek himself feels about this. The majority of the young men and women tried are shown engaging in all kinds of vandalism on the train, so that they're certainly not innocent bystanders taking the rap.

But the nominal issue here isn't the point. Smyczek doesn't have an answer to just why they did it, and in Czechoslovakia, the country where socialism has had all the answers to every problem for thirty or forty years, simply the fact of no clear answer is in itself significant. What emerges is a fascinating portrait of broken homes, abandoned adolescents and adult delinquents, all allowed to run loose in a society which seems helpless and indifferent both to their plight and to their disruptive behavior.

Few films have been made in socialist countries acknowledging that the problems of juvenile and post juvenile delinquency found in the West are endemic under socialism as well. When such cases come up, they are usually laid directly at the door of "Western" influences: sex, drugs, rock-and-roll, and blue jeans. In orthodox socialist thought of the kind that one sees on wall posters rather than hears at international conferences, these influences clearly are linked to the West. The always implicit and sometimes surprisingly overt message is that if only we could keep these contaminating influences out, we wouldn't have these problems.

Although there are some token attempts to link what happened to the Brussels incident, it becomes clear very soon that the point of this film is that Czech society is now having to come to grips with the same problems that Western societies have been struggling with since early Marlon Brando movies. Throughout the course of Smyczek's film, what emerges is a portrait of a rebellious and purposeless set of young men and women who feel that their parents' society has nothing to offer them worth crossing the street for.

The film shows us what happened on the train, and gives us glimpses into the private lives of the defendants both before and after the ride. It concludes with a set of "man in the street" interviews in which people are asked what they think of the sentencing. Well, at least the

authorities set an example which will deter others, the final interviewee concludes. At that point the interview is disrupted by another wild demonstration of soccer fans, equal in intensity to what we've seen at the beginning of the film. It's a nice way to make an upsetting point.

The best film of this current group of films wasn't shown at Cannes at all. But *Little Vera* is an engrossing and outrageous saga of a rebellious young woman that illustrates how all of the current social and political concerns of the filmmakers can be combined with the more traditional virtues of storytelling.

Little Vera opens with a lengthy shot of the industrial wasteland of some anonymous Soviet city. The shot goes on and on: in the background sullen vistas of chimneys and girders, in the foreground, the apartment blocks of the workers. Pichul never abandons this concern. In almost every frame he manages to make the point that his characters are living in the middle of an appalling industrial slum.

But their life goes on. Vera hangs around the house listening to music. Like any sensible young woman she saves all her energy for going out at night and partying. She's out of control: when her parents want to being her around, they resort to calls to her brother in Moscow. But her actions are mostly harmless. She's chased by one boy and ends up marrying another. They move in with her parents, and her father—one of those disgusting alcoholics that Dostoevsky so delighted in giving us—stabs him in a drunken brawl.

To many European, and particularly Eastern European, critics, there's nothing here thematically that we haven't seen in Forman's Czech films. But what's here that is missing in all of the other works is a sense of control. Pichul shares with most Russian directors a reluctance to cut: at 130 minutes, this film is too long. So is practically every other Russian film, including even Askoldov's high praised 1967 film, *The Commissar*, which, when finally released in 1987 (!), was only 108 minutes. But he doesn't ramble, and he manages to develop a surprisingly sophisticated story which covers an enormous amount of emotional territory.

Pichul also does something with his characters that most of his colleagues have trouble doing: he gets the audience to like them. Even the father, by far the most unsympathetic of the group, gets to establish himself as a human being. In his own drunken, obnoxious, bullying way he loves his daughter, and she loves him. The movement in the film is not simply Vera's from sullen teenager to saddened young woman, but from familial estrangement to love. It's an impressive debut film, one which suggests that the Soviet Union may have a real director on its hands.

But for all their problems, the latest crop of Eastern Block films were, even at their worst, better than the gaggle of Euroflops that have by now become the stock in trade of every major film festival. Although Cannes did much better this year in that they didn't dominate the lineup, there were still far too many. As has by now become the custom, the British won the prize for the most singularly wretched.

Pascali's Island is another of those British period films in which the actors simply rampage off with the movie, usually because the script is so uncinematic and the director so untalented that it is a clear case of every man for himself. The time is 1908, the setting a small island off the coast of Asia Minor, then ruled by the Turks as part of the Ottoman Empire. It was, as the opening credits tell us, during that period when all the empires were about to crash (one almost expects the cast to be wearing ear plugs in readiness for the event). One would suppose that the sort of audience that would go see this film in the first place would know that already, but James Dearden assumes that they don't, and for the next two hours he hammers in other such obvious points to the best of his limited abilities.

This is one of those films where when the director says that "what really turned me on about this story . . . is the power of beauty . . . the destructive power of beauty," he manages to illustrate this with a couple of repeated shots of a Greek statue or the sun setting into the ocean.[3] What keeps the film afloat is the acting, or, more precisely, Ben Kingsley's acting, although this film will have a good audience with all those people for whom long wobbly shots of the sun sinking into the Aegean constitute significant form.[4]

Ben Kingsley plays Basil Pascali, one of those part European, part Turkish figures who has formed the stock character of British spy fiction for decades, and although he tries his best, there

[3]Quote from the Press Kit 9.

[4]See, for example, Thomas Quinn Curtiss's favorable (but very brief) mention in his coverage of Cannes in *International Herald Tribune* 14-15 May 1988: 7: "holds attention firmly with its ironic revelation of the intrigues that occur on a Greek island . . . a subtle tale of complicated trickery with style and verve."

isn't really very much he can do with the figure. Everything about the film screams out at us that he is, as Dearden says, "a tragic character," but the problem is that Dearden's concept of a tragic character turns out to be "rather like an unpublished author, a frustrated novelist who has turned his reports into his art form" (10).

So Kingsley tries to make this pathetic little creature into a tragic character, but the other characters don't give him much help. Helen Mirren, who plays Lydia Neuman, is supposed to be a sympathetic Viennese artist, but mostly she tries to keep her clothing from falling off her shoulder and exposing too much of her bust when she's reclining with Charles Dance. Not that she should bother: Basil is one of those "I loved you from afar" characters, who, in an extremely peculiar sequence, runs off to the ambiguous pleasures of a Turkish bath after seeing her nude in the water. Dance, who plays Anthony Bowles, the great love of Lydia's life, seems more interested in keeping a good profile to the camera.

His work here is reminiscent of Christopher Lambert's in Rosi's *Chronicle of a Death Foretold*, a film which the critics here vied with one another in execrating in 1987. Yet both films have the same picture post card view of the Third World, using the same cardboard sun drenched sets. What's the difference between them? To be fair, part of the answer is that this is an actor's film, and en masse film critics tend to be pretty conservative judges who like films with traditional values, and good acting is one such value.

Kingsley is one of those actors whom it is always a pleasure to watch. He's intelligent, sensitive, and he effortlessly takes over any scene that he's in. Unlike a good many successful older actors, he doesn't appear to be turning into himself and reduplicating his earlier roles. He plays Pascali like a man who's spent an enormous amount of time thinking about how to play the role.

Mirren and Dance, on the other hand, get by largely by bluff. Neither one of them seems to have thought very much about the part, and simply rely on their natural talents, which are considerable: Dance has done an enormous amount of live theater work, and he's very good at simply looking impressive. Mirren, on the other hand, is just naturally (by now anyway) a talented actress. She can easily project her feelings, and most audiences like that.

But part of the reason for the over praise of this film is the by now somewhat desperate attempt of the English critics at Cannes to continue convincing everyone that they really have a vibrant national cinema that can stand comparison with everyone else's. With the exception of the members of Python, there's very little sustained talent in Great Britain on the auteur level, with the emphasis on sustained. There are reasonable numbers of talented people who can make one or two decent feature films, but none who are able to demonstrate that continuous kind of cinematic control that we see almost everywhere else. On the other hand, the competition for most boring film of the festival was particularly intense this year, and Dearden only squeaked by on points from the Italians.

Or were they Germans? Margarethe von Trotta's *Love and Fear* is technically an Italian film, something which caused a certain amount of controversy at Cannes. In recent years the Italians have had a difficult time getting together with the festival management. One year there will be a slate of Italian films, which are terrible, and the next year there will be none; or, if there are good ones, there will be too many of them, and some really good film will be passed over. Since von Trotta's film was the only Italian entry, the problems were multiplied. At the start of the festival Ettore Scola, the President of the Jury, said in a press conference that von Trotta's film was German, because she was German. By the time the film was actually shown, von Trotta had replied via an impassioned letter in *La Republica* that she was really a European, and only a German by her marriage (this may seem a funny way to answer him, but this is Cannes).

Whatever she is, and whatever her film is, it is a very poor job at being an adaptation of Chekhov's play *Three Sisters*, and it is assuredly yet another film by von Trotta about sisters.[5] It has all of the same sisterly themes as the earlier ones, and it is easy to get the three sets of siblings confused in one's mind. There is the older sister, who has clearly replaced the mother in the original family, and who continues to exercise a certain amount of maternal domination even though her siblings are grown. In the current film she's played by Fanny Ardent, an excellent actress who is unfortunately dubbed into Italian

[5]The first *Schwestern* was made in 1979, and is sometimes known in English as *Friends and Husbands*, while the second film, made in 1981, is usually referred to in English as *Mariane and Julianne*. There were differing titles for this latest film at Cannes, of which *Three Sisters* was one.

in singularly wretched fashion. So is everyone else, including Gretta Scacci, who plays the middle sister—but Ardent's part suffers more from it.

Of course this is appropriate because it's a film about suffering. The love of the title is family love, because none of the sisters (or their brother) is particularly successful at an emotional life outside of the family. Fear, or anxiety, is the major emotion here, as the director has observed: "There is less hope [than in Chekhov]. For Chekhov, the far-off future held some hope, which would somehow justify the suffering. For my three sisters, the future holds fear, as it does for all of us. They move in a double prison: the past, which has not fulfilled its promises in the present, and the future, which generates only monsters."[6]

Enough said to establish that the film has very little to do with Chekhov. In most respects it is the exact opposite of Yoshida's version of *Wuthering Heights*. There, once we got past the initial shock of transposition, we could see a revitalization of the novel itself, an interpretation in the ordinary sense of the word.

That there's very little of Chekhov in here is perhaps unfortunate, but then it is difficult to think of a playwright whose works have been deliberately misunderstood and perverted as systematically as have Chekhov's dramas. Almost without exception written as comedies, they were transformed into the bleakest sort of tragedy almost from Stanislavsky's first rehearsal. So von Trotta is simply following along in the footsteps of some memorable people who have also adapted Chekhov.

What's less excusable is that in places the film degenerates into a soap opera. Fairly early on in the film, there is an entire sequence in which Velia sees her sister-in-law stepping out on her brother. In the immediately preceding scenes we have seen how the brother is stuck working late at the bank and how his wife abuses the youngest sister, who is at home studying. When Velia comes in the house, her little sister is in a funk, and, after a few inconclusive interchanges, storms off to her bedroom and refuses to eat. In the meantime her married suitor, with whom she has just been rolling on the pebbles of a rocky lake side beach, is sitting in the parlor with the lights

Three Sisters and Friends

[6]As quoted in *Screen International* 15 May 1988: 81.

off. When she asks him why, he says it's because his wife is threatening to kill herself.

What this is, is a soap opera. It's a very genteel, upper middle-class European one, but that's basically what it is. The real anguish of the earlier films, which made the relations of the sisters quite moving, has gone, to be replaced by a series of formulae.

The action isn't the only place where this film comes across like a soap. The cinematography matches the action. Emotions aren't perceived; they're verbalized. While we are one step up in sophistication from the soap opera world of talking heads whose hair spray gleams in the arc lights, we're only one very short step up.

But what the film shares with the soaps that is even worse than all this, is the considerable lack of consciousness on the part of the characters. When Velia bicycles out to that lake to meet her lover, with a smile on her face that makes her look like the cat who just swallowed the canary, she doesn't seem in the least to perceive that there's something incongruous about a mature attractive woman professor speeding to a rendezvous on a bike. Her sisters are equally oblivious to themselves, and live in a sort of post narcissistic phase of life. There's no indication as to whether the reason they are so oblivious to the way they come across is a deep lack of self esteem or simply that they're loony.

This is a possibility which was studiously expunged from the script, as was the possibility that the reason they're so unsuccessful with relations outside of the family is because they wall non family members out. So the script too lacks any sort of self awareness.

Scenes frequently seem to have been stuck in with an almost comic disregard for the way they will appear on screen. When Velia and her lover embrace out in the woods, she obligingly lies down on the rocks and makes out with her fellow professor. Now possibly we can accept the silly smile, the dashing around on the bicycle. Possibly we can accept that here's one of those attractive mature women who is condemned to spend her life as a male doormat (in this case perhaps literally). But it is just impossible to credit that a women this well dressed, this immaculately groomed and coiffured, would plop down on the rocks. But of course when she gets up, she looks absolutely immaculate; so at least von Trotta's consistent.

Most of the other films shown at Cannes were what the traditional Hollywood writers used to call "big pictures," either because of their "epic" scope or because of their attention to "serious" themes. Most of these works, both then and now, are seriously flawed, but occasionally one can see the flicker of something useful and interesting, and one of them, Schrader's story of Patty Hearst, is worthwhile for the way it takes us back into the immediate past.

The saga of Patty Hearst is one of those minor events of the 1970s that exercised a peculiar fascination over the American public. Was she brainwashed? If so, to what extent? Regardless, to what extent was she guilty of collaborating with the remnants of the SLA? Schrader has developed a fascination with ambiguous characters, starting with his taxi driver and including (most recently) the Japanese writer Mishima, and with pretty much the same results. Whatever was really going on, Schrader won't tell us. Instead, he shows us what actually happened. This isn't in itself a bad approach, particularly since the heroine is still alive and well in Connecticut, although the one thing that comes through clearly in the film is that Schrader is basically in sympathy with the central character in the film.[7] What does not come through is why we should be—or why we should not be, for that matter.

One senses when seeing the film that its director believes he is giving us the answers to all of these questions, and when one turns to the canned interviews of the Press Kit one finds this confirmed: "What attracted me to the project was the opportunity to get into a state of mind. . . . *Patty Hearst* is an internal perception of events. In effect, we placed a camera behind her forehead. You see everything through this strange subjective tunnel of first-hand experience, her changing perceptions of this nightmarish drama."[8]

But we don't. In shot after shot after shot what we see is almost perversely the opposite: Hearst in her closet, blindfolded; Hearst making a tape recording; Hearst trying to do push-ups on the floor with the other members of the cell. Natasha

[7]She also came to the festival and gave a press conference, at which she was, as Thomas Quinn Curtiss pointed out, "far more informative than the film. . . . Her personal appearance had more to say than the movie about her experience and the film would benefit by including her interview" (*International Herald Tribune* 17 May 1988: 8).

[8]Press Kit 4. According to an article by Jim Robbins in *Variety*, Schrader had orginally intended the film to have comments from "witnesses," as in *Reds*, but dropped this idea: "I tried to make it work, but the film is very dreamlike, and the device interrupted that" (4 May 1988: 9).

Richardson seems a talented enough young actress (although probably most of her energies were spent in trying to speak Californian, which she learned very well), but the problem is that the camera is neither behind her forehead nor does it register what she's thinking.

This last is perhaps impossible, since both the live and fictional Hearsts readily admitted they

Natasha Richardson: Patty Hearst

themselves didn't know what was going on, so it may be a choice forced by reality. But the problem here, which has become habitual with Schrader, is this: he's constantly hinting that he is going to give us the key to understanding something really important, that he's carefully planned it so that it will be a revelation. And what we actually get is simply an ordinary piece of work, with few illuminations of any sort—not a bad work, mind you: if we could dissociate it from the director's claims about it, his approach might actually be a perfectly reasonable way to proceed.

Schrader's argument, of course, is that "there is no simple answer. . . . It takes the whole film to state our point of view, and the film must speak for itself" (2-3). Fair enough, except that if there is one thing that we have plenty of in this case, it is reportage, ranging from the actual photos of the bank robbery, and the live coverage of the May 17th shootout, to articles in the *Rolling Stone*, seven *Newsweek* cover stories, and seven books.[9] This long after the event, a good filmmaker ought to be able to do something with it besides report it all over again. But that's about all that we get here.[10]

[9]The Press Kit gives a nice summary of the case and includes a bibliography.

Schrader is just enough of a genius to make us see what all the possibilities were that he couldn't be bothered with. Richardson herself manages to suggest a fairly practical member of the California bourgeoisie who saved herself by doing whatever she was told, while Hearst herself supplies one key element in understanding what happened: when she saw the famous shootout in Los

One of the few action sequences from Patty Hearst

Angeles in which the FBI and police managed to incinerate the SLA, she decided that she was essentially dead, both to her family and to the world at large, and so she tried to stick with the only friends she had, the Harrises, who were remnants of her cell.[11] At about the point at which it would have been possible to leave, she meet

[10]Schrader neglects the one fact that would help his case considerably: that Cinque's cell was capable of the most grostesque acts of violence, such as shooting Marcus Foster, the Black superintendent of the Oakland Public Schools. This killing, by the way, is the one place where Schrader does the facts a clear disservice. The fact that Cinque believed that this assassination would accomplish something for repressed Blacks tells us a great deal about his mind. It also suggests why the real Patty Hearst would be so terrified of them. In the real world, they were as crazy as the Manson gang.

[11]I say Hearst because according to the Press Kit she sent Schrader twelve pages of notes which "were either used or influenced what was used in the film" (4). Natasha Richardson confirmed this in her interview in *The Business of Film at Cannes*: "but Richardson still believes she was innocent. 'I'm convinced that she was pretending to go along with them to save her own life. . . . There were two major turning points in her life—after the bank raid being branded a common criminal, and then watching what could have been her own death on television, as the police shoot out with the SLA . . . ended with the building being burned down" (17 May 1988: 16).

Wendy Yoshimura, who comes across as the only reasonably functional adult in the film.

These are interesting insights, as is the one that much of Hearst's motivation was the quite understandable one of showing people like the Harrises that she was as successful at being an urban guerrilla as they were, that she opened up from the car during the famous sporting goods store scuffle simply to prove to the Harrises that she was better at her job than they were at theirs.

If you centered the story on those insights, that it takes kidnapping, brainwashing, forced sex, and a spell in jail to make a basically likable but alienated nineteen-year-old girl grow up, you at least have an interesting fable to hang the story on, although not an original one, because this sounds suspiciously like the plot to something by Joyce Carol Oates.

There's also the possibility here to make one of those films whose insights would have been genuinely subversive (and probably would have offended everyone to boot), because although Schrader's portrayal of the SLA is essentially humorless, the events he portrays make them look like first cousins of the rebels in *Life of Brian*, and much of the dialogue could have come from *Bananas*. Black people never wear blue jeans, one of the white women in the cell tells Hearst. We need more members, says Cinque. Go out door-to-door and get us some new members. No gas, no electricity, we're living like poor people at last, says Emily Harris.

It's not as though Schrader seems to have chosen to ignore this aspect of things, but that he seems oblivious to them, as though when he was filing them it never occurred to him that these persons are ingenuously funny. And Richardson, whatever her talents, isn't given the opportunity to let us see these remarks registering on her. Does she think that blacks don't wear blue jeans? Does she think that the woman who says this is off her rocker? We never get to find out. It's only at the very end, in a very creditable speech to her father (which is very creditably delivered), that Richardson gets the chance to act.

Schrader's inability to come to grips with a "big" subject is disturbing, but at Cannes he had plenty of company, although perhaps not very good luck in that there were several other equally problematic films that had more topicality and thus got more of a favorable critical response. Chris Menges' film about South Africa is a perfect example of this.

The present government of South Africa, like the government of Paraguay, has very few supporters, and it probably doesn't even deserve those. It's impossible to criticize films like this because their politics is so exemplary, and their support so vocal (as a result), that even the faintest of praise is construed as an attack. But the problem is that *A World Apart*, which is Chris Menges' directorial debut, is another one of those aimlessly schematic films.

Set in 1963, it aims to show us the wholly admirable and unselfish struggles of Barbara Hershey, who plays the journalist wife of a self-exiled white leader of the African National Congress, as seen largely through the eyes of her thirteen-year-old daughter. Much of the film is based on Shawn Slovo's real life experiences as the daughter of an exiled member of the ANC, and Menges did the film in Zimbabwe. All of these things certainly give it authenticity, and the two actresses give it some punch. The daughter, played by Jodhi May, is a real scene stealer. She's a natural actress, and whenever the camera's on her, she walks away with the film.

But, considered as a film, *A World Apart* comes across like a cartoon. Those white people who, certainly in 1963, gave their passive support to the government are portrayed as selfish pigs, while the police, right down to the local cop on the beat, are rude and vulgar. The problem with this sort of caricature is that it fails to address the major issue: why is it, a quarter of a century later, that a government following these policies—which everyone finds so odious—is still in power?

The first directors who had to grapple with similar situations devised solutions. Eisenstein had more or less the same problem with his first film, *Strike*, as did Pudovkin with *Mother*. Both directors were making films set in Russia's tsarist past. Neither one had much good to say about the state, and there are scarcely any sympathetic members of the ruling class in either film.

But both directors were remarkably successful at conveying why previous attempts at resisting the regime had failed. The workers in *Strike*, no matter how noble their cause, ultimately become divided and are easily crushed. But the violence, as Eisenstein clearly shows, is the aftermath, the way the state cleans up the debris and rewrites the newspapers. Pudovkin offered another explanation. Most people, like the protagonist's mother, accept that although there are anomalies and inconsistencies in their government, there is finally justice and all will be rectified. The mother of the film finally becomes radicalized, but throughout most of the film she's on the fence, as it were.

Further, Eisenstein, even more than Pudovkin, shows that one reason public resistance never gets off the ground is that the personal stakes for the dissenters are very high. And, paradoxically, these dissenters are often the members of their society least able to articulate the necessity of group action.

That revolutionaries are always admirable and always possess perfect self knowledge is one of those intellectual props of socialist realism. Just because it has become part and parcel of socialist cinematography under Stalin doesn't mean that it's any good as an explanation of anything.

Or take another example: Pontecorvo's analysis of the independence struggle in Algeria, *The Battle of Algiers*, which portrays the fragmentation of the revolutionaries, showing us their vulnerabilities in frightening detail. They are, like most people, subject to internal disputation, bad decisions and disorganization. Like most of us, they can be intimidated and tortured into revealing the most intimate secrets. Their struggle against an organized and determined state is no easy task.

So much for the realities of revolutionary struggle as established by some of the world's better films on the subject. What was good enough for Eisenstein was not necessary for Menges and Slovo. The result is a cartoon account of the situation. What's worse, it isn't even a consistent cartoon. Barbara Hershey, who's arrested and humiliated by the government for her support of members of the African National Congress, is the center of the film, but for some strange reason Menges has chosen to hang the action around her thirteen-year-old daughter, Molly. Unlike Hershey, Jodhi May gives an extraordinary performance. But the script is so inept that much of it is pointless, except as personal film therapy for the scriptwriter. There is, at least initially, plenty of opportunity for mother-daughter conflict here. Hershey is so busy running around at dawn (when everything seems to happen in this film) that she never has time for her daughter, and there are some early scenes where there is considerable tension.

But it never goes anywhere, just as we drop Molly's point of view whenever this proves too limiting and follow her mother through her interrogation. That too is a dead end, as the script never makes it clear what's at stake in her arrest. One could come up with all sorts of reasons why things are so inconclusive here: the state was still (in 1963) somewhat embarrassed that there were white people involved. In a stratified society like South Africa's there may have been a certain reluctance to do anything to people who, as Ernie Kovacs tells Alec Guinness in *Our Man in Havana*, are not of the torturable class. Perhaps the police were divided themselves, or perhaps they were very clever.

But all of these reasons lie outside the film, which is resolute in its refusal to have any truck with causality. The point of having Hershey arrested is to have her arrested. There is no other point. Having her arrested is an easy way to make a point, about how she is harassed for her beliefs, that otherwise would have to be achieved by hard work.

If the film's social analysis is hopelessly schematic, the action is essentially aimless, with an amazing amount of footage being devoted to Molly in ballet and Molly playing with her best friend. Some of the scenes, such as those which show her bored behavior at a party, or show her learning to sing with the housekeeper, certainly have a point: they show how she's alienated by the white society and drawn to the black. But none of that's developed. So, as is sadly often the case in films like this one, the lack of any kind of socio-political analysis is paralleled by the lack of any sort of character analysis, and what results, aside from a good deal of extremely pointless footage of arrivals and departures, and people getting in and out of elevators, is nothing but parties, rallies, raids, and interrogations. Films like this one carry their own imprimatur, simply because of their topicality. But *A World Apart* isn't much as a work of the cinema, and it fails the real test of a politically committed filmmaker: it won't convince the unconverted to change sides and it doesn't provide the converted with any illuminating insights about why the regime has been so successful and what can be done to make it less so.

All the same problems of execution are present in the film that was probably the unanimous critical choice as worst film of the year, Gary Sinise's *Miles from Home*, the latest in a small group of movies that purport to deal with the problems of the American farmer. That the American farmer is a highly subsidized species who has successfully manipulated Congress into passing and repassing all kinds of special interest legislation subsidizing his crops is something that seems to have escaped all of these filmmakers, with the exception of Robert Redford in *The Milagro Beanfield War*. In no one of them do we see anything remotely resembling a small American farm, or hear any sort of genuine discourse.

This is Sinise's first film, and it shows. His experience has been mostly in the theater, and after a nicely done black and white opening which portrays Khrushchev's visit to the family farm in 1959, he settles for the sorts of things that theater people usually do. The two brothers who live on this farm aren't really farmers in the realistic sense that the cinema demands. They're theatrical farmers who wait until a heavy rainstorm to change the belt on their corn picker and do all of those odd chores that farmers tend to save up until the middle of a storm. Their father was a great farmer, but they've managed to lose the farm. Why? Unlike the small farmer in of Cedar Rapids.

But Sinise doesn't seem to realize just how incongruous these things are, because he's basically directing a play about the relations between two brothers. So the farming, like everything else, is just a prop.

Richard Gere, who's actually grown up as a film actor, looks very unhappy in this mess, but the others, who have all, like Sinise, come in from the theater, obviously feel that this is their chance to shine.[12] *Miles from Home* doesn't say much about farmers, or about anything of any real interest, but it is a textbook example of how the cinema differs from the theater.

Hardworking farmers: Miles from Home

The River, who had at least one of everything that John Deere (America's premiere farm equipment manufacturer) makes, the Roberts brothers have very little. In fact, it's difficult to see what they've spent all their income on. It's easy to see why they're bad farmers: they spend most of their time down in some bar drinking beer by the pitcher and chasing women from the nearby metropolis

The reason films like this get made, and then get any critical attention at all, is basically because film people are all too ready to feel guilty about what they do. So there's a feeling of

[12]Nick Roddick suggested that the film should be given "The Golden Gerbil Award for the Good Idea Unable To Be Saved By Richard Gere" (*Screen International* 20 May 1988: 4).

embarrassment about, say, *The Milagro Beanfield War*, while there's none at all about *Miles from Home*.

Yet Redford's film can pass muster from almost any angle. The worst thing you can say about it is that after two very good films no one has any real sense of Redford as a director. It's as though any really competent group of people could have made this film.

Of course competent is a tricky word here. There are very few people around in Hollywood who would have tried to make this film on the terms that Redford made it. There's no romantic interest, which is quite something for a film with Sonia Braga, Melanie Griffith and Julie Carmen, who plays Nancy Mondragon. She's the least known of the three, but she comes across—like all of the actors in this film—as a real performer. She projects an enormous amount of pure sexual energy, but it doesn't do much good. There is no sex in this film at all, and very little in the way of sexual responsiveness.

Not that this is a criticism. The film isn't about the relations between men and women; it's about how a community discovers its sense of community, how it responds to crisis, and how it integrates outsiders into itself. As such, like Redford's study of family dynamics in *Ordinary People*, it's a model film.

The thing that disturbs people about it, besides the fact that it's so enjoyable, is that the plot is full of coincidences of the worst sort, abrupt lurches and turns, and chock full of unexpected revelations. When Joe Mondragon accidentally shoots Amarante Cordova's pig, the pig survives. When Joe, who's also managed to shoot Amarante, is on the run up in the mountains, and the bad guy is about to get him, Shorty, who's the foreman for the chief villain, intervenes to save his life. Needless to say, when Joe goes back down the mountain, it turns out that Amarante isn't nearly as dead as a shotgun wound in the stomach at fifty feet would indicate an eighty-year-old man might be.

It's hard to see where this criticism comes from, in the sense that the credit sequence establishes that this is going to be a whimsical film where the natural and the supernatural coexist quite nicely together. The reason probably is that the plot itself is simply too detailed. John Nichols' novel was full of the ins and outs of developmental politics of the Southwest, and that comes through in the film, but the script never manages to integrate the magical and the sociological.

Frankly, it's to Redford's credit that he's able to bring all the complicated details of water rights

The coyote angel (1) talks to Amarante Cordova: Milagro

and tax laws into the film and make them work. In *Pascali's Island* James Dearden can't make major aspects of the plot of Unsworth's novel easily comprehendible on the screen, so we should give credit where credit is due.

But all this technical stuff, which makes for a very realistic film—and in most places this is an eminently realistic film—are never quite integrated into the overall idea of things, the idea of a place where people believe in magic, and where there are ghosts wandering around interfering in what goes on.

In that sense, it shows that this is Redford's second film. It's not enough simply to get some very talented people together and organize them to do a film (although goodness knows this is an enormous feat). A director has to integrate all these things, figure out ways to make them appear a seamless whole. To a certain extent, Redford seems here to rely too much on the old Hollywood tradition of an assemblage of talent, and too much on his own feelings about good acting.

But Hollywood is a powerful retardant, and there's nothing to say that Redford's own style won't begin to develop. With *Ordinary People* and *Milagro* he's demonstrated an impressive mastery of the studio system of filmmaking. Perhaps in future films he'll begin to develop a real sense of what it is to become an auteur. Even if he doesn't, Redford, like Clint Eastwood, is clearly the man to watch. *Milagro* may not be a great film (although it's a tremendously enjoyable one), but it stands to *Miles from Home* pretty much like *Les Miserables* stands to its illustrated comic book version.

Clint Eastwood's *Bird*, which takes a look at the great jazz saxophonist Charlie Parker, is both impressive and uneven. What's impressive is that Eastwood, like Redford, is trying to make some serious works, and *Bird* is a much more serious work than *Milagro*. In fact, it's a deadly serious work, filmed mostly in darkened rooms and on darkened streets, and its value is probably totally a function of how serious one is about Parker and his music.

Clint Eastwood directing Forest Whitaker in Bird

Parker is one of those cult figures whose members assume, and I think wrongly, that their hero is a household word: everyone knows and loves his works. This just isn't true, and as a result the film has a somewhat limited audience, particularly since there's no attempt to try to sell the audience on Parker. Eastwood's whole attitude seems to be that you know who he is, what he stood for, and what happened to him.

This is not a good approach, as even a brief

comparison with what Forman did with Mozart reminds us. But Eastwood, whose films have given him a completely unjustified reputation as some sort of lunatic fascist or Hollywood idiot, or both, in self-defense probably went overboard on the serious aspects of things.

Two of these aspects are notable. Forest Whitaker, who plays Bird, is good enough, but Diane Venora, who plays Chan, Parker's second wife, turns in a beautifully sensitive performance that would do credit to any director working in America today. The sound track is a technical achievement of the first order which carefully balances Parker's music and performances via remastered performances with new recordings.[13] This suggests that Eastwood, even more than Redford, knows how to assemble a group of talented people and then get them to do their best work.

It is difficult to imagine that anyone who appreciates Parker will not be moved by the efforts that have gone into the film. There's a certain staginess about the action, and the film is probably far too long, although the amount of music being performed may very well justify this.

But, although it's hard for a non-jazz person to be really enthusiastic about this film, the fact of its existence is important. For years now it has been an article of faith that only a handful of rebellious auteurs could produce anything of real interest in the American cinema, that the system corrupted and perverted taste. In the 1980s the careers of directors like Allen, and to a lesser extent Schrader, seemed the unhappy confirmation of this. Although Allen had always billed himself as an outsider to the studio system, by 1980 he was cranking out derivative formula films.

But here, in one year, we had films by two of the major Hollywood box office draws, and both revealed themselves to be filmmakers with impeccably intellectual tastes: Redford concerned with social relations and environmental issues, and Eastwood with the tragic life of a talented young black musician. It would be nice if this turned out to be more than a happy coincidence.

Whitaker playing sax, Red Rodney trumpet: Bird

And, whatever the flaws of the work, at least all of these directors (von Trotta excepted) can defend themselves by pointing to the fact that they were actually trying to make a film about a serious subject that no one had been willing to put at risk as a project before. In this respect the

[13]In some cases Lennie Niehaus, who did the score, took original Bird solos and electronically removed the backup parts, then had the backup recorded live while Whitaker faked the music.

Anglo-Americans this year were light years ahead of their European competition, which suggests that in the future Cannes should begin a new prize given to the director who does the worst job of recycling someone else's work.

In 1988 the clear winner was Carlos Saura, who decided to remake Herzog's *Aguirre, The Wrath of God*, only leaving out all the good parts. Normally, Werner Herzog doesn't require any defending from critics. He's by now safely established as a cult figure, and certainly he's Germany's most famous living director. But Carlos Saura specializes in making those deadly slow literary adaptations that everyone feels compelled to like, and a great many people will like his retelling of the story of the Lope de Aguirre expedition in *El Dorado*. The difference between his film and Herzog's in *Aguirre* is the difference between talent and genius, although this overstates the case somewhat, because *El Dorado* is not a particularly talented film. What it illustrates all by itself is the truth of the hypothesis that any European film about the futile and tragic struggles of Europeans to "civilize" the New World will itself become an example of the futile struggles of Europeans to understand the New World.

In Saura's case, the same defects that have always been part of his work are here, merely amplified. His purpose was to make a more sober and realistic film about this famous (for film directors anyway) expedition that was launched from Peru in 1560 to try and colonize El Dorado. Saura "takes issue with [*Aguirre*] . . . 'not because of its quality, but because of its relevance to the Spanish conquest. All the early sequences with the soldiers slopping around in waist-deep mud pushing cannon through the Peruvian jungle are Herzog, not history. Aguirre's expedition started off as an attempt at colonization.'"[14] The problem is, that, despite all the claims to historical research (and the implicit snobbery that only Spaniards can understand this sort of thing), Saura seems to have less of an understanding of what was going on here than Herzog did.

Because by 1560, the Spanish New World was firmly nailed down. By 1521 Cortés had conquered Mexico. By 1533, Pizarro had conquered Peru. By 1554 the civil wars for the viceroyalty of Peru were over and the civil administration was essentially in place. By 1542, Orellana had already been through the Amazon basin, and much information had trickled back from the Portuguese. By 1559, when the viceroy authorized the expedition to colonize Onamagua, its leaders were men in the prime of life who had been rampaging in the New World for decades.

There's nothing obscure about these facts: they're taken from the Press Kit. But Saura seems oblivious to their implications. There was nothing particularly insane about the attempt. The Spanish had tramped all over the New World, always outnumbered, and always victorious. By this time they had even been to Arkansas. The Amazon was the only place they hadn't thoroughly explored. Saura's hindsight is wonderful, but it's Herzog who caught the spirit of the time: of men who believed they were invincible.

Now it's possible that the viceroy approved this expedition to get rid of all the potential troublemakers in the Viceroyalty of Peru. That's a tempting hypothesis, and it would make a good film. But Saura doesn't consider it. He also manages to miss the simple things. We are asked to believe that these veterans of decades of exploration are constantly making elementary errors of the most outrageous sort. Ursua orders Aguirre to make a reconnaissance through a swamp where his men are picked off in the best traditions of every film Hollywood has made about the Indians. The small bands of men who subjugated whole empires in the space of a few years were scarcely incompetent, and by 1560 even the stupidest ones among them must have learned a good deal.

Now it is absolutely true that this expedition brought the Spaniards face to face with things they weren't prepared for, such as the size of the tributaries of the Amazon and the vast distances they had to travel. Most importantly, what it brought them to face was something they hadn't experienced before: the immensity of this part of the continent. But this was not the first expedition to the New World, and Saura films it like it was, as though everything has to be learned from scratch.

Of course *Aguirre* is such a cult film that it might seem an easy thing to defend, but visually and intellectually it's superb.[15] And the key difference is that Herzog, unlike Saura, doesn't condescend to the New World. The opening images of *Aguirre*, with Herzog's conquistadors descending from the Andes into the swamp, were visually

[14]As quoted in *Screen International* 14 May 1988: 101.

[15]Ironically, it is precisely those scenes which Saura despises which, when shown at the 1975 Telluride Film Festival tribute to Herzog, in large measure launched his career in this country.

stunning. The opening of Saura's film looks like one of a jillion Mexican costume epics about the conquest: hordes of extras lined up in shiny armor, brilliant costumes, the whole affair looking mostly like a minor high school pep rally somewhere in Indiana.

Saura's conquistadors look like extras, while Herzog's looked like astronauts. It is easy to buy Herzog's visual argument that this is an expedition to the moon; in fact, that is exactly the point of the opening footage which Saura jibes at: to show that the descent into the Amazon was a descent into a new world with a totally new set of rules.

Aguirre finds his missing hubcap: El Dorado

Saura's conquistadors just stay on their wretched boats (or in their river side camps) and bicker. Historically there's truth here, because the expedition basically killed itself off. Modern audiences are inclined to accept the idea that the environment finally triumphed, but remember: these same people had sailed all over the world (and around it) eating rats and shoe leather.

But certainly one thing that did happen was that the leaders kept conspiring against one another until almost all of them were dead. Of course this wasn't new. The annals of the New World are full of nothing but treachery and mutiny. Why was this expedition so different? In Herzog's interpretation, which is basically the one the chroniclers of the expedition adhered to, Aguirre just took over, an experienced soldier who unfortunately happened to be crazy. Now there's no doubt in Herzog that the members of the expedition, although they may have some doubts about how many sails were at the top of Aguirre's mast, felt that in this brave new world something totally different was called for, that his lunacy was preferable to Ursua's reason. When reason fails, try insanity. And Klaus Kinski can really project this. When he stands up on the raft and declares war on Felipe II and claims that they will conquer Panama and then Peru (remember that they're floating "somewhere" down the Amazon), there's something comforting in his lunacy.

It's comforting, and it's also good acting.[16]

[16]If in fact it is acting. "I never act anyway," Kinski was recently quoted as saying. "I just am. It's better directing myself than working with a------ like most of the directors I've made films with. It's much harder to make a picture with an untalented idiot like Herzog" (*Screen International* 17 May 1988: 164).

When Ornela Muti, who plays Aguirre in Herzog's film, starts talking, we realize we're watching an actor delivering his lines. Period. The only thing Muti delivers plausibly on (which is pretty much at odds with Saura's film) is the idea that Aguirre was a competent professional soldier. This is absolutely true. By 1561 he had been in the New World since 1534, and he was still alive. But it doesn't have very much to do with the progress of the film.

Saura has never been a really inspiring director, but he's been able to do well working in an extremely restricted area, and his best work has been with small casts, no location work, and a highly literary script that practically everyone in the cast was familiar with. When he turns to the stuff of real film, however, he doesn't seem to have any idea what's going on. This is particularly the case intellectually: "In the 16th century Spain was not the grandiose empire which has been triumphantly imagined . . . those expeditions were rather miserable: armed people, who, without scruples, could not even be called an army" (101).

The problem is that this rabble had, by the sixteenth century, taken over all the available real estate the world thought it had to offer. What was left in the New World by 1560 that the Spanish had not either taken or discarded: Canada and a few beavers? There are many negative things we could say about these men, but that they were "miserable . . . not even . . . an army" seems as far off the mark as saying that Juarez was a poorly educated Indian or that Bolivar was a hopeless idealist.

Herzog, interestingly enough, is well aware of this. It is why, when his Aguirre stands up and declares war on the universe, the audience accepts it. North Americans are particularly willing to accept this sort of bravado. Herzog's accomplishment is in understanding that they are, and why. Or, to turn things around and reconstitute them as a parable, in the press screening of Redford's *The Milagro Beanfield War*, when the inhabitants of Milagro go into the store and start buying ammunition, there was an enormous amount of nervous laughter in the (largely if not totally) European audience. Redford, a shrewd American who grew up in a small Mexican-American suburb in California, understands this as a normal, if perhaps deplorable, New World reflex. Herzog understands this as something uniquely weird about the New World: morally objectionable, maybe, but in its own crazy way worth celebrating. Saura doesn't understand that those are boxes of ammunition they're buying.

In this context, Thomas Brasch's rather excruciating story about the Germans and their National Socialist past at least has the merit of a certain amount of daring. Although everyone else in the world has tried to deal with the implications of modern German history, outside of Syberberg German directors have not exactly rushed in to make films about the Third Reich. One should qualify this with the adjective West, because East German directors have made a number of films about the period. Although most of these emerge as routine political exercises, there are a few of more than passing interest, starting with Konrad Woolf's Bulgarian co-production, *Stars* (1957), and extending to films such as *Jacob the Liar* and *The Children of No. 67.*

Although it is tempting to come up with deep metaphysical reasons why German (West German) directors haven't done much with the period, the basic reason is probably this: the artists of the Bundesrepublik haven't done very much with anything that isn't directly concerned with their own personal private concerns. In this they may very well parallel contemporary North American novelists, who, as Tom Woolfe observed, have managed to stimulate enormously the growth of journalism by their steadfast refusal to talk about anything of interest that was happening in their country.

At first glance, it would seem that Thomas Brasch would be the ideal person to rectify this. He was born in England as the son of Jewish emigrants who then promptly re-emigrated to East Germany, where Brasch soon got into hot water for his politics. He was jailed for his protest of the invasion of Czechoslovakia, and in 1974 kicked out of the university for "defamation of leading figures in the German Democratic Republic."[17] In 1976 he was allowed to get a one-way visa to West Germany, where he has worked ever since. He sounds like the ideal person to make a film about the Reich.

Unfortunately, *Welcome to Germany* is such a mess that it is hard to say what its points really are. The ones that one comes away with emerge from Brasch's many pronouncements about the subject. The greatest of these is that "There was no sense of solidarity among the victims. . . . And strangely enough, until now, neither the wrongdoers nor the victims were interested in

[17]All of the information quoted directly above and below is taken from the Press Kit at face value.

looking into it. If the Germans have the right to feel sorry for themselves as persecutors, then the Jews should have the right to curse the fact that they were often nothing but victims'' (8).

Leave aside the fact that this reads like a suspiciously anti-semitic remark which is also historically untrue. The film is so scrambled that the only coherent arguments are found in the Press Kit. This is peculiar, because there's very little that actually happens in the film: an emigré American director comes to Berlin to make a film about a film made in the Reich which used Jewish extras who were taken out of concentration camps (true: *Jud Suß*, probably the most famous of National Socialist films today, was shot with Jews brought in specially from the Polish ghetto in Warsaw). The director, played by Tony Curtis, starts shooting his film, alienates the German cast by his anti-German remarks, and then, after the film has been shot, tells them to destroy it rather than produce a rough cut.

One can easily see why, because from what we see it is impossible to answer any of the basic questions relating to the director's guilt (or anything else for that matter). Brasch has succumbed to the dread disease of the filmmakers of the Bundesrepublik in that he has produced a work of enormous interest and significance and meaning—but only to Thomas Brasch. The rest of us are still waiting for a German film about the Reich.□

This is the second part of a two-part series of articles on the 1988 Cannes Film Festival.

***John Mosier** is the Film Editor of the* New Orleans Review.

David Madden

THE SATIRIST'S DAUGHTER

Strawberry Plains, Tennessee
March 8, 1986

Dear Editors:

Several years ago, I found among my father's papers this rather odd manuscript of a project he prepared while he was working for the Federal Writers Project in the late 1930's. Among the papers of Doctor James Gettys Ramsey, historian of early Tennessee, which are now kept in the University of Tennessee's Special Collections Library, he found some autobiographical writings by Doctor Ramsey and his daughter Susan, which he freely edited, restructured, and wove into a composite narrative. About thirty percent of the wording is my father's, but what makes this manuscript *his* is the conception. Apparently, he did not attempt, or was unable to publish this narrative. I hope it will interest you for possible publication.

Sincerely,

Lee McArthy

Lee McArthy

Susan Ramsey walked out of the railroad depot which General Sanders had raided in July of 1863 and up Gay Street where it was steep and curved. Sometimes she just had to dress up, put the sad house of her sister, Henrietta Lenoir, whose grief over the loss of her two little boys was slowly pulling her graveward, behind her, and go into Knoxville. So many ill-bred soldiers and insolent Negroes rode up and down the streets and up on the sidewalks that even "the meanest man who ever walked the streets of Knoxville" called them down in the *Whig and Rebel Ventilator*. But Parson Brownlow, the rabid Unionist editor, was also heard often to say on this very street, the street her exiled father so loved to walk, that he detested above all the female rebels. "Old and young, married or single, widows or orphans," he railed, "they ought to be required to behave themselves, and failing to do so, they ought to be sent beyond our lines where their disloyalty and bad behavior will be appreciated. And those who complain of their bad treatment in sending them out, ought to be sent after them." He will probably stick that in his paper, too, already chocked full of similar sentiments, before the year is out. Susan read him as often as she could get her hands on a copy of his rag for the thrill of hatred he inspired in her.

Well, Viper, here I am, giving offense to your kind just by breathing, walking up Gay Street, heading *South*, until I must return to the station, and even then I'd head South if that would get me back to the station.

Parson Brownlow was only the most conspicuous and vocal of the legion of self-appointed detectives the revolution had spawned in Knoxville. She sensed even now that she was being regarded covertly by many eyes on the street and from alleyways and windows and open doorways of shops. For everything we do has military consequences. Why else would brave, loyal men dog Southern rebel ladies to the stores, notice and report their purchases to the military authorities? Mrs. Eames, the patriotic wife of a Confederate exile, was arrested, charged with the grave offense of purchasing something she needed under the *permit* of a Unionist lady who was so kind as to offer it to her for that purpose. For such a ruthless violation, the omnipotent, inquisitorial military powers threatened her with transportation North if she ever again thus trampled on or ruthlessly violated the dignity of

Author's note: The technique described by Lee McArthy is, in fact, the technique I have used. Dr. J. G. M. Ramsey material used by permission of the Tennessee Historical Commission.

their martial laws. Susan prided herself in having honed a satirical blade almost as sharp as her father's.

A common practice was the drumming up of a reasonable conspiracy by mere conjecture. "I saw old Mr. Guthrie actually whispering something in the ear of Miss Susan as they came out of Church Sunday," one of those vigilant patriots and loyal lickspittles told the acting provost marshal early Monday morning, overheard by two female friends of Mrs. Eames who had come to jail on what turned out to be a fruitless mission to secure the release of Mr. Eames. "You ought to double your sentinels and increase your guards. Something wrong is hatching. They are both disloyal and especially that Ramsey girl. She is poison and ought to be sent out. Her brothers were in the Fork last Friday and may be here tonight."

The official had replied, "Never mind that Little Rebel. I will attend to her case."

As long as General Samuel Carter is provost marshal I'll not stay awake worrying about that. That General Carter was temporarily absent made her only a little apprehensive. Surely, they found another who was equally a gentleman to replace him, even though, she'd heard, he was a foreigner. Maybe she would behave herself a little until she was certain General Carter had regained command, she thought, noticing the way the chilling wind animated the Yankee stars and stripes on a pole jutting out over the sidewalk, as if the rippling and popping of the spangled rag were a rapid series of arrogant and hostile gestures that mocked her defiances as merely the mental actions of a prideful young lady posing no threat to guns and forts. "I will not," she said crisply aloud, "even for a second, serve," and stepped down off the sidewalk, where her heels on the planks had declared her Gay Street walk, into mud that clutched at one shoe and sucked the other one off her foot.

Arrested, she faced the acting provost marshal in person, who certainly looked foreign, and whose name, Gratz, fit him, as did his friends, chief among them, that old Viper Brownlow, the second most powerful man in Knoxville next to the commander.

"What, if a Rebel may use the tongue God gave her, is my crime?"

"I see we've caught you red-handed, so to speak," said Major Gratz, looking down at her muddy feet, unsmiling, but getting a round of laughter and applause from the soldiers standing and lounging about.

"I wear them proudly. Mud, unlike some other things, washes off."

"Your crime, you ask? Not one, but many. Not just today's, but we've tallied up all your crimes for many days past. I'll recite them for you, from memory, *starting* with today's. Disrespect for your country's flag."

"If that was the stars and *bars* floating over the sidewalk, I am guilty as charged."

"Unfortunately sarcasm is no crime, simply a nuisance, especially coming from rebel women. You and your sister Charlotte—"

"Charlotte is dead!"

"—collected clothes for rebel soldiers and consorted with a well-known Confederate spy, Belle Boyd, when she was visiting her relatives at Blount Mansion. For reasons I'll never understand, we released her at Washington in August last year, and she went straight to Richmond and has operated out of there ever since. You and your sister made Confederate flags. You floated one of them above the grounds at Mecklenburg, on the veranda of your father's domicile."

"Burned in the night by a cowardly Yankee incendiary."

"He has been punished."

"If being sent home is punishment. Well, to Michigan, I suppose that is punishment enough."

"I'm keeping score, Miss Ramsey. . . . Our reports are that you defiantly, even now, keep a diminutive flag folded away in your trunk—more evidence of disloyalty and rebellion against the best government the world has ever known. You brought away from Mecklenburg a horse that we confiscated at the house of your aunt, Mrs. Crozier, whose husband is in arms against the United States. We freed your cook and hired her to cook for us, and you appeared at headquarters, demanding your horse and your cook, and got them back, thus depriving our army of necessary aid—"

"The cook in the flesh, the horse in the form of an empty promise, if I may be so bold."

"Will your nature allow you to be otherwise? Parson Brownlow is right about female rebels. And Butler down in New Orleans puts that sentiment into a military ordinance. May I continue to answer your initial question? While living at Mrs. Crozier's, you sarcastically rejected the advances of Federal officers, and discouraged your little brother from fraternizing with them. You were often heard singing 'Dixie'—don't deny it, I heard you myself. At that house, you were

visited by and you visited other citizens whose situations here were similar to your own, and you gave each other mutual assistance in every way possible. You frequented the First Presbyterian Church where the Reverend W. A. Harrison was pastor, and when General Burnside put a stop to his treasonous sermons and sent him into the Confederacy, you transferred your membership to the Second Presbyterian Church where another old friend, Reverend J. H. Martin, officiated, and in both churches you were seen to sit near to, and to recognize and exchange friendly words and salutations with, the mothers and daughters of Southern men who were killing United States citizens on battlefields all over the South."

"It is not in my power to transfer those battlefields to 'all over the North.'"

"Most recently, your family, and you in particular, which I'm sure surprised nobody, are suspected of having harbored a Confederate soldier at Lenoir; you brought, by that act, I might tell you, to your sister's house twice as many guards. And we are not at all reluctant to believe rumors that you have incited rebels in the hills to arm and to storm Knoxville. Shall I repeat these charges?"

"Belle Boyd will be very jealous. And now, may I have the passport that General Carter, in whose presence I doubt you would have said all these things to me, routinely gives me when I pass through Knoxville to go visit my sister Mrs. Dickson at Riverside?"

"Which overlooks Mecklenburg?"

"Which overlooks the *ashes* of Mecklenburg, ashes dearer to me than all the North together. Your brave soldiers have simply set me out more quickly and directly to my original destination. May I have the passport?"

Major Gratz reached for a piece of paper and signed it. Susan reached for the paper, but Major Gratz held it down with the tip of his pen. "I call your attention to the printed oath of allegiance at the bottom."

"As a Yankee, General Carter may have the contradictory traits of politeness and chivalry, but he is certainly as loyal as any other officer to his own cause, and *he* never insisted I sign an oath renouncing my allegiance to the Southern Confederacy in whose service my father and my five brothers are now engaged."

"Fortunately, I do not have the defect you note in the General. Sign it or go back to Lenoir's." He handed her his pen.

Susan took the pen only so that she might throw it upon the counter as she said, "I will not."

Major Gratz flinched as if struck. Blood rushed to his face.

"The duty of all loyal citizens requires you to sign it," he said passionately.

"I am a loyal citizen of East Tennessee and of the Southern Confederacy."

"Loyal citizens of the Southern Confederacy are not free to move freely within the United States of America," he said, with more excitement and irascibility than gentlemen usually allow themselves, especially when exercising an unpleasant duty to a lady.

Susan turned her back upon that spectacle, and as she walked out, heard Major Gratz charge her, "You must stay in town," in a voice tremulous with unmanly anger. "You sha'n't go to the country."

Walking out of that scene, she did not expect the driver of her sister's carriage, who had served the family all his life and still served what was left of it even though he was now loyal to their enemies, to have kept his rendezvous with her. But there he was, in the carriage, waiting for her, as usual. He put her so quickly on the road out of Knoxville past Parson Brownlow's toward Riverside, she began to feel that her aversion of the flag and her collision with Major Gratz was only another of her fantasy defiances of that old Viper and his tribe.

The hour was late, the air very cold as the carriage approached the lines. The sentinel was squatting by a fire under a tree some distance from the road. Reluctantly, he started towards the carriage. The driver displayed his passport with a flourish, "*All Right!*" he yelled, and the sentinel waved, turned and went back to his fire.

Riverside was not far from there. Mrs. Dickson and her children were happy to see Susan, glad she had finally come, for supper was just going on the table.

"I was a convict briefly," said Susan. "Mistaken for Belle Boyd."

"Oh, Susan, you talk like a cavalryman."

"Yes. And denied a passport if I did not forswear my allegiance to the Confederacy. So I'm here illegally, without passport."

"Then how did you get past the sentinel? Did George flourish his passport as if he were Washington?"

"Yes, but not to get me through. I don't trust him."

"So he connived at disloyalty without even knowing it?"

"Yes. Is that sifting ethics too fine?"

"You've tipped the scales, Susan, but supper's getting cold."

They laughed, and turned toward the double doors, pushed them back, but stopped, hearing horses come up to the gate.

Mrs. Dickson sent a servant out. She returned, saying, "They come for Miss Susan."

Susan followed her big sister out to the gate. Mrs. Dickson asked the officer in charge what he wanted with her little sister.

"I have orders to arrest Susan Ramsey and take her as my prisoner back to Knoxville."

"It's too late, the roads are too muddy, the weather is too severe. I'll not go. If Major Gratz wants to see me, he must act the gentleman and send a carriage for me tomorrow at a decent hour."

"Don't you think that's reasonable?" asked Mrs. Dickson, as if she was certain he did.

"I must demand your immediate return."

"I must decline."

"She's just a child," said Mrs. Dickson.

"No, Maggie, my refusal is based on sound adult reasoning. It's late, the roads are axle deep in mud and icy water, the weather is making even these brave men shiver in their saddles, and a lady deserves a carriage."

"Don't you think that sounds reasonable, Lieutenant? I expect your mother would think so."

All the men snickered.

"Perhaps, but I have orders from Major Gratz to bring the Little Rebel back. She didn't need a carriage when she rode through Sevier county, stirring up trouble."

"I'm not afraid of Major Gratz. I will face him in the morning."

"I don't think she sounds so reasonable," said the officer, trying to be in charge.

"I'm afraid I must stand by my sister," said Mrs. Dickson. "I can see that during the occupation she has grown up and has a mind of her own."

"All right then, we will place a guard around the house and hold her a prisoner 'till a courier shall be dispatched to town and receive the provost marshal's further orders."

The kitchen house near the big house became military headquarters for "the besieging soldiers," as Susan called them. As if issuing rifles and ammunition, Susan dealt a vocabulary for the use of everyone in the house in talking about the soldiers and the situation in which they placed the family. She spoke as if every word were meant to be transcribed and transmitted in a portfolio to her father, who would preserve it in his archive of historical documents, for, though she had herself sifted through the ashes of items burned and heard rumors of items stolen and dispersed throughout the county, she never ceased thinking of her father as possessing that great storehouse of relics and records and books that so awed her when she was a child interrupting his studies. She had heard and read his satirical flights, that always came in sudden bursts of rhetoric, and secretly read *Tom Jones*, and Fielding's mock heroic passages fit Major Gratz like a uniform weighted down with epaulets and medals.

When the courier returned the next morning and thawed out by the fire in the kitchen house and told the Lieutenant that his orders were to guard Riverside as Lenoir's was being guarded, the soldiers were in no hurry, for Mrs. Dickson's provisions were far more liberal than they were accustomed to in the Federal camps. When the wood ran out, they cut enough for the family in the house, laying it quietly on the porch ready for use. When the water ran out, they brought up from the spring enough for the inmates of the house.

By the second day, the Little Rebel, who had not spoken a single word even to her big sister that was not satirical in tone and phrase, had the satisfaction when one of the men referred to himself and his comrades as "assailants of the fort" of knowing that she had not only infected her sister, her niece and nephews, and even the servants, with the exception of the resentful driver, but her jailors as well. And in a sense, even herself on a deeper level, for she realized one evening that what began as a weapon against the enemy had become a compulsion that held her so powerfully in its grasp she couldn't even think in nonsatirical terms, and thinking was often addressed to her father, in his own voice:

"What might have been the result of this daring pursuit and successful capture of Miss Sue, had the gallant originator of the enterprise—the commander-in-chief Major Gratz—been personally present, military strategists have not yet agreed. The escape of his prisoner from his entrenchments gave immediate rise to fabulous reports that Miss Sue intended to excite afresh the rebellious spirit of her countrymen, rally around her standard the clansmen of Old Mecklenburg, build pontoons across the Holston, march at their head a second Joan of Arc, besiege Knoxville and capture Gratz. These fabulous reports received confirmation from the information sent regularly

to the headquarters of this energetic and superlatively vigilant officer every morning by some of his citizen detectives."

What she was doing instead was writing the story of Private Griffin, the Confederate soldier they had harbored at Lenoir's, called "The Lost Rifle," an historical document she was certain her father, bereft of so many historical documents, would treasure.

A kind of armistice set in at the besieged house at Riverside. Things were *statu quo ante-bellum*. "The besieging party had made no entrenchments, erected no batteries, made no assaults on the old castle. Nor has any knight come to Rowena's rescue. Nothing indicates a renewal of hostilities. If war exists around Riverside, it is a model for civilized warfare."

"You know what I heard one of them privates say? He say, he tired of this war against women," said one of the servants. "They say they can't do no harm anyhow, he say you ought to be allowed to go and come when and where you pleases."

"Indeed, if all that is said and done by this besieging party were reported to the provost headquarters, some of the loyal soldiers of the United States army will be arrested for disloyalty to the Union and certainly to Major Gratz. Some of the officers, feeling ridiculous, clamor for a cessation of existing hostilities. But who shall propose the terms of capitulation?"

"The Little Rebel will concede nothing," said her big sister, a little reproachfully now.

"She is a rebel," said the Little Rebel, "she is a true Confederate. She loves and bows down before the Southern flag, and no compulsory oath can modify or change that allegiance."

"She persists therefore in her refusal to take it."

"I tell you, Major," said Sue, taking on the persona of one of Gratz's detectives, "these Dixie Girls have got some good news, and I believe Longstreet will be here tomorrow. I actually heard with my own ears last night this little Rebel and her classmates, associates and co-rebels singing Dixie out aloud, too, with the candles burning and the window curtains up at that. All these disloyal women must be sent out of our lines and the sooner this is done the better."

Even as she spoke at breakfast to what had become a gloomy audience, surfeited for life with satirical thrusts, overtones and undertones, her words became flesh, in the form of a new functionary who appeared at the door.

The various rumors and alarms had compelled the Major, he said, to acquiesce in what had now become the general public sentiment—the expulsion of Miss Sue from the Federal lines, tomorrow, under flag of truce, to remain thereafter in Dixie. "And if your mother and your sister, Mrs. Breck, choose to accompany you, the privilege will be granted them to do so."

"I cannot go tomorrow. My trunks and wardrobe are at Lenoir's. I must," she said, using the imperative instead of the subjunctive mood, "have time to prepare for my long-wished-for exile to Dixie and my expatriation from Tennessee, my native home. As to my mother and widowed sister, they are now watching around the sickbed of my dying sister at Lenoir's. You must consult them. They will decide for themselves. But as for me, if I can tear myself from my poor sister Henrietta and our dear mother and sisters, I go cheerfully to Dixie. Banishment, expatriation, exile have no terrors for me. I suffer them cheerfully and can bear them patiently." 'Thus spake this brave girl,' thought Susan, 'calm, defiant and graceful,' herself growing weary of that voice.

"On behalf of the United States of America," said the officer, politely answering in kind, "I accept your terms."

But he regretted to inform her that before "the parvenu" at Knoxville would sign Susan's passport to Lenoir's, some loyalist must guarantee her good conduct between her release and her expatriation.

"I don't speak to loyalists. Who then can take on that responsibility?"

"Your own sister, Mrs. Dickson."

"But I am not a loyalist," declared Mrs. Dickson.

"Your signature on the correct document will make you one," he said politely.

"You want—?"

"Major Gratz *wants* . . . "

"That man wants *me* to become a traitor so I can qualify to act as escort to my brave sister? That is a twist that only a very evil person could enjoy."

"I am ordered to remind you," he said, and it gave him pain, visibly, to say it, "that you are a lone widow, with two little boys, unprotected, isolated in the country where bushwhackers roam, dependent on the good will of your victors. You have only to look over the bluff and across the river at the ashes of your father's manor to see what these words mean."

"You—that tyrant—are asking me to become the first, and only, child of Doctor James Gettys Ramsey to be reduced to the humiliating necessity of renouncing allegiance to the South?"

'A widow and fatherless,' Susan heard a voice

say, looking at her sister, 'Mrs. Dickson was in mortal fear of becoming houseless and homeless.'

"Refuse, Ardie."

"Susan, you are my witness to our father that I do this under duress and with a multitude of reservations."

With Susan hanging on her arm, pleading with her to refuse, Mrs. Dickson signed as slowly as a stutterer speaks.

"I am now the 'loyal' guarantor of my sister's good behavior, and will tell the world how good indeed it is. May it serve for both of us. And you may overhear what I tell her. Susan, my sympathies remain unchanged, and will always be what they should be.

"I know that, Ardie."

Armed with a passport respectfully provided, riding through the gates the next morning in a carriage also provided by the enemy, Susan Ramsey began to feel herself less like a character in a novel by Fielding or Thackeray, or even Dickens, pictured in etchings, the satirical voice starting to go mute, feeling at the same moment as if she were becoming an actual historical personage, obliged to feel, think, and above all *speak* appropriately. Embarking upon the doing of a deed, she set words aside.

Susan Ramsey had been in Henrietta's house, and by her bedside, less than an hour when a telegram was delivered, informing her that she must board the train due within the hour to pass through Lenoir to Knoxville, where it would become the flag of truce train that would carry her to Bristol, Virginia, in the Confederacy.

This struck all the women, except the older sister, Henrietta, whose mind was already on another world even as her body lingered in this one, as indecent haste, but another older sister, Mrs. Breck, went to work helping her pack, while her mother went to the telegraph office to reply that her daughter could not come on the morning train, that her wardrobe was not ready, her trunk was not yet packed.

As they prepared for her exile, Susan asked why there were now twice as many guards around the house as before.

"They've discovered that we concealed Private Guffin. They've added more guards, doubled the sentinels, and made a more rigid surveillance altogether, to prevent a repetition of such disloyal acts."

"I pray he's well again," said Susan, "and has some Yankee in his sights at this very instant."

"That's an inappropriate prayer, Susan," said Mrs. Ramsey. "Reconsider it."

The wardrobe selected and laid out, Susan looked into her empty trunk, and said, "I can't bear the thought of submitting to a search by Major Gratz. Let's send for the provost marshal."

Colonel James F. Jacquess, provost for the large Federal force encamped around and near Lenoir's, responded to the ladies' request that he inspect the packing so that he could testify that no contraband of war went into her trunk.

"I will obey your request, cheerfully," said the Colonel, very polite and gentlemanly, "but I must tell you that Major Gratz will have to inspect it again in Knoxville."

This agitated the Little Rebel's stock of satirical epithets, but not a single unladylike word escaped her lips as she nailed down Major Gratz's salient character traits. Not in the process of becoming historical figures themselves, the mother and the big sister did not feel obliged to restrain themselves.

Susan was proud of herself for confining her own remarks to reciting a definition of the gentleman, leaving it to the Colonel to decide whether Gratz qualified, until he, who had listened more attentively to what her body said then to what her tongue uttered, said, "Miss Sue when your wrath gets up to the boiling point just pour it out all on me. I can bear it. I know how to speak to ladies. But let me advise you never to speak to these Dutch. They have no conception what a genuine lady is. Pour out your wrath on my head. I have been always accustomed to ladies, I understand them, and know how to speak to them. But, never talk to these Dutch."

As they talked, the packing was in progress, but not once did he turn his gaze from the fire around which they were seated.

As he rose to leave, Sue asked, "Are you certain you don't wish to inspect the trunk?"

"Miss Sue, a lady is never to be watched."

"Colonel, Doctor Ramsey's ladies all appreciate your kindly manner, your sympathetic demeanor toward us," said Mrs. Ramsey.

"And when I see him," said Susan, "I will certainly tell him about it."

"He will infer that your mother is a lady," said Mrs. Ramsey, "and agree with me that you have conferred honor upon that lady by this exhibition of her method of training her son."

As he retired from the hall, Colonel Jacquess took the Little Rebel kindly by the hand and bade her a polite and affectionate farewell.

"Don't such men make you feel the futility of brute hatred?" Mrs. Ramsey asked Mrs. Breck, and Susan took it as spoken to *her* first of all.

Going from the hall to Henrietta's sickroom made Susan feel much better about herself, even though she was approaching the bed to say goodbye. Should she say goodbye knowing they would never see each other again, or should she say she was only going back to Riverside to stay with their sister, Mrs. Dickson? Perhaps to tell her the truth would inspire her, stir some spirit in her that would enable her to rally. But if fearfulness for her little sister dominated Henrietta's response the effect could be fatal. As Susan sat there, trying to surrender to impulse, Henrietta's lips began to move, weakly. "Ask him to come in."

"Who do you mean?"

"He's standing in the road."

"There's nobody in the road."

"He sees me through the window."

"No one can see you through the window."

"Oh."

"I'm going to Riverside. Want me to tell Ardie anything?" She repeated the question twice more.

As she left the room, she imagined her family going in, one at a time, in an hour not too distant from this.

* * * * *

When she appeared at the train station in Knoxville, she was shocked to see no other ladies present.

"Your co-exile lady friends left yesterday on the truce train," a Yankee lieutenant informed her.

"The train left without me?"

She instructed the driver of the carriage to go to her aunt's house, F. A. R. Scott's, where she left her trunk, and then to take her on to Riverside. 'Not one person of my own sex to accompany me in my lonely exile from my native place, my banishment to a land of strangers.'

Late that afternoon, soldiers came for her.

"You are under arrest. Come with us."

"It's late. I will go in the morning, if a decent carriage calls for me."

"You will come now. You are under arrest, do you understand?"

"I am her sister, a loyal citizen. I will stand for her good conduct," said Mrs. Dickson, her lips crimped as if she'd tasted alum.

"It's not up to you. She must come with us."

"But I refuse to let her go."

"Then I will place a guard around this house and hold her a prisoner."

Next morning, Sue and Mrs. Dickson drove into town in a Captain Boyd's carriage. They went on out the old Jacksboro road, north, to their Aunt and Uncle Scott's house to pick up the trunk.

In a room whose wallpaper scenes imported from France were so life-like and expressive they inhibited the inhabitants from engaging in scenes of their own raised any higher than *sotto voce*, their aunt told them, "Now you must be prepared for what you will see when you open your trunk, Susan. Major Gratz has been here before you."

Susan imagined him riding back to Gay Street dressed in a motley assortment of her clothes. When Mrs. Dickson giggled, she wondered if they imagined the same scene.

"He barges in like a locomotive, demands, 'Where is the trunk?' I said, 'Sue has the key.' 'I have a collection of keys.' He tried a great many until he found one that violated the lock on your trunk. He scrutinized its contents closely, and roughly replaced them, put the United States seal upon it, and left the hall so full of his Dutch surliness I can almost sense it even in here." She looked around at the bold scenes of gentlemen and ladies engaged in leisure activities that President Jackson had ordered from Paris for the Hermitage, that almost sank with the steamboat when it went aground, that Colonel Scott bought as salvage and put up in this room for his bride, Dr. Ramsey's only sister.

"Did he find any contraband goods?" asked Mrs. Dickson.

"I think he left empty-handed."

"What, no treasonable documents, confederate conspiracies, plans for an attack upon Loyal Knoxville, projected campaigns by her gallant Confederate countrymen and five brothers led by this modern Joan of Arc, such as one might expect to find in the trunk of a teenage noncombatant?"

"No, I could swear he left this house empty-handed."

"Then what's to become of his dreams of a promotion?"

Susan wished her big sister would change her tune. Satire did little to remove the stains of indignity Gratz had left upon her clothes. She did not look in the trunk, not even to see whether he had discovered the tiny Confederate flag or the manuscript of "The Lost Rifle" she had hidden there.

"We can assume then that the trunk will be allowed to go on the train," said Susan, eager to remove herself from the scenes on the walls.

* * * * *

When she found no ladies on this truce train either, Susan could not conceal from her big sister the look of fear she knew her face clearly showed. "I'll go with you," Mrs. Dickson said.

At Bull's Gap, the train stopped.

"We've not yet repaired the track Longstreet's army tore up as they retreated, and the bridge over Lick Creek is still down."

A merchant of Knoxville who knew Doctor Ramsey and Crozier well approached them. "Mrs. Dickson, if you wish to return to Riverside, I will take charge of—," he whispered, "the Little Rebel," then aloud, "your little sister. They tell me that every means of conveyance was exhausted in transporting the passengers who came up yesterday—they're still on the road somewhere. If I can find a carriage or wagon to carry her on to where the two flags of truce meet, I'll be happy to do it."

"Thank you, Mr. Walker. Please see what you can do."

He came back an hour later, having had no luck.

An officer approached them. "Ladies, I am General Jacob D. Cox. I understand Mr. Walker here has been looking for a needle in a haystack. I've heard the tale of the exploits of the Little Rebel and it has served so well to break the monotony of military routine I think I ought to show my gratitude. Would my own ambulance be acceptable?"

Mrs. Dickson embraced her little sister, and was able to return the same day on the train to Riverside.

Mr. Walker handed Susan over to the officer in charge of the Confederate flag of truce, and when her name was spoken aloud, the men began to chant, "Little Rebel, Little Rebel, she's here!"

She wished her father, and her dead sister, Charlotte, and Belle Boyd were there to greet her, to hear the cheers.

She met several officers who said, "Oh, we know all about you," and she asked if they knew or had recently seen her father, Dr. James MacGready Ramsey, or her brothers in the army, Robert, Arthur, Crozier, McKnitt, and Alexander. They were all known to one or another of these officers, but none knew their present whereabouts.

When the cars reached Liberty, Virginia, Susan found her father waiting. He had ridden up from Atlanta.

"How are your mother and sisters?" Dr. Ramsey asked, as he embraced her.

"Are you well, Father? Since you left us at Lenoir in December, we've had only a pencilled note from Jonesboro."

"Work keeps me fit. I help out in the hospitals, and I am still a depositary for the Confederate treasury. Are you holding back?"

"No, Father, Mother is fine, though tired and a little nervous. Elizabeth is like a second mother to everyone, as usual. Ardie is still alone with her two boys at Riverside."

"And Henrietta?"

"She languishes on her sickbed, attended by Mother and Elizabeth. We had hoped she would soon be better, but with the armies of General Ferrero and General Hazen camped near and around the house, it's almost in a state of siege. The death of the boys and the hateful sight of the enemies and spoilers of Tennessee constantly in view have broken her heart. I do still hope she will recover, Father."

But Susan knew that her father knew Henrietta's sensitive nature too well to unite with her in that hope.

"Because she *is* doing so poorly, the authorities have granted Mother and Elizabeth the indulgence of watching by her bedside, waiting for the result of her long illness. Then they have permission to follow me into Dixie."

"Why were you sent into the Mountains of Virginia where you could not have known you would have the protection of your big brother, as it turns out, and of your uncle and friends of the family, instead of south to Atlanta to your father?"

"I don't know, Father. I knew I was to be banished, but not where—until a very short time before they sent me out."

The hour being late, Doctor Ramsey being too tired to talk or listen, they went to bed. "I want to hear your story when I'm fresh."

After breakfast the next morning, they sat on the porch with a view of the mountains. "Now give me the reason why you were sent out before the rest of my family, and tell me what this part of your brother's dispatch," he showed it to her, pointing to the phrase 'disloyal acts,' "means. What disloyal act can you, a girl of sixteen, have perpetrated—surrounded as you were by two army corps—Ferrero's and Hazen's—of the United States?"

Recognizing the slow emergence of her father's satirical tone, Susan struck, and tried to sustain, a note of historical objectivity.

Her father and her Uncle Ramsey arrived, listened to Sue's narrative with the liveliest satisfaction, even though Ardie's signing, under

coercion, of the loyalty oath gave Dr. Ramsey great pain.

"Sue, was there nothing more disloyal in your conduct in Tennessee than that you played and sang Dixie, declined the attentions of Federal officers, refused to walk under the Federal flag, or sign the oath of allegience to a government hostile to your own, in whose army your father and five brothers serve? I concede this was all disloyal to the United States if your state had not previously absolved all allegiance on the part of every one of her citizens, even girls and boys, due to the old union. Was there not something more atrocious that you had done thus to provoke the resentment of the military authorities by which you were surrounded at Knoxville, Lenoir's, and Riverside?"

"Pa," Sue replied, "I have no disposition to conceal from you anything which I have done. I confess I always did dislike the Yankees. They are so different from our Southern people. The New England gentlemen that used to visit you at Mecklenburg, such as Dr. Coffin, Dr. Strong, Mr. Sherman, Mr. Cornelius, and others of that kind, were erudite, eloquent, polite, and even refined—gentlemen of taste, culture and weight of character, unselfish, generous, liberal, patriotic, and public spirited—but I never considered them as Yankees, rather as countrymen of your own and entitled to regard and esteem. Even for my tutoresses from the North I never cherished any respect. Many of them were not ladies. After the war began, what had been prejudice once became intensified into hatred and hostility. A blue coat and a Federal flag I detested as enemies of enlightened liberty and as the tools of tyrants and usurpers. Under the influence of these feelings I participated in an affair of which I make this recital." She handed Doctor Ramsey a paper headed "The Lost Rifle," saying, "Let this be the start of a new archive, Pa, on which you can build your history of Tennessee up through this revolution."

"The history of Tennessee ended for me, Sue, in 1845."□

Charles Ramírez Berg

CRACKS IN THE *MACHO* MONOLITH: *MACHISMO*, MAN, AND MEXICO IN RECENT MEXICAN CINEMA

[For the Mexican man] the ideal of manliness is never to 'crack' [rajar]. . . . *The Mexican* macho—*the male—is a hermetic being, closed up in himself, capable of guarding both himself and whatever has been confided to him. Manliness is judged according to one's invulnerability to enemy arms or the impacts of the outside world.*

—*Octavio Paz,* The Labyrinth of Solitude[1]

Yet the more Javier Lira, the protagonist of Arturo Ripstein's *Cadena Perpetua* (*Vicious* Circle, 1977), tries to consolidate his identity, the more fractured it becomes. Lira is a man made completely vulnerable, *rajado*—split in two—by the system. The film catches him at the moment when he is frozen between his past and his present, on the very day when he must attempt to obliterate his past to have any possibility of a future. Like the modern Mexican male, Lira must find a way to fuse tradition and transition, to meld both old and new to forge an "uncrackable," unitary being. The tragic story of *Cadena Perpetua* is the story of one man's failure to effect such a fusion and start over. Tracing the modest rise and precipitous fall of a common man, *Cadena Perpetua* is a portentous tale of Mexico's Everyman and is emblematic not only of the shift in male roles in Mexican cinema, but, I will argue, in Mexico at large during the last twenty years.

Like women, men have their own version of the impossible contradiction. For women it is virgin/whore; for men it is hero/outlaw. Many men—not only Mexicans—have had to deal with these contradictory expectations. The dilemma, like the one Javier Lira lives out in *Cadena Perpetua*, is cyclical and eternal: in the male world, to be a hero, to be respected, you must be successful. But to realize success fully, the male will be called upon, at some point, to bend or break the rules. Ironically, ruthlessness yields success, and as a by-product, respectability.

In recent Mexican films, this hero/outlaw duality has appeared in three kinds of movies. In the first type, the dichotomy is divided between two men who are brothers or close friends. Films like the sex comedy *Fray Don Juan* (*Friar Don Juan*, 1969, directed by René Cardona, Jr.), the Western *Los dos hermanos* (*The Two Brothers*, 1970, directed by Emilio Gómez Muriel), the provincial adventure *Juan Armienta, el repatriado* (*Juan Armenta, the Repatriated One*, 197__ , directed by Fernándo Duran), and *Erótica*, a contemporary heist-romance (1978, directed by Emilio Fernandez), all have main characters who are brothers or best friends, devoted to, yet finally at odds with, one another. In a second kind of film, an outlaw disguises himself beneath the veneer of respectability. Among these false identity pictures are Luis Alcoriza's *El oficio más antiguo del mundo* (*The World's Oldest Profession*, 1968), in which a wounded gangster pretends to be a priest and hides out in a brothel while he recuperates. At the end of Jaime Humberto Hermosillo's *Matinée* (1976), two homosexual thieves attempt to pull off a robbery at the basilica of Guadalupe in Mexico City dressed as priests. *La bestia acorralada* (*The Cornered Beast*, 1974, directed by Alberto Mariscal) is the story of a well-respected family man and businessman who claims to be from the Netherlands but is exposed as a Nazi war criminal. Finally there are films centering on the individual male in which the warring sides of his personality are shown as parts of one man, such as *Cadena Perpetua*. Another remarkable example of this third type is Marcela Fernández Violante's *Misterio* (*Mystery*, 1979) about a soap opera star who can no longer distinguish between his televised existence and his real life. All three types of films disclose the Mexican male's

[1]Octavio Paz, *The Labyrinth of Solitude*, trans. Lysander Kemp (1950; New York: Grove Press, Inc., 1961) 29-30.

dilemma, the contradiction of his trying to live out this respectable/ruthless, hero/outlaw tension. All of them, save the comedy, *Fray Don Juan*, end tragically for the male protagonist. And even *Fray Don Juan*, starring one of Mexico's leading film comedians, Mauricio Garcés, in a dual role, points out the schizophrenic split in the male personality. The film is about twin brothers, one a notorious ladies' man, the other a pious priest, who have psychic flashes during which they inexplicably live the brother's life. It becomes so disturbing to the priest-brother that he finally goes to a psychiatrist. Pleading for help, he reveals how seriously *el macho* has become *rajado*. "I am not myself," the monk tells the analyst. "I don't know what I'm doing. It's Mr. Hyde who has entered into the priest Jekyll. Help me, doctor! I want to continue being good." Something has happened to the Mexican male, changing his life profoundly. It is something that will not allow him to "continue to be good," something has "split" him irrevocably, separating the hero from the outlaw, and preventing him from being the unified *macho* he used to be.

In Mexico, the male's hero/outlaw role—a shaky structure at best—was made operable by grafting it onto the cultural pose of *machismo*, thereby creating a tidy social accommodation that worked for centuries. This male-made arrangement, combining the contradictory hero/outlaw male roles and the *macho* tradition, formed the foundation of Mexican patriarchy. Lately, however, the state, patriarchy (the system the state uses to exercise and maintain its power), and the male (the main beneficiary of the system), all have experienced a steady erosion of their once-unquestioned, autonomous political and social positions. There is a critical connection between the individual *macho* and the state, but to understand that requires a grasp of what exactly is meant by the term *macho*.

The Psychological Legacy of *El Macho*

Many observers view the Mexican's *machismo* as a cover for his extreme inferiority and social/sexual insecurity. Samuel Ramos imagines the *pelado* (Mexican city tramp) saying to himself: "A European has science, art, technical knowledge, and so forth; we have none of that here, but . . . we are very manly." Lost in this maze of insecurity and inferiority, the *pelado* bolsters his fragile self-confidence with boastful displays of his virility, encapsulated, for instance, in such phrases as "*Tengo muchos huevos*" ("I have a lot of balls") to signify his courage, and "*Yo soy tu padre*" ("I am your father") to signify his superiority and absolute power. But the very need to continually assert his power, to prove it over and over, is an indication that he doubts his power. The Mexican is insecure about his control and needs to make continued shows of authority to prove his efficacy. He knows his true self, recognizes his vulnerability, and wears a mask to conceal it. He lives with the constant fear that he will be exposed, and his perception, says Ramos, "becomes abnormal; he imagines that the next man he encounters will be his enemy; he mistrusts all who approach him."[2] His distrust of others is ferocious, going beyond ordinary suspicion, because this aggressive scrutiny of strangers becomes yet another way the Mexican man validates his virility. It is not unlike the paranoia described by Terry Eagleton in his discussion of psychosis, and specifically paranoia. "The root of such paranoia," writes Eagleton, speaking of the state of delusion, "[Freud] locates in an unconscious defence against homosexuality: the mind denies this desire by converting the love-object into a rival or persecutor, systematically reorganizing and reinterpreting reality to confirm this suspicion."[3]

Partially, such an attitude may be traced to the Mexican's Spanish heritage. Stanley Brandes noted similar male behavior in the village of Monteros in Andalusia which may shed light on how this complex psychological mechanism works in Mexicans. "Monteros men," he writes,

> in the process of retaining their sexual and social identities, assume a combined posture of aggressiveness and defensiveness. . . . The best overall protective device is to assume an aggressive stance in all social relationships; this strategy, more than anything, helps to preserve one's position in the world and by extension to consolidate one's masculine identity.[4]

As it does for the males of Monteros, this world view provides the Mexican man with, as Octavio

[2]Samuel Ramos, *Profile of Man and Culture in Mexico*, trans. Peter G. Earle (1934; Austin: Univ. of Texas Press, 1972) 61.

[3]Terry Eagleton, *Literary Theory: An Introduction* (Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 1983) 159.

[4]Stanley Brandes, *Metaphors of Masculinity: Sex and Status in Andalusian Folklore* (Univ. of Pennsylvania Press, 1980) 9.

Paz says, only two options in life: "either he inflicts the actions implied by *chingar* [to do violence to another, most often in the sense of a sexual violation] on others, or else he suffers them himself at the hands of others" (78).[5] The Mexican man is *un macho chingón* or he is a victim.

Who, then, is this *macho*?

He is a man, as Salvador Reyes Nevares says, who puffs himself up with (mainly sexual) self-praise in order to form "a capsule in which he encloses himself, sheltered from all contrariness."[6] *Machismo* is thus a pose of sexual potency made by one man before his fellow men, and in relation not to women in general, but to *a* woman in particular. Like the complex role of the Mexican female, it too is rooted in the nation's history and mythology. The Mexican identifies with the Indian (as opposed to the Spanish) element of his past, that is, with his conquered ancestral mother, La Malinche, rather than Cortés, his conquistador father. But this nativist identification aligns the Mexican with the passive—and exploited—feminine role (not the active, exploiting male one) in the great national tragedy called the Conquest. This in turn sets up an irresolvable internal conflict: the Mexican male's desire to hang on to his Indian roots directly contradicts his psychological need to dominate. He hides the conflict, which is a sign of weakness and a threat to his domination, and meanwhile the contradiction remains unresolved, not-so-neatly tucked away beneath the pose of *machismo*. Linking himself to his Indian past and La Malinche forces him to act more manly. "Any feminine action on his part," says Reyes Nevares, "makes him partake in the passive acquiescence to the Conquest all over again. This is something no Mexican [male] wishes to participate in" (15-16).[7] For the male to have power, he must act manly. And power is so identified with maleness that there is room for little else in his psychological make-up. So it is, writes Mexican psychologist Rogelio Diaz-Guerrero, that "somehow, consciously or unconsciously" an arrangement was arrived at over time "that all power was to be in the hands of the male and all love was to be in the hands of the female." This "seems to hold the key to most dealings both within the Mexican family and within the Mexican socioculture" (xvi).

Every move a Mexican male makes, then, is significant. It is not just any woman they historically tied themselves to; it is La Malinche, their Indian "mother," the Mexican Eve. Since La Malinche is such a complex symbol for Mexicans, at once national mother and archetypal whore, the male's conflicted attempt to identify with her and at the same time reaffirm his manliness places him in the middle of a psychological minefield where each step must be carefully calculated. All this creates sexual and historical dissonances further fueling *machismo*. For historical, psychological and sexual reasons, then, every act for the Mexican man is of the gravest significance. Reyes Nevares imagines the male's self-dialogue:

> My conduct . . . is always *macho*. It is meant to reaffirm my manhood. To that end I will shout louder than the others, and laugh hardier than the others, I will be impudent and will provoke any fight so that others will notice me; and above all, I will maintain my woman in subjugation by a meticulous discipline which preserves her and reaffirms me in my station as head of the household. (17)

A psychological reading of such conduct by Santiago Ramírez sees the shameful history of the Conquest re-enacted again and again in the manner in which the *mestizo* (of mixed Spanish and Indian blood) boy was raised in the typical Mexican family over the centuries. Since, according to Ramírez, the growing *mestizo* boy had little contact with his mostly absent father, the boy was split, wishing to be strong like his father, but at the same time resenting him for the violation of his mother and his subsequent de facto abandonment of her, and moreover for his neglect of him. Given such an upbringing, it is not surprising that the Mexican male acts the way he does, nor that he is so attached to the symbols of the masculine. "The hat . . . the pistol, the horse or the automobile are his pride and joy; it is a matter of compulsively resorting to external manifestations to affirm a lacking internal vigor."[8]

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[5]See chap. 4, "The Sons of La Malinche," for Paz's discussion of *chingar*, a "magical word" with "innumerable meanings."

[6]Salvador Reyes Nevares, "El machismo en Mexico," *Mundo Nuevo* 46 (Apr. 1970): 14. Translated by the author.

[7]See also Rogelio Díaz-Guerrero, *Psychology of the Mexican: Culture and Personality* (Austin: Univ. of Texas Press, 1975) xv, for a similar conclusion.

[8]Santiago Ramírez, *El mexicano, psicología de sus motivaciones* (Mexico, D.F.: Editorial Grijalbo, S.A., 1977) 60-62. Translated by the author.

It is no coincidence that these are sexual symbols, for, as Díaz-Guerrero says, sexual potency is the means by which a Mexican man defines himself. "Through the entire life of the male," Díaz-Guerrero writes, "virility is measured by the sexual potential, and only secondarily in terms of physical strength, courage, or audacity." So much so, Díaz-Guerrero says, that these secondary characteristics are believed to originate in the male's sexual potency. According to Díaz-Guerrero, the focus is on the male sexual organs, with emphasis placed on their physical size and, more importantly, their functional size. As Díaz-Guerrero puts it:

> It is assumed they [the sexual organs] are functioning well when a) the individual acts efficiently in sexual activity or speaks or brags convincingly of his multiple seductive successes; b) he speaks or actually shows that he is not afraid of death; c) he is very successful in the fields of intellectuality, science, etc.
>
> (6-7)

Based on the shape of Mexican history and his researches, Díaz-Guerrero concludes that "the general setting is favorable to the development of neurosis," and he draws this psychological profile of the Mexican male:

> In the male there should be a) problems of submission, conflict, and rebellion in the area of authority; b) preoccupation and anxiety regarding sexual potency; c) conflict and ambivalence regarding his double role: he must at times love and generally act maternally and tenderly, and at other times act sexually and virilely; d) difficulties in superseding the maternal state . . . e) problems before and during marriage: mother's love interferes with the love to another woman . . . f) the Oedipus complex.
>
> (10-11)

The Mexican male's inner conflicts, it would seem, are formidable.

But is this a true assessment of the Mexican male's situation, or only the elegant theorizing of Mexican intellectuals? Folklorist Américo Paredes is not convinced the *macho* image dates from the Conquest, nor that it operates as universally in the Mexican consciousness in the way Paz, Ramos and others believe. Citing a study of Mexican ballads or *corridos* undertaken by the Argentine Vicente T. Mendoza, Paredes notes Mendoza's division of the *macho* into two categories. One is a truly brave, generous and heroic man; the other is a fake who uses the pose to hide his cowardice. The first type, says Paredes, is simply the manly, heroic ideal common to many nations. The second type begins to show up in Mexican *décimas* (ten-line poems) at the end of the nineteenth century. And the word *macho* only comes into popular usage much later, during the 1940s, in *corridos*. Here, says Paredes, the popular image of the *macho* as we know it today crystallized. Among the factors that contribute to the modern usage of the term *macho* are, first, the figure of the *pistolero* [gunman], the Revolutionary man of action who becomes a tragic figure once the fighting stops and he is suddenly thrust into a peaceful world. Second, there is the Mexican experience during World War II: for all practical purposes, Mexico did not partake in the conflict, but opted instead to fall under the comfortable protectionist umbrella of the United States. Thus, as opposed to the *corridos* of Revolutionary times which celebrated actual feats of wartime courage, those of the 1940s instead had to concoct a brave stance much like, as Paredes says, a fellow who shouts challenges while hiding behind a strong protector. Finally, Paredes opines that the term *macho* would never have gained acceptance or popularity but for the fortuitous coincidence that it rhymed with the name of Mexico's President from 1940 to 1946, Manuel Avila Camacho.[9]

Macho was therefore a term popularized through mass media: songs such as the *corridos* Paredes mentions, and films, the *comedias rancheras* [Western comedy-musicals] which served as vehicles for some of the popular male singers of those very same *corridos*, such as Pedro Infante and Jorge Negrete. Whether or not *machismo* is as historically ingrained in the Mexican consciousness as Paz, Ramos, Reyes Nevares, Ramírez, and others believe, or is a more modern construct, the fact remains that the term denotes a distinctive male way of being. In Mexican society *machismo* has both cultural currency and psychological potency, and is intimately connected with the Mexican subject's self-image and with national identity.

[9]Américo Paredes, "Estados Unidos, México y el Machismo," *Journal of Inter-American Studies* 9.1 (Jan. 1967): 65-70.

Manly Mexico: The State as Quintessential *Macho*

If there is a national male symbol in Mexico, it is the nation state itself. Louis Althusser's conception of ideology is as a lived system of shared social behaviors and tenets, "a system (with its own logic and rigour) of representations (images, myths, ideas or concepts, depending on the case) endowed with a historical existence and role within a given society."[10] Following Althusser, we see how modern man in a sense uses the state and all its apparatuses to help define himself, and how, reciprocally, the state relies on the individual's participation to define itself. As Terry Eagleton puts it in an imagined subject's first person reverie, it is

> as though society . . . recognizes me, tells me that I am valued, and so makes me by that very act of recognition into a free, antonomous subject. I come to feel, not exactly as though the world exists for me alone, but as though it is significantly 'centered' on me, and I in turn am significantly 'centered' on it.[11]

Althusser's ideology is thus the dynamic process which provides the individual subject with a center. It is, Eagleton continues,

> far more subtle, pervasive and unconscious than a set of explicit doctrines; it is the very medium in which I 'live out' my relation to society, the realm of signs and social practices which binds me to the social structure and lends me a sense of coherent purpose and identity. Ideology in this sense . . . may encompass not only such conscious predilections as my deep devotion to the monarchy but the way I dress and the kind of car I drive, my deeply unconscious images of others and of myself.
>
> (172)

For Althusser, then, ideology is this mutual exchange between individual and state through which each sponsors the other while at the same time using that sponsorship to establish an identity. In Mexico this process is carried on largely through the social system of *machismo*.

So in a real Althusserian sense, *machismo* names the mutual agreement between the partriarchal state and the male individual in Mexico. Through it, the individual acts out an implicit, socially understood role—*el macho*—which is empowered and supported by the state. The state in turn gains authority by the male's identification with and allegiance to it. Both the nation and the individual male forge their identity in the *macho* mold. As one *charro* (cowboy) song, "Soy puro Mexicano," composed by the foremost songwriter of the genre, José Alfredo Jiménez, shows, the link between male and state in Mexico is a sacred, patriotic contract. "I am pure Mexican," the song goes, "and I have made a pledge/with the land where I was born/to be a *macho* among *machos*./ And because of that I proudly sing to my country."[12] More than a cultural tradition, then, *machismo* is the ideological fuel driving Mexico's patriarchal system. To speak of the male image and *machismo* in Mexico is to speak of the nation's self-image and ultimately to speak of the state itself.

And the state, between 1968 and 1982, underwent dramatic changes that took it from boom to bust, sending its self-image soaring to arrogance and crashing to despair. In the first half of the 1970s, because of President Echeverria's political liberalization and the wealth of economic possibilities foretold by the discovery of vast quantities of petroleum, Mexico was a nation that dreamt of political independence and economic prosperity. By the end of the decade, those dreams had become nightmares. In some ways Mexico was worse off in 1982, after the discovery of its tremendous oil reserves, than before.

Once the news of the discovery of oil—more than enough to make Mexico a major world supplier—was made public in the mid-1970s, a developmental plan was undertaken by the government. Its aim was to prevent the nation from putting all its economic eggs in one petroleum basket while at the same time allowing the newly-found resource to spur the nation's growth rate. What happened instead was that a combination of factors led to misery rather than the economic miracle that had been so fervently expected. These included the inefficient—and corrupt—management of Petróleos Méxicanos,

[10]Louis Althusser, *For Marx* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1969) 231.

[11]Terry Eagleton, *Literary Criticism: An Introduction* (Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 1983) 172.

[12]Armando Jiménez, ed., *Cancionero Mexicano, Tomo IV* (Mexico, D.F.: Editores Mexicanos Unidos, S.A., 1982) 62-63. Translated by the author.

or Pemex, the nationalized oil producer; the bald fact that Mexico needed to produce oil in order to profit from it, and to do so would require expansion and technological modernization in an industry notoriously capital-intensive; and sharply declining oil prices in the 1980s. By the late 1970s and early 1980s it was evident that instead of stimulating the nation's economy, oil was draining it. This in turn led to further economic woes. In 1982, Mexico's foreign debt became the largest in the Third World[13] and the value of the peso had dropped to 45 pesos to the United States dollar—and was still falling—when as recently as 1976 the exchange rate had been stable at 12.50.[14] And to further add to the crisis in the *macho* power structure, there was the changing role of women in Mexican society. Not only were women liberating themselves from the inhibiting social constraints of the past; in doing so they were challenging—and consequently undermining—the patriarchal political structure that had so constrained them. The Mexican state, patriarchy and *el macho* were all under siege, paralyzed like Javier Lira, the protagonist in *Cadena Perpetua*, between a hoped-for glorious future and the return to an ignominious past.

The Vicious Circle: *Cadena Perpetua*

Like Mexico in the early 1970s, Javier Lira (Pedro Armendáriz, Jr.) is just coming into his own and sees a bright future looming on the horizon. A rehabilitated criminal, he is well on his way to becoming a solid citizen. He has carved out a perfect middle-class niche for himself: he has a good job as a bank collector, has gained the confidence of his boss (who knows about his criminal past), has a wife, a child and another on the way, and at least one mistress. But by unhappy chance he comes across a crooked agent of the secret police, known as Burro Prieto ("Dark Burro"), who knew him from the old days when Lira was known as Tarzán, petty thief, pickpocket, and pimp. Prieto steals Lira's briefcase containing thousands of the bank's pesos and demands from Lira 600 (pre-devaluation) pesos a day extortion. In return, Burro Prieto will guarantee Lira/Tarzán police immunity. As a bonus, Lira/Tarzán is free to keep everything he steals over and above his daily 600 peso payoff. But Lira has no desire to return to a life of crime. He has made a good start on a new life, effectively leaving the old one behind. "It's not fair," he protests. "Too bad," Burro Prieto replies, "that's life. Someone has to lose."

Lira decides to tell his boss exactly what happened and seek his help in foiling the extortion attempt. But his boss can't be located. It is late Friday afternoon, and all Lira finds at the now-closed bank are junior executives smooching with willing secretaries. With the day quickly ending, Lira knows that the longer it takes to find the executive, the harder his story will be to believe. How can he prove what happened? Against him will be not only the word of a secret police agent, but his past. Even if he escaped prosecution, would the bank—or any employer—ever trust him again?

Cadena Perpetua keeps cutting back and forth between Lira's past and his present, sharply contrasting his "legitimate" and "illegitimate" sides. For example, there is the juxtaposition of two tableaux that speak volumes about the difference between Tarzán's life and Lira's. In a flashback, Tarzán makes a night collection from three of his prostitutes on a dimly lit street. His girls are pretty but flashy and ragtag. The film cuts abruptly to a dress shop display window in daytime. Pert mannequins wear brightly-colored dresses in the latest fashion. Lira enters the shop, making a collection for the bank. Across the edit, night has become day, past present, illegal legal, and pimp has become bank collector.

But there is a way in which the cut demarks only a difference in degree, not in kind. Lira is still visiting women, and still collecting from them. It turns out that he is romantically involved with the dress shop's salesgirl (they discuss their next tryst). And Lira is able to collect his payment from her while she turns down another creditor: Lira continues to use sex, just as he did before as a pimp, to collect his money. He has not left prostitution behind, only moved the practice to a nicer part of town. Before, he exploited women for his own gain; now, in his socially acceptable role as bank collector, Lira exploits the salesgirl—and in turn is exploited—for the bank. When the film counterpoises Lira's past and present, the

[13]It was surpassed by Brazil's foreign debt in 1983.

For how the promise of oil turned into an economic Pandora's box see, for example, Judith Adler Hellman, *Mexico in Crisis* (New York: Holmes & Meier Publishers, 1983) 68-84; and Alan Riding, *Distant Neighbors* (New York: Knopf, 1985) 90-93; 206-26.

[14]The steady devaluation of the peso continues unabated. By the summer of 1986, the peso's value had fallen to more than 600 pesos to the dollar; by the summer of 1987, the exchange rate had dropped to more than 1,300 pesos per dollar, putting the 1976-1987 inflation rate at more than 10,000%.

superficial differences between Lira's life and Tarzán's are obvious. Less obvious, though still evident, is the one great similarity. Both Tarzán and Lira are compromised, nearly to the point of nullity: Tarzán is damned for being outside the system, Lira for being within it. Inside or outside the system, the state pulverizes you. Lira's tragedy is the tragedy of modern Mexico, the fact that, as Burro Prieto says, "Someone has to lose." In today's Mexico, it seems, everyone loses.

Past and present collide again in the scene where Burro Prieto and his goon shake Lira down. It takes place in a secluded spot at the fringes of the city in a small chamber within a monument. At one point Lira takes out his wallet and shows it to Burro Prieto. In it Lira carries the symbols of his new life: family snapshots, his bank ID, his membership card to a private club that races pigeons, a holy card of San Martin de Porras. The underside of *Cadena Perpetua* is that Lira, in his new, "good" life, is an insincere, groveling functionary.

Throughout the film minor characters ask each other this running question: who will win the soccer match that night between the German and Mexican all-stars? Though the Mexican team is strong, the German team is always excellent. It is not just idle chatter; it is a question that asks the Mexican to evaluate his country against an international standard, a question that forces the Mexican to compare himself with the rest of the West. And Mexico's continual inability to compare favorably with Europe or the United States (of which the 1970s oil boom/bust was only the latest example) has been, as Samuel Ramos says, one source of the Mexican's sense of inferiority. The realization that he cannot measure up leaves the Mexican three choices. Looking at the situation realistically he can simply become frustrated and depressed by the gulf separating him from his First World dreams. He can use, as Ramos hoped, that realistic assessment to work to make himself and Mexico better. Finally, he can delude himself and live behind a mask of self-deception. Lira wears the mask. In the middle of his search for his boss that afternoon, a cabbie asks him which team he favors in the soccer match. Without thinking, he automatically gives the "correct," upscale response of the loyal Mexican: the Mexican all-stars. Lira has bought—and swallowed whole—the upwardly mobile, junior executive party line. He knows his part so well he answers reflexively, unthinkingly—without even having to believe in it.

But whether or not Lira believes in his new life, it is an "honest" one, even if it involves sacrificing his identity. Changing his life involved more than just changing his name; it involved transforming into the complete company man—dutifully carrying family photographs as emblems of his middle-class status, including a holy card in his wallet to please his wife, racing pigeons because it is his boss's passion, not his. Conforming completely to other people's notions of success and respectability, Lira adopts a life other people want him to live, the life "civilized" society expects of its decent citizens, the life the paternal Mexican state expects of its loyal sons.

After spending half a day searching, by nightfall Lira still cannot find his boss. Like *The Bicycle Thief*, the Italian Neorealist classic also about a man who is similarly trapped by forces he cannot control, *Cadena Perpetua* ends with its protagonist face to face with temptation outside a crowded soccer stadium. In existential agony, Lira mills amongst fans of the Germany-Mexico match. With the careful cinematic detail reminiscent of Robert Bresson's *Pickpocket* (1959), Lira buys his favorite newspaper (the one that, folded in half, can best conceal the wallets he will steal) from a vendor, and transforms back into Tarzán. Inside the stadium we hear the crowd's repeated roar, punctuated by three staccato drumbeats: "Me-xi-co! Me-xi-co!" At the film's most crucial moment, Lira picks his first pocket, and the main elements of Mexico's patriarchal system converge: male, *macho*, national self-image, nation state. After making his first pinch, Tarzán, in close-up, stops to stare into the camera's lens in the film's last, extended image. Vile and hateful, it is the look of a man cheated by a present out of his control, forced by his past to forfeit his future—the look of a man who never had a chance, the look of a trapped animal.

But the story of Lira reverting back into Tarzán is much more than the story of one man's failure. The state, its self-image and *machismo* all shared equally in his downfall. *Cadena Perpetua* is the story of a man in crisis, *rajado*, split in half—each side doomed to failure. The wallop *Cadena Perpetua* delivers is a stunning one-two blow: for the male in Mexico, win or lose, you lose. "Someone *has* to lose." When Tarzán was a petty thief, a *ratero*, a pimp and a scoundrel, he had freedom, self-sufficiency and self-pride to the point of arrogance. The respectable Lira, in contrast, is a whimpering, robotized yes-man. Regardless of how Lira tries to define *macho*, legally or illegally, as socially approved

businessman or renegade thief, upstanding citizen or underworld crook, hero or outlaw, he remains unfulfilled. *Machismo*, no longer able to deliver integrity to its Mexican male subjects, is at an impasse.

One of the things that makes *Cadena Perpetua* so fascinating is that although the film's outcome is far from predictable, by the end it all seems so inevitable: Lira becomes Tarzán, returning to his life of crime. What is so troubling about this tragedy has to do with the crushing inevitability with which Lira is squashed, and with the film's suggestion that a man can never leave his reprehensible past behind. But beyond that is the nagging fact that both Lira and Tarzán represent sell-outs. Modern Mexico is to blame. As Mexican film critic Jorge Ayala Blanco has written about *Cadena Perpetua*, "In either period of [Lira/Tarzán's] life, the harassed protagonist must assume the role of the ideal minion in order to continue to exist. . . . It is the Mexican brand of Power that obliges him to do so."[15] Lira's lives are both equally submissive, both fated failures created by Mexican society. *Cadena Perpetua* demonstrates the system-wide exploitation that Mexico's patriarchal power structure so insidiously inflicts on its subjects: *machos* victimize women, and the male exploiters are themselves exploited by the system. This has always been so, of course. But before the recent Mexican crisis and before *Cadena Perpetua*, *el macho* did not perceive (or perhaps did not choose to perceive) his victimization. One of the reasons that *Cadena Perpetua* is such an important film is that it marks the moment at which realization of that victimization is inescapable. *Cadena Perpetua* announces the collapse of the nation state-*machismo-macho* nexus, and in so doing makes the staggering inadequacies of the system transparent.

The Mexican male's central crisis has always been how to shape his identity. In this process the governing paradigm of *machismo* served him well and carried him from the Conquest into the second half of the nineteenth century. Now that *machismo* has been exposed as a façade, as empty as the interior of the monument where Burro Prieto puts the squeeze on Lira, the male must seek his true being with neither an overarching male mythos nor a consolidated political structure to support him. How will the modern Mexican male do it? If he ever does create a new, solidified identity, won't he still be trapped, like Javier Lira, within a society that will not allow him either to express his new one or leave his previous one behind?

There was a time when the mutual, reciprocal identification of male and state operated smoothly and effortlessly, a time when *machismo* was taken for granted and *el macho* was a pose that was unified, natural and cheerfully unself-conscious. It was a time when a happy and self-assured Jorge Negrete could tilt his sombrero back on his head, smile directly into the camera, and sing about how happy he was to be a Mexican. "I am a Mexican," he sang in *La peñon de las animas* (*The Rock of Souls*, 1942, directed by Miguel Zacarías), "my land is fierce/I give you my word as a *macho* that there is no other land/prettier or finer than mine/I am a Mexican/and proud of it/. . . no one can say that I am one who backs down [*rajao*, a colloquial version of *rajado*]/and like Cuauhtémoc, when I am suffering/I laugh and bear it before I give in."[16] Now such innocence is gone. Judging from recent Mexican cinema, and particularly from the watershed film *Cadena Perpetua*, what remains on the landscape is a nation of *machos rajados*.□

[15]Jorge Ayala Blanco, *La Condición del Cine Mexicano* (Mexico, D.F.: Editorial Posada, 1986) 385. Translated by the author.

[16]"Yo Soy Mexicano" by L. and M. de E. Cortázar and M. Esperón, in Jiménez 62-63.

Cuauhtémoc was the Aztec warrior chieftain who was defeated by Cortés.

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Laurie Blauner

WHAT WE DON'T SEE

Could see us, a river carries the reflections of geese
you looked up to watch downstream, the moon hidden in sunlight
silhouettes you, waiting for your shadow to become a small part
of the night. I hold my hand in blue sky to block
the sun from my eyes, finding the branches of my finger bones
gloved by a body that looks like red light against light.
I try to learn the real story, suddenly noticing the cobweb
of a fly's wings translucent against the windowpane.
From the accident of discovery we have been given memory
the same way we could always find our favorite toy,
in the bedroom strange with darkness during childhood,
having found it once. There is so much between us
and understanding: the impostor of ourselves, feelings weathered
to match our ideas of who we are; and habit, the comfort
of the rain of footsteps you hear down the hall everyday,
the same time and place. What we don't see we may never know.
And never miss the scarf of wind wrapped around
a fictitious pine like love or in a city a sculptor
whose hands trace the tributary of bones of a model
who could change your life. We enjoy the oyster-colored
roses of regret in the available light or
the raw river on its shiny pilgrimage just before nightfall,
a fraction of what is still visible.

Carol K. Howell

A DEATH IN THE ENGLISH DEPARTMENT

Something strange had been happening to Cornmueller. First he declined to direct any more dissertations. Next he dropped his upperclass tutorials and Honors Seminars and refused to teach anything but freshman composition. Then we heard that he had taken to interrupting himself in class with remarks which sounded as if he were simply thinking aloud. And then one day, in the middle of an exercise on comma placement, he shut the book and sat down on the desk and gazed at his students and said in a mild clear voice: "But it's impossible to know anything at all."

How they all must have stared! He was like an actor who suddenly drops out of character and comes downstage to speak to the audience.

"Perhaps you're thinking that at least we know physical facts: how high, how deep, how heavy," he went on. "But are the instruments with which we measure such facts not products of our own imaginations? Are the numbers and words which give them meaning not our own inventions as well? What is knowable? Everything must be taken on faith. What we call the world is a huge cobweb of imagination."

He went on in this manner for the rest of the class and for every class thereafter, not teaching composition anymore, not teaching anything—just talking. And the students, with a delicacy uncommon in a group of freshmen at a state university, listened quietly. No one squirmed or snickered, and more astonishing still, they continued to come to class.

Word quickly got around the department, and Abbott, our chairman, asked me to look into the matter. I was only too glad to do him a service since I'd heard (in confidence, of course) that he tended to favor my application for tenure, which would come under review in June.

So the next day, after the bell tower chimed the hour, I approached Cornmueller's classroom quietly, stopping just outside the door. "Just drop in and look around," Abbott had said in that deceptively lazy manner of his, but I thought it best to remain unnoticed in the hall.

"Don't beguile yourselves with the lies men tell each other," Cornmueller was saying. "They are treacheries inspired by ambition and fear. What do men fight over? Property? Principles? They fight over words, over lies. They fight for the same things but give them different names. They invent lies to justify their desires and then fight to uphold those lies."

All of this was said without heat. I inched forward until I could see him sitting peacefully on his desk, his feet not quite touching the floor. He was slight and weedy, with sprouts of white hair and a bald pate, an old man capable of raising a fuss in a faculty meeting, but essentially harmless. Yet there was something new about him, something disquieting—a lucid and composed authority I'd never noticed in him before—unless I was imagining things.

"Ask those who speak glibly of what the future will bring what the past has brought," he went on in his cryptic new style. "What sense does all history make? If truth exists at all, it must come from without."

I waited to see if this was a digression, if he would return to his subject. He didn't—or rather, his subject appeared to be truth. At the risk of being spotted, I pressed forward to get a better look at his face. His eyes did not flash; his mouth did not twist. His expression was serene. Yet every word flew across the room like a dart. He never faltered but spoke fluently and with great economy. It made me wonder whether his soliloquy had been rehearsed. But for what purpose? Was he playing devil's advocate? Was this merely a pedagogical trick? Was he waiting for a student to protest: "What do you mean by equating words with lies? Do you really intend to posit an absolute distinction between truth and falsity? Do you pretend there is no difference between *species* of lies? Some lies are not so bad. Some are even necessary." But Cornmueller, who had taught in the university longer than I had been alive, would know better than anyone that no freshman ever thought, let alone spoke, such things. What on earth was he up to? And what did he mean about truth coming from without?

"The Old Testament tells us that whosoever sees God shall die, that the best thing that can happen in a world of lies is to die of seeing the

truth," Cornmueller finished, just as the bell tower chimed the end of the hour.

Wonderful sense of timing, I caught myself thinking as I hurried away.

"He might have been having an off day," I said later to Abbott after making my report. "Filling in time."

"Happens to the best of us," he agreed pleasantly, tapping his pen against a stack of papers. I knew he was thinking about the wisps of rumor making the rounds, rumor that old Cornmueller had come unhinged. Besides, enrollment in English was declining. Every year the Dean cut our funding, and some junior faculty members had already been dropped. The department could not afford to indulge elderly eccentricity, however quaint.

"I could stop by the class again," I offered. "Just to make sure."

"Do that, would you? It's such a delicate thing."

"How long has he been here, anyway?"

"Nearly forty years. If it were anyone else . . . yes, do that, and let me know how it goes."

I read Cornmueller's vita. He had been a college debating champion, had written a series of well-regarded books on rhetoric, had served his time on boards and committees. His entire academic history demonstrated a solid committment to scholarly ideals and pursuits. It gave me no clue as to what was happening to him now. I tried to give it a name—boredom, or burn-out, or even breakdown—but nothing quite fit. In fact, he seemed so lucid and serene that I found myself looking forward to his class. I started attending regularly. It broke up the staleness of the late afternoon, the sour sensation of too much department coffee and too many bland student faces, and gave me someplace to go before returning to the quiet apartment where I lived and worked alone.

At first I took notes. Then, when I found that I kept forgetting to write and only stood staring at him like his round-eyed students, I began taping the class on casette. That was better, because I could listen to it again at night, during the empty hours when I used to lie awake worrying about tenure.

"Seek the truth," Cornmueller told us. "You won't find it, but the value is in the seeking. Don't pretend not to doubt. Welcome doubt, grapple with it, and it will reward you as the angel blessed Jacob."

This talk of angels and blessings made me uneasy. There was nothing of the zealot in Cornmueller, no hint of a fanatic thinly restrained by reason. In fact, he seemed completely secular. Yet he seemed to know something, to possess it the way a man possesses his arm or his leg. He had said that nothing is knowable, yet certainty had filled him up, had plugged every leak and gap and hole.

And what about the course? His students wrote no papers, took no mid-term exams, had not opened their textbooks in weeks. Cornmueller never even took attendance. How did he propose to grade them? What course did they imagine they were taking? And why did they keep coming back? Some of them had even started bringing their roommates.

At the last class before spring break, Cornmueller was talking again about the necessity of believing, when a boy in the middle row suddenly spoke: "How can we believe things we don't understand?"

It was the first time a student had spoken, and I almost envied him. There were a few questions I would have liked to ask myself.

"I mean like God and everything," the boy went on. "There's so much scientific evidence for evolution, and if you study anthropology you see how primitive all religions really are. So I mean . . ." He stopped.

Cornmueller nodded, smiling. Then he said: "No one has ever convinced me of God's existence. Nor have they convinced me of his non-existence. But if we have no immortal souls, then we are only ghosts trooping from nothing to nothing, and this I cannot believe."

The boy tried again. "But how do we know?"

"You cannot know," said Cornmueller joyfully. "You will never know. The best you can do is to live *as if* you know. It is this—only this—which makes goodness possible."

The boy shook his head glumly. Cornmueller looked past him out into the hall. I was sure he could not see me behind the door, but he suddenly lifted his head and laughed. The laugh was either demented or divine, but it was full of joy. "The Spanish have a proverb," he said, raising his voice. "*Que hay vivir.* You have to live."

The Spanish words, oddly familiar, suddenly brought to mind a story I had once read about a Mexican village near a deep lake. According to legend, there was a ghostly village, a Doppelgänger of the original, submerged at the bottom of the lake. At midnight on Midsummer's Eve, the bells of the ghost village would chime, making such eerie compelling music that men

would have to be restrained from hurling themselves into the lake. It came to me suddenly that I was listening to the bells of the city submerged at the bottom of Cornmueller's soul, and I knew then that he was neither bored nor crazy, but inspired.

I wanted to shout and rush forward, but I froze, not knowing what to say and imagining Abbott's astonished face when he heard that not one but two of his faculty members had lost their minds. I thought Cornmueller laughed again, but the bell tower chimed and I had to hurry away before I was discovered.

There are no secrets in the English department. Abbott heard about the tapes, and I had to hand them over. I barely had time to make a copy for myself. I knew he wouldn't understand—he hadn't been to the class, hadn't seen the man and heard him speak—but I tried to explain indirectly.

"Have you ever wanted to dispense with the subject and just come straight out and *talk* to your students?" I asked. "Tell them the truth, I mean?"

Abbott gave me a quizzical glance. "Having a captive audience three times a week can be a seductive thing," was all he said, but I could see the question in his eyes and I did not dare say anything more.

The tapes were the evidence they needed to force Cornmueller's early retirement. He vanished from the university overnight. His students were greeted after spring break by their new teacher, a crackerjack young man who subscribed to the particle/field/wave theory.

In June, just after I was awarded tenure, we heard that Cornmueller had suffered a stroke. Before the end of summer, he died. I went with Abbott and some other faculty members to pay my respects at the funeral home. The casket was closed, surrounded by flowers. Among these was a large wreath of white carnations from the English department, which I had volunteered to send. Abbott murmured his appreciation, bending over the flowers. Then, examining a small card attached to the wreath, he added: "But what does this mean, this *Que hay vivir*?"

"It was just something he used to say," I replied.

After that, I became clinically depressed and had to apply for my sabbatical a year before it was due.□

Eric Smoodin

ART/WORK: CAPITALISM AND CREATIVITY IN THE HOLLYWOOD MUSICAL

Ars gratia artis, art for art's sake, surrounds Leo in the logo of all MGM feature films. We have come to accept the saying, however, not merely as a motto for Metro but as one that all of Hollywood could have used, and particularly during the 1930s, '40s and '50s, the era of major studio domination. It signifies glossy entertainment that ostensibly has no redeeming social value other than its glossiness. Of course, we understand now (much as it doubtless was understood then) that art never exists simply for its own sake. It always serves political or cultural purposes. At the very least, and this is the sense in which the studio heads must have understood the inappropriateness of the MGM slogan, art often exists to make money. And in the films made by the studios, art—singing, for instance, or dancing, or painting, or the theater—serves such a purpose. For art to be endorsed by the American cinema from the 1930s through the 1950s it almost always had to have an economic base. It could not just be an object of aesthetic contemplation. Art, as depicted in the movies, had to make money. This is even (or especially) true in the musical, the genre that seems at first glance to be the celebration *par excellence* of the MGM motto. The emphasis on the link between art and economics becomes apparent from a close look at six musicals from the period, three made at MGM and three from other studios: *Easter Parade* (1948, MGM), *The Band Wagon* (1953, MGM), *An American in Paris* (1951, MGM), *Holiday Inn* (1942, Paramount), *The Gay Divorcee* (1934, RKO), and *Footlight Parade* (1933, Warner Bros.).

In its first scene *Footlight Parade* stresses the connection between art and business, and in fact puts the emphasis on the latter. During the late 1920s stage director Chester Kent reads the grim news from a Times Square machine that flashes ten foot letters; talking pictures are all the rage in the entertainment business, thereby killing the demand for middle-class theatrical shows. For economic reasons, then, Chester can no longer create his Busby Berkeley-like stage spectaculars. His art, which was his means of making a living, is no longer economically viable. The producers who used to put on Chester's shows, and who have just made the switch to motion picture exhibition, tell him that flesh, which he always delivered, is a "dead issue," and that people now want technology—pictures with sound—which comes to the theaters in "tin cans." Quickly, *Footlight Parade* has gotten itself into trouble. It has shown the oppressive weight of business on the arts because Chester, whom we know to be the hero since James Cagney plays him, no longer can create on account of economic conditions. Further, commerce has debased the cinema, and by extension all the arts, to the level of canned goods, as it now comes safety encased in tin. Jane Feuer has shown that musicals often work to disguise the crass commercialism inherent to the cinema.[1] Here, however, that crassness is exposed, and, as a result, *Footlight Parade* appears to be criticizing itself as well as the industry that produced it.

Sustaining this kind of self-critique is virtually impossible in the cinema of the period. But before *Footlight Parade* redeems the capitalist enterprise and justifies the economic necessity behind the production of art, the film furthers its indictment of American commercial values. For "bad guys," these Warner Bros. backstage musicals usually have big businessmen, and they are often played by Guy Kibbee and Hugh Herbert. In *Dames* (1934), for instance, Herbert plays a millionaire bluenose determined to close down a "scandalous" musical revue. In *Gold Diggers of 1933*, Kibbee and Warren William are Boston blue bloods seeking to prevent a marriage between a member of William's family and a showgirl. And in *Footlight Parade*, the corporate criminals played by Kibbee and Herbert are the producers-turned-theater owners who tell Kent that live theater is dead.

In announcing Kent's ruin the theater owners

[1]Jane Feuer, "The Self-reflexive Musical and the Myth of Entertainment," *Genre: The Musical*, ed. Rick Altman (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1981) 155-74.

describe the studio system, and quite clearly point out its economic advantages over the stage. "It's a lot better," they tell Chester, "to fill your theater ten times a day at forty cents a ticket than to charge five bucks a seat and have it half-filled once a night." Of course this makes sound economic sense. But coming from the "bad guys" (the men who deal solely in money and never, themselves, create anything except profits) the assertion obviously cannot meet with the audience's approval. The simple formula for financial success matches the thinking of the studio system: deliver product that will appeal to the largest number of people and which can be shown as often as possible. Because the formula is endorsed by two of the film's more undesirable characters, though, it serves to condemn rather than glorify the studios. So after just a couple of scenes the film has taken a pro-art, anti-moneymaking view. These opening scenes imply that Chester be allowed to put on his shows without having to consider how many times he can fill the theater. The film depicts him as the creative individual stuck in an impersonal, greedy corporate world. This support of Kent is indeed an art for art's sake approach, and so, for *Footlight Parade* as well as for the cinema of the period, it is unacceptable. The film must not only show the connection between Kent's art and economics. It must also endorse that link. To do this, to redeem its criticism of the motion picture industry, *Footlight Parade* transfers to Kent the message first spoken by the theater owners. Down on his luck, doubtful of ever working again, Chester goes to a drug store for some aspirin. He wonders aloud at how inexpensive the pills are, and the clerk explains that because the store buys in bulk the aspirin can be sold for far less than the normal price. Chester instantly loses his headache and decides to incorporate the drug store methods into show business; he will produce prologues on a mass-market basis—that is, he will create live shows to be put on before the presentation of a feature film.

Of course Kent is successful. But his mass-market approach hardly differs from the methods of the theater owners in the film. The single difference, though, appears not only in *Footlight Parade* but in American movies of all genres from the period under consideration; corporate capitalism must be criticized, but individual, entrepreneurial capitalism is to be extolled. The "bad guys" represent the combine, owning a number of theaters and filling them with the work of others (Kent's prologues, for instance, or movies from the studios). Chester, on the other hand, after his epiphany in the drug store, becomes a wheeling-dealing free agent, creating his own work and devising the scheme to market it. His art has been given an economic base of which the film can now approve.

Besides providing an acceptable link between business and the arts, the depiction of Kent's triumph demonstrates how the popular culture of the period takes the nineteenth-century Jeffersonian myth, celebrating the yeoman farmer working and living off his own land, and combines it with a Rockefeller or Morgan brand of commercial savvy. Kent becomes a new kind of cultural hero. He is the man who, like Jefferson's ideal, "works the land" (he creates his shows almost solely through his own effort and toil) and refuses to become a part of the corporation. Still, in his economic practice (the mass marketing of the prologues), he strays very little from the corporate philosophy.

In *Footlight Parade* Chester finds an economic solution to his artistic problem. The drug store buying-in-bulk approach allows him to go on directing. In *The Gay Divorcee*, however, art (here, the dance) serves as the solution to an economic problem. At the beginning of the film Guy Holden, an American dancer played by Fred Astaire, has come to Paris with Egbert Fitzgerald. After the two men have dined in a chic restaurant they realize that they have forgotten their money. Egbert assures the restaurant owner that their credit is good because, surely, he has heard of Guy. The owner indeed has heard of Guy, but he still requires some identification. Having left his wallet in another suit, Holden cannot provide any. For a solution, Egbert says, "If my friend dances like Guy Holden, that proves he is Guy Holden, doesn't it? . . . Go ahead Guy, dash them off a bit of a minuet or a polka . . . or something." Holden refuses, saying, "I'm on my vacation, I'm not gonna do any dancing." In this exchange over the check, then, Guy's artistic endeavor—his dancing—has become firmly associated with work. Dancing is his job, and so when he is on vacation the last thing he wants to do is dance. The movie has taken leisure time versus work, a standard opposition, and has associated dancing with the second term when, at first glance, it seems more logically attached to the first.

The threat of working-class labor finally convinces Guy to dance for his dinner. Egbert tells him that they will have to wash dishes unless he relents, and so Guy goes on stage. While Guy

dances, director Mark Sandrich cuts to closeup reaction shots of Egbert and the owner, to closeups of Guy's feet, and to a closeup of Guy himself. Later in Astaire's career (this is only his third film) these cuts to closeups during dance sequences become rarer and rarer. Perhaps Astaire gained more control over his films and so had greater control over editing, or possibly either he or his directors became better acquainted with how best to display his talents. Whatever the reason, most of Astaire's numbers are shot more or less continuously, without much cutting, and tend to show his whole body. During the restaurant dance sequence in *The Gay Divorcee*, however, the cut to a closeup of Guy, while somewhat distracting, serves to underscore just how much like work Guy's dancing is. It shows him grinding his teeth at Egbert, and so lets the audience know that this is indeed labor only slightly less onerous than scraping the remains of *haute cuisine* off plates. But Guy's "work" serves its purpose, as the delighted restaurateur tears up the check.

Guy's dancing, therefore, has had a monetary value—the cost of the dinner—and clearly has been aligned with the workplace. For us, the audience, Astaire's dancing may indeed be an object of pure aesthetic appreciation. But the narrative cannot fully endorse that kind of pleasure (at least not when it comes from watching a man; Laura Mulvey and others have, of course, shown how movies frequently posit women as objects of art upon which the audience is invited to gaze).[2] It must equate dancing with economics (that is, paying for the meal) and thereby celebrate, just as did *Footlight Parade*, that which the motion picture industry itself accomplishes—creating art for money.

In another Astaire film, *Holiday Inn*, art again functions primarily as a profession and as a means to financial stability. Jim Hardy (Bing Crosby) has decided to leave Ted Hanover (Astaire), his show business partner, because their act has become too much work. Jim tells Ted that neither of them has had a day off in months, and that what for other people are holidays have become, for them, days when they must work even harder because an extra show is required. Instead of continuing with his singing Jim has decided to live on a farm, where, as opposed to the theater, he will do no work at all. His parting words to Ted, in the form of a song, sum up his position: "I want to be lazy."

There are virtually no conditions under which the classical Hollywood cinema can accept a character's decision not to work. As a result, Jim's attempts at being lazy are disastrous and he finds himself working harder—at milking cows and bailing hay, for instance—than he ever has in his life. Ultimately, he winds up in a sanitarium. Upon his release he decides to keep his farm but change his profession, and the one he chooses is show business. In order to pay the mortgage he starts running his farm as a sort of dinner theater, open only on holidays. That way he can be "lazy" most of the time and make enough money to support himself while working only eleven or twelve days a year. Now called Holiday Inn, the farm is, of course, as big a success as Chester Kent's prologues, with Jim's elaborate productions drawing standing room only audiences.

Just as in *Footlight Parade*, the creation of art leads to economic stability in ways that other professions—farming, in this case—could not. But even though he failed at growing crops and raising poultry, Jim fulfills the Jeffersonian model just as did Kent. The "crop" his farm produces is the theatrical production, and all of the numbers are the results of Jim's individual sweat and labor; he has almost no help in staging them. This twentieth-century theatrical yeoman farmer remains true, as well, to the Rockefeller model of not having to dirty one's fingernails and of having undreamed of amounts of leisure time, as he earns enough money in a few days work to make any kind of work unnecessary practically the entire year.

Jim only grudgingly sells the story of Holiday Inn to Hollywood executives. "The idea's not for sale," he tells them. But then, disappointed, he relents, saying, "I guess it was just too good to last, eh? A simple little layout where we could do our best at the work we know without having any illusions of glory. . . . Go ahead . . . take the whole darn thing." This criticism of the big business mentality and commercialism of the movie studios matches the criticism of the large-scale corporate capitalism of the theater owners in *Footlight Parade*. Both films extol the more modest capitalism of their heroes, which points out that, while the economic hero can be celebrated, he cannot seem too economic. Similarly, while other musicals stress the economic value of singing or dancing they are careful to underscore another, and this time transcendental value of art. Art can be about

[2]See, for instance, Laura Mulvey's "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," in *Screen* 16.3 (Autumn 1975): 6-18.

money, but it must also encourage community, or it must finally have to do with romance.

Easter Parade gets us away (but not completely) from the notion of the singer/dancer as entrepreneur and towards a rendering of art's transcendental as well as economic nature. At the beginning of the film Don Hewes, yet another of Fred Astaire's incarnations, takes an Easter Sunday walk down Fifth Avenue. He whistles as he strolls, tips his hat to passersby, and says "Happy Easter." Delivered in rhythm, the words clearly are part of a song. Before any lines of dialogue have been spoken rather than sung, art has been aligned with religion, because Don celebrates Easter by singing about it. Art also has been shown as a means of bringing the community together. Through the song, by saying "Happy Easter," Don either affirms his relationship with old friends or makes the acquaintance of new ones. Art, in the form of a song, seems to have nothing to do with making a living, and at least during the opening moments of the film, it in no way associates Don with the entrepreneurial ethic of Chester Kent or Jim Hardy.

While it creates a sense of community, however, the song also glorifies consumption. Just before singing "Happy Easter" to the doorman at a posh store, Don asserts, as part of the song, that the only way to celebrate the holiday is by purchasing things. "Me oh my," the lyrics go, "there's a lot to buy/And shopping left to do." Don enters the store to buy things for his girlfriend and dancing partner, Nadine Gale, and women parade in front of him, modeling hats and urging him in singsong to buy what they are wearing. "Here's a hat that you must take home," one assures him, and the next woman tells Don, "Here's a lid for milady's dome." In this scene the film adheres to the typical pardigm: women have been reduced to objects of art because they are little more than singing mannequins, and they display themselves for an appreciative male gaze—Don's. But just like Guy Holden in *The Gay Divorcee*, these women are not simply objects of aesthetic contemplation. Through their singing, which so stresses buying things, they are also associated with economics.

After buying a hat, some flowers and various odds and ends, Don continues his shopping spree in a toy store where he decides to buy a stuffed toy: "A bunny for my honey." Women were reduced to posing automatons at the hat shop; and here they are infantilized by being associated with toys. But besides making women something less than human in the first case and something less than adult in the second, both sequences celebrate the importance of buying things. A small boy challenges Don for the bunny, grabbing it away from him, but Hewes manages to get the stuffed animal back through a combination of tap dancing, singing and manic buying. As he performs "Drum Crazy," Hewes loads the boy up with a number of different sized toy drums, takes the bunny from him, and then pays for the instruments and the animal on the way out. Taking place during the singing and dancing, this purchasing, as did Don's earlier acquisitions, aligns the musical number with the importance of buying while also introducing the small boy to the wonders of consumption.

By working his way out of a problem—not being able to get the bunny—through Herculean consumption, Don seems far more closely related to the theater owners in *Footlight Parade* than to Chester Kent or Jim Hardy. The push-pull between art representing community and art standing purely for economics has shifted decidedly in favor of the latter. The film must work to change this emphasis, and it must turn Don into something beyond a singing and dancing J. P. Morgan. As a result, in the next scene *Easter Parade* shows the relation not between art and commerce but rather between art and romance, and depicts Don not simply as a capitalist, but as a capitalist who prizes romance over money.

Don brings all of the loot to Nadine, but she is less than thrilled. She tells Don that she is disregarding their theatrical commitments and breaking up their act because she has the chance to be a star and to make more money on her own than as Don's partner. The end of the partnership signals the end of the romance. Just to make this clear, the scene shows Nadine to be far more interested in Don's friend Johnny, who has stopped by, than in Don. Obviously, then, business and romance are one and the same: the end of one indicates the end of the other. And it is the woman who thinks primarily of her economic rather than romantic well-being, as Nadine's primary motivation is her desire to make more money.

In its first two major sequences, on Fifth Avenue and at Nadine's, the film has dealt with the coming together of the community and the breaking up of the romantic couple. That which is good—the formation of the community—is aligned with a man because it is Don's singing that has signaled togetherness. That which is

bad—the end of the romantic couple—is all Nadine's doing.

Women in the film have gone from being mannequins (at the store) to being associated with infants (Don wanting to buy toys for Nadine) to being purely economic animals. In the first two cases a man maintains control. At the clothing store Don gets to gaze freely upon the women and to judge them, as he must decide what hat to buy. At the toy store Don buys things for a childish Nadine, whose tastes are identical to a small boy's. In her apartment, however, Nadine takes control, as it is she who ends the partnership as well as the romantic relationship.

A movie from the period of *Easter Parade* can give a woman this kind of extreme power but cannot endorse it. Further, as we have seen with the theater owners in *Footlight Parade*, a film cannot support Nadine's tunnel-vision greediness which only lets her concentrate on making as much money as possible. As the correction to Nadine *Easter Parade* shows that for Don, making money is of secondary importance to romance. Both money and romance, however, have a connection to dancing. Trying to win Nadine back, Don tells her that, prior to their partnership, he "danced with lots of girls. But it's always been just a business. That was before I met you." About their own act, he says, "This isn't just dancing. It's . . . it's different. This is us." He sings "It Only Happens When I Dance with You," they dance together, and then they kiss, but Nadine almost immediately returns to her senses and insists once again on ending their partnership. For Don, dancing leads to love, and this transcendental value which he finds in his art/profession redeems him from the realm of the purely economic, the realm in which the film places Nadine.

So the film provides the necessary economic importance to art while condemning greediness and supporting the other, more important values of art. Further, while criticizing the individual who simply wants to make money, the film, in a fashion similar to *Footlight Parade*, nevertheless celebrates the motion picture industry as a money-making institution. More precisely, by aligning its hero with a consumption mentality and also by equating consumption with the community, *Easter Parade* metaphorically glorifies the cinema. Motion pictures are objects to be consumed by a mass audience. It is precisely this kind of group buying that the beginning of the film romanticizes, and even, by forming a link between Easter and the purchasing of goods, equates with a religious experience.

The Band Wagon, too, revels in art for commerce but must also step back and criticize the debasing of art by economics. In the opening shot, under the credits, we see a top hat, a pair of white gloves and a black walking stick. Together, in an MGM musical from the early 1950s, these objects must signify Fred Astaire. Of course they also stand for upper-classness, and that certainly has always been a part of the Astaire movie persona, but notions of class difference or economics are secondary to Astaire himself; the objects make us think of all of the dance numbers in which he used them. As soon as the credits end, however, the significance of the top hat, gloves and cane changes. These effects are being auctioned off, as are all of the other movie accessories of Tony Hunter, a song and dance man modeled after the actor who plays him—Astaire—and whose career has fallen on hard times. The signifiers of Tony's screen persona as well as of his dancing have been commodified, put on the block to go to the highest bidder. In *The Gay Divorcee* Astaire's dancing had been an object of aesthetic contemplation as well as an object of economic worth. In *The Band Wagon* those objects with which Astaire's dancing is so closely associated come to stand simply for their money value.

The next scene continues this depiction of art reduced merely to economics. Before we have seen his face in the flesh, we see a picture of Tony, and it is a portrait of the artist as a corporate shill: a magazine advertisement in which Tony plugs for a brand of cigarette. Just as in the opening scene, where the objects of Tony's art have become objects to be bought and sold, here the artist himself has become just a means to increase a company's revenue.

As it must, the film criticizes this debasement of art and the artist by glorifying the same transcendental values of art—romance and community—found in *Easter Parade*. Tony comes to New York alone, and his first song describes his situation: "I'll go my way by myself/ . . . No one knows better than I myself/I'm by myself, alone." While *Easter Parade* begins by positing the hero as part of the community, *The Band Wagon* shows that Tony is separated from it. He has been abandoned by the movie studios, the press no longer reports anything about him, and he has listened to a former fan say about him, "Well, he was good twelve, fifteen years ago."

By the end of the film, however, Tony has directed and starred in a Broadway smash and has fallen in love with his leading lady, Gabrielle

Gerard. While the first song in the film posits Tony's separateness, the next-to-last one shows his position within the community: the cast and crew serenade him with "He's a Jolly Good Fellow." After this appreciation, Gabrielle speaks for herself and everyone else in the play when she tells him, "We've come to love you Tony. We belong together. The show's going to run a long time." She then adds, "As far as I'm concerned, it's going to run forever." In *Easter Parade*, Nadine easily sorted out love from economics. She broke up the act with Don and so ended their romantic relationship when she had a chance to make more money. In *The Band Wagon*, however, romance and business become one. In talking about a long run, Gabrielle speaks not merely of the success of the show but also of her romance with Tony. It is the show that has brought Tony into the community and that has also led to romance. In fact, so closely is the show aligned with being in love that they can be spoken of in the same terms, that is, having a long run. Clearly, art—the show—has transcended the economic concerns which controlled the opening scene. In stressing these higher values, *The Band Wagon* makes it appear that the film as a whole functions differently from the auctioneer in the first scene, or the tobacco company in the second. The film tells us that it is not commodifying the artist. It is concerned not with the money value of the artist but rather with his role in the community and in the romantic couple. Like *Footlight Parade*, then, *The Band Wagon* exposes the oppressiveness of the system of which it is a part only to claim not to be a part of it.

The movie studios, at least from the period under discussion, treated stars just as the beginning of *The Band Wagon* treats Tony. In her discussion of the star system, Cathy Klaprat demonstrates the economic significance of movie stars.[3] Functioning virtually as highly-paid indentured servants, they were created in accordance with consumer demand and were used by the studios to create "product differentiation." Because Bette Davis appeared in a film, and not, say, Joan Leslie, Warner Bros. could charge its exhibitors higher rental fees. Therefore, Tony Hunter reduced to a few objects which demand a certain price simply because they belong to Tony Hunter, or the star being used to sell a product—in the case of this film, cigarettes—are perfectly in keeping with the use made of performers by the studio system. But *The Band Wagon* denies that this is so. It tells us that the real job of the entertainment industry, which in the film is represented by the theater, is to improve the personal life of the entertainer. *Footlight Parade* and *The Gay Divorcee* celebrate that which the studios do best: create art for money. Here, however, the film glorifies that which the studios almost certainly did not do, or at least neither intentionally nor systematically: create art because of its therapeutic value for the people creating it.

Despite this emphasis on transcendental values, the film presents us with a bottom line. Art must make money. And the art which is best suited to this task is popular art. Tony's friends, Lily and Lester Marton, have written a play for Tony, and hit seems the quintessential popular entertainment, combining musical comedy with detective melodrama. The play concerns an illustrator of children's books who writes lurid murder mysteries on the side, and according to Lily it lets Tony perform "lots of gay and varied numbers." The Martons recruit the British impresario/intellectual Jeffrey Cordova to direct the play and co-star in it. Jeff, however, has very specific ideas about the theater. He sees the Marton's puff piece as "a modern version of Faust," and he urges Lily and Lester to play up that angle in their rewrites. Aware of the necessity for commercial value, Lester asks Jeff, "Is this a box office idea?" Cordova responds, "Faust by Christopher Marlowe, Faust by Goethe, Faust by Gounod, Faust by Hector Berlioz. I tell you, anyone who's touched this legend has turned it into a gold mine. It's got to be a smash!" He also tells Tony and the Martons that "there is no difference between the magic rhythms of Bill Shakespeare's immortal verse and the magic rhythms of Bill Robinson's immortal feet." The message here is clear. All art is the same and all of it can sell. According to Jeff, the usual opposition of low-brow/commercial versus high-brow/uncommercial is purely artificial. To prove the point, Jeff, along with the newly-convinced Martons and Tony, sings "That's Entertainment," in which "The clown, with his pants falling down" comes to be equated with "some Shakespearean scene/Where the ghost and the prince meet/And everyone ends in mince meat."

The film, however, takes a more selective view than does Jeff. The rehearsals begin after Cordova's heroic efforts to raise money for the show, and we see instantly the complete

[3]Cathy Klaprat, "The Star as Market Strategy: Bette Davis in Another Light," *The American Film Industry*, rev. ed., ed. Tino Balio (Madison, Wis.: Univ. of Wisconsin Press, 1985) 351-76.

incompatibility between Tony's "low-brow" art—tap dancing—and Gabrielle's "high-brow" talents—she is a classically trained ballet dancer. In directing the play Jeff tries unsuccessfully to elevate Tony to Gabrielle's level; during the dance numbers Tony must attempt balletic lifts, but he is never able to complete them. Gabrielle, however, does come down to Tony's level. She begins smoking, a habit of Tony's which, earlier, she had shunned as forever inappropriate for a dancer. Then, as rehearsals make disastrous progress, Gabrielle calms herself by forgetting about first position and tap dancing an improvisatory *pas de deux* with Tony. Contrary to Jeff's earlier assertion about the two Bills, Shakespeare and Robinson, here there are clear distinctions between the arts. Ballet, representing the "high arts," is overly arch, difficult and tension producing. Tap dancing, and the world with which it is associated (smoking serving as an element of that world), is spontaneous and relaxing.

The film clearly supports the naturalness and ease of the more popular art forms while raising a dubious eyebrow at the strained seriousness of the more classical ones. Then *The Band Wagon* lets us know that only one kind of art, the popular, can make any money, thereby completing the film's condemnation of high-brow, culturally esteemed pursuits. As a modern-day Faust drama Jeff's production lays an egg. Indeed, *The Band Wagon* shows this to us quite literally. Over the chants of an increasingly anguished Greek chorus, we see sketches from various scenes from the play, and the last drawing shows a gigantic egg. Even more anguished than the chorus are the play's investors, who stumble dazedly out of the theater after opening night. Obviously, the Marton's play, as redesigned by Cordova, cannot make money.

To correct this situation the play must be popularized. And in keeping with the trend established by *Footlight Parade* and *Holiday Inn*, that reworking must come not from an aesthete like Cordova but from a man who understands mass entertainment and who knows how to make money from it. Tony takes that role, becoming the show's new director, and he immediately removes everything Faustian and brings back all of the "popular" material discarded by Jeff. These changes, of course, make the show a success. In trying to smooth out oppositions, however, in the manner of most classical narratives, *The Band Wagon* cannot rest after celebrating the popular. It must also reconcile high art with low. This task will be completed at the end of the film with the romance between Gabrielle, from ballet, and Tony, from tap dancing. But we can also see it taking place when Tony takes over, with the film showing us that high art can be as economically viable as low art, and can, in fact, help to guarantee the commercial success of popular entertainment.

After the calamitous opening night all of the backers pull out of the play. To keep the show going Tony sells his collection of French Impressionist paintings. These paintings certainly belong to the realm of things high-brow, and so the culturally esteemed arts, which in the form of ballet and serious drama have been criticized throughout the film, here have been redeemed, and in the same manner as all of the arts in musicals. That is, they have been shown to be capable of making lots of money.

Because the paintings are sold they help achieve a balance of which the film can approve. *The Band Wagon* could not have countenanced the paintings simply as works of art and it could not have tolerated treating them purely in economic terms. Instead the film shows them to be objects of great aesthetic value (Tony lines his walls with them, and it is indeed a great sacrifice for him to sell them) as well as economic worth. In fact, this is a typical balance struck by a movie dealing with painting. Just as in *The Band Wagon*, in *An American in Paris* (like the former film, directed by Vincente Minnelli) painting can be beautiful, but it must never be too far removed from such real life concerns as making money, although a desire for money must not be the sole reason for producing a painting.

In the film, Jerry Mulligan has remained in Paris after World War II in order to paint. Every morning he arranges his completed canvases on a wall in Montmartre and sets up his easel. He has no apparent means of income, and he frequently complains about not having any money. Just after the movie begins, and while Jerry prepares to paint, a young American woman stops to stare at his work. In the accent of a beginning French student, she tells him that his paintings are "très intéressants." After Jerry says, "Relax, sister, I'm from Perth Amboy, New Jersey," she continues her critique in English ("I can understand disregarding perspective to achieve an effect . . ."). Finally, Jerry tells her, "Look, honey, why doncha be a good little girl and move on. You're not gonna buy anything. You're blocking out the sunshine." We know that Mulligan is the hero of the film; his narration

opens the movie, and if that is not clue enough, he is played by Gene Kelly, a major star at the time of the film's production. As a result his comments to the woman meet with our approval. We too are put off by her forced archness and by her ridiculous ruminations about the nature of Jerry's art. Everything here, then, conspires to criticize the notion of art as an object merely to be contemplated. The woman's comments, and not simply because of her accent, are laughable, and we applaud Jerry for getting rid of her. Jerry is an artist, but he need not stand for his work being discussed solely in terms of art.

After the woman leaves, another, much older woman, Milo, approaches Jerry. He tells her that "those third year girls" give him "a swift pain." Jerry explains that Paris is full of American students taking their junior years at the Sorbonne and who think that they know everything about art. The study of art, removed from all economic or "real life" values, has been exiled to the classroom, reserved only for twenty-year-olds who want to be considered mature. Even Gene Kelly's screen persona underscores the criticism of this kind of art appreciation. Kelly was always the athletic, working-class counterpart to Fred Astaire's suave stick figure, so it is difficult to imagine him as an artist interested purely in aesthetics.

Milo clearly is not a "third year girl." She too tells Jerry that his work is good, but then she offers to buy it. This is different behavior from that of the student, and because it is so different it conforms to what the film implicitly has claimed to be the proper way to treat art. If aesthetic, intellectual contemplation is frowned upon, then the opposite—art as investment—must be approved. Indeed, Jerry, whose judgments we follow because of his status as the central character, soon assures us of the correctness of this attitude. He is stunned at the prospect of a sale, but quite eager to complete the transaction.

In presenting these opposite attitudes towards art—the contemplative and the economic—and by so firmly favoring the latter, the film has worked itself into something of a bind. By making Jerry eager to sell, it has come close to showing him to be too interested in making money. Musicals have done this before and have had to find a way out of it. In *Footlight Parade*, for instance, Chester Kent must be made to resist, at least on the surface, the corporate philosophy of the theater owners. In *Easter Parade*, Don Hewes must have more of an interest in romance than in economics. Similarly, *An American in Paris* works to redeem Jerry. He wants to sell his paintings, but when Milo asks him what they cost, he says, "Gee, I don't know. I never thought I'd come to the point where that would be an issue." So the heroes in these films can and must be interested in money (here, Jerry wanting to sell the paintings), but they cannot be too interested in it (Jerry never has even thought about what he might charge for his work). Economics is always a primary motivation. It must not, however, seem like a too-consuming one. Later, to underscore how Jerry places a value on the paintings beyond money, the film has him tell Milo how difficult it is for a painter to part with his work. "A writer, a composer, they can always buy a copy of what they create," he tells her. "But a painter, it's the original that counts. Once that's gone it's out of his life."

The sampling of musicals here has been something of a random one. The film analyst could pick any number of musicals, at least from the period under consideration, and make the same findings. One thinks of *Singin' in the Rain* (MGM, 1952) in which making a successful movie equals romance between an established star and an ingenue; or *Follow the Fleet* (RKO, 1936), where a show business couple breaks up their act as well as their romance only to get back together during a show; or *Gold Diggers of 1933* (Warner Bros., 1933), in which a wealthy young man wants to write the music to a smash Broadway hit, not so much to make money but to prove something to his stuck-up family; or *Yankee Doodle Dandy* (Warner Bros., 1942), where getting a job in vaudeville not only provides money but also allows a family to stay together. The films always stress economics. But always, as well, the stress cannot simply be economic. It must, instead, also be on higher values, or must de-emphasize the corporate mentality.

From this we can learn something not only about a genre but about how a country's cultural artifacts explain that country. A broader study probably would reveal that the systems explained here apply to the American cinema in general from the classical period. There is a celebration of capitalism but also a wariness of capitalism unrestrained. Any number of westerns (*Red River*, for instance, from 1948, or *Shane* from 1952) extol the virtues of the free agent looking to make money by, say, building a herd from scratch with virtually no help. They criticize, however, the corporate combine determined to take over land and cattle without having to work for either.

This ambivalent view of capitalism matches an

American cultural ambivalance present at least from the 1890s through the 1950s. As historian Oscar Handlin puts it, in trying to understand ourselves and explain ourselves during that period, "the good guys were the capitalists who built the nation."[4] But at the same time the populism that began at the end of the last century, and which ultimately came to be incorporated into both major political parties, advocated "the cause of the oppressed and their situation as game independents facing up to the entrenched and powerful." And, of course, the most convenient targets of populism were "the business corporations, entrenched in Wall Street" (Handlin 339, 348).

This is not the place to analyze as complex a movement as populism or the American admiration of the unrestrained capitalist "good guy." The tension between the two, however, almost certainly appears in some form in all film genres from the period under discussion. In the musical, it manifests itself as art providing money but also something higher, and with the hero being motivated by money but not too motivated by it. Art is always a profession in these films, but it is also something else. Indeed, these movies tell us that art is nice work if you can get it precisely because of the way it combines capitalism with community, and a Rockefeller *raison d'etre* with romantic love.□

[4]Oscar Handlin, *Truth in History* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 1979) 332.

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FACING THE CHARMS OF *EMMA*

In 1816, one of the first critical notices of *Emma* began with a quotation from Horace, "Dulce est desipere in loco," an elegant confession that "it is pleasant to indulge in trifles."[1] A century and a half later, Austen's novels are firmly established in the canon of English literature, but critics are still engaged with the question of value, wondering just what it is that she does so well. Ian Watt, in the introduction to a collection of critical essays, declares that "the enduring problem of Jane Austen criticism [is] scale versus stature; the slightness of the matter and the authority of the manner."[2] To be more specific, the problem is one of trifling, domestic content, details of daily life, courtship and marriage developed in a small compass. Indeed, this is the traditional place of the feminine, and the "problem" is a matter of the diminutions and insufficiencies long associated with femininity. How can such trivial matters be the subject of such controlled and authoritative writing, a writing which is eminently pleasurable? For Austen's feminine texts never seem partial or lacking, and are entirely free of self-depreciation. Quite the contrary, Austen's writing appeals by its effect of unassailable perfection.

To reconcile matter and manner, critics have worked to demonstrate that Austen's novels are not what they seem. The critical task has been to open up the closed setting of "3 or 4 families in a country village" in order to discover in the restricted content general, even universal moral precepts, damning satires of narrow self-interest, precise observations of the effects of class and status. The small compass of the novels has been shown to yield large implications when one reads beneath the charming surface of the texts.[3]

This enterprise has been taken up most recently by critics concerned with the problem of femininity in Austen's novels. To account for the evident femininity of her texts seems to require reading obliquely, reading at a slant to see beneath the conventional surface of the novels, resisting the charms of the writing in order to reach more substantial truths. Such a project is admirably conceived and executed by Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar. They read Austen's novels as palimpsests which tell on the surface stories of "docility and restraint," but reveal beneath these feminine attitudes the decidedly anti-feminine "delights of assertion and rebellion."[4] Gilbert and Gubar refuse to take the texts at face-value, and discover unfeminine stories which parallel and give the lie to Austen's apparent conventionality. In order to argue for the large significance of the novels, the truths they tell of women's double lives, Gilbert and Gubar become resisting reader, just as, they argue, Austen was a resisting writer.

Such a critical approach resolves the question of Austen's slight matter by proving that slightness to be but a cover for substantial anger and revolt. Yet the question of Austen's manner persists, the pleasures of her admirable texts. I propose to think about one of her novels a different way, not focusing on the oblique meanings pursued by those who read slant, but

[1]Unsigned notice, *Gentleman's Magazine* 86 (Sept. 1816), rpt. B.C. Southam, ed., *Jane Austen: The Critical Heritage* (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1968) 72.

[2]Ian Watt, "Introduction," *Jane Austen: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. Ian Watt (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1963) 12.

[3]Lionel Trilling, in his Introduction to the Riverside Edition of *Emma* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1957), argues that Austen is important because she perceived "the deep psychological change which accompanied the establishment of a democratic society" (xvii). A. Walton Litz claims that *Emma* "reminds us that freedom is dependent on a recognition of limitations" ("The Limits of Freedom: *Emma*," *Jane Austen: A Study of Her Artistic Development*, rpt. Norton Critical Edition of *Emma* [New York: Norton, 1972] 434). Alistair Duckworth, in *The Improvement of the Estate: A Study of Jane Austen's Novels* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1971), asserts that Austen's novels are predicated on a "natural moral order" and show that "it is the duty of the individual to discover this moral order . . . and to live within those valid structures" (14). David Aers, in "Community and Morality: Towards Reading Jane Austen," says that Austen "emerges as a polemical Tory ideologist, a most accomplished partisan in a period of open and intense ideological controversy . . ." (in David Aers, Jonathan Cook and David Pinter, eds., *Romanticism and Ideology: Studies in English Writing, 1765-1830* [Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1981] 120).

[4]Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1978) 174.

looking directly at the text. For in admiring *Emma*, I see the femininity of Austen's writing as a matter of manner, a remarkable embodiment of femininity in her writing. Her writing never strains, is always composed, delightfully perfect in its design. Indeed, in claiming this I am echoing the observations of no less a reader than Henry James. He looks directly at Austen's writing, free of the "beguiled infatuation" and "sentimentalized vision" which he sees distorting most evaluations of her work. For James, the case is simple: "Jane Austen, with all her light felicity, leaves us hardly more curious of her process, or of the experiences in her that fed it, than the brown thrush who tells his story from the garden bough. . . ." For what one responds to, he goes on to say, is "the extraordinary grace of her facility, in fact of her unconsciousness."[5] No matter that we know of Austen's extensive revisions of her novels, the seriousness with which she regarded her writing, and her admonitions to her novelist niece to take more care with her composition. What matters is the effect, and the effect of a text like *Emma* is precisely what James says: the quality of an extraordinarily graceful facility, of an easy pleasing perfection. James argues that, in fact, that's all there is to Austen, which is, of course, a good deal. There is no profundity, only "little touches of human truth, little glimpses of steady vision, little master-strokes of imagination." All these diminutives, along with lightness, gracefulness, and a delightful unconsciousness indicate that we are in the domain of femininity; indeed, for James, it is precisely femininity in its littleness, in its dispensation from the large toils and troubles that plague men and their work, that enables Austen's charming facility. In this James accords with another masterful interpreter of femininity, for James regards Austen's writing much as Freud regards narcissistic women in his 1914 essay "On Narcissism: An Introduction." There Freud argues that narcissistic women are "unassailable" in their self-satisfaction, charming in their self-sufficiency, but limited and diminished in the final analysis. Both James and Freud associate with femininity certain felicities and pleasures, but see feminine charms resting on an inherent limitation.

Must one come to such a conclusion when admiring the charms of *Emma*? Must one therefore resist the femininity of the text and argue for an oblique rebellion against its limitations, a discontent which shatters the specious charms of the surface? Rather than refusing to entertain the idea of *Emma*'s femininity, or accepting it only as a ruse, a cover for something else, I advocate a closer look at the text in the light of femininity. For *Emma* demonstrates as well as any text ever has that nothing signifies like femininity. Only by considering directly how *Emma* displays femininity can one see how the text creates a femininity-effect; only by admiring the feminine can one see how *Emma* cites "femininity," or recognize that *Emma* is a narcissistic text which embodies femininity as the representation of "woman." Such a reading requires that attention be focused on the text's femininity not to see around it or beneath it, but to understand that *Emma* realizes the feminine, makes it evident. And in the course of such a reading, both femininity and narcissism must necessarily be revalued.

Of course, any attention to femininity and narcissism brings one immediately to the title character, "handsome, clever, and rich" Emma Woodhouse. Emma's is "the old story," the "common case" of a woman deluded by her vanity. As we learn in the first paragraph, Emma is threatened by the "real evils" of "having rather too much her own way and a disposition to think too well of herself."[6] Curing Emma of her vanity is apparently the enterprise of the book which bears her name, making femininity and narcissism central elements of the novel. If the story warns against a narcissism long associated with femininity, how then can femininity be anything other than a failing, an insufficiency that Austen criticizes as so many have done before and since? In *Emma*, Emma's vain certainty of her own perfection is challenged by Mr. Knightley, the man who helps her overcome her reflexivity. He knows that she is charming but misguided, saying early in the novel, "'There is an anxiety, a curiosity in what one feels for Emma. I wonder what will become of her!'" (26). Similarly, in his essay on narcissism, Freud anxiously wonders what will become of narcissistic women who fail to overcome a primary narcissism that men, in general, leave behind. In both texts, narcissism seems to be characterized as charming but regressive, a problem needing a cure. Austen's moral discourse on vanity thus appears to

[5]Henry James, "The Lesson of Balzac," *Atlantic Monthly* 96 (July 1905), rpt. Norton Critical Edition 375.

[6]Jane Austen, *Emma* (New York: Norton, 1972) 1. All further references will appear parenthetically in the text.

anticipate the psychoanalytic discourse developed in the next century. Before arguing further for *Emma*'s narcissistic effect, then, I will consider how Austen displays the "real evils" of Emma Woodhouse's situation and disposition.

In the first two pages of the novel we learn that "her mother had died too long ago for her to have more than an indistinct remembrance of her caresses," that "her place had been supplied by an excellent woman as governess," that Miss Taylor's "mildness of . . . temper had hardly allowed her to impose any restraint," and that even "the shadow of authority [had] long passed away." Miss Taylor had been for Emma "a friend and companion such as few possessed, intelligent, well-informed, useful, gentle, knowing all the ways of the family, interested in all its concerns, and peculiarly interested in herself, in every pleasure, every scheme of hers," and her father quite simply thinks her perfect. With confirmation of herself everywhere available, it is no wonder that Emma is caught up in narcissistic relations. Only Mr. Knightley can see faults in her, and his influence is slow to make itself felt.

One of the most obvious and ultimately the most troubling of her narcissistic relationships is with Harriet, a pretty but simple boarder in the village's school for young ladies. After Emma spends an evening "busy in admiring [Harriet's] soft blue eyes," she decides that Miss Smith is "exactly the young friend she wanted—exactly the something which her home required" (16). Emma appropriates Harriet, seeing in her all sorts of qualities that are her own projections, for Harriet is much too simple to be the lady Emma sees waiting to be developed. As Mr. Knightley complains, "'[Harriet's] ignorance is hourly flattery. How can Emma imagine she has anything to learn herself, while Harriet is presenting such a delightful inferiority?'" (24). But Emma doesn't think she has anything to learn, or, indeed, that she need ever change. "'Fortune I do not want; employment I do not want; consequence I do not want,'" she tells Harriet, explaining, "'I cannot really change for the better. If I were to marry, I must expect to repent it'" (57). Emma claims to want for nothing—not even a husband—satisfied as she is by her "active, busy mind with a great many independent resources." "'[N]ever, never could I expect to be so truly beloved and important; so always first and always right in any man's eyes as I am in my father's,'" Emma declares. Indeed, she accepts as her due a conundrum offered by Mr. Weston, one of her friends. He says, "'What two letters of the alphabet are there, that express perfection? . . . I will tell you. —M and A.—Em—ma. —Do you understand?'" For Emma, "understanding and gratification came together" (253). She thus revels in the most reflexive image of herself, her own name which reveals itself as in a mirror (EM-MA)—an emblem of her narcissism.

Emma's narcissism has various consequences, one of which is that she is an "imaginist." That is, she speculates about the world, but her discoveries are always her own projections, as when she shares with Frank Churchill her theory about the source of Jane Fairfax's piano. Of course, the great dramatic irony of the book is that Emma is consistently mistaken, not just about the piano, but about Harriet, Mr. Elton, Frank, Jane Fairfax—and about herself. Only when Harriet Smith acts on her own, aspiring to marry Mr. Knightely, going far beyond what Emma imagined for her, does Emma recognize "the whole truth." "It darted through her, with the speed of an arrow, that Mr. Knightley must marry no one but herself" (280). And when Emma wonders at Harriet's presumption in thinking of Mr. Knightley, she soon comes to the sorrowful conclusion that she has made Harriet what she is: "Who had been at pains to give Harriet notions of self-consequence but herself? If Harriet, from being humble, were grown vain, it was her doing too" (285). Her patronage of Harriet she comes to call "the worst of all her womanly follies" (319). And, indeed, her "willful intimacy" with the young woman transfers onto Harriet Emma's most striking fault—her vanity—making Harriet into an image that is finally much too close for comfort in Miss Smith's hopes of Mr. Knightley.

We readers have shared the narrator's awareness of Emma's follies, having been guided in part by the observations of Mr. Knightley, the only character who returns to Emma something other than what she expects or wants to see. His relationship is avuncular, even paternal; unlike Emma's womanish father, Mr. Knightley does not think Emma is perfect. And, in the end, Emma's desire for him makes her aware that she is wanting—that she lacks something. Fearing that Harriet may have secured Mr. Knightley's affections, Emma realizes how much she wants him for herself. Her desire breaks the closed narcissistic system in which the world always gives back to her a flattering image of herself, perfection achieved, and she comes to see, as we have seen, the "real evils" of thinking too well of

herself and always having her own way.

Emma is charming in her self-assurance, imagination, confidence, and irreverence; Emma also displays for us her faults and the serious moral consequences of her misguided actions. Austen thus dramatizes the effects of what Freud was to call the narcissistic woman's "unassailable libidinal position." Further, Austen's moral language seems to anticipate Freud's early characterization of narcissism as regressive, a problem which needs to be solved even as it resists solution. For Freud not only says that narcissistic women are charming; he claims that they are so because they stay in "the unassailable libidinal position *which we ourselves have since abandoned.*"[7]

The dualism evident here—those women and the rest of us—is an important part of Freud's introductory essay on narcissism. There Freud argues that men and women develop along fundamentally different lines. He postulates a primary narcissism in everyone, saying that "a human being has originally two sexual objects—himself and the woman who nurses him," but distinguishes two subsequent paths of development in early childhood. In one the child's choice of erotic object depends on that which satisfied his infantile needs, that is, the mother. This is the anaclitic type. The second possibility is development along narcissistic lines, which is properly speaking a "disturbance" of libidinal development. In this case, the child takes itself as an object-choice, not the mother. Men, in general, follow the first path; women the second. As Freud says, "complete object-love of the attachment type is, properly speaking, characteristic of the male." Conversely, "the purest and truest" type of female, the one "most frequently met with," tends not to direct her libido outside of herself, and intensifies her narcissism at puberty: "Women, especially if they grow up with good looks, develop a certain self-contentment which compensates them for the social restrictions that are imposed upon them in their choice of object" (88-89). Narcissistic women exert a particular charm on the men who love them, their very inaccessibility reinforcing the masculine tendency to over-value the love object. Yet, as Freud notes, "The great charm of narcissistic women has its reverse side; a large part of the lover's dissatisfaction, of his doubts of the woman's love, of his complaints of her enigmatic nature, has its root in this incongruity between the types of object-choice" (89).

Immediately following this discussion Freud offers a disclaimer: "Perhaps it is not out of place here to give an assurance that this description of the feminine form of erotic life is not due to any tendentious desire on my part to depreciate women" (89). Yet, as Sara Kofman has pointed out, "In the name of what would woman's narcissism be capable of depreciating her? In the name of what if not of a certain ethics which identifies narcissism with an egoism which must be overcome and not only because it would be a fixation or regression to an infantile libidinal stage?"[8] "We" (we men? and "the number of women who love according to the masculine type"?) who have put away childish things do not approve of those who remain in the position we have abandoned. Kofman argues strongly that Freud recognizes in his essay that narcissism is primary, that even those who love according to the anaclitic type have simply abandoned a narcissism which they envy ever after, and that Freud was unwilling to accept the "immorality" of such self-reference and self-affirmation.

For Kofman, the narcissistic woman is affirmative in the Nietzschean sense, unassailable in her narcissistic consistency as are (according to Freud) children, "cats and the large beasts of prey," and "great criminals and humorists, as they are represented in literature." Kofman asserts that Freud recognized in the narcissistic woman a great "criminal" who is beyond good and evil, who disregards those supposedly universal categories and does not submit to the received cultural order. The narcissistic woman would thus be self-generating, not defined by lack, not secondary to the normative male, but complete in herself. As Kofman argues, Freud was threatened by this understanding of woman and compelled to depreciate her and bring her to the path of righteousness, deflecting the danger posed by a woman not supplementary to man.

This moralizing of narcissism, the tendentiousness which Kofman finds highlighted by Freud's disclaimers, is as we know an important part of Austen's novel as Emma is brought in the course of the narrative to recognize the "real evils" of her situation—the very dangers she failed to perceive as the book opens. She recognizes her "folly," her "insufferable vanity" and "unpardonable arrogance," is "sorrowfully indignant" and "ashamed" of herself (284). Thus

[7]Sigmund Freud, "On Narcissism: An Introduction," *The Standard Edition*, trans. James Strachey (London: Hogarth Press, 1957) 14: 89, emphasis mine.

[8]Sara Kofman, "The Narcissistic Woman: Freud and Girard," *Diacritics* 10.1 (Spring 1980): 40.

"handsome, clever, and rich" Emma Woodhouse—who had been in an unassailable libidinal position—is brought by Mr. Knightley to see things his way. Indeed, she is brought to love him where before she had loved herself. "She was most sorrowfully indignant: ashamed of every sensation but the one revealed to her—her affection for Mr. Knightley.—Every other part of her mind was disgusting" (284). So much for thinking that she "could not really change for the better." Austen thus seems to anticipate Freud in more than her recognition that narcissism is charming; she shames her heroine and silences her—Emma will plot no more, "however inferior in spirit and gaiety might be the following and every future winter of her life" (291). Her days as an imaginist are over.

Reading *Emma* as the story of Emma's cure sets the novel firmly against the threat of a self-sufficient femininity, but this comforting interpretation overlooks the potent charms of the text itself. For if *Emma* tells the exemplary tale of narcissism's dangers, the text also confirms its delights. Emma may no longer be an imaginist, but Austen's writing in its consistency and completion implicity offers a narcissistic appeal.

Virginia Woolf recognizes this characteristic of Austen's work when she observes, "she is impersonal; she is inscrutable."[9] These qualities are evident, Woolf notes, even in Austen's adolescent satire, *Love and Friendship*: "Never, even at the emotional age of fifteen did she round upon herself in shame, obliterate a sarcasm in a spasm of compassion, or blur an outline in a mist of rhapsody. Spasms and rhapsodies, she seems to have said, pointing with her stick, end *there*; and the boundary line is perfectly distinct" (146). Her later work is no different. Of *Pride and Prejudice* Woolf writes, "Here was a woman about the year 1800 writing without hate, without bitterness, without fear, without protest, without preaching."[10] *Emma* is similarly dispassionate, excluding spasms and rhapsodies, creating the effect of a self-sufficient and unassailable text, one in which the rhetoric of narration is simply perfect.

Of course, to argue that Austen's texts are unassailable is not to say that Austen herself was; to claim a textual narcissism in her writing is not to make the author a narcissist. Indeed, from the censored letters left to us we know that Austen was anything but impersonal or inscrutable in her private correspondence, and certainly not detached. There is something of a spasm in this report of an evening party:

> Another stupid party last night; perhaps if larger they might be less intolerable, but here there were only just enough to make one card table, with six people to look on, & talk nonsense to each other. . . . I cannot anyhow continue to find people agreeable;—I respect Mrs. Chamberlayne for doing her hair well, but cannot feel a more tender sentiment.—Miss Langley is like any other short girl with a broad nose & wide mouth, fashionable dress, & an exposed bosom.[11]

Here scorn and protest are on display, but turn to *Emma* and the effect could not be more different. Austen's personal disgust nowhere impinges on the text, and the grace of her style and urbanity of her narrative voice remain undisturbed.

Austen quite evidently understood the charm of her prose and her narrative style, for while she was interested in what others had to say about her novels, she did not alter her writing to suit anyone but herself. Thus she turns off with witty candor the foolish suggestion of Mr. Clarke, the Prince Regent's librarian, that she write an historical romance:

> I could not sit seriously down to write a serious romance under any other motive than to save my life; and if it were indispensable for me to keep it up and never relax into laughing at myself or at other people, I am sure I should be hung before I had finished the first chapter. No, I must keep to my own style and go on in my own way; and though I may never succeed again in that, I am convinced that I should totally fail in any other.[12]

Her own way is by means of a narrator who controls our access to the text, setting our relation to the characters and the action of the novel, offering judgments (of the "real evils" of Emma's

[9]Virginia Woolf, *Collected Essays* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1925) 1: 146.

[10]Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One's Own* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, 1929) 71.

[11]Jane Austen, "To Cassandra Austen," 12 May 1801, Letter 36, *Jane Austen's Letters to Her Sister Cassandra and Others*, ed. R.W. Chapman (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1979) 126.

[12]Jane Austen, "Letter to Mr. Clarke," Apr. 1816, rpt. J.E. Austen Leigh, *A Memoir of Jane Austen* (Folcroft Library Editions, 1979) 117.

situation, for example) and information, shifting for a moment to a character's point of view and then back to reveal the limitations of an interested position. Wayne Booth, in his justly famous analysis of the narration of *Emma*, discusses how the narrator implies the author, and how the implied author of *Emma* "is, in short, a perfect human being, within the concept of perfection established by the book she writes. . . . The process of her domination is of course circular. Her character [the character of the implied author] establishes the values for us according to which her character is then found to be perfect. But this circularity does not affect the success of her endeavor; in fact, it insures it."[13] The perfection of the narrator and the narration is further guaranteed by the experience of reading the novel, since the reader tends to repeat the mistakes Emma makes as the story develops. Adena Rosmarin argues that "Austen meant the reader to be mystified, to make many of the interpretive errors, or as Booth aptly puts it, many of the same misreadings that Emma makes."[14] We readers begin by complacently assuming we know more than Emma does, but discover, to our chagrin, that what we think we know is partial and incomplete, significantly formed by our expectations about what "should" happen in a novel about a handsome young woman. As Rosmarin says, "we find ourselves trapped by our readerly desires, helplessly running in the grooves of Emma's tritely romanticizing imagination: Will Frank Churchill come? Will he and Emma fall in love?" (327). The novel, of course, surprises its readers as Emma is surprised, and if we do not find our minds disgusting as she does hers, we do admire the consummate skill with which Austen has negotiated the many subtleties of the narrative. Most important, the implied author alone remains beyond reproach, perfectly disinterested and just, perfectly able to use the conventions of romance to reflect upon romance, explaining perhaps why Woolf would call Austen "impersonal," "inscrutable" and why I call the text unassailable.

Other aspects of *Emma* contribute to the narcissistic effects of the text, none less obtrusively than the prose style. In the several hundred pages of *Emma* Austen uses almost no explicit metaphors, concentrating our attention on the here and now of the text rather than referring by metaphoric substitution to something else.[15] Austen forgoes striking figures in favor of a style resolutely metonymic. Often writers display their talents at unexpected comparisons to surprise or amaze, but Austen depends on the developing interest of her narrative to create her effects. As Richard Simpson remarked in 1870, "she has scarcely a spark of poetry. Perhaps there is no author in existence in whom so marvelous a power of exhibiting characters in formation and action is combined with so total a want of the poetical imagination."[16] This want of poetry, however, is not felt as a lack in *Emma* precisely because of the gain in the steadiness of the focus on character and dialogue: we remain in the charmed circle of Highbury. When Austen does use metaphor, she uses "buried or dead" metaphors, as Mark Schorer has demonstrated in his essay on the language of commerce which pervades *Emma*.[17] But this use of metaphor also helps to maintain the sense of a closed and sufficient text, for metaphors which are dead or buried work by convention—they must be highly conventional figures to be dead or otherwise unobstrusive. A conventional metaphor by definition doesn't draw attention to itself and away from the story.

Similarly, Austen relies little on the literary allusions, again maintaining the enclosure of the text. There is almost no mention of other texts in the whole of *Emma*; the narrator does not appeal to other authors for authoritative substantiation. Remarkably, Austen doesn't even make any explicit appeal to the Bible. The absence of allusion is so consistent that we don't even notice it, but this aspect of Austen's style also contributes to the narcissistic effects of the text.

Yet perhaps the most seriously narcissistic

[13]Wayne Booth, *The Rhetoric of Fiction* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1969) 266.

[14]Adena Rosmarin, "'Misreading' *Emma*: The Powers and Perfidies of Interpretive History," *English Literary History* 51.2 (Summer 1984): 327.

[15]The few explicit metaphors cluster around Jane Fairfax, and are used to emphasize her suffering. The first is in her statement about looking for employment: "There are places in town, offices, where inquiry would produce something—offices for sale—not quite of human flesh—but of human intellect" (204). Later, Emma thinks metaphorically when she realizes that her flirtation with Frank had hurt Jane, who had then refused Emma's offer of help: "An airing in the Hartfield carriage would have been the rack, and arrow-root from the Hartfield store-room must have been poison" (27).

[16]Richard Simpson, unsigned review of the *Memoirs, North British Review* Apr. 1870, rpt. Southam 243.

[17]Mark Schorer, "The Humiliation of Emma Woodhouse," *The Literary Review* 4 (Summer 1959), rpt. Watt 99.

aspect of *Emma* is its conventionality, not just in terms of its metaphorics, but in its complete subscription to the truths of femininity. This perfectly articulated text never does violate the bounds of fictional or feminine propriety, so masterful is Austen's control of novelistic conventions, so consistent is *Emma*'s focus on interior scenes, the feminine world of love and courtship. As Sir Walter Scott wrote in a review, *Emma* "reminds us something of the merits of the Flemish school of painting. . . . The subjects are not often elegant, and certainly never grand; but they are finished up to nature, and with a precision which delights the reader. This is a merit which it is very difficult to illustrate by extracts, because it pervades the entire work, and is not to be comprehended from a single passage."[18] This is the merit, too, which G. H. Lewes called "at once womanly and literary," saying "of all imaginative writers she is the most *real*."[19] Various writers other than Scott have compared Austen's books to paintings, trying to explain the particular realism of her writings.[20] Indeed, her domestic, precisely delineated and detached writing is like trompe l'oeil painting in its apparent faithfulness to "nature," to the details of quotidian life, but like trompe l'oeil, *Emma* is not just a matter of reproducing reality. Rather, the form and convention are of first importance: in trompe l'oeil, the apotheosis of perspectival convention, the vision is impartial, absolute, utterly precise, and in that precision and impartiality actually calls attention to the power of convention even as it is a deceptively faithful imitation.[21] The illusion of trompe l'oeil depends on a hyper-conventionality, and thus reflects on the very conditions of representability which make illusion possible. *Emma*, long praised for its "unimpeachable conformity to nature" in fact reflects upon the novelistic conventions of realism and comedy, and intensifies the conventionally feminine. Rather than simply reproducing some truth about the world, rather than speaking the truth about women, their vanity and narcissism, *Emma* turns back upon itself and foregrounds the conventionality of what we take for nonconventional, determinate truth—the reality that is represented in writing. *Emma* deserves to be analyzed not as a representation of the truth of woman, but as a particularly intense instance of a certain femininity which is taken for "nature," which makes *Emma* seem to "mirror" life "with a purity and fidelity that must endow [it] with interest for all time" (Southam 140).

Most readers, however, are too intent on explaining what *Emma* is really about, what reality it represents, to attend to the unobtrusive but insistent emphasis on conventionality which pervades the text. Everyone who reads Austen and writes about her books knows of her own characterization of her writing as "the little bit of Ivory (two Inches wide) on which I work with so fine a brush, as produces little effect after much labor."[22] Readers of Austen have been quite happy to accept this description, but only on the condition that they can save Austen from her seeming self-depreciation, from her femininity, by taking her works as microcosms of a larger and more substantial reality. *Emma* is thus opened up, shown to depend all in all on a prior truth—the reality of women's vanity, for instance, the need to cure self-indulgent femininity. The narcissistic effects of the text are thus recognized as that which makes the novel a microcosm, but are overcome by making the text as a whole stand for something else. By this gesture, critics are able to make *Emma* into a total metaphor, opening the seemingly closed text to the world.

In order to do this, to insure *Emma*'s significance, one must pay particular attention to the end of the novel, because the resolution of the narrative is the point at which the developments and deviations of the plot cohere into a meaningful totality. This, at any rate, is Peter Brooks' argument in an essay on plot in which he writes of "the retrospective illumination which will allow us to grasp the text as total metaphor."[23] In order to constitute *Emma* as such a totality, which can then stand for something in

[18]Sir Walter Scott, unsigned review of *Emma*, *Quarterly Review* Mar. 1816, rpt. Southam 68.

[19]George Henry Lewes, "The Lady Novelists," *Westminster Review* July 1852, rpt. Southam 141.

[20]See Southam: "faithful, Teniers-like pictures" (147); "the most accomplished miniature-painter" (253); and see the *Memoirs*: "These writings are like photographs . . . all is the unadorned reflection of the natural object" (144).

[21]M.L. d'Otrange Mastai, *Illusion in Art: Trompe l'Oeil: A History of Pictorial Illusion* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1975) 9. I also found helpful Naomi Schor's essay, "Duane Hanson: Truth in Sculpture," *New York Literary Forum* 8-9 (1981): 235-48, in which she discusses the uncanny effects of Hanson's "hyper-realistic sculpture."

[22]Jane Austen, "To J. Edward Austen," 16 Dec. 1816, *Austen's Letters* 468-69.

[23]Peter Brooks, "Freud's Masterplot: Questions of Narrative," *Yale French Studies* 55-56 (1977): 296.

the world, the end of *Emma* must have an explanatory value. The novel can then be elevated by the critic who can speak for it, interpret what it, as a metaphor for something else, really means.

Consider this in terms of a psychoanalytically informed reading of Emma's vanity, of the charms and dangers of female narcissism. One must take the ending seriously, believe that the "perfect happiness of the union" between Emma and Mr. Knightley is emblematic of her cure. D. A. Miller would have it so when he says that

> Emma's cure, like the psychoanalytic one, is worked out by means of replacements or exchanges. In place of nonobjectal desire, there is put an object choice; in place of the symptomatic language of error, there is put a language that can designate and disclose error; and in place of the picaresque narrative constituted by wandering desire and errant language, there are put a sense of the novel's true itinerary and the ending to which it was always directed.[24]

Obviously, if one is to read *Emma* as Emma's case history, the retrospective illumination afforded by her marriage is highly significant: one can see all the way back to the first pages of the novel where Mr. Knightley finds fault with Emma, up to her recognition that only her love for him saves her from utter folly, to the perfection of their union. The novel thereby resolves into Brooks' total metaphor, each part in logical relation to the others, and the whole standing for the truth: female narcissism is alluring but dangerous, attractive but morally damaging. Thus the miniature, finished up to perfection, comes to represent a larger truth which is spoken by the critic, and the unassailable text reveals itself as anaclitic, taking its form from something else outside itself, the reality of female narcissism.

This particular critical move on *Emma* effectively cures the text of exclusive self-reflexivity, but does so by displacing the troubling question of the text's hyper-conventionality, the fact that it is intensely feminine, intensely and insistently conventional. The rhetoric of narration which is perfectly mastered in *Emma* is here also the rhetoric of femininity, and both realism and femininity—and the "reality" of "femininity"—are displayed as rhetorical effects. This perfectly trivial text turns on its triviality, not to open up to some truth of women, but to bring to the fore the conventionality of the feminine, to be hyper-feminine and produce a femininity-effect.

As Richard Simpson, that early and astute critic of Austen, notes, "she is always perfectly calm, perfectly self-conscious" (Southam 252).[25] This self-consciousness is nowhere more evident than at the end of *Emma*, an end which does not resolve the text into a total metaphor, but emphasizes by its exaggerated conventionality the artifice of novelistic discourse and the discourse of femininity—both of which say that marriage is the end to which all truly mature women aspire.

Austen's texts all end with conventionally comic resolutions in marriage, bringing together the heroine and hero whose careers are thereby brought to a close. The endings are designed to please. Indeed, the narrator of *Northanger Abbey* is quite explicit about her designs, saying to the readers of the novel as the end approaches that they "will see in the tell-tale compression of the pages before them that we are all hastening together to perfect felicity."[26] And at the wedding, "the bells rang and everybody smiled." How perfect. The ending of *Emma* is less obviously exaggerated, but it, too, offers a "resolution"—that is, an ending which is constructed so as to mark its conventionality and to mark, also, the reader's expectations of such a close: "the wishes, the hopes, the confidence, the predictions of the small band of true friends who witnessed the ceremony [among whom the reader counts him or herself], were answered in the perfect happiness of the union" (335).

We must, on the one hand, take this marriage seriously as a solution to problems which have been developed in the course of the narrative. At the close, Emma has finally come to understand the truths which Mr. Knightley has been telling her all along. He warned Emma against matchmaking; she confirms, after the Elton fiasco, that "the first error and worst lay at her door. It was foolish, it was wrong, to take so active a part in bringing two people together . . . , making light of what ought to be serious, a trick of what ought to be simple" (93). He criticizes her for publicly insulting Miss Bates; she responds

[24]D.A. Miller, *Narrative and Its Discontents: Problems of Closure in the Traditional Novel* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1981) 20.

[25]Although the concept was not available to Simpson, I would emphasize that we should think of the implied author, not Austen "herself."

[26]Jane Austen, *Northanger Abbey* (New York: Vintage, 1976) 540.

with "anger against herself, mortification, and deep concern" (257). He is in love with her; she recognizes that she is in love with him, and that "every other part of her mind was disgusting" (284). Indeed, before he proposes to her, as Emma is trying to explain her conduct with Frank Churchill, she realizes at last that she's not so different from other women as she had thought, not so perfect, not so penetrating; her flirtation with Frank was, she says, "An old story, probably—a common case—and no more than has happened to hundreds of my sex before; and yet it may not be the more excusable in one who sets up as I do for Understanding. Many circumstances assisted the temptation. . . . My vanity was flattered . . ." (293). Emma's common case is diagnosed, and we should rejoice in the wedding which unites her and Mr. Knightley, a marriage which insures a lasting cure. Yet when Mr. Knightley proposes, Emma "found one or two such very serious points to consider, as made her feel, that even her happiness must have some alloy. Her father—and Harriet" (299). How to marry when her father depends on her absolutely, and when Harriet, following the mistaken advice of Emma, has grown so vain as to think Mr. Knightley is interested in her? These two "very serious points" must be resolved to allow for the necessary marriage, and so they are, but in a way that makes one wonder how to take the exemplary end of *Emma*'s "old story." Indeed, Austen herself may be said to do just what Emma herself denounced as her "first error and worst"; that is, Austen "[takes an] active part in bringing two people together," "making light of what ought to be serious, a trick of what ought to be simple." But in *Emma*'s case the trick is compounded, for no fewer than three marriages close the novel.

Further, the conventional comic removal of obstacles to the weddings is developed so as to stress the convention, not the resolution.[27] Consider on what Emma and Mr. Knightley's married bliss depends: the depredations of a poultry thief who pilfers the neighborhood turkeys. This "house-breaking"—for so it seems to excitable Mr. Woodhouse—is so frightening that he welcomes Mr. Knightley as a son-in-law, just to have a real man in the house. Thus Mr. Woodhouse, who for the course of 333 pages has held that "matrimony, as the origin of change, was always disagreeable," decides in one paragraph on page 334 that his daughter's marriage should take place forthwith, which it does two paragraphs later on page 335, ending the novel. Austen offers a foreshortened "motivation" to remove the barriers blocking the union between Emma and Mr. Knightley; she compresses her final "solution" into one and a half pages; she even skews the conventional marriage by arranging for Mr. Knightley to move in with Emma and her father, hardly a resolution which silences Emma or makes her subject to her husband. And, finally, she goes even further, in a scene shortly before the end. Mr. Knightley decides in favor of spoiled children, after an entire book spent trying to correct the effects of Emma's indulged youth: "I am losing all my bitterness against spoiled children, my dearest Emma. I who am owing all my happiness to *you*, would it not be horrible ingratitude in me to be severe on them?" (318).

The hen house takes care of Mr. Woodhouse's objections to matrimony; Harriet takes care of herself. And Emma's response to her fortuitous and unexpected marriage suggests how we might take the end and the "resolution" marriage offers. When she learns from Mr. Knightley that Harriet has accepted Mr. Martin's second proposal, and that her friend will be happily matched in spite of her own foolish interventions, Emma is grateful, wishing only "that the lessons of her past folly might teach her humility and circumspection in the future." Emma is serious, too. "Serious she was, very serious in her thankfulness, and in her resolution; and yet there was no preventing a laugh, sometimes in the very midst of them. She must laugh at such a close!" (328). Emma finds Harriet's motivations "unaccountable" and "unintelligible"—laughable—but so it is with Emma's marriage, too. Mr. Woodhouse's blessing on her union with Mr. Knightley is as absurd as Harriet's change of heart. Further, Harriet is not just a fool whose witlessness is a foil to Emma's intelligence, nor is her marriage just a comic parallel to the "perfect union" enjoyed by Emma and Mr. Knightley. Harriet and her wedding also compromise the solemnity of Emma's nuptials, and provoke a laugh at the whole idea of marriage resolving

[27]Karen Newman, in "Can This Marriage Be Saved? Jane Austen Makes Sense of an Ending," *English Literary History* 50.4 (Winter 1984): 693-710, has already reconsidered Austen's endings and argues convincingly that "In Austen's case, irony and parody are subversive strategies that undermine the male hegemony her novels portray and reveal the romantic and materialist contraditions of which her plots and characters are made." Her analysis of Austen's use of convention and parodies of convention helped me form my argument about *Emma*.

anything.

Thus the "resolution" of *Emma* is deceptive—deceptive in its endorsing of marriage as a solution, deceptive in its resolute adherence to the expected discourse on femininity, deceptive in speaking the moral of the story. Like trompe l'oeil it displays the conditions of representability without ever violating convention. Rather, it is intensely proper, intensely detailed, intensely domestic and feminine. As with trompe l'oeil, one is confronted with the power of convention and expectation, the conventions of narration and the expectation that marriage will be an answer. By offering an ending worked up so exquisitely according to rule, *Emma* insists on the letter of the law which says that woman is insufficient, that woman is the supplement, the complement to man. But this insistence on the letter marks the limit of that law, for while Emma takes Mr. Knightley's name, *Emma* stands alone. And "without protest or preaching," to recall Virginia Woolf's phrase, this artfully feminine novel insists on the utter conventionality of the conventionally feminine.

The affirmative textual narcissism of *Emma* is therefore a matter of manner, of reflecting on propriety and convention not to denounce convention as false in favor of a real truth of women, but to insist that "femininity" is nothing but convention. This is the fascination of Austen's novel, the polite but insistent demonstration that woman is an effect of discourse, a product of convention. No wonder critics have depreciated Austen's writing, and have wanted to speak for the text, to make *Emma* mean something by supplying some ground on which the writing must depend. For while *Emma*, in its irreproachable propriety, tells the "old story" of Emma's insufficiency, the text also lacks nothing as it turns on the question of femininity.□

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L. J. Bright

THE RIDDLE

When I was very young I imagined myself no different from the very few strangers whose business took them down the track, it could hardly even be called a path, on which I then was posted. Of course I knew that I did not look like them—that much would be obvious to any reasonable being. Even if I hadn't had a pool in which to gaze at myself through heavy lidded eyes, I could not help but be aware that these muscled flanks and haunches, these paws which score my tongue when I lick them, bear little resemblance to the white-flashing limbs and bodies of the creatures who cross my path. I mean "men" of course. The others with whom I feel a bond, more so now in this changed world than ever in the past, I had less question about. Many did not fear me unless I spoke. The birds would scratch and peck between my extended feet, and wild goats browsed in the glade in which I lay in the dappled sunshine. In those days I felt that I quivered, like the summer air above the cliffs, on the very edge of pure being, and I waited in joyful anticipation for the passing over. I came across a pride of creatures very like myself, yellow-eyed, lolling in the grass, but when I approached them they warned me off, caught, I could see, between fear and rage, and I retreated lest in their confusion they tear me into pieces. My loins ached to join them.

Once I rolled the body of a man to the edge of a pond where I could see her face next to my own. Her hair lay flat against her head, twisted into heavy strings in which were entwined shells and bits of crimson cloth. Curiously worked metal and stones hung from her ears and encircled her pale throat where the pulse winked weakly and died. In the wavering water my hair seemed shapeless, disordered, matted here and there, and in places erect like a horse's mane. I pulled at it with my claws until, my eyes filled with tears, it fell straight to my shoulders, filled with bits of twigs and leaves. I looked more closely at the man. Her grey eyes lay in violet sockets and above them the brow had been plucked and shaped into a sliver like the waning moon. "That I could do had I those limbs," I said to myself, but the rest, the thin braceleted arms and blue-veined legs, the delicate pink-tipped breasts, had nothing in common with this tawny, coarsely-haired body.

No, the resemblance which I thought we had lay not so much in the face, but behind it. I believed, then, that perhaps they, too, awaited a kind of metamorphosis, that, since we both therefore existed in transition, we shared similar mistaken perceptions about ourselves and our world. That was my mistake—I realize now that they were, and are, complete in their incompleteness, although most do not really know it because they do not care to. Their answers to my questions have proved that.

That one, of course, could answer nothing, scared out of her wits. "Didn't anyone tell you not to use this path?" She turned as if to run, but I prevented her with a touch. "Don't be foolish. You might as easily escape your reflection in polished brass. Silly thing! Why are you here?"

She stood trembling, her knuckles pressed to her rosy lips, and then, suddenly, she fell to her knees. "Mercy!" she cried. "Mercy!"

"That won't do—I am she who knows neither mercy nor sanctuary. Once again, why are you here? Speak, or do you believe that this rough body will prevent me from understanding?"

Her words tumbled in disorder from her mouth, and I understood that, stranger to these parts, she had been sent on an errand by her mate. She could not have replied to the questions I longed to put, but still I would have spared her if I could, sacrifice that she was to her husband's greed or concupiscence. I do not say that that confrontation marked the point at which I first began to comprehend the nature of man, since to see him shod or mounted is to suspect his distance from all that crawls or flies, but I had not known how easily he could become alien to himself. Well, that was long ago, and I know better now. I have seen him armed, leaping from ambush on the lonely traveller, and in legions too, covering the earth like ants and locked in swaying combat until the spongy earth oozed blood. And in gaudy show also, supported by

dozens of retainers and lying at ease amidst woven coverlets and jewels.

I am no longer young. How many times I would have sought a den, high in the hills, where perhaps none would pass, but I was prevented, chained somehow to this spot or that.

And how chained? And why moved from this edge of the meadow to that steep valley, so narrow beside the plashing water that none could avoid me? Those were among the questions I used to ask in my middle age, if time be measured as they do in the world of men, although I do not think such reckoning applies to me. I did not ask in so many words however, for who would then be prepared to answer? Some there were who said, "The Gods order all, except that they too struggle against the tangles of fate." Some, perhaps more honest, or perhaps simply more stupid, merely let their hands fall, open and limp, declaring the motives of the Gods unknowable. Both of these I slew reluctantly, but without regret, nibbling at their flesh with my weak jaws. Upon occasion a sojourner, more strong-minded than the others, a dusky foreigner or a poet with his strings and drum or a woman of riper years, might say of the Gods that they acted like men, moved by appetite and unreason. They understood a little, if not enough to welcome death, at least so much as not to puzzle over it. These I killed because I thought I could not do otherwise. In any case, the Gods have not appeared to me.

But what about those, or at least that one on his way to Thebes, who escaped me? Legend has it that the one who truly answers my question destroys me, wipes me clean from the pages of the future, reducing me therefore to a footnote in a mythic moment. Absurd! I saw him striding, confident, sword at his back and spear in hand, and even before I leaped to bar his way my wrinkling nose smelled his rage and triumph. He fell back, raising the bronze-pointed ash, his face white with fear. He said nothing as I circled him, but I was used to that, and finally I lay upon the path before him. "You have killed?" I said.

He swallowed to find his voice. "What are you?" he asked.

"I am she who asks questions to which you must reply. You have killed?"

He nodded, his fingers working on the shaft of the spear.

"Why did you kill?"

The dying sun struck his eyes into gleaming metal, and I understood that some strength or compulsion made him look beyond me into the past and into the future where his drama lay. "I am the son of a King, and they shouldered me aside."

"And so you, in your pride, slaughtered them all, the herald, the bearers and their royal cargo?"

He had gone so far beyond me now, caught up in his vision, that he let his right arm fall to his side so that the bright point of his weapon buried itself in the dust.

"I am the son of a King," he said again.

I rose to all fours, and with a convulsive movement he raised his spear. "That would not serve you this time," I said, "for I am she who cannot be killed. Listen carefully, because I shall ask you one last question, to which only I know the answer. You are under a curse?"

Despite his fear he knitted his brow and then, licking his lips, he nodded, "Yes."

"But you think I am mistaken, for you knew that answer. But you did not for we are not referring to the same curse. Listen again now, for I am going to tell you what you must do. Continue your journey—you will reach Thebes before midday tomorrow, and there you must tell them that you answered my question and that I dissolved like smoke from a fire. Your invention will serve you for the question and answer."

I waited for I knew the son-of-a-King. "Why are you letting me pass?" he said.

I told him the truth because I understood now that it would make no difference whether I lied or spoke truly, for they would mean the same thing to him. "Because you must fulfill your destiny." I motioned him on. "Go now, and remember to let your invention serve you."

Was he the first whom I let escape me? I do not remember now, although since that time there have been others, a growing number. Perhaps it is difficult to believe that I was mistaken in assuming that the curse for which I spared him was restricted to a very few, but for a while I did so assume. Is it so difficult to believe, too, that I was once young, and that age has brought me the knowledge that all men suffer from a curse, the curse of knowing themselves separate from a creation which is perfect simply because it is, and intends nothing? All men desire that rest implicit in the ceaseless motion of the beasts of the field, and all that flies or swims, but knowing that they desire it only awakens in them an awareness of their separateness, of their permanent exile from the harmony of spontaneous being. And that knowledge of their alienation fills them with self-hatred. My task then is superfluous, because, unaided, they have made death an art, and grow

fat upon it. And what of me, caught more poignantly between the two orders of the world? Do I have any greater hope than he? Can I hope that this head will drop away like a blown blossom, leaving behind a ripened tawny body, crouched to dip its prey-blooded jaws in a mountain pool? I fear not, for I have discovered now that I am, mankind's symbol, a warning to himself and all creation that here it is possible to love death. I am she who asks the questions to which she knows the answers. Is it fair?□

FEATURED ARTISTS

Laurie Blauner's first book was published in 1984 by Owl Creek Press, and her second book, forthcoming from the same press, has won a 1988 Seattle Arts Commission award.

L.J. Bright is Professor of English at Indiana University of Pennsylvania. He has published both poetry and fiction, the latter in such journals as *Event, Mark, The Small Pond,* and *Wind.*

Carol K. Howell's work has appeared in *Redbook, North American Review, Quarry West* , and *Crazyhorse.* She currently teaches English at Syracuse University.

Robert T. Klose teaches biology at University College of the University of Maine. His poems and prose have appeared in *The Christian Science Monitor, The Beloit Poetry Journal, National Forum,* and elsewhere.

David Madden has published seven novels, of which *The Suicide's Wife* is best known, and two books of stories. The title story of *The New Orleans of Possibilities* appeared in the *New Orleans Review,* along with an interview. "The Satirist's Daughter" is an independent short story that is related to Madden's unusual Civil War novel, *Sharpshooter.*

Lucía Maya, born in Avalon, Santa Catalina Island, has exhibited her work throughout Mexico and the United States. "Sístole" is one of the twenty-nine works comprising *Diálogos con Frida,* a series of drawings depicting the artist Frida Kahlo. Lucía Maya is represented by the Carmen Llewellyn Gallery in New Orleans.

Lisa Zeidner is the author of two novels, *Customs* and *Alexandra Freed* (both Knopf), and a book of poems, *Talking Cure* (Texas Tech Press). She is completing her third novel, *Limited Partnerships.*