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William Virgil Davis

# THE VISITOR

As soon as the dog started to bark, I knew someone new was on the block. I live on a cul-de-sac and my dog knows all the neighbors and most of the people who visit them. He only barks when something is out of the ordinary.

I was busy and didn't want to be interrupted. I thought it would be a special delivery or UPS truck, but there wasn't any sound so I knew it was someone walking. Probably the man who reads the gas meter or the man who reads the water meter, I thought. But it wasn't the end of the month, and both of them came at the end of the month.

Maybe it was someone who wandered into the street by mistake, someone who had turned around and was going back. Maybe it was no one at all, a false alarm. But the dog was still barking. I didn't want to get up to look. I didn't want any interruption.

Since my house is the last house on the block, the one at the end of the cul-de-sac, I knew I had time. I didn't leave the room where I was working.

The dog was barking loudly. He was in the front hall now, and the barking echoed from the tile floor. Then he ran to the living room, then to the front bathroom, where again the echoes of his barking sounded louder than they really were. Whoever was on the street seemed to be coming this way. The dog's barks became both louder and more rapid. He was running back and forth from the front hallway to the back door. I didn't call to him because I knew it would do no good and I didn't want to confuse him. After all, dogs are supposed to bark when someone strange comes into the street or yard. It's what dogs do. It makes them feel wanted and useful. They like the rewards we give them for doing it. It relieves their boredom.

This barking, finally, caused me to go to the window in the front bedroom. I peered out from behind the curtains. It was raining. I didn't see anyone on the street. He, or she, must have gone into one of the other houses. I put my hand down to the dog and said, "Good boy."

"Now lie down," I said. The dog looked at me and stopped barking, but he didn't lie down.

I went back to the back room where I worked. I'd been surprised to find it raining, raining hard. I hadn't heard the rain.

In a few minutes the dog started to bark again. I knew what that meant. Someone was coming down the street, stopping at each house. Probably selling something. I hated these interruptions. I didn't like people who sold things door to door. They were a kind of people I always had difficulty dealing with. Insistent people, insistent and persistent. I never knew what to say to them to make them go away. They always got me riled up, and often angry. They destroyed my morning.

I was hoping that the person selling something would go away, think it wasn't worth his while to come all the way down the street, especially in the rain, the odds being that no one would be home anyhow, that cul-de-sacs were hardly worth the trouble. But I knew from experience that these sales people were persistent and insistent, and so, when the dog started to bark again in a few minutes, I knew that he or she was on his or her way down the street, stopping at each house, coming my way.

I thought perhaps I just wouldn't answer the door. Sometimes I did that. I'd just wait out of sight until they went away. But the dog was a problem. He barked and barked, and he ran from the front door to the back room where I would be waiting, running toward me and barking as loud as he could, as if for some reason I couldn't hear him. He would jump up on me and seem to want to drag me down the hall to the front door. He was doing his job, and he didn't understand why I wasn't doing mine. Did he worry that he was doing something wrong?

It didn't help to put the dog into the bedroom and lock the door. He still barked, and then he jumped against the door.

And what if it was someone suspicious? He might think that no one was home. He might try to break in.

I went back to the front bedroom and stood behind the curtain. I wanted a glimpse of this sales person. I would make my decision once I saw him, saw what he was carrying. Usually you could tell something about them from what they were carrying.

It was raining even harder. No one was in sight. The dog was beside me, standing watch with me. He was not barking. The person must be in one of the houses. I noticed now that there was no car parked at the end of the street. Whoever it was was on foot. There was only one of them, not another waiting in a car at the end of the street like they sometimes did.

When I saw him, I was surprised. He came out of the house two doors up. He was crippled. He was on crutches, and he hadn't a raincoat on. Of course, he couldn't carry an umbrella. He seemed badly crippled. Each swing between his crutches seemed to be a struggle for him. He planted his crutches carefully, and then, with what seemed considerable effort, he swung himself between them. Often, he seemed almost to lose his balance.

I thought the sidewalks must be slippery in the rain. He didn't even have a hat on. Obviously, he wasn't prepared for rain. It must have caught him by surprise. I wondered if the weatherman had forecast rain. I couldn't remember.

Now he was out at the street, coming toward the house next door. The woman there was at work. I watched him swing himself between the crutches up the walk toward her door. It was raining very hard. I thought of opening the door and calling out that the woman there was at work, to save him the trouble, but I still hadn't decided what I was going to do when he got here, to my door.

The dog was barking beside me. I thought surely the man must be able to hear the dog, unless the rain drowned out the sound. He was drenching wet. He wasn't carrying anything. I wondered what he could be selling—and then I knew. He wasn't selling anything but God. Religion. One of those religious freaks who come around all the time. I should have thought of it before. They were usually pathetic in one way or another. Not crippled, but old or disfigured. Usually they carried something though, pamphlets or something like that. Or a Bible with scraps of paper stuck into it at places they wanted to point to. Usually they came in twos and were women.

Maybe I was wrong. Maybe he was a veteran. That seemed a better bet to me now. But I hadn't had many of them. Usually they just called on the phone and were polite about it, selling light bulbs or something like that. I was intrigued.

He was on his way down my neighbor's walk now. The dog was barking louder than before and racing back and forth from the bedroom to the front door, then to the back door, and then back to me, barking as loud as I've ever heard him bark.

The man started up my walk. He didn't seem to hear the dog. I didn't think it could be raining that loudly. He grimaced each time he swung himself between his crutches. It obviously took quite a bit of effort for him to walk that way. I marveled that he could do it as well as he did.

The bell rang. The dog was at the front door, barking up at him. I hadn't decided what to do.

He knocked on the door with his fist. "I know you're in there," he shouted. "Call off the dog and come to the door." How did he know I was in here? I wondered. I took one last glance up the street and started for the door.

I took the dog by the collar and opened the door a crack. The man was standing on the porch, dripping. Already small puddles had formed around his feet and the ends of his crutches.

"Yes?" I said.

"That a lab?" he said.

"Yes."

"Ferocious dogs, those labs."

He shouted everything. It seemed to be his habit, not just because of the rain.

"He's not ferocious," I said.

My dog had stopped barking but was straining against me toward the door. I held the door open just a crack. It was one advantage with a dog. You didn't have to open the door. The man was watching the dog closely. He had lifted one crutch slightly off the porch, as if ready to defend himself with it.

"What do you want?" I said. "I'm busy."

"You don't look busy," he said. "What are you doing home anyhow? Don't you have a job?"

I thought I could just open the door and let

the dog go. Who would know what had happened. Self-protection. An accident. The dog got away from me, I'd say. But the crippled man no longer seemed to be afraid. He swung back and forth on his crutches. It was, I thought, probably a form of relaxation for him, an unconscious habit, like shifting weight from one foot to another.

"What do you want?" I said.

"Call the dog off," he shouted.

"He's OK," I said.

The man looked at me and then at the dog again. Then he shouted out, "I'm here for truth. Here to tell you the truth and have you hear it."

God, I thought.

"Do you know the truth?" he said.

"Listen, I'm really not interested," I started. "I'm really very busy."

"Do you think I'd be here, do you think I'd come out in weather like this if it wasn't important? Do you?" His voice boomed at me. The dog relaxed somewhat and stepped back.

"Do you?"

His face was wild, contorted. It had gotten red and seemed to puff up. A white scar cut through his forehead, over his left eye. He swung back a step to the edge of the porch. For a moment I was afraid he was going to fall.

"Do you consider me some kind of maniac?" he shouted.

I was beginning to, I thought. He took another swing-step back, off the porch, and into the rain. Immediately, the rain started to stream down his face again. His glasses clouded, and, behind them, his eyes seemed to drizzle.

"Just because I'm crippled," he shouted, "do you consider me some kind of maniac out in the rain?"

I didn't know what to say. I stood there staring at him. He lifted one of his crutches and pointed it up at the sky. "In weather like this," he screamed. "I'd have to be mad to be out in weather like this if I didn't have something important to tell you, something important to say."

I was glad the woman next door was at work because I was afraid he could be heard several houses away, even in the rain. I didn't know exactly what to do. I stood there staring at him.

"I really must get back to work," I began.

"Yes. Hide. Hide from the truth," he shouted, his face lifted up to the rain. "Hide from the truth."

I shut the door and pulled the dog away. The man continued to shout about truth. When I got to the front bedroom he was still standing there shouting, pointing with his crutch at my door, his face lifted back, the rain streaming off him.

I waited and watched.

Finally, he turned, pulled himself between his crutches, and splashed his way to the next house. I knew no one was home. Once, he almost fell at an uneven place in the sidewalk.

He went up the street from house to house, and I watched him. Three doors up, he began to gesture with his crutch again, his face turned up toward the rain. □

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Diann Blakely Shoaf

# THE MAN UNDER THE BED

There's a man who waits under the bed.
He is armed to the teeth, he could cut you to ribbons

and smile. Sometimes he's glimpsed
behind windows, or heard breathing outside your front hall.

(You've imagined bright knives, a stocking held tight
to your throat.) He has always been patient—

you have known it from childhood—
you can sometimes forget him for days.

Yet he sees the packed suitcase, hears the cab's horn.
He fingers steel locks, the chains drawn

across doors. You read hours in bed then,
and sip tumblers of sherry.

Your husband will be gone three days, perhaps four.

Kathleen M. Kirby

# THE PERSONAL AND THE POLITICAL: REARTICULATING THE DIFFERENCE

The connection between the personal and the political seems like it has been endlessly argued and long since resolved for political theories, particularly feminism. In asserting that the personal *is* the political, we think we have finished the argument. Yet the continuing debates over issues of subjectivity, the body, emotion, and rationality taking place along the borders of so-called American, British, and French feminism suggest that there is much still to be negotiated on the issue. Certainly, contemporary feminism was heralded in by, and gained its force from, the rallying cry that demanded the inclusion of personal issues within the domain of political consideration. This has meant that all those phenomena—masturbation, domestic violence, the beauty culture, housework—that were formerly relegated to the realm of the private (meaning inside the home, meaning "feminine") deserved to be treated as aspects of a class division, part of a social battle: they deserved inclusion within any discussion of the political, just as much as did concern over wages.

The fact that there is a relation between the personal and the political is secure. Yet the precise relation between the two terms has yet to be decisively determined. Perhaps that is good. Perhaps there needs to be continued oscillation along that boundary, continued reflection. But there are some instances in which such a lack of decisiveness on this question can prove debilitating. By examining the strategies of two writers wrestling with questions of gender, homosexuality, and power, I hope to demonstrate that while the personal is always, indeed, the political, the political is not necessarily *merely* the personal. The difference between the two should not be elided. If anything, the phrase needs to be changed: the personal must be *politicized*.

Kate Millett's book *Sita* is an autobiographical account of her love affair with another woman. Her "notebook" presents itself as an expression of the extremely painful personal sentiments of love lived and lost. One expects to find in the story some of the powerful feminist sentiment of her earlier text *Sexual Politics*, which still cannot be denied its role as a founding text of contemporary feminism. But that sentiment is relatively absent. *Sita* actually participates in what could only be called conventional romantic discourse.

> And what can I do? Passing the Mixmaster on the way to the bathroom, its aluminum bowl registering irrelevantly out of the corner of my eye. Prisoner all weekend of this empty kitchen, these meaningless objects. Why didn't I go with her down there? What a mistake that was, that little notion of independence. Nothing, I can do nothing. Am helpless, impotent, the initiative is always taken from me. She acts and I react. This is subjection. And how clever of her to have been the one to bring up the idea of "respect" last night, insisting that I did not respect her. Even mentioned the word "subjection," that we had never been equals before, that she used to feel everything revolved too much around me. She has certainly changed all that if it were ever so in the first place. But how clever to steal a march, appropriate these very complaints to herself, put me in the position of assuring her of the depth of my respect. Monstrous and feudal respect. Virtual despotism.[1]

In this passage, Kate bemoans Sita's power over her. Her complaints align her with a long tradition of "male" writers ruing their obsession with desirable female objects. This makes the text highly problematic, for several reasons. First, the narrator demonstrates no awareness that, while a lesbian and a feminist, she is participating in a wholly mascu-

[1]Millet, *Sita* (New York: Ballantine, 1977) 171.

line ideology, the very one that has subjected lesbians and feminists. The lesbian arrangement of the relationship is completely erased as the couple falls into a wholly traditional heterosexual narrative. The basis of that arrangement, and its formation along gender lines, is not questioned, though this would be an ideal place for doing so.

But there is for me (a heterosexual) an even larger problem. Kate articulates the relationship as one based on a division of power, but what she does not recognize is the difference between the two kinds of power at work. One is that of the desired and sexualized object over the desiring subject. Sita appears to have the superior power in the relationship because of Kate's dependence on her for sexual pleasure. Thus, when viewing their relationship on this personal and subjective basis, Sita, the feminine partner, appears endowed with superior power. Yet this power—one might call it the power of fascination—is one limited to the interpersonal relationship. It is a power long attributed to women, and one that is supposed to equal or outweigh any material cultural suppression they may have had to endure; one, then, that has been often called in by men to justify the continuation of imbalances between men and women. The mistake that the narrative makes is to confuse this interpersonal power of fascination with the larger forces of power at work forming gender relationships. The differences between the two are elided, making Kate feel that her subjection as a lover is the same as her subjection as a woman. Hence she brings feminist discourses to her defense—in spite of the fact that she accords herself a masculine position.

Sita, too, activates feminist discourses, claiming that Kate is subjecting her as lover and as woman. In this case, Sita is right. Sita is placed in the feminine position in the romantic discourse because she is the desired and sexualized object. If we question the source of the desired female object's attraction, we might see it as an effect of a larger cultural oppression, for it is a result of women's objectification within a masculine inscription. While her "desirability" may grant her a form of local power, she is still the loser in the molar, cultural division. And perhaps more so precisely because of her supposed interpersonal "ascendancy."

Throughout the text Kate identifies with male others (Sita's past husbands, Sita's son-in-law, Henry Miller), but the means of her identification are never made clear. Her identification is possible because she is located by the discourse of sexual desire in a masculine subject position. Kate, in the masculine position of desiring subject, perceives herself as lesser in power; in fact her position as a subject of the masculine discourse—even in a lesbian relationship—gives her superior power, the power granted male subjects. No wonder Sita complains and registers her complaints from within the discourse of women's liberation (52).

Regardless of the political convictions of the author, *Sita* is an anti-political text because it relegates discussions of power to this interpersonal sphere and wholly erases the difference between the personal and the political. Patriarchal ideology has been so long lived partly because it veils the fact of large, cultural divisions of power and insists that power is "merely" interpersonal. Thus, in relation to gender, the interpersonal sexual relationship is taken as the model for all relationships, and the continuity of oppression across subject positions is clouded. This may be one of the reasons for the limited success of the Women's Liberation Movement, a movement reflected in *Sita*, where the liberation worked toward is liberation from individuals: women try to free themselves from husbands, lovers, bosses, not recognizing that in all these cases, the oppression is linked. Hence molar power relations escape attention or are misread. Whereas power can be reversed in the interpersonal relationship, and frequently is in the sexual relationship, the larger problem of gender and the subjection of women remains.

Luce Irigaray writes in "This Sex Which Is Not One" of the power of the harem.[2] "The powers of slaves? Which are not negligible powers, moreover. For where pleasure is concerned, the master is not necessarily well served" (32). But while the concubine may appear to have a certain mesmeric power, it is in the end an insignificant power because it is relegated to the interpersonal, the realm of pleasure. *Sita* demonstrates that power rela-

[2]"This Sex Which Is Not One," *This Sex Which Is Not One*, trans. Catherine Porter (Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 1985) 23-33.

tions can be reversed in the sexual relationship with no result on power as it exists at a higher level. A local reversal of power occurring between individuals in the (hetero)sexual relationship, or any other such interpersonal locus, has no result on the larger oppression, as Irigaray records: "There remains, however, the condition of under-development arising from women's submission by and to a culture that oppresses them, uses them, makes of them a medium of exchange, with very little profit to them . . ." (32). Thus, the slaves may mock their master and the dominatrix may humiliate her customer, but the master remains master and the customer is always right. "Thus to reverse the relationship, especially in the economy of sexuality, does not seem a desirable objective" (32).

One author who has attempted to analyze the relations between the personal and the political, the molecular and the molar, is Michel Foucault. In *The History of Sexuality* Foucault writes,

> It seems to me that power must be understood in the first instance as the multiplicity of force relations immanent in the sphere in which they operate and which constitute their own organization . . . thus forming a chain or a system. . . . Power's condition of possibility, or in any case the viewpoint which permits one to understand its exercise . . . and which also makes it possible to use its mechanisms as a grid of intelligibility of the social order, must not be sought in the primary existence of a central point, in a unique source of sovereignty from which secondary and descendent forms would emanate; it is the moving substrate of force relations which, by virtue of their inequality, constantly engender states of power, but the latter are always local and unstable. The omnipresence of power: not because it has the privilege of consolidating everything under its invincible unity, but because it is produced from one moment to the next, at every point, or rather in every relation from one point to another. . . . And 'power,' insofar as it is permanent, repetitious, inert, and self-reproducing, is simply the overall effect that emerges from all these mobilities, the concatenation that rests on each of them and seeks in turn to arrest their movement.[3]

Foucault is trying to resist the view of power as a force which comes from a sovereign body or government and is imposed on the people. He is trying to account for the multiplicity and diversity of power relations and the arrayal and dispersal of power across numerous sites in society. A perceptible exercise of power, such as the oppression of women, is the result sum of all the multiple oppressions of individual women; it constitutes a "line of force" that cuts across the social landscape and exceeds the personal. In this way power comes from below, and "the personal is political." Large inequalities of power distribution are the sum of small and local inequalities. Major inequities only become visible as a result of the number and force of minor and local occurrences.

It might seem that Foucault is championing the focus on the personal level that Irigaray critiques, but his own work has always concentrated on institutions and their ability to create effects on a collective level. Foucault's focus on the collective effect of multiple operations enables more active interventions. But an explanation for the homogeneity of those divisions must also be advanced. While Foucault demonstrates little interest in ideology, there is much room for such a supplement within his formulations. A cultural oppression, while it is only the sum of individual oppressions, is the source of oppression's perpetuation; ideology ensures the continuity of oppressions at the same time that they are effected through local institutional actions. The analysis of discourse provides an opportunity to both see how discourse produces punctual effects in each enactment and to analyze the perpetuation of ideological tenets that enable a continuity of power relationships. Discursive initiatives both produce and reproduce, with production providing a site for intervention and reproduction an explanation of stability.

Political analysis and activity must concentrate on power and subjectivity as it is inscribed and determined on a larger scale in

[3]*The History of Sexuality Volume I: An Introduction*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Vintage Books, 1980) 92-93.

the discursive production and reproduction of categories, groups, signification, and meaning. A view of discourse that sees the individual as the important site of intervention disables analyses of power and therefore political action. In this mode, the "individual" functions as the nodal point and becomes the locus of intervention. That is, the individual is viewed as the origin and destination of discourse; though the discourse may be seen as existing separately in culture or as preexisting the subject, nevertheless the "individual" is taken to be the important point of intervention, rather than society or discourse itself. The personal relationship which is, in the last instance, a result of the discourses that circulate autonomously in society can seem at this low level to escape the effect of discourse and power, just as the "individual," when viewed apart from discourse, seems unique, sovereign, unitary, and autonomous.

In *The Subject of Semiotics* Kaja Silverman captures the importance of this distinction by pointing out the very different theoretical effects enabled by the difference in the terms "subject" and "individual": "The category of the subject thus calls into question the notions both of the private, and of a self synonymous with consciousness. It suggests that even desire is culturally instigated, and hence collective; and it de-centers consciousness, relegating it . . . to a purely receptive capacity."[4] To see the political as personal depends on a concept of the subject as controlling, rather than controlled by, discourse; the subject pre-exists, rather than being an effect of, discourse.

An autobiographical text like Millett's rehearses the common tendency to personalize discourse. The importance of the discourse is its importance to the people involved in the love affair; its value is its ability to express their feelings; likewise its danger is that it will not be taken seriously enough, that it will not have the desired effect on the other partner. While issues of gender, power, and sexual orientation exist on the edges of the affair, they are not considered constitutive of the affair or important to its configuration.

Millett's *Sita* performs an elision of the specific and political in favor of the individual and liberal: "Somehow she has always seemed to be a woman who might love another woman, or had, or did even then, without being what the world imagines as a lesbian" (290). The notebook presents itself as being an expression of extremely personal sentiments totally free of the influence of society and politics. The factor of lesbianism functions to increase privatization: where it could be expected to lead to a consideration of the politics of gender and power in relation to homosexuality, it works more to deny it. The lesbianism of the lovers functions not to introduce political considerations but to make such considerations inappropriate. Their lesbianism is understood to make them even more private individuals, less inscribed, and separate from politics—this in blindness to the fact that the relationship is quite thoroughly encompassed by heterosexual discourses of love and romance. Homosexuality is used to rationalize the text's highly antipolitical treatment of discourse rather than as a political problem that exceeds the personal and necessitates political consideration.

*Sita*, as an autobiographical text, invites a personalized view of discourse. But even texts that actively critique this view can be recuperated to an individualist viewpoint. This has frequently been the function of autobiographical criticism, the criticism of choice where marginal writers are concerned. Such a recuperation is visible in Taylor Stoehr's "Afterword" to Paul Goodman's *Parent's Day*[5] and "Editor's Introduction" to Goodman's *Don Juan, or, the Continuum of the Libido*.[6] In these texts, as in *Sita*, the discourses are attributed to origins in the individual, regardless of whether the text is or is not presenting itself as autobiographical. Whereas the texts of the white, straight male are seen as universal, representative, the texts of the woman, the homosexual, the man or woman of color are seen as necessarily idiosyncratic, autobiographical. While the importance of nonmarginal authors is attributed to socially legitimate effects (their texts are seen as ex-

[4]*The Subject of Semiotics* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1983) 130.

[5]Stoehr, afterword, *Parents' Day*, by Paul Goodman, ed. Taylor Stoehr (Santa Barbara: Black Sparrow Press, 1985) 257-71.

[6]Stoehr, editor's introduction, *Don Juan, or, The Continuum of the Libido*, by Paul Goodman, ed. Taylor Stoehr (Santa Barbara: Black Sparrow Press, 1985) 9-14.

pressing the "human spirit" or being part of a humanistic, didactic tradition which educates the individual reader), the marginal text is seen as containing discourses expressive of and instructive to only the local and marginal audience. The Universal Man speaks for everybody; the marginal subject is treated as separate and different. This reduces the possibility of their texts having an impact on the social body of knowledge.

Paul Goodman's *Parent's Day*, a novel with a first-person narrator, is treated by its editor, Taylor Stoehr, as an autobiographical novel. Here a familiar event—punishment and embarrassment resulting from common sexual behavior—is interpreted as an event which is only significant in the formation of an individual, "Paul Goodman." This episode—a result of the discourses of sexuality—is reduced to possessing only personal significance:

> Goodman is remembering—though he does not tell us so—the humiliations he suffered in junior high school when he was caught kissing a girl in the hall and sent to sit all day with a class of younger children, his knees pressing the bottom of a third-grader's desk. There were other incidents as well, freshly rankling after his self-analysis, so that it was easy for him to feel the justice of his cause, and not so absurd to offer his perverse motives as a clinching argument.
>
> (262)

Stoehr instigates a slippage from the first-person narrator to author to Goodman as person. He treats the novel as if it contained a one-to one correspondence with Goodman's life. "Paul Goodman" is treated as a unified identity which can be described in language, which exceeds language. There is a real Paul Goodman who exists apart from language and manipulates that language self-consciously; he is psychoanalyst and patient, not the tale itself: "The story unfolds as both the report of what happened to him and as the psychoanalysis of that report; like the telling and interpretation of a dream" (*Parent's Day* 259).

Stoehr performs a similar reading of *Don Juan*: Goodman "is the Don, exploring every nook and cranny of gratification; he is also the Commandant, brought to a pause in his second honeymoon because his love springs from sources too deep and too terrifying ever to be gratified . . ." (14). Goodman himself sees the text differently. He reads the text as a theoretical construct. In the "Author's Preface" to *Don Juan* Goodman asserts that the characters are embodiments of ideas. They are configurations of gender difference; they embody the various discourses of gender and sexuality: "And the disposition of the other characters, of the infant, the boy, the man who is a little older than the Don, and the old man—all vis a vis the Woman—is simply the machinery of chronologically explaining a germinal idea not my own" (17). The characters represent stopping points along the continuum of the libido described by Freud; Goodman is implicated in the narrative only insofar as he is structured by the same discourses as all (male) subjects of the society. Goodman thus encourages a political approach to discourse and a "discursive" approach to literature.

Stoehr's psychoanalytic approach, which initially promises access and attention to the discourses of desire and sexuality, the configuration of the subject by discourses which exist separately and prior to it, and the political importance of language as collective and depersonalized, instead instantly reflects back to Goodman, in a move toward personalization and autobiography. Stoehr gives *Don Juan* an autobiographical interpretation, even against Goodman's indications: "*Don Juan* is a novel of crisis in this ultimate sense too; that is, it unflinchingly examines the neurotic side of Goodman's own sexuality" (13). Goodman, on the other hand, describes *Don Juan* as a novel depicting "the real causes of behavior as I see them" (18). Goodman goes on to distinguish between intimate personal behavior and the social behavior of classes. The "experimental" character of Goodman's text encourages a view of the discourses of sexuality as separate from the individual.

Stoehr, in referring all the textually represented events back to the author, means not to discredit him but to raise him up as champion.

> Ironically, the audience for *Don Juan* was partly created by Goodman's own public efforts during the Sixties. He helped to

> rescue us from our terror of sexuality, to break down our fences of proprieties and self-censorship. Most of all, he enlivened us by his own example, taking for granted that "facts of life" meant *his* facts, *his* life, and were to be enjoyed. For many of us, he was our culture hero, the first public man in America who had never been "in the closet" either sexually or in any other way.
>
> (13)

Stoehr's slippage from the politically marginalized position of homosexuality to Goodman's more general liberal stance again disguises the political importance of Goodman's real location in the discourse of homosexuality: as a member of a marginal group asserting his rights he was taking a far more precarious position than as a follower of liberal politics. Goodman's location in and more importantly refusal to move from his position in the discourse of homosexuality is by far the more radical and dangerous act. Stoehr's de-emphasis of the specificity of this political act, his reconfiguration of power and emphasis instead on a more general liberal "politics," his shift from Goodman as occupying a homosexual subject position to Goodman as culture hero, all represent "Goodman" as a unitary individual and reverse the disturbing effect of Goodman's text and position. If "his facts" and "his life" are meant to denote his homosexuality, his position in a prohibited discourse, then his use of the discourse is a political move; it is an insistence that culture must acknowledge the discourses and subjects it has produced; it is a demand for power and the refusal of outcast status. But if "his facts" are only his, and have only individual significance, our picture of "human nature" merely expands while power relations remain unchanged.

In *The History of Sexuality*, Michel Foucault presents an entirely different notion of the relationship of power and discourse than the traditional one Taylor Stoehr presents here. Foucault suggests, in opposition to commonly held convictions, that the primacy given to repression and censorship in discussions of power leads to a false and limited picture of language. Foucault challenges the belief that the representation of sexuality is always a liberating activity: this view assumes that there is a truth that the work of power must deny in order to perpetuate the subjection of the people. Instead, Foucault sees a discursive activity as always indicative of power negotiation. The discursive circulation of sexuality may indicate an extended control over sexuality and the subject's body and privacy. While each discursive situation has a specificity, it is always tied up with power. This view leads away from the individualistic approach of language that Stoehr demonstrates; the deployment of discourse leads beyond "personal expression" to take a role in reforming the power relations among groups of people.

Every discursive act, in Foucault's formulation, is a strategy for power. "We must make allowance for the complex and unstable process whereby discourse can be both an instrument and an effect of power, but also a hindrance, a stumbling-block, a point of resistance and a starting point for an opposing strategy," he writes (101). Discourses can be used to enlarge or perpetuate existing imbalances of power. Their function in this way is not usually a conscious activity on the part of the group in power. Because of their collective and public status, they also can be the site, as the individual-subject and interpersonal relationship cannot, of intervention in power relations. Goodman was raising the illicit discourse of homosexuality to the level of respectability conferred by "literature"; his activity can be seen not so much as an instance of honesty, expression, and education as an instance of refusing the secondary and disempowered position that his location in this unauthorized discourse conferred. He was not so much bringing "knowledge" as Stoehr implies as demanding "power." So Goodman's text cannot be seen as exposing the dark secrets of sexuality; it must be viewed as a deployment of the discourse of desire to a political effect—an effect reversed by Stoehr's autobiographical treatment of the text.

Discourse, a social, collective phenomenon, is constitutive of power relations. Working from Foucault, Harold Beaver writes in "Homosexual Signs" that "power and discourse are inseparable. . . . Power is the right to

[7]"Homosexual Signs (In Memory of Roland Barthes)," *Critical Inquiry* 1 (1981): 107.

formulate categories, to control the moral currency, to define the nature of 'nature.'"[7] This "formulation of categories" always takes place prior to the individual. As Parveen Adams indicates in her essay "A Note on the Distinction between Gender Division and Gender Differences," subjectivities or relations on the personal level are always-already inscribed by discourses, in her example, of gender.[8] Focussing on this already-inscribed level reproduces the inscription and the power imbalances by reproducing the discourses. The point, she writes, is to intervene as that differentiation into binaries occurs and explain how difference is produced.

American feminism not infrequently makes the mistake of concentrating on the local and subjective, as *Sita* demonstrates; American feminist "liberationist" discourses and psychoanalytic theory coincide in the ways that they treat the "personal as political." Psychoanalysis, with its emphasis on the individual via the patient, sacrifices the critical importance of the term "subject." The view of the subject as a libidinous, desiring subject that appears in psychoanalytic theory focuses attention too exclusively on the individual, leaving the theory incapable of dealing with discourse as a determining factor. Treating the subject as a desiring subject rather than as a discursive subject leads to a distorted picture of power relations in society and discourages political work. In her critique of Juliet Mitchell's analysis of patriarchy and feminine subjectivity, Adams indicates that the (feminine) subject constructed by psychoanalytic discourse, and as well by "Marxist" discourses of feminism, does not give sufficient emphasis to discourses in the constitution of the subject:

> What has been argued is that the construction of femininity is theorized in such a way as to produce a coherent, unified entity, the feminine subject, albeit that is explained as an effect. To explain the structure of the unified feminine subject is taken to be tantamount to exposing the mechanisms of patriarchal ideology. It is suggested here that such an analysis makes impossible the consideration of the effectivity of a variety of systems of representation. Now in the present case it is the psychoanalytic notion of patriarchy which is used and it might be argued that this is why the effect of specific discursive practices can have no place—psychoanalysis being concerned with an unchanging structure of discourse. That is to say, that the effectivity, conscious or unconscious, of a variety of systems of representation cannot be addressed within that particular framework.
>
> This difficulty, however, is not a function of psychoanalytic theory, but rather, it is a function of the centrality of the subject in theories of ideology.
>
> (56)

Focusing on the individual, who is always already a gendered subject, bypasses the recognition of the production of that subject as gendered and forgoes attention to the discourses which produce the subject. Extrapolating from the individual and interpersonal, from the family or sexual relationship, means that the produced character of the individual or interpersonal eludes recognition.

Taylor Stoehr's analyses of Goodman's novels provide sufficient examples of this tendency. "*Parent's Day* may be regarded as a second stage in that self-analysis, a literary anatomy of his own motives and morals, performed on the living conscience. Goodman said as much . . ." (258). "From the outset he saw his book as a kind of case-history, taking himself simultaneously as patient and therapist . . ." (258). Treating the text as a psychoanalytic text—the text as self-analysis, psychoanalysis—reduces the text to its individual effects and discourages a view of the subject as produced. The popular view of psychoanalysis as the ultimate means of self-discovery leads it to be amenable to the personalization of discourse. Stoehr treats *Parent's Day* as Goodman's Odyssey, as his personal journey to self-knowledge.

Even postmodern psychoanalytic theories tend toward the personalization of discourse. Lacan's model of the subject—the "speaking subject"—as an effect of language, so promising to political projects, tends to dissolve under the great weight of attention afforded the individual in psychoanalysis; while the

[8]"A Note on the Distinction between Sexual Division and Sexual Differences," *m/f* 3 (1979): 51-57.

subject is dissolved, it remains the center of attention, to the loss of the importance of the discourse of which the subject is an effect. "Masculinity" and "femininity," or any other subject position, says Adams, "have, then, to be always already available for the individual to take up the position" (54). Adam's critique points out the fact that psychoanalytic theories, and most theories of ideology, take the existence of the discourse which forms the subject for granted and so fail to see the active production of the discourse and of the subjects which are an effect of it. The focus on the subject in this way constructs it as an already-formed and continuous subject, as a pre-existent quantity rather than an effect of language; it ceases to be the speaking subject which can have no concrete identity beyond the ephemeral "I."

By concentrating on the individual and personal, psychoanalysis is led to naturalism. Parveen Adams writes that "reality is always already apparently structured" and divided; without a theorization of discourse, these structures and divisions come to seem natural (52). The continuity of characteristics across subjects and the apparent inescapability of, for instance, a gender or race position, reaffirm the origin of those categories in genital anatomy, or skin color. Adams writes, "Categories are not fixed though they may appear to be so at any one time and a category has no necessary unity—in relation to the category woman, for example, it is indeed possible for a concrete individual to be judged a woman for some social purposes and not others" (57). When the focus of theory is on the already-constructed, already-gendered, already-heterosexualized subject; when the subject is viewed as always-already inscribed rather than continually reinscribed with every practice of signification—the categories seem to spring from natural division rather than produced differences. Felix Guattari, in his essay "Becoming a Woman," writes, "When we reduce people to categories—black or white, male or female—it is because of our own preconceptions, our need to ensure our power over them by a process of dualizing reduction."[9] The homogeneity of a category, and the perceived one-to-one correspondence of subjects to that category, establishes power over groups through the process of naturalization.

While the focus on concrete and pre-established subjects would appear to be a necessity for political practice (one must identify the oppressed group in order to work against oppression), it is actually this focus which discourages change; the subject is reproduced as a marginal subject. Alternatively, focusing on discourse separate from concrete individuals, and seeing the subject as a result of specific instances of the enactment of the discourse through time, enables political activity and transformation. Focusing political effort on the individual and interpersonal, even with the best of intentions, can lead to recuperative activities, as Fredric Jameson points out in "Pleasure: A Political Issue": "For males of good will, meanwhile, the depth-psychological part of the argument will serve mainly to reinforce that tendency to ideological *examen de conscience*, morbid introspection and *autocritique*, and the guilt trip, which . . . is so often an attractive way for the isolated left intellectual to 'work out his personal salvation.'"[10] This sort of "political" activity ceases to be political because it does not attempt to intervene in discourses as they circulate in society and affect future configurations of power.

When reading Goodman's texts, one gets the sense that the "I" representing a constituted subject is less an expression of a deepset psyche than the marker for a quantity set loose in open-ended game—in spite of the fact that his editor, Taylor Stoehr, would reattach that tag to a real historical person and close down the play. In reading Millett's *Sita*, one gets the feeling of a correspondence between the narrator and a person—in spite of the fact that the narrative itself, which carries all the earmarks of the "morbid introspection" to which Jameson refers, is enabled only by an inherited discourse. Certainly there is a relation between the personal and the political, and definitely the two need to be linked together—even collapsed. But only if the political remains ascendant. As much as they may seem otherwise, subjects—and liv-

[9]"Becoming a Woman," *Molecular Revolution: Psychiatry and Politics*, trans. Rosemary Sheed (London: Penguin, 1984) 235.

[10]"Pleasure: A Political Issue," *Formations of Pleasure* (London: Routledge and K. Paul, 1983) 7.

ing material persons—are the effects of discourses which preexist and come to form them in each punctual moment. As a result subjects are amenable to change. But change must come from the level of discourse down.

Walter Benjamin closes his well-known essay "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" by comparing Fascism, which aestheticizes politics, to Communism, which "responds by politicizing art."[11] While we would not want to go so far as to call those who personalize politics "fascists" (maybe only counter-revolutionaries) we would follow Benjamin by saying: the point is not to personalize politics. It is to politicize the personal. □

[11]"The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections*, trans. Harry Zohn, ed. Hannah Arendt (New York: Schocken, 1968) 242.

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António Ramos Rosa

# TO START OUT FROM MINERALS FROM STEEP SIDES

*Translated by Richard Zenith*

To start out from minerals from steep sides
or from smooth planes from whetted edges
to reencounter the violence of expanding lava
to cease being a point of coordinates
to break the surrounding boundaries
to cut the ties between the body and its shelters
to seek the wayward ways
where shadow opens like an ancient future
O heart that is open to the darkest land
the lamp of emptiness is your compass
Something implores perhaps the Impossible
It tries to treat its black wounds
with fragments of grass and with stone
with a bit of white silence
What I write now is like a movement
in the depths of movement and a commerce
between different kingdoms The words tremble
with a silica blood It is here
that the song begins here in the absolute absence
I am a tree of edges and knots where the earth splits
I am the stone's magnetic patience a planet's tumult and hush

# Alex Kuo

## REDUCTIONS

From where Ge was looking up at the mountains in front of him with the filled waterpack on his back, the entire forest appeared to be on fire. Fresh firefighters were lined up and ready every twenty meters, their new yellow plastic hardhats edging the blackened ground as far as he could see to his sides, anxiously waiting for their leader's whistle signal to begin in unison. He recognized some of them as his students who had come up with him on the train from Beijing, in response to the Forestry Ministry's call for volunteers to suppress a fire two months out-of-control.

He exploits this story now two winters later as he can no longer tell for sure how old he is. Ever since the directive came down from the bureau last month deducting ten years from everyone's age, Ge has been confused about his life and what he wanted to do with it. At first he welcomed the official edict, and saw it as an inspired healing of the national wound, giving back to the people the ten years they had lost to the cultural revolution, but now he isn't so sure. By now everyone's birth certificate, residence booklet, work permit, and identity card have been meticulously changed, not only erasing a decade of aberration, but also reflecting a gift of youth from the government, along with the forty kilos of cabbage which every domiciled citizen receives at the end of every harvesting season.

At twenty-one then, Ge is teaching graduate students who are thirteen years old, and of late they are begging to act that age too, screaming *Yi-Er-San-Si* as they skip rope, practice the latest disco steps, or play badminton in the hallways between classes. Some of them were with him on the wildfire in the Da Xinan Mountains two years ago when the signal was given to press the starter button for the tiny Canadian motor on their pack to begin pumping the piddly three gallons of water onto the raging forest fire. He doubts that they can remember this now, nor would they want to. In this cold month of January in Beijing, such loss is easier to see, along with the shared cabbage wasting in every quadrangle of every *hutong*.

The student in Ge's office is beginning to get nervous, alternately twisting one clenched hand inside the palm of her other. After acing the TOEFL test, she had asked Ge for advice on her application letter for admission to the medical school at Columbia. Ge is challenging her inclusion of her hobbies—stamp collecting, listening to American country music, badminton—in her letter as coy and ridiculous. She purses her lips and begins to contrive the ritual sulk, but before she can convince herself of it, Ge asks her how she can worry about such trivia when only a few short months ago more than two hundred people were shot at Tiananmen Square, the same number as had burned to death at the Da Xinan fire because the ministry did not have the foresight to evacuate them. Ge does not press the issue, however, suspecting that the ministry had committed its economic vision to validating its newly invented backpacked water pumps instead of a fire detection and warning system. He also knows such details do not make any difference, since the student will not change anything in her letter anyway, that in asking him for advice she had merely followed a formality which was not of her own design either.

Alone in his office now, Ge wonders if he should take advantage of his new age and pursue another course of study that would lead to some other profession than teaching, maybe night courses in petroleum chemistry, where he might meet someone he would like to marry. Then would she be in her twenties, or teens, he asks himself; would she wear a big pink bow in her hair, or would she have short hair; would he introduce her to his parents as a girl or a woman? He is coming closer and closer to the conclusion that the age deduction directive was a mistake, that experiences in life, however tragic and painful, cannot be erased by some administrative decree, however studied.

Furthermore, if ten years are to be deducted

from his age, exactly which ten years have been erased? If Ge is now twenty-one, does it mean that he's lost the last ten years, including the memory of the Da Xinan fire and yesterday, too; or the decade of upheaval between 1966 and 1976, as the government had intended in its lengthy deliberations, when he was in grade school and middleschool? Despite the heroic efforts of man and technology, the fire at Da Xinan burned itself out when the rainy fall weather set in, just as it had started when several lightning burns merged and defined their own course. Now the ministry is again asking for volunteers, this time to re-seed the burned-out hundreds of thousands of hectares in the spring, as if nature cannot heal itself.

Although Ge doesn't feel like going home, he buttons up his coat, puts on his gloves, and waits until he is warm enough before mounting his bicycle. Is this all there is in life, futilely arguing with a student over what she should include in her medical school application letter, mentally bashing the Forestry Ministry for playing around with its miniscule water pumps while the whole forest burned up, and now wondering which years of his life have been lost? Urging his toes down on the pedals, Ge imagines that in spite of everything, he will live on forever in the dust of stones, his memory ever shifting, no matter what is said or written, to save us our worries, our troubles, and, yes, even our sighs. □

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Julian Smith

# THE STRANGE CASE OF LARS THORWALD: ROUNDING UP THE USUAL SUSPECT IN *REAR WINDOW*

"We think Thorwald's guilty." So says one of the characters in Alfred Hitchcock's *Rear Window*, speaking of the man who is suspected of murdering his wife. Recently, when one of my students complained after seeing *Rear Window* that "they left out the scene where Thorwald killed his wife," I discovered he had expected that scene after reading the synopsis reprinted in every edition of *Halliwell's Film Guide*: "A news photographer, confined to his room by a broken leg, sees a murder committed in a room on the other side of the court." Although I have not found any other claim that L. B. Jefferies (Jeff) actually *sees* the murder committed, almost everyone who writes about Hitchcock's *Rear Window* is certain that Lars Thorwald has murdered his wife—and no one has ever said that he didn't.[1] Among the more than two dozen members of this critical lynch mob is a very distinguished Harvard philosopher who accuses Thorwald of the "murdering of his wife and dismemberment and disposition of the pieces of her body."

My purpose in this essay is not to argue that Thorwald is innocent (just for the record, I think Hitchcock wants us to believe that Thorwald is guilty); rather, I intend to point out that close examination of the film itself will not provide any concrete evidence that Thorwald killed his wife *or* that she is actually dead. In the hope that generosity on my part may result in a voluntary re-opening of the Strange Case of Lars Thorwald by the many critics who have "convicted" him without a trial, I will not identify within my text any of the critics I quote or paraphrase; instead, I will leave it to the guilty parties to re-examine the evidence.[2]

[1]David Kehr seems to be alone in taking an intentionally neutral stand on the matter of Thorwald's guilt. In the process of developing the conceit that Jeff has metaphorically "created" his neighbors, Kehr says that "in Thorwald, [Jeff] has invented a murderer, a projection of his darkest feelings, to eliminate [Lisa]" and accuses Jeff of "persecuting Thorwald for the crime that is, at least metaphorically, really his own." See "Hitchcock's Riddle," *Film Comment* 20 (May/June 1984): 13.

[2]The critics I quote or paraphrase in my text do not include the many contemporary reviewers of the 1954 film or the authors of routine plot summaries. Rather, I limit myself mainly to academic scholars and critics, many of whom have published since *Rear Window* was re-released in the early eighties. The "guilty parties" include John Belton, "The Space of *Rear Window*," in *Hitchcock's Rereleased Films*, eds. Walter Raubicheck and Walter Srebnick (Detroit: Wayne State Univ. Press, 1991) 76-94; Robert J. Benton, "Film as Dream: Alfred Hitchcock's *Rear Window*," *Psychoanalytic Review* 71 (1984): 483-500; David Bordwell, *Narration in the Fiction Film* (Madison: Univ. of Wisconsin Press, 1985); Lesley Brill, *The Hitchcock Romance: Love and Irony in Hitchcock's Films* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1988); Stanley Cavell, *"North by Northwest," Themes Out of School: Effects and Causes* (San Francisco: North Point Press, 1984); Raymond Durgnat, *The Strange Case of Alfred Hitchcock* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1974); Patricia Ferrara, "Through Hitchcock's *Rear Window* Again," *New Orleans Review* 12 (Fall 1985): 21-30; Thomas Harris, *"Rear Window* and *Blow-Up*: Hitchcock's Straightforwardness vs. Antonioni's Ambiguity," *Literature/Film Quarterly* 15.1 (1987): 60-63; Sander H. Lee, "Escape and Commitment in Hitchcock's *Rear Window*," *Post Script* 7.2 (1988): 18-28; Thomas M. Leitch, *Find the Director and Other Hitchcock Games* (Athens: Univ. of Georgia Press, 1991); Anthony J. Mazzella, "Author, Auteur: Reading *Rear Window* from Woolrich to Hitchcock," in *Hitchcock's Rereleased Films* 62-75; Tania Modleski, *The Women Who Knew Too Much: Hitchcock and Feminist Theory* (New York: Methuen, 1988); R. Barton Palmer, "The Metafictional Hitchcock: The Experience of Viewing and the Viewing of Experience in *Rear Window* and *Psycho*," *Cinema Journal* 26.2 (Winter 1986): 4-29; Ruth Perlmutter, *"Rear Window*: A Construction Story," *Journal of Film and Video* 37 (Spring 1985): 53-65; Gene D. Phillips, *Alfred Hitchcock* (Boston: G. K. Hall, 1984); Eric Rohmer and Claude Chabrol, *Hitchcock: The First Forty-Four Films* (New York: Ungar, 1979); Donald Spoto, *The Art of Alfred Hitchcock* (New York: Doubleday, 1976); Donald Spoto, *The Dark Side of Genius: The Life of Alfred Hitchcock* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1983); Robert Stam and Roberta Pearson, "Hitchcock's *Rear Window*: Reflexivity and the Critique of Voyeurism," *Enclitic* 7.1 (Spring 1983): 136-45; John Russell Taylor, *Hitch* (London: Faber and Faber, 1978); George E. Toles, "Alfred Hitchcock's *Rear Window* as Critical Allegory," *Boundary 2* 16.2/3 (Winter/Spring 1989): 225-45; Francois Truffaut, *The Films in My Life* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1985); Elizabeth Weis, *The Silent Scream: Alfred Hitchcock's Sound Track* (East Brunswick, N.J.: Fairleigh Dickinson Univ. Press, 1982); Robin Wood, "Fear of Spying," *American Film* Nov. 1982: 28-35; Robin Wood, *Hitchcock's Films* (New York: A. S. Barnes, 1969); Robin Wood, *Hitchcock's Films Revisited* (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1989); Slavoj Zizek, *Looking Awry: An Introduction to Jacques Lacan through Popular Culture* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1991).

The plot of *Rear Window* may seem too well-known to recount here, but let me, for the record, give a brief summary of the "rounding up" of Thorwald within the context of what is, after all, a romantic comedy. On Wednesday morning, we meet Jeff, a globe-trotting news photographer who is stuck in his Greenwich Village apartment with a broken leg and little to do other than watch his neighbors, who include Lars Thorwald and his bedridden wife. Jeff tells Stella, his nurse, that if he ever marries it will be to the kind of woman "who's willing to go anywhere, and do anything, and love it." On Wednesday night, after arguing with Lisa, the beautiful young woman who wants him to marry her and settle down to do studio photography, Jeff hears a woman scream and soon notices the "strange" comings and goings of Thorwald. On Thursday morning, Jeff discusses Thorwald's nocturnal activities with Stella, who concludes that Thorwald is leaving his wife. Alone, Jeff watches Thorwald wrapping a large knife and a saw in newspaper. That night, Jeff and Lisa argue about his growing suspicion that Thorwald may have killed his wife, who has not been seen (at least not by Jeff) since before he heard the scream—but as soon as Lisa gets her first glimpse of Thorwald, she apparently begins to share Jeff's suspicions. On Friday morning, Jeff tells Tom Doyle, an old friend who is also a police detective, about his suspicions. That afternoon, after checking on Thorwald, Doyle tells Jeff that Mrs. Thorwald has apparently gone to the country for her health. That night, after Doyle proclaims that "Lars Thorwald is no more a murderer than I am," Jeff and Lisa seem to accept Doyle's conclusion—until a little dog is found dead near the flower-bed Thorwald tends. On Saturday night, Jeff, Lisa, and Stella conclude that Thorwald killed the little dog because it was trying to dig up something Thorwald had buried in the flower-bed—and that something could only be *part* of Mrs. Thorwald. After she and Stella find nothing in the flower-bed, Lisa sneaks into Thorwald's apartment in search of evidence—and finds the wedding ring that she and Jeff assume belonged to Mrs. Thorwald. Later that night, Thorwald comes to Jeff's apartment, asks several questions, demands the return of the ring Lisa took, and pushes Jeff out the window. The police arrive and grab Thorwald just as Jeff falls to the ground. At that point, there is less than a minute left in the scene in which the main action of the film ends.

Let's look closely at the remainder of this scene. After telling Lisa that he is proud of her, Jeff turns to Doyle to speak his final line, a line that initiates the exposition about Thorwald on which the scene ends:

> Jeff: You got enough for a search warrant, now?
>
> Doyle: Oh, yeah, sure.

Just then, one of the detectives who grabbed Thorwald leans out of Jeff's window to tell Doyle that "Thorwald's ready to take us on a tour of the East River." Stella, who had earlier speculated with almost gruesome relish about how Thorwald had cut up his wife's body in the bathtub and spread the parts around, now whispers something in Doyle's ear, causing him to turn back to the detective leaning out of Jeff's window:

> Doyle: Did he say what was buried in the flower-bed?
>
> Detective: Yeah. He said the dog got too inquisitive, so he dug it up. It's in a hatbox over in his apartment.
>
> Doyle (to Stella): Wanta look?
>
> Stella: Oh, no thanks—I don't want any part of it.

With that line, and Stella's startled double-take, this penultimate scene ends. In the brief coda some weeks or months later, no one says anything about what happened to Thorwald.

A quarter century ago, in the course of rejecting a French critic's argument that Jeff projects his own wishes on his neighbors, one of the first Anglo-American critics to take Hitchcock seriously insisted that Thorwald is "a real man who has murdered a real woman, deposited real limbs around the country, and buried a real head in a real flower-bed." But Thorwald is only a character in a very carefully constructed fiction—and the critics victims of what I call Hitchcock's "Hatbox Trick." Talking with Francois Truffaut about

*Rear Window*, Hitchcock claimed that because "the killing presented something of a problem" (in the sense, apparently, that he did not wish to give away too much by actually showing a murder), he took "the idea of having them look for the victim's head" from British newspaper accounts of a man who killed a young woman, cut up the body, and threw the pieces out a train window, except for the head, which he burned in a fireplace. "In all cases of mutilation, you see, the biggest problem for the police is to locate the head."[3] What we need to remember here is that Hitchcock did not speak about Mrs. Thorwald's head itself, but about the *idea* of having someone *look* for the head. Once he came up with that idea, it was no longer necessary for him to provide any evidence of a murder. If there is a "real" head in the hatbox, I suspect it is the deathless head of Alfred Hitchcock himself. And if we dare to look inside the hatbox, the head will shake, the eyes will roll in vexation, the lips will purse, and the disembodied voice will admonish us: "Now you've done it—you've spoiled the MacGuffin."

In the light of Hitchcock's refusal to show or tell us what is in the hatbox, the failure of the many critics of this film to remember that they have not actually looked inside the hatbox provides a useful reminder of what happens when critics rely too heavily upon their own unexamined assumptions and inferences rather than examining how filmmakers rely upon audiences to make assumptions and inferences. In the case of *Rear Window*, reliance on faulty inference is particularly ironic, for Hitchcock's films, more than those of most directors, are haunted by the consequences of faulty assumptions by some characters about others. Even the critics who are most aware of Hitchcock's reliance on subjective perceptions seem incapable of giving Thorwald a fair trial. One such critic begins her essay on *Rear Window* with the reminder that "The dramatic locus of most Hitchcock films made between 1940 and 1964 is the mind. Hitchcock is less interested in external reality than in how it is perceived. Thus the chief stylistic tactic of [Hitchcock's] subjective films is also their major point: to show how easily a character—and the viewer for whom he is a surrogate—can misinterpret events according to his own preconceptions." Two paragraphs later, however, she concedes that "it is a mere accident that in one case [Jeff's] assumption is correct" (i.e., his assumption that Thorwald has killed his wife).

Before I go any further, let me make it clear that I don't claim to know what Thorwald "actually" did. Nor do I care that Thorwald's guilt seems far more likely in the Cornell Woolrich short story on which the film is based (in the story, Thorwald dies in a shootout with the police before he can confess to anything, but the wife's body is found and the arrest of the "other woman" is announced).[4] What I *do* know and care about is that the many critics who have written about *Rear Window*, which is one of the most closely studied of Hitchcock's films, have routinely "convicted" Thorwald of killing his wife. Though not all have accused him of all the crimes I am about to list, not one has ever questioned the off-stated claims that he killed his wife (*and* the little dog), cut up her body, hid part of it in a hatbox, and came to Jeff's apartment to kill him. Nor am I particularly surprised that the critics have ganged up on Thorwald in this way: after all, Thorwald has an unpleasant manner and a "foreign" name, he looks like a brute, he acts guilty, and he never denies having killed his wife. And while I agree with one very recent assertion that "The most telling implication of the audience's identification with Jeff is that . . . the audience wants Thorwald to have killed his wife," I am not willing to identify with the audience at every stage.

* * * * *

In order to make sense of the many claims about what happens in *Rear Window*, I will proceed by asking some basic questions about Thorwald and his actions and will then examine what the critics have to say.

—What Is Lars Thorwald's Relationship to His Wife?

[3]Francois Truffaut, *Hitchcock/Truffaut* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1984) 222.

[4]The short story is available in *Stories into Film*, eds. William Kittredge and Steven M. Krauzer (New York: Harper and Row, 1979) 132-67.

When we first see Thorwald on Wednesday morning, he comes into his apartment and goes directly to the bedroom, where his wife is in bed. She taps her watch as though to make some point about what time it is (has he come home late? early?) and they exchange what seem to be harsh words (looking on as he speaks to his editor on the phone, Jeff makes a generalization about nagging wives that seems to be inspired by what he sees). That night, we see Mrs. Thorwald, apparently alone in the apartment (the lights are out in the kitchen and living room), sitting up in bed, eating something (ice cream? cottage cheese? yogurt?) from what looks like a disposable container. A few minutes later in this scene, we discover the kitchen and living room lights on and see Thorwald preparing a tray of food, which he brings to his wife and places on her lap. After he fluffs her pillows and kisses her head, she removes a flower from the tray and tosses it aside. Leaving his wife to her meal, Thorwald goes into the living room and makes a phone call. Mrs. Thorwald gets out of bed and listens to the conversation, then seems to mock or tease Thorwald, who hangs up and dismisses her reaction with a wave of the hand. After that, we never again see anyone we can be certain is Mrs. Thorwald, though we do see (in an obvious "violation" of Jeff's point of view) a woman dressed in black, her face hidden by a large hat, leaving the apartment with Thorwald shortly before dawn the following morning.

With the help of Lisa's guess that the woman who left with Thorwald "wasn't Mrs. Thorwald—that is, not *yet*," various critics have transformed these few innocuous details into the raw material of gossip. One, for instance, insists that Mrs. Thorwald "berates [her husband's] profession" (and we all know what *that* means); a second claims that Mrs. Thorwald uses her illness to "refuse to have sex with him" and that he "telephones his girlfriend." How this second critic knows about the refusal of sex and why he is certain that Thorwald calls "his girlfriend" rather than, say, his mother or bookie, I have no idea, but he is far from alone in inventing a girlfriend or a mistress for Thorwald, who is denounced by yet another critic as "an adulterous" husband.

This kind of gossip-mongering about the Thorwalds should not be surprising, for the critics of *Rear Window* seem determined to define Jeff's neighbors in terms of their sexuality: according to the critics, Miss Lonelyhearts "fantasizes about gentlemen callers"; Miss Torso, the dancer, is "desperately seeking male companionship" (a claim that seems contrary to her actions) and is married to "a bald little man who clearly won't content her" (attention to the film reveals that she seems quite content with the gentleman in question, a cocky young soldier with a healthy appetite and a full head of hair); the "overly amorous" and "sexually hyperactive" newlyweds are "submerged in the sexual passion of the first days of marriage" and "spend all their time in bed behind closed shades" where they "make love all day"—"except when the exhausted bridegroom escapes to the window to smoke a cigarette before being called back to his conjugal duties" (I have spliced together the words of six different critics to come up with this description). And in the case of the middle-aged couple in the apartment above the Thorwalds, the gossip tends to be about their apparent lack of fecundity: they are called "childless" by more than half a dozen critics, perhaps because they have a dog which they "treat . . . as a child."

I have recited these claims about some of Jeff's other neighbors to indicate the general tendency of the critics to place lurid or titillating sexual interpretations or emphases on what they see—or to see things that are not even in the movie, as in the case of the Lacanian critic who invites us to "note the scene where Grace Kelly changes into a transparent nightgown" (there is no such transparent nightgown *or* scene: Lisa changes into an opaque nightgown in the ellipsis *between* scenes). I won't bother to comment on the trendy claims that Jeff's reluctance to marry Lisa is a sign of sexual immaturity, or that his broken leg signals sexual impotence or castration, or that the huge cast on his leg is somehow phallic (don't expect consistency from these critics), but I can't let pass the pathologically silly claims that Jeff's neighbors are "a pathological collection of deformed lovers" and that Jeff's "voyeurism goes hand in hand with an absorbing fear of mature sexuality. Indeed, the film begins by hinting at a serious case of

psychosexual pathology. The first image of [Jeff], asleep with hand on thigh, is quietly masturbatory, as if he were an invalid who had just abused himself in the dark." In a critical system in which the placement of a sleeping man's hand on his lap invites speculation about masturbation, a critical system in which masturbation itself (whether actual or imagined by the critic) signifies a "serious case of psychosexual pathology," it is no wonder that Thorwald (whose wife is seen in bed alone, eating alone, and "rejecting" his flower) is accused of being a sex-starved maniac.

—Is Mrs. Thorwald Really Dead?

This question is never asked by Hitchcock's critics. Nor do they ask why Hitchcock does not have Lieutenant Doyle follow up on the information that a woman who identified herself as "Mrs. Anna Thorwald" picked up the trunk that Thorwald shipped to the upstate town to which that invalid lady has supposedly repaired for her health. To ask such questions about *Rear Window* is as useless as asking why the marauding Indians in *Stagecoach* don't simply shoot one of the horses pulling the stagecoach if they really want to stop *that* vehicle. Speculation about Thorwald's guilt keeps Hitchcock's vehicle moving; finding Mrs. Thorwald alive would bring everything to a crashing halt.

—Did Thorwald Kill His Wife?

Even the critic who is most careful in examining the evidence cannot avoid ending with an indictment: "That Thorwald has committed murder seems unlikely in Scene 4 [which ends a few seconds after Jeff hears a woman's scream followed by a crash], more likely after Jeff pleads his case [to Lisa, then to Doyle], less likely after Doyle's deflating evidence, more likely after the neighbors' dog is murdered, and virtually certain after Jeff discovers something was buried in the garden." After reminding us that "the murder hypothesis, however unlikely in real life, is highly likely in a Hitchcock film," this critic concludes that after what he calls the "murder" of the dog, "the murder inference is virtually inescapable [because] it explains more than any other candidate."

—Ah, But *Was* the Dog *Murdered* and Did Thorwald Do It?

No critic bothers to ask this question or even to consider the possibility that the dog died by accident or that it was killed by another neighbor (one tired of stepping in its excrement, perhaps). There is nothing wrong with not asking this question—but it *is*, in the absence of evidence, terribly wrong to assert without qualification that Thorwald killed the dog.

—How Did Thorwald Kill the Dog?

There is some disagreement among the experts on this point: Miss Lonelyhearts, whose expertise as a canine pathologist is not established, stoops beside the dog and announces without hesitation (*or* an autopsy) that "It's been strangled—and the neck is broken"; critics in three different countries think it was poisoned.

—Why Did Thorwald Kill the Dog?

The standard answer runs along these lines: "the dog was a danger to the murderer [so] he killed it" or it "was murdered by Thorwald because it was digging in the flower garden where evidence was buried (the dog who 'knew too much,' as Lisa puts it)." The standard answer invites another question: if Thorwald removed the "evidence" from the garden and put it in the hatbox in his apartment, why would he bother to kill the dog? At the risk of sounding like Lieutenant Doyle, who is accused of having the kind of "flat-footed vision of reality . . . which insists on evidence," I insist on pointing out that there is no evidence Thorwald did anything to the dog.

What "really" happened to the dog? The answer should be obvious: Hitchcock "killed" the dog in order to get Jeff and Lisa's suspicions *and* the narrative back on track. The death of the dog is a matter of plot convenience; blaming it on Thorwald provides a shortcut for busy critics in a hurry to pass through the arid wastelands of their plot synopses. As the busy Captain Renault says in *Casablanca*, "Round up the usual suspects."

—Why Did Thorwald Kill His Wife?

When I recently put this question to a group of film students just after they saw *Rear Window*, most asserted that he was tired of taking care of his nagging, invalid wife and wanted to be with his girlfriend (remember her?). Except for one recent critic who sees Thorwald involved in "a noirish crime . . . which reworks the murderous love triangles of James M. Cain," no critic cites the girlfriend as a motive—and only four bother to supply a motive: one finds in Thorwald "the suppressed rage of the henpecked man who finally turned and slew his tormentrice" (after claiming that Mrs. Thorwald "drove her husband to chop her up into small pieces" and calling Thorwald "a passionate man [who] has lived a dog's life," this critic pleads for mercy with the amazing testimony that "only once has his latent violence got the upper hand"); a second critic (female, oddly enough) also places blame on the victim with the claim that "It is [the wife's] perpetual nearness—she is an invalid—that presumably drives him to murder her"; a third critic seems to hint that it is the wife's fault when he calls Thorwald "a man capable of murdering a helpless if maddening woman"; and a fourth opts for the totally nebulous: "Thorwald has chosen to kill another human rather than face up to his troubles responsibly."

—How Did Thorwald Kill His Wife?

No one answers this question—but more than a few have opinions about the *quality* or *style* of the act: one critic describes a "macabre yet pathetic marital murder"; another refers to "Thorwald's ugly deed"; a third, who sees Thorwald "washing [an] axe" *I've* never seen, uses the adjectives "brutal," "extreme and hideous," and throws in an adverb: "peculiarly hideous"; a fourth places the act in the bathroom "where blood . . . splattered when Thorwald murdered his wife and cut her up in pieces." Most recently, we learn that "the murder of Mrs. Thorwald in the film is far more violent than its source in the story" (a meaningless claim in that we don't know how violent it was in the story).

—When Did Thorwald Kill His Wife?

One critic says, "We hear a scream followed by a crash. Only later do we realize that this is the sound of Thorwald killing his wife." Others say, "We hear a crash and a scream which we later learn to have signalled the demise of Mrs. Thorwald." I think what is being signalled here is that the movie, so quiet up to this point, is about to change direction—is about to turn into the kind of "thriller" we expect from Hitchcock.

The scream in the night is a variation on the Hatbox Trick: just as we don't know what's in the hatbox, we have no way of knowing who screamed—or why. We can, however, trace the scream back through the screenplay to its source. In the screenplay, Jeff hears a dog howl shortly after Lisa leaves him on Wednesday night: "Jeff smiles a little, but as the howl continues, his expression sobers. His eyes begin to scan the neighborhood, as if looking for the source. He fails to find it, and sits there, puzzled and disturbed. The scene, and the sound of the dog: FADE OUT."[5] The ominous howling of the dog, a conventional movie omen of death (and one Hitchcock used in *Secret Agent*), has a clear source in Woolrich's short story, where Sam, a stereotypically superstitious black servant, tells Jeff that the noisy chirping of a cricket signals a nearby death. Immediately after Sam leaves, Jeff begins to notice the "strange" activities of Thorwald. In the film, the noisy cricket and howling dog have been replaced by the abrupt scream of a woman that comes thirty-one minutes into the movie and is elegantly balanced by a second scream, fifty-one minutes later, that signals the discovery of the dead dog. Those two screams, which serve as conventional plot points at the end of the first and second acts, first trigger Jeff's curiosity about Thorwald, then reinforce his suspicions.

—What Did Thorwald Do with His Wife's Body?

This question sends many critics into high gear, especially one feminist who finds in *Rear Window* "the murder and dismemberment that result from marriage," "cut-up pieces of the psychosexual narrative with its

[5]Here and elsewhere, references to John Michael Hayes' screenplay for *Rear Window* are to the unpublished "Final White Script," dated 1 Dec. 1953, and available from Script City (8033 Sunset Boulevard, Suite 1500, Hollywood, Calif. 90046).

metaphor of mutilation," "gory details of violence against women," and "tropes of dismemberment, decapitation and castration—from the materialization [sic!] of the murdered wife's head to references of parts of women (Miss Torso and the headless female sculpture).[6] Another feminist critic, having asserted that Thorwald "murdered his wife and cut her up in pieces," tries to spread the blame around by claiming that "Jeff's impairment—his helplessness, passivity, and invalidism" is the source of the "fantasy of female dismemberment that pervades the film," then concludes that "Of course, the most brutal act of all is Thorwald's butchering of his wife's body—an act devoutly desired by Jeff—and later, by Lisa herself." What this critic *probably* means is that Jeff and Lisa desire to find evidence that Mrs. Thorwald is dead, not that they desire the "brutal act" of spouse-butchering itself.

Among the male critics, one accuses Thorwald of "cutting her up in little bits and distributing them around the country," a second says he "dismembers his wife's body and parcels out the limbs to various sections of the city," a third is certain he "chops her up to fit his fridge" before he "disposes of the body in nightly packages," a fourth testifies to "physical dismemberment" and the "scattered remnants issuing from his murderous rage," and a fifth reaches for poetry: "Mrs. Thorwald's body—chopped into portable pieces—haunts the entire movie without being shown. Thus the woman's mutilated body becomes the emblem of the sight too terrible to see."

To understand how presumably reliable and otherwise responsible critics come to maintain with such relish that Thorwald is a marital cut-up, it is useful to remember that speculation about the fate of Mrs. Thorwald's body is scattered through the narrative like the bits and pieces of the corpse imagined by the critics. On Thursday night, Jeff begins the process when he notices Miss Torso brushing crumbs from her bosom as she eats a snack. "Just how would you *begin* to cut up a human body?" he muses aloud. The next morning, Stella puts Jeff off his breakfast by wondering aloud, "Now just where do you suppose he cut her up?" On Saturday night, Stella speculates that Mrs. Thorwald is "scattered all over town." And later that night, when Lisa and Stella fail to find body parts buried in the garden, Jeff smoothly converts the *absence* of evidence into "proof" that something was removed from the garden, "Something a dog could scent." Inspired by this leap of faith, Jeff reinterprets Thorwald's nocturnal trips with his sample case as a sign Thorwald was removing his wife "in sections." It is only a short step for a critic to forget the source and context of such information and convert Jeff's speculation into an apparently factual statement that "Thorwald [carries] parts of his wife's body out in his samples case."

By the time the detective in Jeff's window announces that "Thorwald's ready to take us on a tour of the East River," and that there is something "in a hatbox" in his apartment, it is very hard for the audience (*and* the critics) to resist the temptation to assume that Thorwald has confessed to murdering and dismembering his wife. But how do we know it was Mrs. Thorwald "in sections" in the sample case, in the garden, in the East River, and in the hatbox—and not drugs, counterfeit money, stolen jewelry, military secrets, or dusty wine bottles full of uranium ore left over from *Notorious*?

—Why Did Thorwald Come to Jeff's Apartment?

The few critics who address this issue all ascribe a murderous intent to Thorwald. Listen to the most persuasive of the bunch: "up until this moment there is the possibility that Thorwald might really be innocent—that the evidence bears another interpretation. But when Thorwald moves to attack Jeff, there can no longer be any doubt: He is a murderer and he wants to kill Jeff." Another critic mistakenly remembers Thorwald delivering a moral lesson of sorts: "For, as the murderer protests, if Jeff hadn't pried, he would have gotten away with it, and wouldn't have had to commit the murder which he is now about to commit, i.e. of Jeff. The murderer maintains that Jeff's curiosity killed Jeff." This critic then concludes the lesson with Thorwald pushing Jeff "through a window into midair in a wheelchair," a tremendous improvement

[6]The "headless female sculpture" to which this critic refers is a genderless abstract work identified by its creator as a representation of "hunger."

on the chairless defenestration that Hitchcock was content to show.[7]

For a man supposedly bent on murder, Thorwald seems to be oddly talkative. Three times he demands the same thing of Jeff: "What do you want of me?"; "What is it you want?"; "Tell me what you want!" Although Thorwald admits that Lisa *could* have turned him in to the police, he does not indicate *what* she could have turned him in *for*. The closest Thorwald comes to betraying what bothers him is when he demands the return of the ring Lisa took from his apartment.

Which brings me to the "problem" of the ring Thorwald wants to recover. Here is a state-of-the-art critical commentary on the meaning of the ring: "Lisa concludes that Mrs. Thorwald *must* have been murdered rather than, as Tom Doyle believes, sent on a trip because no woman would leave behind her favorite purse (to say nothing of her wedding ring)." But how does Lisa know that the purse *or* the wedding ring actually belonged to Mrs. Thorwald? And does Lisa's generalization that no woman would leave behind her wedding ring apply to a woman who intends to divorce her husband and does not want to keep the ring he gave her?

The wedding ring, I suggest, is nothing more than another MacGuffin, something for Lisa *and* Thorwald to go in search of. For all we know, Thorwald may want it back because it ties him to some other crime. Only when Jeff says that "the police have [the ring] now" does Thorwald begin to move away from the door and toward Jeff. Whereas the screenplay contains a line that makes it clear Thorwald intends to kill Jeff ("If the police get *me*—*you* won't be around to laugh!"), in the film Thorwald now says nothing, leaving Jeff and the audience to fear for the worst.

And that, I argue, is at the heart of this film: getting us to fear for the worst so that we will join Jeff and Lisa in rounding up the usual suspect.

—What Happened to Thorwald after He Was Arrested?

Only two critics have addressed this question, one quickly and in passing ("If [Jeff] hadn't spied on his neighbors, a murderer would have gone free"), the other with a series of claims spread over several pages: "convinced that Lars Thorwald has murdered his wife, Jeff desires to have justice done, a goal he eventually attains" when he traps Thorwald, who "eventually confesses to his wife's murder," after which he "is processed by the machinery of social justice." Wrong, dead wrong: the film itself contains no actual confession by Thorwald to a specific crime—nor is there any indication of any legal process after the implied "arrest" of Lars Thorwald. I suspect that if the Strange Case of Lars Thorwald ever got to court, it would probably have to be thrown out—unless, of course, there really was something incriminating in that hatbox.

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Shortly after Doyle leaves on Friday night, Lisa chides herself and Jeff for being disappointed about the news that Mrs. Thorwald seems to be alive and well in some upstate town where she has reportedly gone for her health: "You and me with long faces, plunged into despair because we find out that a man *didn't* kill his wife. We're two of the most frightening ghouls I've ever known." Just as frightening are the critical ghouls who feed off the "corpse" of Mrs. Thorwald. Listen to a critic who has condemned Thorwald in two

[7]The mistake about the wheelchair is typical of careless attention to the details of the film. Although Jeff prints out Thorwald's name for all to see, some critics spell it "Torwald," "Thorwold," "Thorvald," and "Thornwalt"; although Jeff's last name can be read on his cast, critics frequently spell it without the middle "E." Although Thorwald gets into Jeff's unlocked apartment like everyone else (he simply opens the door and walks in), he is accused of breaking in. One critic moves Jeff's Greenwich Village neighborhood (a hodgepodge of buildings of different ages, sizes, and styles) to a "housing development" on the "lower East side"; another sees Jeff "living out of a suitcase in a lower class apartment" (I would say that his comfortably middle-class apartment seems a permanent residence). The composer is called an alcoholic (we see him drunk *once*) with a serious creative block (despite the fact that he is first heard vamping his "Lisa" theme on Wednesday and arranging it with other musicians on Saturday—quick work for someone with a creative block). The composer is also accused of falling in love with Miss Lonelyhearts "as he completes his composition" (they are seen together for the first time only after his new song has been recorded—and even then there is no evidence he loves her). Miss Lonelyhearts, according to several critics, is saved from suicide by Jeff (actually, she is saved when she is distracted by the composer's song).

thick studies of Hitchcock's work: "Hitchcock distracted himself by directing, between October 18 and 22 [1956], his least distinguished teleplay, a pallid variation on *Rear Window* called *Mr. Blanchard's Secret*. In this a suspicious observer believes--wrongly, as it turns out—that her neighbor has killed his wife. Nothing happens, either in the story or in the sensibilities of the audience." "Nothing happens"? *We* discover that a woman is still alive, that her husband was the victim of a busybody, and *that's* "nothing"?

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While it may be tempting to dismiss the critical certainty about Thorwald's guilt as a matter of no great importance, as a harmless result of conventional plot or story inferences invited and expected by Hitchcock, I would argue that the lynching of Lars Thorwald by the critics is significant in terms of the political and cultural mood of the times in which *Rear Window* was made. Consider the strange case of the two critics who compare Jeff's snooping into the affairs of Thorwald to the anti-Communist fervor of the early 'fifties: "McCarthyism, after all, is the antithesis of neighborliness; it treats every neighbor as a potential other, alien, spy. . . . [Jeff] is an anonymous accuser whose suspicions *happen to be correct* [my emphasis], but the object of his hostile gaze might easily have been as innocent as Father Logan in *I Confess* or Christopher Emmanuel Balestrero in *The Wrong Man*." Having placed Thorwald in the unfriendly neighborhood of Hitchcock's "wrong man" theme, these critics forgot to examine the evidence against him or to consider that the narrative energy expanded in clearing the "wrong man" when he is a central character (as in *The Lodger, The Thirty-Nine Steps, Saboteur, Spellbound, Strangers on a Train, To Catch a Thief, North by Northwest*, and *Frenzy*, to name some other examples) might not be worth the trouble in the case of a secondary or tertiary character like Lars Thorwald. In their brief reference to McCarthyism, these critics remind us that Thorwald might be studied as an innocent victim of witchhunting hysteria —as a scapegoat persecuted in the name of political or social consensus. How strange it is that, having come so close, they abandon Thorwald to the untender mercies of Jeff, the police, the critics, and the rest of the mob. □

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John Mosier

# BACK TO THE BASIC INSTINCTS: CANNES 1992

## 1. Adam Smith Visits the Côte d'Azure

For 1992, the forty-fifth year of the festival, there were sweeping and largely unremarked changes which affected almost every part of the world's largest and most important cinematic event. These changes present the opportunity to discuss what its present management, led by Gilles Jacob, is apparently trying to do, how they see world film, and, how the world's film critics see film. Although much of this discussion is devoted to matters outside of aesthetics, they have an enormous amount of bearing on how films are perceived and written about.

The event most noted was the hopefully final move of the *Quinzaine des Realisateurs* from its temporary camp in the Palais des Festivals, now forever known as "the bunker," to a lavishly appointed screening room deep underground in the new Noga Hilton, built on the site of the *ancien palais*.

Back in the pre-bunker years, i.e., before 1983, the *Quinzaine* screenings were held in the Star theater complex on rue d'Antibes, and not in the old palais. This was because the *Quinzaine* was not a part of the "official" festival. After the failure to pronounce the word *Cannes* correctly, the most misunderstood part of the festival is its organization. "Official" Cannes consists of two components: the competition section and an official non-competitive section which since 1978 has been called *Un certain regard*.

In 1968, after the collapse of the festival, and much of France, separately administered events were inaugurated to be held in parallel with the festival: the *Quinzaine des Realisateurs*, or Directors Fortnight, and the *Semaine de la Critique*, or Critics Week. As the names suggest, the films would be selected by a group representing directors and critics. A third parallel event was added devoted to the French cinema, presumably in anticipation of that dreaded day when no French film would make it into the other events.

One supposes originally there was nice Gallic logic here: the management of the "official" festival would select the most important films and give the best ones prizes, using *Un certain regard* as the repository for experimental, documentary, or other kinds of films which, while not suitable for competition, would be worthy of inclusion in the official festival. The other three events would use their own selection procedures, presumably selecting the kinds of smaller more intimate films that only dedicated bands of cinéphiles would be interested in seeing.

Initially this may have worked perfectly, but by 1978, when Gilles Jacob had taken over the management of the official festival, several events occurred, which, taken together, changed Cannes dramatically. Jacob became seriously concerned that younger, less established directors needed the benefit of the glamour of Cannes if the cinema was to keep rejuvenating itself. Or maybe he was concerned about the number of significant or important directors, e.g., Bernardo Bertolucci, whose works had first been shown in the *Quinzaine* or the *Semaine*.

So after 1978 we began to see films in the competition section from new directors, including those for whom, like Susan Seidelman, the film (*Smithereens*) was her first feature film. In effect, for whatever reason, Jacob began competing with Pierre Deleau, who was programming for the *Quinzaine*. This competition was exacerbated, in 1980, by the collapse of the *Semaine*. For the first decade of its existence, it had been administered by the president of the French Film Critics Association, Vera Volmane, who was well able to hold her own against Deleau (and, as the literary director of Andrzej Wajda's film unit once confessed, every film critic and festival director in the world). But when she retired, the *Semaine* stopped being competitive. So the *Quinzaine* was able to rise to pre-eminence unchecked.

Volmane had the *Semaine* screenings inside the old palais, forcing the *Quinzaine* out into a commercial theater. Although this was a

shrewd move on her part, with time, Deleau, who from the first was showing sixteen to eighteen feature films to her six or seven, began to capitalize on the growing mood of the 1980s.

For intellectuals, the secret word wasn't greed or ostentation, despite what eccentric hacks like Oliver Stone would say; it was being on the inside of things, being one of the cognoscenti who could look down on the crowd of the uninitiated. And the *Quinzaine* possessed the ultimate cachet. Not only was it a "secret" part of the festival, with its screenings held blocks away, but they were held in a small screening room, and this screening room had perhaps the ultimate symbol for any film festival, a secret unmarked entrance at the back. So the premieres of the *Quinzaine* were the most exclusive part of the festival. If you were a professional journalist working for a major paper, you could get into all of the screenings, even the ones at night where everyone wore *tenue de soiree* (assuming you had such). But you couldn't get into the *Quinzaine* screenings unless someone told you where the entrance was.

The world's film critics being what they are, i.e., masochistic snobs, the *Quinzaine's* stature was assured, while all of those things that the *Semaine* did that were decent and logical, like giving priority to the film critics for each premiere, was of course repaid with the gratitude one would expect from such people. And after Volmane's retirement, none of this made any difference: the *Semaine* no longer had any films to show of any real interest.

It's a characteristic of competition that some entities are unable to compete, while others thrive. In a free market, the *Semaine* would have gone bankrupt. But Cannes, as everything French, is a series of markets where the competitors are subsidized. The Semaine didn't go broke. It did what all noncompetitive entities do, and redefined its goals, becoming a kind of high school film society cum mutual admiration society. This sounds harsh, but from 1980 or so on (and perhaps even a year or so earlier) there were no directors in the *Semaine* who went on to do anything substantial as filmmakers. The Semaine became a dead end. People made a film, showed it there, and then imitated the worker in *The Bicycle Thief.*

At this point, the *Quinzaine* looked like the terminator of film festivals. When official Cannes moved into the bunker, the Fortnight took over the old palais and started showing films in the same auditorium where the official competition events had been screened before the move. Now all those people over the years who had never actually been able to get into the screenings could, and did. The bunker was riddled with problems, and the official selection during 1983 and 1984 wasn't great either, so the *Quinzaine* profited. In the comforting halo of its fame, all sorts of young directors got their start, i.e., Spike Lee with *She's Gotta Have It.*

But a new competitor loomed, the most ambiguous and poorly understood part of the festival, the *Un certain regard* section, where Jacob put everything he wanted to show but couldn't for some reason see a way to feature in the competition. Given the fact that the official competition was already showing films *hors competition* but inside the "official" selection, the need for this additional film depository might seem gratuitous. But its existence proved fortuitous, because slowly *Un certain regard* was creeping up on the "real" competition, i.e., the *Quinzaine.*

In 1978 there was Fassbinder's *Despair,* with Dirke Bogarde, and with each year that followed the list of significant or exciting directors grew. If, by 1986, the *Quinzaine* was arguably the second or third most important film festival in the world, a tough competitor for Venice and Berlin all on its own, the eighteen or so films in un certain regard were a more interesting package than anything you were likely to see in one of the minor festivals elsewhere, and frequently they were more intriguing for anyone seriously interested in the cinema than what was being shown in the official selection. By 1990, *Un certain regard* was looking like Jacob's Frankenstein to Deleau's Terminator, competition for both the Fortnight and the Competition.

By about 1987 or so, Cannes was three big competing festivals. When critics started whining on about how there weren't any good films being shown, their examples were always drawn from the competition section of the "official" part of the festival. This was particularly true of the English language press, who alternated between ignoring the

parallel events completely (usually out of ignorance) or suggesting they had discovered a small intimate film seen only by a handful of cognoscenti, at a time when the Fortnight and *Un certain regard* had multiple screenings of their films in auditoria each seating a good two thousand people. This small intimate film from Burkina Faso or Quebec or New Zealand the critic was gushing about had been seen by about five thousand other people working in the industry.

Then, in 1990, bad news for Deleau and the Terminator. The old palais was torn down to make place for a Hilton hotel, and the Fortnight and *Un certain regard* both had to make do with the infamous *salle Debussy*, about which the only good thing that can be said is that it's better than the room it replaced, which wasn't air conditioned (and still isn't).

So in 1992, its odyssey over, the *Quinzaine* was now out of the bunker and installed in the middle of the *croisette*, the long ocean-front boulevard of Cannes, in a miniaturized version of the old palais main auditoria. It was good to see the event back on independent turf, too soon to say anything very favorable about the new room except that the location is horrible, the screenings are jammed with cinéphiles desperate to discover that small intimate masterpiece they can hijack to film festivals in San Diego or Bratislava, and there doesn't seem to be any way of exiting the theater back into the lobby.

But there it was, back in its full glory, opening up with a peculiar Mexican film which suggested right off the bat that father-daughter incest was just terrific for the teenage heroine, whose main occupation was blowing flames out of her mouth in a circus so bedraggled it made Kusturica's gypsy settlements in *Time of the Gypsies* look like Beverly Hills. I'm not persuaded that Dana Rothberg's *Angel of Fire* is a very good film, and its chances for distribution are weak, but it certainly sets a new standard for handling incest with aplomb. If Verhoeven wanted some real sexual scandals on which to base a movie (in a controversial but rather shrewd move, Jacob had selected *Basic Instinct* to open the festival), he should have gone to Mexico instead of putting up with Joe Eszterhas' multimillion dollar script.

Coincident with the move, the French finally gave up on the traditional *Perspectifs de Cinema Français* series, in which all the French films not good enough to be selected for some other part of the festival were roped together and shown on their own. It was gobbled up by the new Fortnight, tagged as *Cinemas en France*, and downscaled to about the size it merits. Anyone who can't understand why *Basic Instincts* was setting box office records in Paris should take a healthy dose of contemporary French cinema.

All of this is not to imply there were fewer films being shown. Quite the contrary: the official competition section of the festival introduced new screenings on a wholesale basis this year, bringing to its logical conclusion the confusion that has always existed regarding this, the most glamorous and visible part of the festival. If you thought the division of Cannes into its various components was confusing, couldn't believe there was really a secret entrance for the Fortnight, can't fathom in the least why critics could fail to locate entire portions of the festival, read on.

Once upon a time, the only films shown in the official competition section were those films in competition for the prizes. But then, some temperamental but shrewd director told the festival he would let his new film be shown, but not in competition. And this director wasn't just a prima donna who didn't want to subject himself to competition; he was a director of some stature, someone like, say, Woody Allen.

Woody Allen wasn't the first of the prima donnas to demand a slot in the "official competition" section without having to face the rigors of competition (although he was demanding this privilege way back in the 1980s), but the idea spread. For almost a decade we've had the anomaly of the "out of competition" film screened in the "official competition" section of the festival.

Then there were the special screenings, or *seances speciales*. Once upon a time, these were limited to such choice morsels as Tarkovsky's *Stalker*, which was shown almost unannounced, as a "film surprise." In Tarkovsky's case, there were political reasons why this should happen. Likewise, one supposes, with the restored print of Griffith's *Intolerance* that was shown as the opener one year. A nice way of celebrating the festival's dedication to the cinema, not the sort of thing you could dump off in *Un certain regard* with

strange works from Raul Ruiz or Fassbinder, and certainly not something you could enter into competition, as even the dimmest Hollywood producer or National Public Radio critic knows Griffith wouldn't be able to collect his prize.

But over the years there has been a tendency to expand this part of the festival. So in 1992 we had the "competition," this time with everything actually competing; no less than ten *seances speciales;* the *Un certain regard;* and then, what's this, it's, why it's *Regards sur le cinema nordique.* A rather stingy regard, by the way, since there were only four films, one from (guess what, Finland doesn't count) each of the four Nordic countries.

Nor had the festival found ten new films by Tarkovsky, Griffith, or Woody Allen. There was a retrospective on Blake Edwards, who is now, we are being told, a Hollywood outcast, a sort of slimmed down comedic version of Orson Welles, along with some more serious works of the cinema as *Welles' Othello, Pather Panchali, and John Cassavetes' Opening Night,* together with a mixed bag that defies description.

There was *Beauty and the Beast.* So, well, these other directors are important, and they're dead, as is Nordic cinema (despite the fact that Bille August's *The Best Intentions* won the grand prize--it's still very dead, all right?). Animation is always a special category, important but not quite right. So OK. But what about Vincent Ward's over two hours of unfinished film, *A Map of the Human Heart*? Who is Vincent Ward? A rhetorical question, to be sure, but he's scarcely an artist of such stature that anyone wants to see his unfinished work (unless perhaps to prevent it from being finished, or in this case, made still longer).

Not to belabor the point, it appears as though Gilles Jacob, not content with presiding over the official part of the most important film festival in the nearer galaxies, feels the need to expand in new directions, leaving the *Quinzaine* and the *Un certain regard* to battle it out with the lesser festivals for top dog.

But underneath the almost comic confusion of events, auteurs, and tastes, there's a serious point. The preeminence of Cannes, by now uncontested and almost unremarked, in marked contrast to a decade ago, is almost exclusively a function of this unparalleled and unique sense of competition among the various parts of the festival. What has happened is that a small group of extremely talented people with drastically differing ideas about cinema have been turned loose to program for an event, the end result being they regard themselves as being in competition for some kind of world film programming prize. The result is funny, exasperating, and a complete overload of the senses. But it has made Cannes an entirely different order of festival from Berlin or Venice.

## 2. The Dead Hand of the Invisible Critic Writes Once More

As the festival has grown, so has the coverage of it. Despite global warming and the global recession, and the lack of state subsidies to provide the *croisette* with large delegations from socialist countries. The word coverage generally implies the flow of information from the press to the outside world; whatever the increase there, it is nothing like the flow inside the festival. Once upon a time, there were two daily journals that covered the festival. One, published in French by the staff of France's professional media magazine, *Le Film Français,* and the other published by Screen International. Then there were the issues of *Variety* that came out during the festival. There were supplements in the major French publications, of course, but these were actually intended for their subscribers in the general public.

By 1992 there were, published on a daily basis, *Le Cinema Français, Screen International, Moving Pictures International, The Business of Film, Foyer, The Hollywood Reporter,* and the daily newsletter from the festival itself, *Le Festival.* There were also countless "special Cannes issues" of every French publication imaginable, everything ever published in Scandinavia, Australia, Benelux, and New Zealand in the last year about film, annual guides to everyone's national cinema, bulletins and programs from other film festivals, announcements from obscure European media bodies worried about the absence of Hispanic soap operas on Swedish television, and the like.

And this is neglecting all the continuous television and radio reportage generated inside the bunker and beamed all over . . . town.

When *Variety*, owing to its continuing editorial mismanagement and ineptitude, was forced to suspend its brief fling at producing a daily, there wasn't even a blank space on the racks where it had once been, so bountiful were the other publications. The only reminder that once upon a time there was a daily *Variety* at Cannes was a forlornly abandoned booth in the lobby of the Carlton hotel.

The television coverage, which dates from only a few years back, is interesting. Under the glamour and the glitz, Cannes has become a very high tech enterprise. The French have scarcely led the world in the development of new technology; but they have very definitely led the world in the widespread dissemination of new technologies for the bourgeoisie. Citröen and Dassault aside, this is not a nation that rushes madly after the new.

But suddenly, about 1986, there was a complete television network inside the bunker and elsewhere. Equally suddenly, in 1990, all the major news networks were piped into the third floor of the bunker, reserved exclusively for the press. One was confronted with the spectacle of two German news channels both forecasting the weather simultaneously for the same time period, but with totally different weather. If you lived in the United States and thought your local weather forecaster was bad, welcome to European television.

Originally the television coverage was designed to relay the press conferences to those people who, forewarned, didn't go. In time of course, this produced a wonderfully ironic situation: everyone with enough sense to ask a decent question did something else while watching the press conference via monitor. Their absence enabled the more brain dead members of the press corps to ask their own questions (which meant, and here's the beauty of it) the people who should have been asking the questions sat around watching the answers to the questions that should never have been asked. As you can see, Cannes was light years ahead of the new trend in media criticism, in which members of the media sit around deploring the behavior of the rest of the media.

In subsequent years the coverage expanded, and we now have the ultimate: a standard cable program display which gives you a schedule of events. The main event that comes on each night is titled, simply, "the stairs." That's right. Safe inside the bunker, you can watch celebrities ascend the stairs to the auditorium. One supposes this gives the members of the press corps who were the butt of the press conferences someone they can now condescend to in turn. The rest of the world sees tightly edited footage which amply reinforces the notion of glitter and glamour. But the other 90% of the gala audience looks like a reunion of a minor Bulgarian fire department, or senior prom night in a Nebraska high school, with dresses chosen by and possibly for the colorblind, unironed smoking jackets several sizes too small (or large), costumes hastily pulled off the rack from some fashion boutique. It's a bewildering mixture of the nasty and the comic, the only common denominator being that its inappropriate for the occasion.

But there's a serious thread here, the difficulty film critics are having coping with the fact that the cinema isn't a nice safe form like Latin, or the Opera, but a changing one that involves all of this technology. To that end, probably the most important change to the festival was one that was completely unreported. Since about 1946 the press were assigned boxes into which press kits and announcements were stuffed at the rate of four tons a day. You paid a deposit on the box, and received a small key. That is, you did if you were one of the fortunate who had been assigned a box. Although it always seemed to me this system worked well enough, a steady stream of film critics complaining that their keys didn't work, they had lost their keys, someone had broken into their box, etc., etc., provided a constant background source of entertainment.

So in 1992 all this was changed. The photographic identification plasticized press cards used to gain admittance to films were replaced by thicker cards with magnetic stripes. You ran your card through a stripe reader, adjacent to your box and, presto, your box opened. Now you might think this system wouldn't work very well because people wold lose their cards. Not true. Cannes is the kind of festival where you frequently need to show your identification not just to get into a film, not just to get into the building, not even just

to go from one floor to the other, but on occasion to exit into the lobby. The KGB has nothing on the security system used inside the bunker.

So even the dimmer journalists knew if you lost your card you might starve to death in a broom closet somewhere. Loss wasn't a problem. You might think the problem would be that, given all this abuse, the cards would become damaged. Not true. The French have developed a magnetic card system that appears to withstand the worst journalistic abuse (it was, after all, designed for the French).

No, the problem is far simpler: the world's film critics can't figure out how you insert a magnetic card into a card reader. I always knew there was something peculiar going on when I noticed how many film critics at Cannes had to sit on the first row of the auditorium. A desire to see a giant moving picture? No, they were all blind. So the card reader problem is no surprise.

But it does serve as a kind of tipoff. Film critics, never very interested in technology, have become steadily less so, to the point that some of them now positively flee from all those parts of the cinema that are technically innovative, while others accept anything new as something significant.

This explains not only the ancient tastes and prejudices of most film criticism, the preference for the archaic and the primitive, but also the consistent miscalling of the ways in which the new technologies of the cinema have impacted on mass audiences. For example (and this discussion can't begin to do justice to the example), we've had a massive misreading in recent decades of the total collapse of socialism as prefigured by socialist filmmakers like Wajda, Zanussi, and their less well know colleagues in Bulgaria, Hungary, and parts of the old Soviet Union.

When, many years ago, Ron Holloway, an American critic working in Berlin who was responsible for most of *Variety's* Eastern European coverage (back when they bothered with covering the rest of the world), said that "film was the capital of Poland," he locked on to an essential truth about what was happening on the other side. But it was an unpalatable truth. Most film critics in the West don't really believe in the power of film (which explains, by the way, why they flip for filmed plays). They ignored all the messages that were being broadcast wholesale on the cinema screens, preferring to follow the line of nineteenth century frauds like Hans Dietrich Genscher, the ex-foreign minister of the German Federal Republic who exceeded even fellow travelers like Brandt and Schmidt in his zeal to boost the longevity of a system whose bankruptcy was being testified to on a daily basis by those few of its film artists who managed to float one by the censorship.

But only by them, which is why I say that these critics don't really believe in the power of the cinema. Instead, they listened to the sycophantic chorus of the captive artists of the stage and music, who extolled the virtues of socialism right up until its collapse. Not to mention the captive intellectuals of the printed word--whose noticeable absence from Cannes in recent years is a great reminder of how fraudulent their claims to real reportage or professional achievement were.

But the collapse of SocCamp is the least of what these heroes of the printed word have managed to miss. They've also managed to avoid coming to terms with all of the new technologies of recent years, whose impact on Western audiences is probably immeasurable.

In normal film reportage this isn't a big problem, because the mass medium part of the cinema, and a good deal of the art film side of it, is very conservative. The five films at Cannes this year most highly regarded by film critics could have all been made twenty years ago; in the case of *Howards End*, it could have been made in the 1930s. Which is not to imply that these were not the five best films. Conservative artists may very well be the best artists: Brahms was much more conservative than Wagner. Was he any less a genius? But artists aren't critics. Critics need to worry about change. They need to deal with the new, explain it to the public, and mediate between that public and the artist. When they can't run their press card through a card reader, they're going to have a tough time explaining a medium as technical as the cinema. The problem is not, as many film directors and artists believe, that film critics are morons. The problem is that increasingly they're technological illiterates who are aesthetically conservatives who have fundamentally rejected the idea of the cinema as a mass art form.

3. A Radical Establishment and Some Very Conservative Rebels

This may seem a peculiar comment, because the press, particularly the European press, prides itself on being rebellious, iconoclastic, and radical. The politically liberal members (almost everyone) are fiercely concerned about the needs and rights of the masses. But even the politically conservative critics pride themselves on being radically conservative. On the other hand, the management of Cannes epitomizes the world film establishment.

The problem is that the management of Cannes, epitomized by Gilles Jacob, is turning out to be infinitely more radical about the cinema than radical critics of any political persuasion. While the film critics are still moaning about the impact of video, The management of Cannes, or at least Gilles Jacob, who essentially determines the official selections all by himself, has been one of the first to embrace the practical side of video, for example, using video cassettes as an indispensable tool in the selection process. This isn't quite the trivial point it might seem. As Jacob's North American representative has observed: "The small independents don't really have the money to ship a full print and have a screening room in Paris, and they don't have anybody over there handling the print."

So increasingly, there is a split between the world of film as it exists and is nourished and fostered by people like Jacob and the world of film as it is codified by film criticism. In addition to being technologically illiterate, these folks are historical morons and aesthetic puritans. As professional criticism has become increasingly anti-technological, it has also become anti-historical. Reading Joan Dupont's opening story on the 1992 festival, one would come to the conclusion that Cannes is "socking it to the cinéphiles . . . . It looks as though after long years of dedication to alternative cinema--Antonioni, Bergman, Buñuel, Wajda--the festival is backing something simpler, cheap thrill cinema."

There are so many erroneous assumptions in that quote (fairly taken from the article, one hastens to add) that one scarcely knows where to begin. What we have here is the resurrection of the old BritCrit canard that Cannes is simply a commercial bash: the real art festival is Venice. The trouble is this makes DuPont's prognostication doubly untrue: attacks on Cannes as a commercial entity were enshrined in Liz-Anne Bawden's *Oxford Companion to Film*, published back in 1976, a reference work chiefly otherwise notable--aside from its venerable publisher--for declaring that there was nothing going on in Polish cinema after 1968.

There was, and is, a short answer to both propositions. To the first, the idea of Cannes as a completely commercial place, a list of some of the prize winners: *Viridiana, La Dolce Vita, Blow-Up, The Tree of the Wooden Clogs, Man of Iron, Kagemusha,* and *Under the Sun of Satan.* One could add films of somewhat greater obscurity but no less merit; this list deliberately mentioned only those films made by the more well-known artists.

But the list works the other way as well. Gilles Jacob isn't afraid of videotape, Cannes isn't afraid of commercial cinema, startingway back in 1957 when the grand prize was awarded to William Wyler's *Friendly Persuasion*, continuing down through the years with films like *A Man and A Woman, M*A*S*H, Taxi Driver,* and *All That Jazz.* Those films are in many ways different from *Wild at Heart* or *Basic Instinct*, but they're all alike in one key way: each film was a success at the box office in purely commercial terms.

The paradox is this. On any one film, Cannes and people like Jacob are exercising judgments that are probably wrong. I doubt that anyone who knows Verhoeven's work would say that *Basic Instinct* was as good as some of his earlier films. But that argument misses the point, and on the main point, Jacob is totally right. Take France, a country which justifiably prides itself on its cinematic sophistication. In 1991, no French film got more than half a million admissions in the greater Paris region. The French were involved in over 130 feature films that year, but only six did any reasonable box office at all in France. The films that did reasonably well were pretty good films: *Cyrano, My Father's Glory.* And some very difficult films, like Pialat's *Van Gogh*, did surprisingly well.

In other countries the situation is even worse. Not because—as many critics and artists like to pretend—people are unsophisticated, but on the contrary, because they have enough sophistication to vote with their

feet. And video has opened up a whole new area of competition. You can go to the theater and watch a movie where two young women read excerpts from a von Kleist novella in French (an actual example taken from the *Semaine*), or you can sit at home and watch *The Four Hundred Blows*. You can sit at home and watch the French equivalent of *The Wheel of Fortune*, or *Family Feud*, of course, but we can't very well say that the person who chooses to watch Truffaut is culturally deprived. Given much of what is passed through the projector in the way of French film, the true cinéphile may be justified in staying away from the movie theater.

But the longterm major problem of the European cinema is, that left to its own devices and state controls, it will keep on turning out films which no one will watch, and which in some cases will never even be released. European audiences have essentially stopped watching the films which they subsidize, with occasional exceptions which are films which win awards at major festivals or the infrequent crowd pleaser that manages to sneak into the theaters.

So although attacks on films like *Basic Instinct*, which Jacob chose as the opener for the festival, are correct in the narrow sense, they're wrongheaded in the more important sense, and this is a sense that Cannes fosters owing to its size. It's an extension of the mistake Rex Reed used to make when he would write about how a film got a standing ovation and was the hit of the festival. It was, at that one screening and with that one audience. But that was only one of four or five screenings. It is often the case that a film which gets enthusiastic applause at the formal evening screening—which is full of well wishers for the cast, the crew, or the studio—has been greeted with indifference or hostility at the press screenings.

It needs to be stressed here that even the strictly reserved press screenings are salted with distributors, buyers, festival directors, and other film professionals. And a sizeable percentage of the "press" are also at Cannes as programmers or consultants. They have press credentials because the press cards get them into more events than any other form of accreditation they can get. Of course they also have press cards because, like many people interested in the cinema, they write about it. But what this melding means is that a film's reception at the evening gala screening is far less important for its commercial success and intellectual reputation than its reception at one of the press screenings.

Strictly speaking, these remarks apply only to the screenings of the official competition films. But it is quite often the case that, given the early morning and mid-evening press screenings for this section, most of the "press" see the films in the other sections at certain predictable times. So even there, audience reaction can be misleading. At Cannes you can show a film three times and find that the first audience contained everyone in the world who might be likely to buy, program, or write about the film, while the other two screenings contained everyone else. If the first group liked the film, it will go into distribution and receive attention, regardless of the responses from the other audiences.

In other words, the reaction David Lynch got for *Twin Peaks* at the evening screening whose processional and recessional was covered on the stairs was irrelevant. Everyone who was in a position to make a decision about this film had already seen it at eight-thirty that morning, and at the end of the screening, a steady chorus of boos, whistles, and catcalls, made the situation clear: it was a total flop. Even the French used the word.

But sitting in a room with two thousand other people also builds up a false sense of audience. It may very well be the case that those four or five thousand people who saw the film are the audience, the only people in the world, statistically speaking, interested enough in the cinema to sit through a film in which the only action is watching a painter paint a picture (as was almost the case with Victor Erice's *The Shadow of Light*).

Somewhere there is that happy medium, films that critics like and audiences do, too. It doesn't have to be the case consistently; but it should happen frequently. Jacob is to be credited with trying to force the pace. On the one hand he's tried to expose the European film establishment to the unpleasant truth that many of their darling projects are wretched by any standard, and, when exposed to the kind of criticism a film gets at Cannes, their wretchedness is revealed. In other words, the argument that the film is a significant contribution to the cinema, even

though it may not have much of an audience, is demolished by the bad reception it gets from the world's critics and artists.

On the other hand, Jacob has tried to get both the European film establishment of producers and intellectuals as well as the press, to consider the kinds of films that stand a reasonable chance with an audience and aren't simply exploitation films.

In doing this, he's been badly served by a series of recent juries, whose presidents seemed totally mesmerized by the so-called American independent film. More probably, it was the directors who were presidents of the juries who were mesmerized by seeing a film just like one they had always wanted to make. So Sidney Lumet wanted to give the prize to *The Mission*, Forman to *When Father Was Away on Business*, Wenders to *sex, lies, and videotape*, Bertolucci to *Wild At Heart*, and Polanski to *Barton Fink*.

Most of those choices were, at the time, defensible. By defensible I mean they were choices culled from one of the films that had gotten a high ranking by most of the in-house press juries working the festival through the daily journals such as *Screen International*. The exception to this was *The Mission*, which increasingly is referred to as a scandalous award, although, as I said at the time, to the man who made *Out of Africa*, this must have looked like a great film.

But their cumulative effect has been unfortunate, because, with the exception of the Kusturica film, not only have the prizes been going to the Americans, but they've been going to the kind of vaporous and subjectless film that often looks like a cross between music video work and student filmmaking. In so doing, the juries have managed to trample on a group of impressive or serious films. Last year was particularly offensive, but the only trend it set was a short one: after Polanski departed, the rules were rewritten to prevent giving all the prizes, or most of them, to one work.

So in 1992 Jacob assembled a more conscientious jury. Instead of another director, the president was Depardieu, an actor. The jury went back to the old jury behavior which was the hallmark of the festival, distributing the prizes judiciously among films which were, in general, at the top of the critics' lists, making sure that almost everyone with any reputation who had made a decent film got a prize. They even went back to the traditional dodge of making up a prize and giving it to the director who would otherwise have been left out, in this case James Ivory for *Howards End*, who got the *Prix du 45eme anniversaire* (this was the 45th anniversary).

Given the antics of previous years, this is a major improvement. However, in this case the jury was so conservative it managed to ignore all of the really interesting films, settling for the sorts of choices that were so catholic no one could really complain about them.

We might start with a brief discussion of Bille August's *The Best Intentions*, which used Ingmar Bergman's script about his parents. It's best described as *Fanny and Alexander* minus the fun parts, although owing to the duplication of some of the cast, the stills give you a sense of dejá vu. And that's exactly the kind of film this was, three hours of nicely redone bits and pieces all of which had been done before. Just as Volvo creates new models by recycling bits and pieces of earlier ones and changing some pieces of sheet metal, August creates his films by juggling the better parts of other Scandinavian films.

One never gets a sense of people in a definite time and place, as was the case with Von Sydow's *Katinka*, or the film by Nykvist's son, *Women on the Roof*. Nor is there any hint of the kind of religious conflict that provided *Fanny and Alexander* with its real conflict. Instead we've retreated into a kind of mythical previous century (the world before 1914). What Bergman's script gives us is *Scenes From A Marriage*, transposed back in time, but with a happy ending.

*Best Intentions* is a pleasant film. The problem is that it sends out a set of signals almost as bad as the one the jury gave out with Lynch and the Coen brothers. With those awards, the jury said it prized subjectless excess. With this award the jury is saying it thinks the world of filmmaking has stopped with *Les enfants du paradis*, although now it's OK to use color.

The jury took this approach right down the line. It gave an award to Gianni Amelio's *The Stolen Children*, a film which could have been made by De Sica or Rossellini. It gave an award to Altman for directing *The Player*, and made up one to give to James Ivory. In only

two areas did it appear to give any recognition to anything remotely interesting cinematically, and that was with the awards to Victor Erice for *The Shadow of Light* and to Solanas for *The Voyage*.

Now, unlike in recent years, but quite true to tradition, the jury gave awards to a group of pretty good films. *The Player* is an entertaining film, and *Howards End* is nicely done. Either one of them is better than *Best Intentions*. They just had the misfortune to be entered in a year when the jury was tired of handing out prizes to American or Anglo-American productions.

This left them with a real problem, because American (and English language) films dominated the festival once again, something about which I have mixed feelings. On the one hand, European and world film production is in a trough. The collapse of SocCamp, and the coincidental collapse of the centralized film economies of much of what used to be called the Third World, has put films from those areas in short supply. There are good filmmakers out there, but they have not yet made an impact. Nor are the Western Europeans exactly in the forefront of a cinematic surge.

But few of the American films shown had much of a subject. The film that was close to the top of everyone's list, *The Player*, was about Hollywood, not in itself much of a subject, and although the film was reasonably funny and brilliantly paced, technically the best film Altman has done since *Popeye*, the subject just isn't there. The directing was first-rate, without the dragging that has characterized much of Altman's more serious work, but the film is almost as self-indulgent as *Barton Fink*. Neither film has a subject worth making a serious film about.

Subject isn't the only thing, of course. *Howards End* has a great subject, taken from an accomplished novel about England before 1914. Like Altman, James Ivory has a terrific script, fine actors, and the best technical staff one could ask for. Both films are, in every sense of the word, top drawer filmmaking. But to what end is all this put? *Howards End* could have been filmed in the 1940s, or even earlier, as it goes back in inspiration to the Cavalcanti productions of Dickens. To put it shortly: When Forster wrote his novel, he was writing a modern piece of fiction. Not experimental, but modern in the best sense that British fiction of this century has had.

The key thing in it, as Virginia Woolf would say, is that you see what's inside the head, don't just stop with the outside. What Merchant has done is to take a modern novel and turn it into a work of the last century. By misappropriating the style, he's considerably blunted the impact of his subject. What we end up with is an extremely high grade film version of the kind of thing the BBC has been doing for decades so wretchedly.

So when the jury gave prizes to these two, it came down very squarely in favor of an old fashioned kind of filmmaking, one in which a story is told in strict chronological order, with the scenes laid out like a play, with the actors scooting in and out of the set. One has to use a very old yardstick to see these films as being very important.

It's a far drop down from Altman and Merchant, however. Both Hal Hartley in *Simple Men* and Terence Davies in *The Long Day Closes*, the next two English language favorites, favor a more personal and idiosyncratic approach to their art. In Hartley's case, the approach is minimalist, a melange of Jim Jarmusch and Sam Shepherd, while in the case of the British director, it's more of the same old filmmaking of the 1960s. In their way, both films are curiously old-fashioned.

So while all four of these films are easy to watch, and rewarding to watch, they aren't particularly exciting or memorable works. And they don't push our ideas about the cinema very far, but remain content to work within the bounds of what's already been achieved.

The other American films all seemed to me more or less remakes of a previous work. Time and again, you would hear somebody asking: "Do you remember that film about four years ago . . . ." Just as Verhoeven and Michael Douglas came to *Basic Instinct* loaded up with bits and pieces from previous films which they recycled into this one, so their less commercially successful colleagues were recycling their own ideas (along with everyone else's), the results being syncretic in the extreme.

Of the smaller bundle of Commonwealth films, i.e., films in English from Ireland, Great Britain, Australia, New Zealand, and Canada, the less said the better. Although the British

critics rallied to *Long Day Closes* (as they usually do for any halfway decent film from the United Kingdom), Robert Osborne hit the nail squarely on the head when he observed that *Long Day Closes* "Takes forever to close. . . . unlikely to get much positive response from any quarter."

Alison Maclean's film from New Zealand, *Crush*, was significantly worse, managing to show up in the bottom five of both the *Film Français* and the *Moving Pictures International* juries. This is a great example of where the festivals' search for new talent backfires. Most of the people who worked on this film were just getting started in the movies, as was cinematographer Dion Beebe, and it shows. Beebe's New Zealand is a place you wouldn't send your dog to vacation in, and the generally lousy images (and horrific lighting) didn't get much help from the actors or the script. In the more gently handled parallel sections, this film would have fared better: it probably should have been in the Critics Week.

The truth is that films in competition are subjected to a merciless scrutiny. *Basic Instinct*, with its box office rampage in Europe and the United Kingdom, can take a bunch of prissy critics dumping on it in stride. But lesser works can't. Major directors aren't excluded, either. Take Sidney Lumet's *A Stranger Among Us*, which started to go wrong right from the casting, with Melanie Griffith playing a hardboiled female cop who's supposed to have all the characteristics of "Shooter" Curran.

Griffith does as well as she can in the role, but her range is just too limited. It's like Helen Bonham Carter in *Howards End*—we seem to be seeing outtakes from her performance in *Hamlet*. But it's hard to blame Griffith, because the script is loony. She's a tough New York cop who has to investigate a murder in the Hasidic community. In order to catch the perpetrator, whom she believes is living inside the community, she has to move in with them. Now the Hasidim, regardless of how religiously idealistic they may be, are, by almost any standard one could muster, the most fanatical and chauvinistic religious sect around. They can easily bear comparison with the more extreme sects of Islam. The only difference is they don't have guns. If they did, the effects would be roughly what we've seen where their Islamic counterparts have assumed political power.

Their attitude towards women is particularly offensive, and what any female cop would make of it is sobering. But in Robert J. Avrech's script, the Hasidim are idealized to the point of disbelief. Presumably we are supposed to believe that because these folks are Jewish, everything is acceptable. And the Hasidim are idealized to the point of nausea. They're deeply spiritual people who just happen to specialize in cutting diamonds, doubtless because of the spiritual values of the stones. Women in particular are deeply attracted to a culture in which they're treated somewhere between beasts of burden and household appliances.

Apparently the idea is that contemporary Jews are supposed to get all starry eyed over seeing the roots of their religion. It's like saying that a contemporary Catholic or Anglican would be gaga over being immersed in her religion in 1620 when her fellow co-religionists were happily torturing everyone who disagreed with them to death. The whole idea is offensive, and the fact that we're talking about Jews doesn't make it any better. In fact, it makes it worse, because if this particular persuasion of Judaism had its way, there wouldn't be any Jews, except for the few that made it to New York. There certainly wouldn't be any Israel, as these folks don't think it should exist. The whole idea is back there with all those films that showed how happy the blacks were down on the plantation. The film deserved the round chorus of boos and hisses it got at the early-morning press screening.

At least Lumet managed to make Verhoeven's work look serious. Although *Basic Instinct* marks one of those rare occasions where a controversial mass audience film in the United States receives official notice at Cannes, the fact that such a film was featured is not in itself anything new. The last—and to all intents and purposes the only other—time this happened was with *E.T.* The festival management has never been afraid of big commercial films of any stripe. In 1991 they showcased the Madonna documentary, *Truth or Dare*, and in 1992, *Beauty and the Beast*, only to name a few recent examples.

Do those titles define Hollywood? No. Nor do they define commercial cinema. The truth is, we can't define it, nor its alternatives.

Those who try, ignore the history of the art form. DuPont tries to weasel around this by invoking the word "alternative" cinema. Apparently she's unaware of the extent to which this term was coined by Marxist filmmakers who wanted to dissociate themselves from studio productions and were too far away from a sympathetic political structure to see themselves installed as an arm of the government. But even in its most general, i.e., uselessly broad, sense, the term is nonsense. There hasn't been any alternative or independent cinema around since the big festivals, Cannes the chief among them, started taking advantage of the revolution in transport and communications technology and showcasing new and hitherto unscreened talent on a continuing basis. At that point every "independent" or "alternative" filmmaker saw that to have her film screened at Cannes and go on to make films with bigger budgets and more support was an achievable goal, and not simply a daydream.

Nor does either term have enough precision to give it even transitory appeal. There were always "independent" producers or artists working outside the major studios in North America. The problem is that Russ Meyer and Roger Corman were interested in telling stories and making money. They positioned themselves shrewdly in the market and did quite well, Corman because of the incredible speed with which he could make films, and Meyer because of the niche he created back in the 1950s when the studios were shy of sex.

Film critics have managed to create a tidy kind of mythical film history. Once upon a time there were the studios, commercial and vulgar, the auteurs, artistic and innovative, the independents, fresh and vigorous, the alternatives, heretical and polemical, the third world, political and innovative. There's not only the comfort of the list and the categories, there's the fact that everyone fits into it so neatly. It's all so perfectly determined, so pellucidly known.

So film critics tend to reject or rewrite the real world because it's so messy, and, most importantly, because it doesn't fit their theories.

Cannes draws more than its share of fire because it mirrors the real world of the cinema so perfectly. When the academic mind—whether housed in an academic, someone who is academically trained, or located deep in the recesses of the journalist—comes face to face with an unpleasant reality that contradicts the theory, reality has to go. Tidying up the messy world of the cinema is small potatoes when compared to the way this same group managed to overlook the problems of socialism.

4. Cross-Over Art

So there isn't anything particularly extraordinary about the decision to showcase *Basic Instinct*. Cannes has seen more sex, more violence, and much more deviant behavior, as the remarks about the opening film of the *Quinzaine* made clear. What Verhoeven symbolizes is a peculiar kind of filmic wave, the auteur who becomes a commercial talent by making films that systematically capitalize on mass audience interests in the extremes of deviant behavior. He is scarcely the first. Some people would argue the ability to jump continents isn't anything new. Look at von Stroheim. But the world of the cinema was much smaller then, much more homogenous.

Probably the first of the cross-over artists was Louis Malle, who moved from auteurist classics such as *Zazie dans le Metro* to *Pretty Baby*. It was this last film that established the blend. In his earlier films Malle had indicated both a willingness to cross sexual taboo lines in film (incest in *A Murmur of the Heart*) and the social and moral complacency of the traditional Hollywood paradigm (*The Thief*). In *Pretty Baby* he applied these to a more accessible story, using the growing North American awareness of New Orleans as an exotic and sensual locale first established by *Easy Rider* to serve as a springboard for a story of taboo love. The use of the period, the cover of the persona of the photographer, and the fact that Brooke Shields was a very tall little girl, all enabled him to provide a work that aroused audiences without arousing them to a complete condemnation of the work.

Malle could have perhaps made a film about America analogous to the films he had made about his own country, but he chose instead to make a commercially successful film that was successful precisely because of its shrewd manipulation of audience taboos about sex, in particular the idea of an adult having sex

with a child.

This in itself is an interesting accomplishment, since North American film audiences are still surprisingly puritanical. Why was Malle able to loft a film set largely in a whorehouse that deals with a man's sexual relations with a young girl so neatly into the commercial theaters when Bertolucci got so much flack for a story about two people trying to find an apartment in Paris?

Malle's success was not just a function of the rapidly changing values of American society. It was a function of his ability to keep the story inside an ideological framework that has by now come to be labelled, a trifle derisively, as politically correct. There are the elements summarized above, chief of which probably is the use of historical period. When Americans, who aren't very historically minded, see historical films they apparently decide that what they are seeing is over in that comfortable realm called fantasy, the kind only one niche over from Disney.

But Malle also added other reinforcements designed to comfort his audience, downplaying the lust element on the part of Carradine (who plays the role as an essentially passive reactor), and providing the film with an acceptably happy ending. So although the film is unequivocally about a man's sexual infatuation for a young girl, there's in the final analysis much less to the infatuation than meets the eye.

This is manipulation, but it isn't manipulation of the kind that Malle was uncomfortable with: he had already shown how easily people recover from traumatic events in *A Murmur of the Heart*. So there's a kind of honesty there as well.

One could go on to write a brief history showing the progression of the other crossover artists who followed Malle (who may not be the first, although I am unaware of anyone else): Scott, Forman, Babenco, Konchalovsky. And Verhoeven, who follows the pattern better than anyone since Malle himself.

Because there's much less to *Basic Instinct* than meets the eye, and what does meet the eye is comfortably lodged in the requirements of the genre, where we've seen much of it before: the sexually confused killer and the bloody elevator stabbings from DePalma's *Dressed to Kill*, the idea of a cop who's sexually attracted to the murderess he's supposedly chasing and lets her off in *Sudden Impact*, and almost everything else in between from Hitchcock.

In other words, this is the kind of film that appeals to the adult version of the teenage audience that saw the original *Halloween* through its fingers with one eye tightly shut, an audience that wants to be tantalized, as Michael Douglas confessed to *Cosmopolitan* apropos of whether or not he and Sharon Stone were having an affair during the shooting.

But it doesn't do so in any vague or inconsistent way. Verhoeven's always been intrigued by homosexuality and violence, and he's always had an eye for the sexually aggressive and manipulating woman. It's not an act, or something he trotted out just for this film; you can find it all back there even in his filmed adaptation of *Soldier of Orange*, a scrupulous historical rendering of an autobiographical memoir.

It's that honesty, the artistic honesty of a director who sees the world in his own peculiar vision, that makes these films as satisfying as they are. It's probably the case that mass audience films have to be either morally uplifting or socially redemptive. Whether this is because that's what people want or because they've been conditioned to it over the decades by the artists (and their paymasters, for conspiracy theorists), it seems a fact.

Malle and Verhoeven are successful at making this kind of film because their own personal vision is congruent with those requirements. Bertolucci was ultimately unsuccessful at it because his wasn't: it's instructive that *Last Tango* ends with the hero being killed by the heroine, as, in a way, does *The Sheltering Sky*, even though he tried to turn it into a commercially viable love story, shredding Bowles' novel in the process.

Of course part of this is also a matter of timing. Malle would have had a rough time from the neo-Victorians of the early 1990s, who, under their various banners of health and equality have essentially declared heterosexual relationships to be unhealthy, and certainly the rather peculiar ones of *Pretty Baby*. Bertolucci, in his attempt to make *Sheltering Sky* a commercial hit, didn't just turn the man and woman relationship into an

extremely romantic one; he carefully detuned the nuances of Kit's stay with the natives after her husband dies. Maybe it's just one of those coincidences, but all Bowles' hints about the darker side of Kit, the idea that in her sexual slavery she is getting what every woman secretly wants and this woman openly deserves, are missing in the film.

All really successful commercial films are crafted to pass the muster of whatever passes as the dominant orthodoxy. The creation of a bisexual heroine who enjoys playing bondage games with her male lovers and possibly likes to kill them as part of the fun may be shocking, but it also passes the current politically correct standard in a way that a bisexual heroine who liked to be handcuffed to the bed would not.

Right beneath the surface *Basic Instinct* is as painful an attempt to be politically correct in sexual politics as is Spielberg's *Hook*, with its sexually attenuated Tinker Bell and its racially balanced Lost Boys.

Anyone who has recently seen Robert Altman's *The Player*, will of course, be smiling craftily, since Griffin Mill requires a happy ending for the films he produces. But so do audiences—a point that Altman definitely makes with the hilarious final scene to the movie *Habeas Corpus* that Larry Levy is producing—but which everyone seems to omit in discussions of Altman's attack on Hollywood.

All that Verhoeven does is to extend the limits of what is discussable in commercial film. The gradual extension of limits, like the gradual increase in the speed with which the narrative moves, is a perfectly appropriate approach to take in a film designed to appeal to large masses of people. And not just in the United States, either. When *le film français* had a headline entitled "Le triomphe de *Basic Instinct*," the triumph it was referring to wasn't critical, but to its box office receipts the weekend it opened.

But what happens when you can no longer tell the difference between what was designed for a mass audience as entertainment and what was designed as an art film? That's not to say there isn't any difference; there's the difference of quality, but what the management of the festival keeps saying, and what their audience in the media keeps missing, is that the line is increasingly blurred. DuPont excoriated Cannes for drifting away from alternative cinema and over to the commercial, citing Jacob's statement that "we want more entertainment and genre films," but she left out Jacob's all important explanation that followed: "These days it's becoming more difficult to get people into a theater. Our object is not to show films that will never be released anywhere."

*Basic Instincts*, which is really not a particularly good film, is well enough done, and it is entertaining. It's probably the least good work Verhoeven has done, but he's still an impressive filmmaker. There's an interesting comparison here with Eduard Niermans' *Casanova's Homecoming*, a film on an impeccably more literary topic, Schnitzler's final work of the same name. Both films are about the pitfalls of male sexuality. Casanova, freeloading off admirers in France, falls in love with a beautiful young woman and makes a fool of himself. Like Michael Douglas' Nick Curran, Alain Delon is an older man who knows the risks, but can't rest without that physical act of possession. In order to enjoy it, both of our heroes lie to themselves, and both evince the same sort of male cruelty towards other women whom they aren't interested in just at the moment, with Curran actually killing Beth Garner, while Casanova simply subjects Amelie to emotional torture.

What's interesting though is that both directors have all sorts of marvelous opportunities which they simply ignore. Part of this has to do with the plot itself. Curran is nicknamed 'shooter' because he's apparently too quick to shoot first and ask questions later, an important detail that is a requisite to the nearly climactic scene when he shoots Beth. But Verhoeven doesn't do very much with this: it's in the script, but as the climax approaches, he more or less forgets about it, and in so doing he throws out the important detail that would make Curran's killing explicable as a part of his character in a way that playing on his fears doesn't. One minute Curran is a rebellious and intellectually curious cop who likes to play all sorts of psychosexual games, the next minute he's a panic stricken ordinary fellow in fear of his life.

Part of this comes from the actors. Altman attributes the line "I want talent, not actors," to studio head Joel Levison, but in a way that Altman doesn't bother to explore (probably

as the price for using every major actor on the West Coast in a cameo role) the actors are very much part of the problem. Whatever Douglas brought into this film to the part of Curran he brought with him from the role he developed for Ridley Scott in *Black Rain*, while Stone expands on the deliciously nasty part she had in *Total Recall*.

But on a more serious thematic level Verhoeven throws away even more of the details. Men have varied and complex reactions to the idea of feminine homosexuality. But Douglas doesn't have any of these, and yet to pursue the relationship in the way he does he ought to. There's potentially a nice parallel between Douglas' relationship with his partner, which represents one kind of homosexual relationship, and Sharon Stone's more obvious relationships with the three women. But it remains in *potentio*. Douglas is less successful at coming to terms with who he is and what he wants than Schwarzenegger is in *Total Recall*, which is pretty peculiar.

One always wants to think that the problem in commercial film is that the story is all on the surface, unlike those mystical alternative cinemas of nuance and gesture. All of these things may have been in Eszterhas' script, but to produce a big hit, Verhoeven left them out. The problem is that Niermans left them all out of his film, too. His Casanova represents not just the spirit of male sexuality, but also the spirit of the enlightenment as well. He's attracted to this young bluestocking, but she's not attracted to him. She sees him as the embodiment of all that's corrupt and foul about the old order.

An interesting conceit, but it isn't worked out except in a few places where we trip over it. Not that there's any point in dwelling on either one of these films. Neither one of them is all that great, although it's a telling commentary that all the various in-house juries of the trade papers ended up giving Verhoeven's commercial film a higher critical score than Niermans' painfully authentic historical work. As well they should; except for a formidable performance by Alain Cuny, this was a big zero, a painful reminder of why Hollywood at its worst is as successful as it is with audiences.

5. Excellence and Excitement

Although the jury this year was, as I have noted, essentially a conservative and cautious group content to give the nod to the safest example of successful filmmaking, they did give two rather intriguing prizes, the Jury Prize to Victor Erice for *El sol del membrillo*, and the *gran prix technique de la commission supérieure technique* to Fernando Solanas for *The Voyage*.

It's often said that the *prix du jury* is for the third place winner (since there's also a *gran prix du jury*). But I've always been dubious about that. At Cannes there's really only one prize, the *palme d'or*, and an expanding and flexible group of honorable mentions which juries traditionally (and this jury returned to that tradition) have meted out to its favorites. Frankly, the management at Cannes seems to me quite delighted that there is, after all these years, a certain amount of confusion about the prizes. If you go back to your home country and advertise yourself as having won the *gran prix technique de la commission supérieure technique* or the *prix du jury*, it certainly sounds like you won a big prize.

And in recent years we've seen a great deal of that, culminating in the claim made in a relatively sophisticated English language magazine that Spike Lee was a "runner-up" at Cannes for the prize. So was everyone else who had a film entered in competition (probably one reason originally for the *Un certain regard* was to enable people to claim their film had been part of the "official" selection for Cannes).

But basically, these other prizes are just honorable mentions, and, in the case of the *gran prix technique*, more of a small note which says, "interesting idea, too bad about the film," that's more or less comparable to the *prix de la mise en scène*, usually described as the best director prize. Maybe. But when you look at people who've gotten this award, it would be better to describe it as the "nice try, too bad about the film" award.

In Solanas' case, once you say interesting idea, you've pretty much said it all. The idea is neat. A young man who lives down in Ushaiaa, in the frozen south of Argentina, sets out on a bicycle trip which covers most of the continent. Ostensibly he's looking for his father, and along the way he runs into all sorts of real and unreal events. If this sounds slightly familiar, it's because Joaquim Pedro de Andrade did it decades ago with

*Macunaima*. It wasn't particularly new then, since he got the idea from a literary work of the 1930s. But Argentines never bother with what Brazilians have been doing, and the look and feel of Solanas' voyage is very much his own, even though the combination of the real and the fantastic has been kicking around in South America for a generation.

And Solanas has one terrific idea, which is to have the young man encounter real characters that he's seen in a series of comic strips. Each comic strip character is shown in a little animated skit, and each one represents one of Solanas' ideas about South America.

The problem with the film is that Solanas is stuck in a kind of parallel universe. In this world, every radical leftist idea of the 1960s is actually true, every propagandistic leftist rumor is fact, and, although Solanas is very much his own man, and no stooge, the universe looks suspiciously like the one touted by Fidel Castro. I don't mean here that Solanas is sympathetic to those views. I mean that the film seems to accept them lock, stock, and barrel, as being wholly true.

There is, in 1992, a certain kind of lunatic charm in seeing a film whose *weltanschauung* is so firmly based on such a discarded junkpile of ideas. The idea, first expressed in print so far as I can tell by Andrei Codrescu, that even though communism had collapsed as an ideology, it would still live in the academy, has by now become a kind of comic platitude, an utterance onto which the speaker grafts some appropriate body, as in "and also, in the Liverpool City Council." The whole joke, of course, is appropriated from an old communist joke told in Hungary. At the time the joke was current, Poles could travel from Poland to Budapest by train; from thence they could buy commodities or, more importantly, wrangle a passage to the West, given Hungary's traditionally (in the 1970s) less restrictive policies.

And now the joke, which was told at a time when European communists believed the Chinese would end up with everything. As the Chinese attack, the Hungarian Defense minister calls his deputy in Budapest (of course from the safety of Vienna). "How are defenses in the capital?" "All is lost," the deputy says, "except for a few Poles still holed up in the train station."

We might adapt this joke to the present situation: "except for a few Argentines still holed up in Havana." In any place where there is enthusiastic acceptance of the old ideology, this film will do wonderfully. Elsewhere, it has a mixed future. It's too antiquated to be offensive, too repetitive to be successful. But the comic strips are neatly done (and based on real drawings of considerable merit). Like many of Solanas' ideas, this one is neat. But I'm afraid that he's passing into the same category as directors like Fererri: an interesting curiosity, sort of like a Trabant with a spoiler, racing stripes, and a metallic paint job.

Erice's film, on the other hand, is a whole different proposition. Technically it is intriguing because he switches from thirty-five millimeter film to super Beta video and back again throughout the film without any warning. The technical achievement part is that he does this seamlessly, and although you can tell, after the first shift, what the difference is between the two, it's incredible how close the blend is.

I don't think this is so much the improvement in the medium as the talent that's using it. Erice, like many Spaniards, has that mastery of the frame in which everything is always in perfect focus, a cinematography without the interference of atmospherics, absent the distortions of the camera, which we now accept as being some integral part of filmmaking.

He's put all his formidable technical abilities and impeccable aesthetic sense to work capturing the attempt of a living artist, Antonio Lopez, to paint a tree in his back yard. The result is a long and subtle film which in some ways is the best film about painting that's ever been done, certainly better than Rivette's more heralded *La belle noiseuse*. Part of the film resembles a straight documentary, as we watch Lopez make his frame, mount his canvas, and size up the subject. Right off, you know you're watching a master of one medium portraying the master of another. Erice doesn't muck up the picture of Lopez mounting his canvas with some silly narrator explaining what he's doing. The images make it clear.

Lopez is one of those painters who doesn't begin with a sketch, or cartoon, of the subject. He sizes it up, and begins laying on the paint. He's a flat out realist, and his interest is in

capturing the quality of the light as it is reflected on the leaves of the tree. Along the way, his friends drop by, and we're treated to that kind of discussion that seems straight out of Buñuel's autobiography, a casual mixture of gossip, recollection, and aesthetics. Taken all at once, it is heady stuff. In writing about Rivette's film in these pages last year, I said this. "Rivette, in 1991, hasn't gotten past the world Somerset Maugham describes in the preface to *The Moon and Sixpence*, the presumption that artists have twisted and tortured private lives in which words like madness and extremes figure constantly. At least Maugham saw the best artists were the worst talkers, and certainly had nothing very profound to say about their work. But here we are back in the world of those old studio clinkers where great artists labored away in a creative frenzy, their dialogue filled with passionate declamations about the courage it takes to be a great artist, and the risks of failure. Once past the derivative nonsense about the artist, what we have that is of some reasonable value is a step by step production of the actual painting."

So it's a real pleasure to watch a film full of live painters talking about their art—and watching a work of art creep into being—and eavesdrop on a world that isn't tortured and melodramatic. And where Rivette endorsed the old Hollywood stereotypes about painters (as Kurosawa did in the Van Gogh section of his *Dreams*, Erice gives us a much more workmanlike world of great calm and tranquility.

But it's also a world which forces us to confront some interesting observations about art. How does photography differ from realistic painting? What is realism, anyway? In the Lopez/Erice example, by the time Lopez begins to finish painting the tree, that which attracted him to it has decayed, part of the inevitable change of the seasons. So in one sense the answer is simple: the painter can never capture the tree, because the object is always changing. And the film artist, when he looks at the same scene, misses the sense of absence and emptiness the painter is trying to capture.

The press kit for this film insisted that the English translation was "Dream of Light," which is perhaps a less accurate but more apt way of describing the task of the painter in this instance. But "The Shadow of Light" would be better, because it's the interplay between light and shadow, between presence and absence, that defines Lopez' interests. A formidable film. In 1978 the jury gave the *palme* to *The Tree of the Wooden Clogs*, which was a courageous and controversial decision (aesthetically and cinematically speaking). If the present jury had exercised the same courage, it would have given the prize to Erice.

Nor, had it wanted to recognize the truly off the wall in the cinema, would it have been stuck with David Lynch or some other American. There were two formidable works of the imagination shown, which the jury simply ignored, Jean-Claude Lauzon's *Léolo*, and Raul Ruiz's *Dark at Noon/Eyes That Lie*. But this was not the 1978 jury, trying to strike out in a new direction; rather it was a group trying to find a nice safe Eurochoice.

This does not mean, however, that David Lynch, like Spike Lee, was being picked on (as, thanks to his publicity machine, many Americans who should otherwise know better are disposed to believe). *Twin Peaks—Firewalk with Me* is a complete disaster of a film, long, incoherent, and boring. This last is the worst thing I can say about David Lynch. He managed to turn s-m into boredom in *Blue Velvet*, science fiction into boredom in *Dune*, and, no, I wasn't too crazy about *Wild At Heart*, either, which took a kind of Roger Corman road movie and made it even more boring.

Here's why. The reason these popular genres—science fiction, whatever—have a certain appeal is that the original artists were really serious about what they were doing. What gives an old chestnut like *Forbidden Planet* its wallop, even today, is that the people who made it felt they were actually telling a gripping story, making a kind of allegory of *The Tempest*. Now sure it's the case that between a glorified tin can robot and Anne Francis in a little tennis skirt, even a dignified hack like Walter Pidgeon has tough going, but that's twenty years later on.

The problem with Lynch is that while he appropriates these mass media forms and recreates them on screen, he seems obsessed with letting us know that he himself is a real artist who's simply reshaping this kitsch into something mythic. So he makes what are essentially soap operas, but without the nar-

rative unconsciousness that characterizes them. If Susan Lucci stopped acting like her television life was REALLY IMPORTANT, nobody would watch her.

Lynch's audience, in this view, then, consists of people who would like to go see Roger Corman movies, music television numbers, or late night cable channels, but are embarrassed to do so. It's tempting to say that Lynch is trying to do to pop genres what Hugh Hefner or Juste Jaeckin did to pornography, i.e., make it respectable to a new audience. But in those cases, as in the case of the Star Wars and Indiana Jones movies, the successful idea was to take forms people liked and trick them up so they had a contemporary look and feel.

The problem with the old movie serials whence sprang the ideas for Star Wars and Indiana Jones was that the special effects and the acting (the look and feel, in other words) weren't successful with a cinematically sophisticated audience. Similarly Hefner understood that there was an audience of men and women out there who liked seeing erotic pictures, but the subjects had to be from the socio-economic class just below theirs (or the same as theirs), and the subject had to meet their aesthetic standards. For people who didn't feel that sex was dirty and disgusting, the sexual objects wouldn't be successful as objects if the audience perceived them as being dirty or disgusting.

To extend this analogy: Lynch doesn't seem to have grasped the bit about the audience. If he had been Hugh Hefner, the models would have been the same hapless overweight prostitutes traditionally used in pornography, only the pictures of them would have been printed upside down, or off center, or cut into pieces and scattered through the pages of the magazine like a quiz.

In the shortrun, of course, the narrative muddle present in all of his films redeemed them temporarily with an audience of Americans who were being made to feel increasingly embarrassed about their sexual desires. As I said earlier in this essay, part of the art of creating popular hits, as practiced by people like Malle and Verhoeven, is to push the limits of the acceptable just a little, but to hang back just enough so that the end product is socially acceptable. Lynch's knack was to present the seamier sides of sexual behavior without actually making them attractive enough to make him run afoul of current social trends.

Of course to do this meant saying goodbye to any sense of narrative or characterization. Look at Isabel Rossellini in *Blue Velvet*. Her character is absolutely incoherent: every scene is played from a different film. To make it worse, Lynch has a tin ear for dialogue. When I saw it in the opening of *Dune*, I ascribed it to De Laurentis, but there are passages in *Blue Velvet* that are even worse (the interchanges with Laura Dern's father, for instance).

So Lynch remains the director for people who don't really like mass movies but like to pretend that they do; or, in some screwball way, his choice of subjects validates their desires without actually fulfilling them. Either way, it was great to see his number finally come up.

If we subtract the music television bits (and they're not very well done bits, either), we get the following. Apparently Laura Palmer's father is an alien force of evil who also entertains incest fantasies for his airhead daughter, even though she seems to be from a different species. She, along with all the other halfway attractive high school girls in Twin Peaks, alternates between drug abuse and mindless sex in the sleazy motels and truck stops that seem to be the principal economic activity of the town. Despite its small size and rural nature, no one ever notices any of these things.

In the press kit, David Lynch describes himself as "director, co-writer and executive producer, eagle scout, born Missoula, Montana." Boy scouts in the United states are always thought of as being a rather naive group. Naive as opposed to idiotic, which in some cases is the point of the reference when it is used in Great Britain. Apparently Lynch is so naive that he has to use mysterious dark forces to account for incestuous fatherly desires for teenage daughters, and so naive about small town life that he doesn't realize just how much everyone knows about everyone else. And so naive, as well, that once again, as in *Blue Velvet*, he has no idea on earth how to present vice and depravity. Or maybe it's not naivete, maybe he went for one too many merit badges or something. Or maybe if you're from Montana, life in Washington and Oregon looks like the big wicked city or something.

If Lynch wanted to find out life, about the outrageousness of narrative, and about the perverse, he should have watched some of the other films in competition, starting with Pavel Longuine's *Luna Park*. This is Longuine's second film, although it has many of the same interests as the first (*Taxi Blues*), which is to say, antisemitism and violence on the seamier sides of Moscow. In places the film is incoherent and overblown,and Longuine isn't particularly helped by the professional actors he uses. Although they're some of the better ones from the old Soviet cinema, what you end up concluding once again is just how bad that cinema was. In particular, they all scream at one another. To hear these people yell it's as though the Soviet sound recording system didn't have microphones, and it's not just in Longuine's work, either.

The subject is a right-wing skinhead named Andrei who roams an amusement park (the park of the title) roughing up homosexuals and other undesirable elements. The film opens with an out and out battle between the members of this cleanup squad and some bikers, a sequence which for its first few seconds, with its conscious parodies of millions of posters extolling socialist youth, is a keen shot.

Andrei discovers his father is Jewish. He finds him, they become acquainted, and the old man slowly turns him into a kind of human being. The film is interesting and incoherent, fascinating in its documentarist portraiture of what life in parts of Moscow has become, but not ultimately successful as a narrative film.

Many of the European press managed to tie themselves into some kind of masochistic knot about this film, arguing that it was really perhaps a work of antisemitism and violence in disguise. One supposes it difficult for a generation of critics who have regularly extolled the propagandistic effusions of Mosfilm to swallow a work that rolls back Russian history (and I do mean Russian) into its seamier past of pogroms and peasants, superstition and sloth, vodka and violence.

Longuine, in an interview attached to the press kit for the film, spoke of a new "post-ideological" world, in which "the notions of right or left are meaningless. We are entering a new cultural era: we cannot understand the world around us, the cinema and art in general are no longer there to illustrate but must offer explanations." To Longuine, the task of art now is to bring myth back into the cinema, and for him, "*Luna Park* is a step in defining a mythology of the post-Perestroika period: the story of the son taking his father's place, training for war in order to kill the father, is a pattern that exists in all mythologies the world over."

I'm not sure the film successfully captures all this, but the quotations do give one an idea of the quality of Longuine's mind, and they make the film well worth seeing. It's not a success, but it's a better film than many of the others. One thing's for sure, Pavel Longuine is not an eagle scout.

Neither is Chilean born Raul Ruiz, whose *Dark at Noon/Eyes That Lie* was easily the most surealistic and infuriating film shown at Cannes this year. Ruiz' cinematographer was Ramon Suarez, another of those talented Cuban filmmakers who, like his close friend Nestor Almendros, found no place in the socialist paradise for themselves. North American audiences may remember him as the man who worked on *Death of a Bureaucrat*. Filmed by Latin Americans in Portugal, the film manages to have a curiously luso-hispanic air about it, even though the cast is French and English.

And a good one, too. Didier Bourdon plays a young doctor, Felicien, who leaves Paris in 1918 to go inspect a factory his father has sunk the family fortune into. The factory is in far-off Portugal, and Felicien, whose major interests are languages and miracles, is in for a real treat. Felicien approaches a mysterious village surrounded by abandoned crutches, where everyone is asleep and the dogs devour the corpses.

This village is presided over by John Hurt, who plays two roles, Anthony, the industrialist whose scheme to manufacture artificial limbs is backed by his father-in-law, the marquis, whom he also plays. The idea of making artificial limbs during WWI is a sensible one, but the factory runs into numerous problems, such as the large number of miracles and mysterious apparitions of the various virgins who keep appearing during the most inopportune moments.

Then there's David Warner, who plays the artist Ellic. He keeps burying people alive,

because, as he tells Anthony reproachfully, "I need my material." Felicien, buried alive, is rescued by the local curé, played by Daniel Prevost. The story is totally nonsensical, although the cast makes it almost work. Not that Ruiz takes his narrative all that seriously. At one point he rotates the picture ninety degrees, and continues til the end of the scene.

There's a kind of pleasure in seeing such an undisciplined but talented mind at work. Ruiz, like Borges, seems infatuated with Anglo literature (he had a most peculiar but intriguing version of *Treasure Island* in the *Un certain regard* in 1991), and this film is no exception. Full of bits and pieces of Poe and a hundred minor writers of the last century. Although one is tempted to say it's a pity he doesn't just try to do an adaptation of Poe, or another version of *Dracula*, that would miss the intellectual point. Ruiz isn't so much telling a story as deconstructing one that we already know. The sort of thing Lynch is trying to do, but is too much of a boy scout to be very good at.

I don't know whether Raul Ruiz's films to date are simply sketches for a more ambitious career, or whether he will remain, like Borges, a doodler and a sketcher. If the former, he could end up as Latin America's foremost director; if the latter, he'll always be a funny and entertaining artist to watch.

With Longuine and Ruiz, I had the feeling Jacob had gone as far past the film critics in one direction as he had in the other with *Basic Instinct*. All three works left the world's press more or less at sea, grumbling about the choices, just as his choice of *The Player* was applauded by everyone.

But with Jean-Claude Lauzon's *Léolo*, we enter an entirely different world. Although ignored by the jury, this was the film at the evening press screening that got the best response. In fact, the last film shown in this time slot which got this kind of response was Jim Jarmusch's *Down By Law*, the film which, aS everyone knows, cemented his reputation as the minimalist on an inside track. If pressed, I'd have to say *Léolo* was clearly the best film in competition, standing to the independent American feature film wave (*Barton Fink*, *Wild at Heart*, and so on) pretty much like Mozart is to Salieri. It's an outrageous and comic story full of vioelnce that moves inexorably but seamlessly towards tragedy.

There is, after all, nothing really comic about insanity, particularly when the subject is a young boy who loses his mind and ends up catatonic. That the film is excruciatingly funny is as much a tribute to Lauzon's abilities as a director as is the fact that the narration is the boy's own words.

They are read to us by an old man who collects what the boy has written. It is his voice we hear, reading the words of the young Leo. My own position has been that voice over doesn't work, and that most of the time it seems to be tacked on in a pathetic attempt to produce a film accessible to the blind and the halfwitted. This is the first time I've seen it really work, and Lauzon uses it very neatly. The force of the film, particularly the ending, comes from the child's fate. Like all his relatives, he goes crazy and ends up in an institution. The words he writes are his attempt to differentiate himself from these others. "I dream, therefore I'm not," he says. So Lauzon needs a first-person narrator, and he also needs someone to tell the story. In the figure of the "word tamer,"played by Pierre Bourgault, he's found the perfect narrator.

Leo grows up in a poor section of Montreal in the 1950s. His parents are big and fat and somewhat crazy. All his siblings are completely *fou*. They live with their grandfather, Albert, and he and Leo spend most of the film trying to kill one another. Leo's development and growth is as darkly satiric as anything in *The Tin Drum*, and a lot funnier. The film is full of jokes about excrement and sex; it is, in places, grotesque and even horrifying. In other words, it is very much the world as it would be seen by a talented and mentally unstable child, at least insofar as we could imagine that peculiar vision.

Leo shares a room with his brother Fernand, who is somewhat simpleminded. In school, he had his problems. Sent to the guidance counsellor, he was given a sheet of paper and asked to draw something. In about an hour, the narrator says, he returned, holding up what appeared to be a blank sheet of paper, on which he insisted he had drawn a white rabbit in the snow. We alternate between the narrator's words, and the dialogue of the actual scene. Fernand's mother picks up the paper, looks at it strangely. Fernand, very quietly, rotates it ninety degrees for her.

There are also indescribably nasty scenes, and the whole film is a remarkable mixture, with violent swings of mood. Those swings are accompanied by remarkable shifts of light, image, and sound.

It is absolutely incredible that it was only in 1987 that Deleau had chosen as the opener for the *Quinzaine* a first film by the unknown young Canadian director Jean-Claude Lauzon, entitled *Un Zoo la Nuit*. The film was, as I wrote at the time in these pages, "completely typical of the *Quinzaine* film at its best: brutal, polished, and fundamentally cinematic. *Zoo* is too long, and it begins to meander towards the end, but this is typical of what one gets in a first film. What isn't typical is the cinematography, done by Guy Dufaux." I concluded by discussing the problem of Canadian identity in film. "Crudely put, the Canadian cinema is what the cinema of the United States would be like if there was any taste or wit in it." *Léolo* is the kind of film these much more heralded American independents would make if they had any talent.

With a first film, one never quite knows how much of the film was a function of luck and talent, and how much was a function of the knowhow of others. Over the years the *Semaine* has been ample reminder of how chancey the business of second and third films can be. So it seemed that Lauzon was just another one of those oneshot directors. He isn't. This is a film of great maturity and sureness of touch, one which has the kind of wide-ranging tastes usually only associated with older and more established artists. For instance the music, which goes from Tom Waits through Khatchaturian, Thomas Tallis, and Ariel Ramirez' *Gloria* to Sabhuya and "Prelude in Tchahargah." It could be a mess. It isn't.

What it is is the kind of film that is the reward for sitting through hours of untalented shills, aging hasbeens, and mediocre Euroartistes. And in the final analysis, that's what it's all about. □

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Julio Flórez

# EVERYTHING . . .

*Translated by Joe Bolton*

*(Fragment)*

Everything comes too late for us, even death.

Susan L. Martin-Marquez

# MONSTROUS IDENTITY: FEMALE SOCIALIZATION IN *EL ESPIRITU DE LA COLMENA*

Victor Erice's 1973 film, *El espiritu de la colmena*, considered by many to be among the greatest Spanish films, continues to captivate audiences with its elliptical, haunting depiction of life in the aftermath of the Civil War.[1] The film's images gravitate around Fernando, a self-absorbed, obsessive student of bees, his wife, Teresa, preoccupied with an unspecified person to whom she sends letters via a Red Cross address in France, and the couple's two daughters, six-year-old Ana and her sister, Isabel, three years her senior. The fragmentary plot shuffles glimpses of the family's daily activities with actions propelled by the girls'—and especially Ana's—viewing of James Whale's film *Frankenstein*, which takes place early in the narrative.

Many interpretations regard *El espiritu de la colmena* as political allegory characteristic of the best films of the time period. Ana's fascination with the Frankenstein monster, society's outcast, is seen as symbolic of the girl's rebellion against the repressive Francoist society and indicative of her future status as an isolated progressive spirit in a "beehive" structured around conformance.[2] Other important studies focus on the psychology of Ana's character. Luis 0. Arata, for example, details how Erice's film directly depicts a child's world as opposed to the more common adult's-eye remembrance of childhood,[3] while E.C. Riley describes Ana's experiences as typical of initiation into the adult realm.[4] Neither of these studies takes into account the child's gender, yet it is interesting that Erice has chosen as both his youthful protagonists not boys or even one boy and one girl but two girls.[5] In fact, the characters' girlhood adds an additional resonance to the tale, one that has not yet been explored in depth: Ana and Isabel (the latter much neglected by critics) may be seen as representing distinct paths of female socialization in a patriarchal society. In *El espiritu de la colmena* this particular network of meaning is intimately tied up with a self-referential exploration of the creation and reception of films, and, more specifically, with the role of women within this process.[6]

Several ideas developed by feminist film theorists aid in the understanding of this dimension of Erice's film. Mary Ann Doane, for instance, studies how many examples of what she terms the "paranoid woman's film" differ from classical Hollywood movies in which female protagonists are controlled, victimized, and fetishized through the gaze of their

[1] *El espiritu de la colmena* [*The Spirit of the Beehive*], dir. Victor Erice, cinematography by Luis Cuadrado, ed. Pablo del Amo, music by Luis de Pablo, with Fernando Fernan Gomez, Teresa Gimpera, Isabel Telleria, Ana Torrent, and Elias Querejeta (1973). Quotations from the script will refer to Victor Erice and Angel Fernandez Santos, *El espiritu de la colmena* (Madrid: Elias Querejeta Ediciones, 1976).

[2] See, for example, Angel Camina, "El espiritu de la colmena," *Cine para Leer* 1973: 120-23; Peter Evans, "*El espiritu de la colmena*: The Monster, the Place of the Father, and Growing Up in the Dictatorship," *Vida Hispanica* 31.3 (Autumn 1982): 13-17; and Fernando Savater, "Riesgos de la iniciacion al espiritu [Prologue]," in Erice and Fernandez Santos 9-26.

[3] "'I Am Ana': The Play of Imagination in *The Spirit of the Beehive*," *Quarterly Review of Film Studies* 8.2 (Spring 1983): 27-33.

[4] "The Story of Ana in *El espiritu de la colmena*," *Bulletin of Hispanic Studies* 61 (Oct. 1984): 491-97.

[5] In "Silence and Self-Portraits: The Artist as Young Girl, Old Man and Scapegoat in *El espiritu de la colmena* and *El sueno de la razon*," *Estreno* 12.2 (Fall 1986): 66-71, Peter B. Ashworth notes in passing the potential importance of this choice, writing that it contributes not only "connotations of tenderness, sensitivity and intuition [but also] the suggestion of vulnerability and added difficulties she faces in a patriarchal society" (68).

[6] Both female socialization and self-reflexivity are central to Erice's second film, *El sur*, which serves to confirm the importance of these issues for the filmmaker. See Peter Evans and Robbin Fiddian, "Victor Erice's *El sur*: A Narrative of Star Cross'd Lovers," *Bulletin of Hispanic Studies* 64 (Apr. 1987): 127-35.

male counterparts.[7] In the works she examines, female protagonists are bestowed with their own gaze, which allows them to explore their domestic surroundings—typically cavernous mansions—in order to uncover some secret, oftentimes relating to their sinister husbands. However, acquisition of the gaze is not without negative consequences, as the woman is inevitably punished within the film for her curiosity. According to Doane, "the woman's exercise of an active investigative gaze can only be simultaneous with her own victimisation" (72); her desire for knowledge is thus equated with a "typically feminine" masochistic desire for pain.

Linda Williams' study of the female protagonist of horror films, "When the Woman Looks," also exposes punishment of the woman's gaze.[8] She notes that in traditional horror films women are systematically victimized at the moment they act upon their curious desire to see the monster. Yet the very revelation of the monster's true nature can somewhat paradoxically bring about an affinity between the two, as the female character recognizes the monster's similar position as "other" within patriarchal society. Williams points out the subversive potential of the woman's discovery that what males fear is the monster's power to mutilate, to make monsters of them, too. However, all possibilities for rebellion are crushed in the classical horror film's denouement, in which the monster is destroyed, oftentimes eliciting female empathy.

*El espiritu de la colmena* not only incorporates fragments of the film *Frankenstein* but also contains elements typical of the horror genre and the "paranoid woman's film": a large, slightly decrepit and mysterious house, enigmatic characters, sudden violence, and even a black cat, all filmed with expressionistic (*Nosferatu*-inspired) lighting and camera angles (Ashworth 66-67; Evans 13). In fact, Erice's film also seems to conform to some of the paradigms set out by Doane and Williams. First, as a typical—though somewhat embryionic—female protagonist, young Ana's actions are motivated by curiosity. She is puzzled after viewing Whale's film and asks Isabel to explain why the monster kills the little girl, and why the monster is himself killed. Isabel informs her that Frankenstein is not dead and that she has seen him. Ana is driven by her desire to know more, and the film progressively documents her search for and identification with the monster, initially aided and abetted by her sister.

Ana first discovers Frankenstein's counterpart in Don Jose, the wooden figure with removable internal organs used for pedagogical purposes in her all-girls school. As Don Jose's incomplete body appears before them the students gleefully proclaim that their teacher, Dona Lucia, is responsible for the monstrosity, as if expressing an unconscious awareness of masculine fears of mutilation/castration at the hands of females.[9] The teacher instructs one of the girls to re-compose the figure, and the student obliges by adding the heart, lungs and stomach. Ana is then called on to finish the task, and after being prodded by Isabel, she provides Don Jose with eyes. The young protagonist thus appears to facilitate her own victimization within traditional cinematic terms; the script states that at this moment, "Ana, muy cerca de esa figura ambigua, se siente, mas que ninguna, intensamente mirada"—"Ana, very close to that ambiguous figure, feels, more than anyone, intensely watched" (67). The camera also captures from a high angle shot originating from behind Don Jose's head how Ana is suddenly overpowered by the wooden man's "gaze." At the same time the girl endows Don Jose with her own most arresting feature: Ana Torrent, the actress who portrays Ana, has inspired enthusiastic homages from critics entranced by her wide-eyed expression. In essence Ana re-creates the monster in her own image.

Dona Lucia's final observation that "Don Jose ya puede ver"—"Don Jose can see now"—is immediately echoed by Isabel's question to her sister as the image track situates them on

[7]"The 'Woman's Film': Possession and Address," in *Re-Vision: Essays in Feminist Film Criticism*, eds. Mary Ann Doane, Patricia Mellencamp, and Linda Williams (Frederick, Md.: Univ. Publications of America, 1984) 67-82. For a detailed account of this process in classical films, see Laura Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," *Screen* 16.3 (Autumn 1975): 6-18.

[8]In Doane, Mellencamp, and Williams 83-99.

[9]For his part, Camina notes that "visualmente, la imagen esta gritando al espectador que al 'pobre don Jose' le falta tambien el sexo"—"visually, the image screams out to the spectator that 'poor don Jose' is also lacking a sex organ" (121).

a hill overlooking a vast plain: "Ves aquella casa?"—"Do you see that house?" Ana and Isabel's gaze in effect propels the narration forward as the girls run toward an abandoned stone building off in the distance. When the two arrive Ana hangs back—along with the camera—while her sister races over to peer into a nearby well and then explores the structure, entering through one door and exiting through the other. The camera remains fixed in place as Ana and Isabel run out of the frame, and Ana runs back in, alone this time; only a subtle change in the sky and Ana's dress reveals that this apparent long take is in actuality composed of two carefully matched shots filmed at different points in time. Ana follows the path marked out earlier by Isabel, investigating the same places. She looks into the well by the abandoned cottage, but all she finds is her own reflection, which we see at the moment she destroys it in dissatisfaction by throwing a stone into the water below. We then follow Ana into the structure and share her point of view as she scans the empty space. Ana discovers a man's footprint and fits her own tiny foot into it, once again matching body part for body part.

When later a fugitive—perhaps a *maquis*, or Republican escapee from the Civil War—takes refuge in the abandoned hut, he is, for Ana, the monster she has been seeking. As Ana sleeps, the filmic apparatus identifies her with this figure by means of a lap dissolve which transforms her face into his, as he rests in the same position as does she. And once again a connection is established between the girl and the monster by means of their feet: the camera stops to record in detail as Ana ties the laces on her shoes; soon after we see a similar image of Ana as she ties the refugee's shoelaces for him.

After the refugee is discovered and killed by the Civil Guard—an event that we infer from a single shot of the hut at night, lit up momentarily by gunfire—his body is placed, significantly enough, in the makeshift theater (actually the town hall) directly in front of the movie screen. When the door to the hall opens offscreen, lights flicker over the body as in a movie projection, and once again we are reminded of the connection between this character and Whale's monster. After losing the flesh-and-blood incarnation of Frankenstein, Ana will in fact fall back on his cinematic image. In a poignant scene at the hut, she discovers the refugee's absence and the bloodstained straw, and when her father suddenly appears at the doorway she defiantly runs away from him, perhaps suspecting that he has been involved in the crime. Ana spends the night wandering in the countryside, and her dream-like experiences culminate next to a lake. She looks into the moonlit water at her own reflection; ripples appear on the surface and her image is replaced by Frankenstein's. A reenactment of the scene from Whale's film in which Frankenstein plays with Maria follows. And as in the earlier film, the end of the encounter is suppressed; the last thing we witness is Frankenstein slowly reaching out to Ana.[10]

Yet Ana, unlike Maria, survives her encounter with the monster, and continues to seek out the creature in the film's final shots, standing at the door which opens to the outside world from her bedroom and invoking him with the phrase taught to her by Isabel: "soy Ana"—"it's me, Ana."[11] Erice's film thus de-victimizes the female protagonist, in essence supplanting the traditional ending of the Frankenstein story, and thus simultaneously—as Camina notes—demythifying the monster (122).

Linda Williams describes a similar phenomenon in Michael Powell's film *Peeping Tom* (1960). The protagonist, Mark, kills prostitutes and models with a dagger attached to the tripod of his camera; he films their expression of horror at the moment of death, which is augmented as the victims are forced to view themselves in a distorting mirror also attached to the camera. However, the main female character, Helen, refuses to see herself as victim and monster, turning her gaze away at the crucial moment, and thus refusing "the oppressive lie of the narcissistic mirror that the cinematic apparatus holds up to her" (92).

Williams notes that through self-conscious, distancing strategies, *Peeping Tom* subverts generic traditions, and in fact these are the

[10]In Whale's *Frankenstein*, this ellipsis was due to Universal Studio's self-censorship: the image of the monster throwing Maria into the water was considered too shocking and excised from the final version.

[11]Ana does fall ill after being brought back home; however, upon recovering she does not forget her experience, as the fatherly doctor predicts, but actively attempts to recreate it.

same techniques employed by Erice to expose, this time through the figure of Isabel, the true horror of the objectification and subjugation of women inherent in these traditions. From the very start, *El espiritu de la colmena* calls attention to its status as fictional representation. The credit sequence, which is composed of a series of drawings made by the children of the cast, ends with the image of a movie screen, in front of which are arranged viewers, their backs to us, seated on chairs. Whereas before we were provided with static views of the sketches, this time the camera zooms in to the screen, which depicts a scene from *Frankenstein*: a little girl with flowers sits near a lake while an angular monster peeps out from a clump of bushes off to the side. At the end of the zoom, this crayoned screen just fits inside the screen on which we are viewing the Erice film, and there appears at the top the words "Erase una vez . . ."—"Once upon a time. . . ." Riley notes that this is an indication of the fairy-tale-like or mythical quality of the film we are about to see (492). Yet Erice injects a degree of distanciation into this title by enclosing it within quotes, suggesting that this is not a direct depiction of "once upon a time," but a reference to the "once upon a time" mode of storytelling.

In fact, this is not the only frame to the film. Immediately after the image of the drawn screen, the film cuts to a view of a country road and a truck which approaches us, and another title appears below, also in quotes: "Un lugar de la meseta castellana hacia 1940." The words attempt to link the film with reality through reference to a (relatively) specific time and place; the shot itself, with its careful presentation of perspective by means of the road disappearing in the distance and the truck which appears to move through three-dimensional space, is highly verisimilar, and in sharp contrast to the two-dimensional crayoned screen of the credit sequence. The first two narrative frames thus juxtapose realistic and mythical modes of representation, inviting the spectator to take an active role and reflect upon how he or she will choose to "read" the film. The second title also refers, of course, to the first line of the *Quijote*, the archetypal work which subverts its own mimetic construction through metafictional play.

Yet a third opening frame reinforces the break with traditional patterns of creation and reception of cinematic meaning. The children and older inhabitants of the town settle down to see *Frankenstein*, which itself begins with a prologue featuring Edward Van Sloan (the actor portraying Dr. Waldman in the narrative proper), who enters a stage and directs a series of warnings to the audience, advising them to not take the movie too seriously.[12] After this comment the screen fades to black, but instead of continuing on to the beginning of *Frankenstein*, *El espiritu de la colmena* cuts to a view of Ana's father, working with his bees. We are asked to be on our guard not simply while watching *Frankenstein*, but also while watching Erice's film.[13] *El espiritu de la colmena* is thus layered with devices to elicit our awareness of how we are manipulated by films and film genres, and this message is expressed in purely verbal form when Isabel comments to her sister that film in general is simply "un truco"—"a trick."[14]

Isabel (played by Isabel Telleria) proves to be an expert on fictional "trucos." Her bed-

[12]It is interesting that the Spanish translation of the end of the original English warning—"So if any of you feel that you do not care to subject your nerves to such a strain, now is your chance to . . . well, we've warned you!"— alters the meaning considerably, shifting the emphasis to the viewer's ability to distance him or herself from the film's images: "Pocas peliculas han causado mayor impresion en el mundo entero. Pero yo les aconsejo que no la tomen muy en serio"—"Few films have caused such an impression world-wide. But I advise you to not take it too seriously."

[13]Riley has also observed that since after the prologue to *Frankenstein* we are eagerly awaiting the appearance of the monster, the cut to Fernando in his beekeeping outfit suggests that he too is monstrous in some way (492).

[14]There are many more examples of meta-cinematic references, and quite a few are achieved through the use of lights and/or secondary frames within the mise-en-scene. Perhaps the most lovely of these takes place when Teresa, after cycling to the railroad station to mail a letter to France, contemplates the face of a soldier in the window of the train. We see several shots of his face framed by the window, intercut with views of Teresa's gaze. Then, as the train begins to move, the camera remains fixed in place and several of the train's window frames move in and out of the filmic frame. As one image is gradually replaced by another, we experience an approximation of a slowed-down projection of a movie, and thus the normally invisible workings of the cinematic apparatus are unveiled.

time claims that Ana may invoke Frankenstein with the phrase "soy Ana" are immediately confirmed for her younger sister by the sound of heavy footsteps (which in fact are produced by their father as he paces back and forth in his study). Similarly, when, after Isabel leads Ana to the hut where she says she has seen Frankenstein, the monster materializes in the form of the refugee, Isabel's art becomes so mimetic it seems to form a part of reality.

Another important sequence documenting Isabel's creative talent begins with Ana typing in her father's office. She hears a crash and a scream and runs to her bedroom to find Isabel lying like a rag doll on the floor. The hexagonally leaded glass doors are partially open, and a dog barks in the distance. Ana vacilates between interpreting the scene as fiction or as reality. Although she closes the doors and reassures Isabel that "he" (we assume she is referring to the monster/spirit) has gone and smooths her hair comfortingly, she also tries to verify her sister's physical condition, first by lifting up an arm and observing it flop woodenly back onto the floor and listening for a heartbeat, and then attempting to trick her into revealing the deception by leaving the room, only to open the door again suddenly. Interestingly, we share Ana's uncertainty: via the camera we enter the bedroom at the same moment she does, and we are denied any privileged information. In fact, although when Ana leaves the room the camera remains behind next to Isabel, the older sister doesn't move a muscle. Evidently, she is anticipating Ana's return, but the scene also creates an uncomfortable awareness in us of Isabel's apparent recognition of a larger audience; she seems to demonstrate a willingness to play not only for Ana but also for the camera.

On the one hand, Isabel's representation involves cruelty toward Ana. Yet by portraying in such realistic fashion her own victimization, Isabel displays a "monstrous" sadomasochism. She is key not only to the establishment of self-referentiality in the film but also, concurrently, to the depiction of a second path of female socialization. As we shall soon see, while it is Ana who most actively pursues the monster, it is Isabel who is punished as she takes on the "feminine" traits ultimately re-established in the classic horror or woman's film.

The double-edged cruelty of Isabel's role is perhaps most apparent in the scene, prior to the one just analyzed, in which the girl plays with a cat. In one of the fragments of *Frankenstein* seen earlier by the town viewers, Maria's father tells his daughter to go play with her cat, but the child quickly rejects the animal upon spotting the monster. Isabel, unlike Maria (and unlike her sister, Ana, who also chooses to seek out the monster), does opt to play with the cat, and the full extent of her conformance with "father's" wishes is rendered in symbolic fashion in this scene. The girl is curled up on a bed when the cat enters the room; she then scoops the animal up into her lap, caressing its neck. Isabel's grip begins to tighten, and the cat purrs louder and louder, narrowing its eyes to slits, as the girl slowly attempts to strangle it. But Isabel's apparent sadism once again slips over into masochism. Earlier, through montage, we have been encouraged to associate Isabel with the cat. In this scene the animal, all black with large green eyes, is a double for Isabel, who is dressed in black tights, a black long-sleeved sweater, and a green jumper; thus by tormenting the cat Isabel symbolically inflicts pain on herself. And literally that is exactly what happens, since the cat angrily reacts by howling and scratching Isabel's finger, which begins to bleed.

Isabel then uses her own blood to paint her lips, surveying the effect in a hand-held mirror. This scene mimics those of classical films in which the woman's gaze is severely circumscribed, turning in upon itself in "feminine" narcissism. Isabel not only takes on the role of the femme fatale, or vamp, but also occasions the film's self-conscious re-establishment of the etymological link between these terms and danger/vampirism through her blood lipstick. The camera focuses on the tiny mirror, which reflects only her lips and a bit of nose, while the rest of the frame registers nothing but shadows. This image of floating lips is also self-conscious in its pu-

[15]As Kaja Silverman points out, the fetish serves to deny male lack by projecting the lack onto the woman (*The Acoustic Mirror: The Female Voice in Psychoanalysis and Cinema* [Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 1988] 20); in this case nothing could better represent female castration, the ultimate construction of female lack, than bloodstained lips.

rity: it is the perfect fetish, more pronounced even than those created within classical film narratives.[15] The vision of this bloody, isolated body part is in addition reminiscent of the severed limbs which make up the monster. Isabel is therefore inscribed into traditional cinematic feminine roles in an overdetermined way, symbolizing that her real-life socialization is horrifyingly complete: she is destined to play both victim and monster.

Thus while Ana's fusion with "Frankenstein" is not monstrous but poetic, Isabel suffers a radically different fate. Several visual clues scattered throughout the film indicate that although these sisters begin at similar points they travel along separate paths of socialization. We first see the two girls in the makeshift movie theater, an appropriate setting for their introduction since their personal development will be coded within cinematic traditions. Although in the first sequences depicting the screening of *Frankenstein* there are several shots of the sisters, the two are only clearly distinguished from the rest of the audience when Ana asks Isabel to explain the death of Maria. Their conversation is captured not by a long take with the camera panning back and forth—the girls are seated right next to one another—but by cuts from straight-on views of one sister to the other, their images occupy the same spot within the frame, emphasizing their interchangeability. Similarly, the technique of filming the girls' exploration of the abandoned hut, described earlier, substitutes one sister for the other. Later on, however, when Ana returns for a third time to the structure, Isabel has apparently followed her unseen, and now, hiding behind one of the building's corners, she spies on her sister; in her new position as spectator, Isabel establishes distance between herself and Ana, a distance which is emphasized from this point on.

Elements of the mise-en-scene also contribute to the initial establishment of convergence between the sisters, while hinting at their separate destinies. In the first sequences involving Ana and Isabel, both are wearing either identical school smocks or nightgowns; as the film advances, however, they shed their uniforms for more distinctive forms of dress that set them apart from one another. The girls' bedroom is furnished with two heavy wooden beds on either side of a nightstand, adding to the illusion that at night the sisters are mirror images of one another. Yet it is interesting that the beds, while quite similar, are not identical. And at the end of the film, Isabel's bedding has been removed and the symmetry is destroyed; the older sister has moved to another bedroom, accentuating the complete separation of the two girls.

Ana herself recognizes and is repulsed by her sister's transformation and responds by withdrawing from her. While initially Ana confides in Isabel, she soon refuses to share with her the details of her nocturnal wanderings. Ana's mental picture of her sister's new role is portrayed in a scene in which Isabel and her friends dance around a bonfire, taking turns leaping through the flames. Ana observes them, transfixed, at a distance. Several shots of her face, lit up by the glow of the fire and crossed by the girls' shadows, intercut with views of the revelers and accompanied on the soundtrack by insistent and foreboding music, signal that we are slowly being drawn into Ana's perspective on the scene. Various critics have noticed what the script also confirms, that is, that this sequence is reminiscent of the pagan festivities on the eve of Saint John (106). Yet the exact nature of the freeze-frame image of Isabel with which the sequence ends has not yet been noted: the girl is captured in the moment she hovers over the flames, with her hair forming two distinct horns.

The word "devil" has been used twice before in the film: first, at one point in Whale's film Dr. Frankenstein learns from Dr. Waldman that the dead man whose brain lives on in the monster was a "demonio." Ana's own father has also used the term while instructing his daughters about mushrooms. He describes one particular species as "un autentico demonio" —"an authentic devil"— and his warning concerning the plant is curiosly peppered with double entendres. Ana comments on the mushroom's lovely odor, and her father counters: "cuando es joven, engarna. Pero de vieja ya es otra cosa . . . no la olvideis, hijas. Es la peor de todas. La mas venenosa. Al que la prueba, no hay quien lo salve. Se muere sin remision"—"when young, she fools you. But when she is old it's another matter . . . don't forget it, my daughters. She's the worst of all. The most

poisonous. He who tastes her cannot be saved. He dies without absolution." Since in Spanish the word for wild mushroom, "seta," is feminine, Fernando's comments seem to refer to women as much as to mushrooms, especially since he never uses the noun "seta" itself in his commentary, only the corresponding feminine pronoun. He thus transmits to his daughters the demonic attractiveness of the femme fatale which, as we have seen, Isabel herself practices representing. By envisioning her sister as a devil, Ana perhaps subconsciously recognizes that Isabel has been ensnared by these traditional patriarchal views of women as dangerous, monstrous, other.

In *El espiritu de la colmena* the functions of the female protagonist of the traditional horror/woman's film are divided among two young characters. Although Ana is the one who most obviously identifies with a monster, it is actually her sister Isabel who unwittingly takes on the truly monstrous role, conforming to expected female behavior under patriarchy. Ana, by contrast, develops into a rebel, not only against specific Francoist politics, as other critics have observed, but also against the more universally prevalent patriarchy; we can only hope at the film's end that she will never abandon the spirit she acquires over the course of the narrative.[16]

My purpose here has been similar to Dr. Frankenstein's; in fact, the task of anyone who wishes to interpret *El espiritu de la colmena* must be so: the film's narrative ellipses might be likened to missing body parts, which must be supplied and sutured into place by the spectator/critic. And the member that I have attempted to recuperate is the same one that is missing from "poor don Jose": the sign of sexual difference, as it is constructed in society at large and within the filmic realm. □

[16]In fact at the film's close, Ana is the only character who resists the status quo, since Teresa abandons her more rebellious ways (writing to someone, perhaps a lover, in France and feigning sleep when Fernando climbs into bed) for a more traditional motherly attitude (burning an unsent letter and solicitously covering Fernando with a blanket as he sleeps in his study).

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John Biguenet

# AN ALLIGATOR ON THE PATH

The bike path that he had followed at water's edge along the southern shore of Lake Pontchartrain stopped abruptly at the marshes of St. Charles Parish. Across a swollen canal, thick plugs of swampgrass rose up in little islands that stretched off into the lake all the way to the horizon.

Having gone as far as he could go, the cyclist turned his bike back towards the city. He had not expected to make it to the end of the path, which was littered with the flotsam of the week's storms. He had had to pick his way among bloated redfish seething with flies, shattered branches, and shards of broken bottles strewing the path. The stiff wind that he had felt at his back out of the east had pushed the lake up over the asphalt bike path in several places; the cyclist had coasted through the deep puddles holding up his legs like two tusks beneath the handlebars. At times, his spinning wheels had ground to a halt in the thick silt deposited by the tides. Mostly, though, he had chased the long shadow cast ahead of him, the helmeted head wobbling on the sharp plane of his shoulders like an egg teetering on a table.

Now he was at the end of civilization. Twenty-five yards away behind the dense forest that had sprouted on the batture between the levee and the lake, watery land waited to be parceled out to young families moving to the outskirts of New Orleans. But for the moment, the muddy waste was home only to snakes, muskrats, and nesting birds. The cyclist was all alone.

He squirted water into one cheek and slowly swallowed. As he straddled his bike, squinting into the huge sun that lay as bright on the lake as in the sky, the wind riffled his loose shirt. Bending down, he plucked a few blades of grass from a crack in the asphalt and tossed them into the air. The breeze carried them over his shoulder and into the canal. He sighed. Getting home would be hard work in this wind.

His foot twisted the pedals half a turn. Leaning his full weight on the upper one, he felt the lower rise against his foot. He shifted his weight.

Soon he was in the upper gears, struggling against the gusting wind. On the trip out, except for birdcalls and the wheezing of the tires against the path, the morning had been silent; now the roar of the wind into which he bent blasted the cyclist. The racket annoyed him, and the knobs of the skull behind his ears grew sore from the chill still on the breeze.

The wind suddenly died as the bicycle followed the path through a brake of bamboo that jutted some distance out into the lake, forming a little pond. Though choppy brown waves broke upon the outer walls of bamboo, the water of the pond was utterly still. A huge egret poised in the shallows, its perfectly white feathers brilliant in the sunlight. A few yards away, a swarm of green and black turtles huddled on a half-submerged tree trunk.

The cyclist stopped and twisted his water bottle out of its frame. Flicking open the top, he gulped down three or four swallows, then checked his watch. He still had a long way to go, and against the wind it might take him an extra hour to get home. The woman who by now had awakened and was drinking the coffee he had left for her would certainly be angry if he were an hour late. He would have to hurry—wind or no wind.

The pedals had made only a single revolution when he stopped again. Ahead on the path, where the bamboo curled back to the shore, a log completely blocked his way. It had not been there when he had passed the pond a half hour earlier. He couldn't understand how it had suddenly appeared on the path until, to his shock, the log moved. Actually, it didn't move so much as twitch. Alligator, he thought.

Popping open the kickstand of the bike, the cyclist looked for a way around. The pond and then the lake prevented skirting the creature to the left. He knew that alligators killed by locking their jaws on the prey and dragging it down into an underwater nest to drown. Once in the water, particularly with

a bike on his shoulder, the man would have no chance against the eight-foot monster. To the right, impenetrable woods ran all the way back to the levee. And even if he could find a path through the dense trees and soggy underbrush, another alligator, a mate perhaps, might be skulking beneath the palmetto fronds and sawgrass. The man had nowhere to go.

The alligator, slowly turning its long head from side to side, suddenly froze. It seemed to be looking directly at the cyclist.

A splash distracted the man for a moment. A turtle had dropped from its perch into the water. As he surveyed the pond to make certain there was nothing larger lurking there, he saw, in the corner of his eye, the alligator charge.

The squat creature took only three or four steps before it stopped and raised itself up on its forelegs, opening huge snaggle-toothed jaws and bellowing the most primitive sound the man had ever heard. He was stunned by its speed. The ratchet of the gears clicked off the distance as he rolled his bike backwards a few yards.

The white and yellow flesh of the mouth transfixed him until the alligator snapped its jaws shut and turned its head slightly to eye him. The man could see the thick tail trail off in a lazy S behind the creature.

As he stood in the path confronting the animal, he tried to recall everything he knew about alligators. For a moment, he thought he remembered reading that alligators could climb trees, but then he realized that was in a book of folktales. It was bears that could climb a tree after prey. He did know that the powerful tail could kill a man, and he was fairly sure that a person could hold the snout of a gator closed with just his hands—all the muscles in its jaws were for biting down, not for opening its mouth.

He almost laughed as he imagined himself grabbing the jaws of this monster as it attacked him. While he was at it, he thought, he might just as well wedge his bike's aluminum tire pump between the gaping jaws of the creature to prop them open.

He knew there was such a thing as alligator wrestling; battered billboards on state highways throughout the Delta still promised matinees at the few remaining snake farms. And he remembered something about putting an alligator to sleep by rubbing its belly. So all he had to do, he thought, was to wrestle the gator onto its back and then rub the cracked white leather of its stomach till it fell asleep.

Before he could smile, he noticed the claws. The curved, yellow spikes scraped against the asphalt whenever the creature moved. The slight sound shivered through the man as if a fingernail had been drawn across a blackboard.

It occurred to him that the alligator was probably just sunning itself after a night's hunting. Eventually, it would slip into the lake and, with slow flicks of its tail, glide back to the marsh.

He started to sit down on the path to wait but realized he'd be better off on his feet if another alligator came crashing out of the underbrush or suddenly burst from the brackish water of the pond. He shifted his weight from one foot to the other.

At home, he knew, he would face an implacable anger. The full litany of his most recent irresponsibilities would be chanted in a peevish voice, to which he would be expected to refrain, "I'm sorry." His beautiful companion, easily vexed, would pout all weekend. She would not believe his story about the alligator.

For the first time, he realized that she didn't love him. Once he said it to himself, he felt stupid for not having seen it sooner.

He kept his eyes on the alligator. It lolled on the path, less attentive to him now. Hoping another cyclist might venture out this far, the man squinted into the glare of the morning sun along the twisting path; nothing seemed to be moving.

"She doesn't love me," he thought to himself, almost relieved. He was anxious to get home.

A few steps closer to the beast, a short, heavy stick was stuck in the mud at the lip of the pond. The man inched forward, slowly crouching at the edge of the path to draw the thick shaft from the slime. Just as slowly, he backed up to his bike. Taking careful aim, he raised the dripping stick above his head and hurled it at the alligator. It spit its ooze into the bright air as it tumbled towards the drowsing monster. The stick clattered and skittered along the path beside the alligator's tail—he had missed.

The creature seemed unaware of the attack. Its unmoving head lay flat against the path.

The man felt foolish. He looked about for something else to throw. In the thick grass that bordered the path, he found chunks of broken cement. Parish work crews used concrete from demolished buildings and resurfaced streets to shore up the bike path against the ravages of pounding waves. Some of the scattered pieces he found were small enough to throw. He piled them up in a little pyramid like cannonballs on a parade ground.

He positioned his bike for a fast getaway back to the end of the path, if necessary. Then he tested the weight of the first chunk, traded it for a lighter one, and threw with all his might at the alligator. The concrete struck along the ridges of its back. It lifted its head, apparently unsure what had happened.

Just then, a second chunk caught it between its foreleg and its throat. It growled as its whole body tensed on it paws, curved claws scrabbling on the asphalt.

A third throw skidded past the beast, but the next landed right between its eyes. Enraged, it slashed its head back and forth.

A blow to its side seemed to confuse the creature, which pivoted and rushed up the path a few steps in the opposite direction, bellowing fiercely.

A squawking white explosion just to his left startled the man. The egret, plodding about the shallows, had suddenly burst into flight. Its large wings frantically beat the air as it lifted above him. It was the first time he had ever seen an egret move without grace.

He scanned the pond for something more than the bird's ripples but found nothing. He picked up two more pieces of concrete.

The barrage continued until the alligator scurried into the brown waters of Lake Pontchartrain. Taking one more chunk of cement with him, the cyclist ran his bike to the spot where the alligator had abandoned the path. Already twenty yards out, the creature sculled towards deeper water. The man, elated and now ready to vent his fury at the beast that had threatened him, poised—rock raised in hand—on the edge of the lake. All about his feet, ragged pieces of concrete lay where they had struck the animal. But before he could throw, his arm dropped to his side. It was over.

The wind, though slackening a bit, continued to buffet him as he turned the wheels of his bike towards home, where a woman fretted over a cup of cold coffee. Bowing to a sudden gust, he shivered as the wind bellowed in his ears, and he could not tell whether what he felt was joy or despair. □

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***John Biguenet's** third book,* Theories of Translation, *has just been published by the University of Chicago Press.*

John W. Murphy and Jung Min Choi

# THEORETICAL JUSTIFICATION FOR A POLITICS OF DIFFERENCE

*Introduction*

Culture is no longer regarded to be sacred by a host of writers.[1] Once considered to be the harbinger of civilization and order, culture has come to be viewed as repressive. In some circles, supporting culture is almost synonymous with curtailing freedom. Proponents of this critique claim that culture has become too homogeneous, monolithic, and thus restrictive. As a result, the sacrifice of human expression is encouraged in the name of preserving morality.

Despite the existence of superficial differences, civilization is believed to be held together by a few fundamental themes. These so-called commonalities are often described to be derived from human nature, reason, or other basic qualities of life. Novel developments may occur, but radical breaks that may disrupt the harmony found in nature should be eschewed. This means that growth is expected to equilibrate around standards that are seldom questioned, at least by responsible persons.

Actually, the adoption of a "Eurocentric outlook" has been the denouement of this approach to culture. But due to the inherent limitations of this viewpoint, many persons have begun to rebel. After all, why should this cultural hegemony go unchallenged? Refusing to admit that their culture is inadequate, persons throughout the world have formed a variety of liberation movements. Also consistent with the current rejection of cultural imperialism, taking pride in one's heritage has become widespread.

Recently, Cornel West labeled this trend the "New Cultural Politics of Difference" (93-109). Simply stated, persons are refusing to subordinate their values, beliefs, and commitments to traditional cultural mandates. A variant of decolonization is underway, which is designed to introduce voices from the periphery into the debate over the identity and significance of culture. Those who have been subjugated are demanding to be heard; the typically accepted empire of signs and demeanor has begun to collapse.

Although the proliferation of claims is applauded, this political philosophy has been articulated in a haphazard manner. Most social scientists are preoccupied with collecting data and gaining legitimacy, and exhibit little interest in the deconstruction of culture. As a result, literary critics and others in the humanities have been thrust into the vanguard of the movement to expand the range of acceptable human expression. For the most part, however, these writers do not understand the history of social thought. And due to a noticeable absence of social philosophy, what has emerged is a rendition of difference that does not differ appreciably from earlier renditions of pluralism. In other words, a true radicalization of culture has not yet occurred.

The aim of this paper is to provide theoretical or philosophical justification for the politicalization of difference. In order to accomplish this goal, a few ideas must be systematically discussed. For example, how is the basis of order usually conceived? And how are reductionism, monolithic order, and hierarchy supported by this foundation? Once these questions are addressed, the justification for "inferiorizing" cultures can be attacked. As Sartre might say, the "metaphysics" of discrimination can be successfully undermined.[2]

But this is only half of the project. Society must be reconstructed in a non-repressive way. If the usual social imagery is no longer deemed acceptable to integrate persons, how is chaos to be averted? Because they have failed to address the reconstitution of order, advocates of cultural deconstruction have

[1]Cornel West, "The New Cultural Politics of Difference," *October* 53 (1990): 93-109.

[2]Jean-Paul Sartre, *Anti-Semite and Jew*, trans. George J. Becker (New York: Schocken Books, 1969) 40-46.

been described as nihilists. But clearly the politics of difference will have little chance of gaining credibility if order is always assumed to be repressive. In short, who is likely to recognize a principle that is anathema to order?

Rather than merely calling for the institution of difference, the social philosophical gambits that are necessary for emancipation should receive attention. Hence extolling the benefits difference will not sound frivolous, as is often the case when this policy is simply wrapped in platitudes. Not only must promoting difference have a sound rationale, but the resulting options must be integrated. An explanation must be provided of how differences are engendered, protected, and organized, without creating a rigid and stifling system. Such a task is impossible, however, in the absence of appropriate theoretical work.

*Social Reality and Repression*

Niklas Luhmann notes correctly that Western writers have had a penchant for describing society as "centered."[3] By this term he means that an absolute referent has been invoked typically to secure order. As Durkheim states, unless social norms constitute a "reality *sui generis*," the maintenance of society is impossible.[4] Deprived of an ultimate center around which persons can coalesce, chaos is unavoidable. In more contemporary terms, the tendency has been to describe society in a "logocentric" way.

Giving social reality this sort of status is certainly understandable, in view of the desire to have an inviolable basis for order. But why is this search for unimpeachable norms thought to be valid?

This pursuit is legitimized by dualism. Positivists characterize this idea when they argue that fact can be distinguished from value. Their point is that knowledge unencumbered by interpretation not only exists, but that this information is objective and easily recognizable by informed persons. Because the vagaries of interpretation are minimized, clear and distinct knowledge can be adopted to reinforce institutions. Order that is unencumbered by situational exigencies, therefore, is not an empty dream.

What is accomplished by this demarche is that particular knowledge is granted a seignorial position in society. In other words, certain input is not vigorously scrutinized, because it is presumed to be free of values or biases. Additionally, and maybe more important, knowledge that does not conform to this standard is treated as dubious. Although no knowledge is created *ex nihilo*, select information is assumed to be undefiled by quotidian concerns. In this sense, asymmetry is accepted among knowledge bases. Whereas one kind of knowledge is reliable, others are not. But surely this conclusion is a value judgment?

Nonetheless, accepting dualism is critical to inferiorizing political opinions or lifestyles, for example, that threaten the *status quo*. If one perspective is assumed to be indicative of rationality, while the remainder are believed to be redolent of emotion or other undesirable traits, an epistemological or social hierarchy is not difficult to justify. Furthermore, because different types of knowledge are imagined to be mutually exclusive, credence is given to essentialism and other methods of linking inherent abilities to special groups or persons.

Frantz Fanon, for instance, found dualism to play a key role in supporting the exploitation associated with colonialism.[5] Because depriving persons of their rights is believed to be serious, opinions and other ephemeral kinds of information are insufficient to sanction this practice. Therefore, more profound justification is sought. Often this takes the form of scientific knowledge, which is generally regarded to be impersonal. For if objective evidence can be obtained that some persons are inferior to others, the reign of colonialists is not in jeopardy. As Fanon notes, once black skin is identified as representative of underlying maladies, giving rights to black slaves makes no sense. Why should equal status be granted to those who do not deserve

[3]Niklas Luhmann, *The Differentiation of Society*, trans. Stephen Holmes and Charles Larmore (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1982) 70-89.

[4]Emile Durkheim, *Pragmatism and Sociology*, trans. J.C. Whitehouse (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1983) 82-85.

[5]Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, trans. Constance Farrington (Middlesex, England: Penguin, 1967).

this privilege?

Clearly dualism is vital to promoting "biopower," which Foucault says is the most effective mode of social control yet devised.[6] This kind of power is intimidating because it is ahistorical. That is, associating power with biological processes perpetrates the illusion that all social arrangements are natural and necessary. If specific persons eventually find themselves in unenviable positions, political motives cannot be blamed for this unfortunate outcome. After all, biology does not appear to be related to class conflict or other social issues. The exercise of power is thus provided with the facade of neutrality, so that the ire of the public is not aroused by injustice.

Postmodernists call this version of order "phallocratic."[7] Their point is that order is secure because norms embody a referent that is unrelenting. As a result of associating social reality with a *causa sui*, however, the human element is depreciated. Stated another way, difference is cast into the penumbra of an ominous force, and thus integration eventually comes to be a euphemism for guaranteeing social and cultural uniformity.

*Difference and Anti-dualism*

Difference cannot be brought to fruition unless legitimacy can be denied to the source of cultural imperialism. In other words, no one should be allowed to claim immunity from interpretation. For if interpretation is understood to be ubiquitous to every knowledge base and cultural formation, how can claims to represent a reality *sui generis* be taken seriously? To use Barthes' characterization, once reality is acknowledged to be nothing more than a mode of interpretation, conformity should be a matter of choice rather than a *fait accompli*.[8]

But resurrecting human action in this way requires that dualism be abandoned. All inviolable barriers to creativity must be discredited, or the development of options will be inherently restricted. Thus difference will not be promoted, but only the views that have been domesticated and are consistent with what Deleuze calls the "dominant forms of signification." Yet such acquiescence is not repressive to those who benefit from the prevailing reality. Instead, proper adjustment to these norms is believed to be indicative of sound judgment and maturity.

Many contemporary writers contend that this scenario is, at best, fatuous. They base this assertion on recent advancements in philosophy which illustrate that dualism is outmoded. Subsequent to Kant, the rationale for this charge should be obvious. Nonetheless, more recent writers, such as Barthes, Derrida, and Lacan, have progressed further in subverting realism. And as a result of them taking certain steps, the theoretical justification is finally available for making difference the cornerstone of society. Whereas Comte, Durkheim, and Parsons, for example, feared that difference would have to be controlled to avert *anomie*, this is no longer necessary.

These postmodernists write that due to the ubiquity of language, reality cannot be envisioned to be a spectacle. Because reality is the product of "language games," a pristine foundation is not available for order.[9] According to Barthes, even objectivity represents a special modality of interpretation.[10] Consequently, reality must be preserved through speech acts. And instead of constraining human action, order stands in the midst of interpretation. Special appeals made to reality, accordingly, will have little influence in preventing order from unravelling.

Usually a sanitized location is reserved for social reality, so that order cannot be threatened. As is suggested, this place is assumed to be divorced from the contingencies that plague daily existence. But because "nothing exists outside of the text," writes Derrida, such a domain cannot be sustained.[11] And

[6]Michel Foucault, *Power/Knowledge*, trans. Colin Gordon (New York: Pantheon, 1980).

[7]Felix Guattari, *Molecular Revolution*, trans. Rosemary Sheed (Middlesex, England: Penguin, 1984) 233.

[8]Roland Barthes, *The Rustle of Language*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Hill and Wang, 1986) 160.

[9]Jean-Francois Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, trans. Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 1984) 9-11.

[10]Roland Barthes, *The Grain of the Voice*, trans. Linda Coverdale (New York: Hill and Wang, 1985) 52.

[11]Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1976) 158.

erecting a Leviathan on this spot is no longer a reasonable proposal, for escape from interpretation is impossible. Therefore, discovering the kind of universal interpretation of reality sought by Hobbes is not feasible.

Does this mean order is passé? The answer to this question is no. But to paraphrase Paul de Man, all claims about reality are clearly decanonized.[12] Instead of simply accepted, reality must now be inaugurated. This is what Lyotard has in mind when he suggests that truth must work to be recognized.[13] For only by preserving interpretation can reality be maintained.

In terms of promoting difference, what is the significance of this change in thinking about reality? Again to use Lyotard's terminology, the base has been eliminated from which terrorist attacks can be launched.[14] In other words, an ultimate reality cannot be identified that can be enlisted to discredit all other viewpoints; no legitimate reason exists for enforcing asymmetrical relationships between cultures.

Instead of the monolithic, order consists of a patchwork of competing tendencies. Accordingly, each one of these positions has the right to autonomy. After all, what knowledge base has the status required to allow one culture to dominate automatically all others? Obviously attempts have been made to create such an ideology, through the use of science and technology, but these efforts can be exposed as inept. For even so-called scientific facts have been illustrated as united inextricably to interpretation.[15]

Implied by this subversion of dualism is that the expansion of differences has no absolute limit. But also, the idea of difference has been radicalized. With his use of the term "differance," this change has been adequately captured by Derrida.[16]

What Derrida has done is to expand thoroughly on the usual definition of difference. Far more is implied by "differance" than simply enlarging the regular selection of options, for when this is the case each one is still understood to have a fixed identity. Stated differently, a vital facet of realism is retained that is compatible with hierarchy. A dais, simply put, is preserved on which the standard prejudices can be established, only now implementing these biases is slightly more complicated.

This inability to radicalize difference has begun to cause problems in Europe. Members of the New Right in France have transformed the notion of difference into an excuse for racism. If persons are different, why not keep them apart? This is the logic that is used by these new racists. But upon close examination, however, these rightists are basing their advocacy of difference on the principle of sameness. The inherent traits that separate persons also invoked to keep particular groups homogenous. In this case, latent realism is allowed to pervert difference.

Nonetheless, what Derrida means by differance is that every referent consists of various meanings which compete for dominance. Lyotard conveys this sentiment when he insists that "A is almost equal to A."[17] Every identity, therefore, must be reinforced, or risk being concealed by rival interpretations. And furthermore, because there is no escape from the realm of interpretation, no final reconciliation of interpretations is possible. According to Derrida, there is no *Aufhebung*; there is no final arbiter to separate differences.

This inability to transcend interpretation is referred to by Julia Kristeva as "intertextuality."[18] All that is possible is movement from one interpretation to another, with no final end to this trek. No Archimedean point is available, from where the entire social scene can be surveyed. Hence there is no

[12]Paul de Man, *The Resistance to Theory* (Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 1986) 97-98.

[13]Jean-Francois Lyotard, *Driftworks* (New York: Semiotext(e), 1984) 35.

[14]Jean-Francois Lyotard and Jean-Loup Thebaud, *Just Gaming*, trans. Wlad Godzich (Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 1984) 98.

[15]John W. Murphy, *Postmodern Social Analysis and Criticism* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1989) 24-26.

[16]Jacques Derrida, *Speech and Phenomena*, trans. David B. Allison (Evanston: Northwestern Univ. Press, 1973) 129-60.

[17]Jean-Francois Lyotard, *The Differend*, trans. Georges Van Den Abbeele (Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 1988) 32-58.

[18]Julia Kristeva, *Desire in Language*, trans. Thomas Gora, Alice Jardine, and Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1980) 36-38.

cosmos, with each component assured a proper place. Only identities are present, which may be temporary, that stand in the presence of other uncertainties.

Speaking about difference is clearly warranted. But these are not fixed options, because each choice is multivalent, elusive, and lacks sufficient justification. For example, Canguilhem says that all social phenomena, even diseases, are "polysemic," or speak various ways simultaneously. What could be better for a society that wants to encourage diversity? Indeed, no restrictions can be imposed *a priori* to restrict diversification. A politics of difference is thus inevitable. In fact, as a consequence of dislodging the underpinnings of inferiorization, demands should be expected from all sectors of society. Who is likely to accept an inferior status, once the rationale for such injustice has been eviscerated?

*Order in the Presence of Difference*

Because interpretation is interjected into the core of reality, essentialism is undermined. Natural standards are not available to differentiate groups or persons, and thus every identity is volatile. In this regard, Barthes writes the "I is nothing more than the instance of saying I."[19] The self, in other words, should not be accounted for by substantialist metaphysics, because the ego is a *persona* that is adopted, altered, and sometimes jettisoned in favor of other possibilities. While emphasizing the fluid character of identity, Lacan asserts "The Woman" is all that exists.[20] His point, like Barthes, is that only the residue of interpretation is available to sustain a person's identity.

However, as is noted earlier, denying legitimacy to essentialism is especially problematic for establishing order. Specifically, the usual centered image of society is defunct. Due to the pervasiveness of interpretation, a reality untrammeled by passion is unacceptable. Jean Gebser captures the thrust of this objection when he remarks that the "center is everywhere," because no interpretation can demand automatic recognition and special status.

What this means is that the old assimilationist models of adjustment are outmoded. Although new terminology may be adopted, such as cultural socialization or role identification, assimilation is coercive. For example, describing assimilation to be the product of socialization may appear to be scientific, but presupposed by both processes are norms that are believed to be crucial to the survival of society. Straying from these standards, furthermore, is thought to signal a breakdown in rationality and social control. In any guise, the principle of assimilation is not scientific but ideological, due to the obvious commitments that sustain this process of adjustment.

But throughout the history of social thought, primacy has been given to this sort of ontological realism. Stated differently, sameness has been treated as the only reliable basis for society. In the absence of a universal human nature, natural laws, or cultural prerequisites, productive interaction is thought to be impossible. Hence intense pressure is placed on those who appear to be different, for the fate of society depends on their eventual conformity. What could be more diabolical than knowingly contaminating reality? In point of fact, for such an indiscretion persons are often severely punished.

But clearly this dense social imagery is problematic. Given the desire to foster radical epistemological pluralism, which according to contemporary writers is better described as "nomadism," more diaphanous order is needed. In this kind of open society, various options should be permitted to freely associate. Luhmann summarizes this argument when he declares that order can be promoted through the "recognition of differences," in addition to giving credence to an exalted reality (353-55). As a result of acknowledging the uniqueness of the other, the behavior of this individual can be anticipated. Clearly homogeneity is not necessary to predict the actions of persons. What is crucial, instead, is that their differences be recognized and understood, rather than viewed as impediments to rational discourse.

What this means is that order can be directly related. Nothing has to mediate the relationship of self and alter, other than the

[19]Roland Barthes, *Image, Music, Text*, trans. Stephen Heath (New York: Hill and Wang, 1977) 145.

[20]Jacques Lacan, *Feminine Sexuality*, trans. Jacqueline Rose (New York: Norton, 1982) 137-48.

nuances of speech. Therefore, rather than constraining human action, order embodies language use. All that is available to reinforce order are definitions, announcements, and other strategies for clarifying knowledge. Order is thus woven, as opposed to reflecting an indubitable reality. This means that the ground of order is constantly shifting and always in need of further elucidation. Although reality is fragile, order can be maintained through the process of iteration that is essential to accurate interpretation.

Gebser refers to this rendition of order as "integral."[21] By this he means that the components of society are constantly adjusting to one another, and thus the number of alignments is unlimited. Hence continuous integration and the rapid redeployment of reality are normative. Yet such dynamism scares many cultural critics, for the interaction of so many factors is thought to lead to chaos. Many persons find the lack of a first cause, *telos*, or some other guiding principle difficult to tolerate.

But models of order are available that do not require the acceptance of an unscrutinized axis. Gebser, for example, has selected the term *systasis* to describe how order may be integrated in a non-repressive manner. Deleuze and Guattari, on the other hand, compare this kind open society to a rhizome.

A *systase* is not a system, and thus order is not regulated from a static or central control point. As discussed earlier, retaining this pristine location will only foster the creation of a hierarchical structure. In a *systase*, instead, all elements occupy a similar plane and are "conjoined or fitted together into integrality" (310).

A good example of this centerless mode of integration is provided by the rhizome. Anyone who examines this weed is immediately frustrated, for a rhizome has no beginning or end. Deleuze and Guattari argue correctly that a rhizome has no privileged point of entry, or a primary root structure which serves to anchor this plant.[22] Growth, therefore, proceeds in all directions simultaneously, while order is represented by lines of intersection.

Even though any one of its elements may be connected to any other, the development of a rhizome is not chaotic. Growth is not random, haphazard, or sporadic. On the contrary, this plant thrives in even the most harsh environment. Yet order is maintained without the assistance of a regulatory center; coordination is direct, and control is dispersed throughout the rhizome.

The message conveyed by this rhizome imagery should be apparent to those who are interested in the politics of difference. That is, promoting "differance" does not have to culminate in anarchy. Instead, a decentered form of order is possible, where differences complement one another. In the rhizome world, a shift in direction does not result in the destruction and complete reorientation of order. Slight adjustments are merely made and growth continues, without any sign of disequilibrium. Accordingly, emphasizing "differance" is a viable alternative to abstract system building.

*Conclusion*

The aim of this paper is to show that a politics of difference is possible. Advocating epistemological nomadism, in other words, does not have to be viewed as destroying culture or condemning society to interminable disorder. Perfectly reasonable persons can call for the dismantling of hierarchies without having misanthropic tendencies.

In terms of modern race relations, practically everyone recognizes the legitimacy of pluralism. Encouraging diversity, subsequent to the work of Memmi, Fanon, Said, and so on, has become almost a moral imperative. The key stumbling block, however, has been the inability to invent the requisite model of integration. Simply put, is integration possible without assimilation?

Most traditionalists answer no to this question, for the recognition of a single reality has been presumed to be necessary to secure order. A by-product of this approach, however, is uniformity, which gradually culminates in the sacrifice of human freedom. Because personal expression is viewed typically as trivial, reality is rarely allowed to be obscured by any form of human action.

[21]Jean Gebser, *The Ever-present Origin*, trans. Noel Barstad and Algis Mickunas (Athens, Ohio: Ohio Univ. Press, 1985) 97-102.

[22]Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *On the Line*, trans. John Johnston (New York: Semiotext(e), 1983) 10-20.

But structural necessity is not the only principle for insuring order. For when order is conceived to be a rhizome, openness and control can co-exist. Persons can continue to maneuver until they establish mutually satisfying relationships. This is true liberation, in that respect for the other is the only limiting condition. Sartre refers to this activity as "collective praxis." Hence the self, other, and their interaction are not regulated by a force that can demand uniformity. Instead, through intersubjectivity differences can be preserved as a patchwork—similar to a quilt—that is orderly but not monolithic. What could be more liberating than order without a system? □

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# Reiner Kunze

*English Translations by Thomas S. Edwards*

## ADVANCE GUARD HERE

In the hands
paving stones, the heavy semen
of darkness

Stone throw by stone throw it advances

## VORTRUPPS HIER

In den händen
pflastersteine, die schweren samen
der finsternis

Steinwurf um steinwurf rückt sie vor

## FLEEING THE LITERARY BUSINESS

They don't want your soaring, they want
the feathers

## DEN LITERATURBETRIEB FLIEHEND

Sie wollen nicht deinen flug, sie wollen
die federn

## NIGHT JOURNEY

Sending a light out ahead, driving
toward a light

Toward the possibility of a light

Toward a light switch that
will not be touched

Under whose lamp
you sleep

## NACHTFAHRT

Ein licht vor sich herschickend, zufahren
auf ein licht

Auf die möglichkeit eines lichts

Auf einen lichtschalter der
nicht berührt werden wird

Unter dessen lampe
du schläfst

## PLEA AT YOUR FEET

Die earlier than me, just a bit
earlier

So it isn't you
who has to walk
the path to the house alone

## BITTGEDANKE, DIR ZU FÜSSEN

Stirb fruher als ich, um ein weniges
fruher

Damit nicht du
den weg zum haus
allein zurückgehn muBt

## UNDER DYING TREES

We have offended the earth, she takes
her wonders back

We, one of her
wonders

## UNTER STERBENDEN BAUMEN

Wir haben die erde gekränkt, sie nimmt
ihre wunder zurück

Wir, der wunder
eines

## IN THE PROVENCE

The sky, a hard blue stone
in the setting of midday

Gorse grazes in golden herds

Dust raises itself up
like the master it is

## IN DER PROVENCE

Wer himmel ein harter blauer stein
in der fassung des mittags

Der ginster weidet in gelben herden

Der staub
schwingt sich auf zu dem herrn, der er ist

Eugene J. Devlin

# STOIC INFLUENCE IN THE JESUIT HUMANIST THEATRE OF THE SIXTEENTH AND SEVENTEENTH CENTURIES

When Jacob Gretser (1562-1625) finished writing *Nicholas of Unterwalden* in 1586 he had already joined a number of Jesuit baroque dramatists who were attracted to the teachings of Neostoicism and one of its troublesome corollaries, flight from the world. For Gretser it was not his first brush with the hermit theme and probably represented a deepening and precision of his ideas on the subject.[1]

Like some of his Jesuit contemporaries, Bidermann (1578-1639) and Rader (1561-1634), Gretser was undeniably attuned to the ascetic mood of his epoch. Religious and political turmoil had left an unmistakable imprint on the character of contemporary literature and drama. Baroque religious experience tended to be turned inward and a highly emotional quality is evident in much of the drama of the period. There is an observable tendency to consider man a stranger and exile in an alien world and a consequent tendency in dramas of the period to reject social responsibility.[2]

One striking reaction to the uncertainty of the period was the desire to flee from what was viewed as the vanity of life and seek the solitude of some sylvan wilderness to work out personal salvation in reflection and prayer. Given the characteristics of the epoch it could come as no great surprise when William V, ruler of Bavaria, abdicated his throne at the height of his power to spend the last three decades of his life in the solitude of a monastery (Muller 1: 41-43). Some decades before, an even more illustrious ruler had confessed his own inability to face the turmoil of the epoch when Charles of Spain put aside imperial robes to don the simple habit of a monk in the cloisters of the Escorial.

The last half of the sixteenth century was notable for its religious and political insecurity. The monolithic faith of the Middle Ages had been fragmented to a large extent by a new intellectual and religious ferment which sent men even to the occult in search for a meaning to life. Wallenstein is only one example of a prominent personality who was known to have consulted his horoscope before coming to a decision. There was a tendency in the air to confuse theatre with life, to find reality in appearance and illusion. Abrupt change was the name of the game, and the king of today could readily be supplanted by a beggar on the morrow.[3] Loss of faith in the permanence of things brought with it an understandable desire to abandon the hopeless struggle and seek the relative security of solitude and prayer.

It is perhaps not without its own irony that in the wake of the Tridentine Reform, with its accent on authority and the positive role of providence in human affairs, Catholic writers began to manifest a certain discomfort with previously unquestioned principles governing Christian society. Stoic philosophy with its uncompromising orientation toward personal independence began to be heard increasingly among writers and dramatists.[4]

Jesuit dramatists could not long remain indifferent to this revival of interest in stoic philosophy. On the Jesuit stage the traditional notion of the Christian hero begins to undergo a subtle transformation. Alongside typically baroque hero types as Adocetus and Promethes (*Cosmarchia*), Jacob Bidermann introduces the figure of the anonymous hermit whose only act of heroism was to flee from the pomp of the world to a life of

[1]Jacob Gretser (1562-1625), Jesuit dramatist and theologian in the period of the post-Tridentine reform. Wrote dramas on humanist, legendary, and historical subjects for the Jesuit college stage at Fribourg, Dillingen, and Munich. Gretser's *Comoedia de Nicolao Unterwaldio* appears in the Codex Dillingensis 221ff. The play has been translated into German by E. Scherer in *Schriften der Gesellschaft fur innerschweizerische Theaterkultur*, Bd 1 (Basel-Fribourg: 1928). The ms. source will be referred to as *CD*.

[2]Johannes Muller, *Das Jesuitendrama* in 2 vols. (Augsburg: Filser, 1928) 1: 41.

[3]Jacob Bidermann, *Cosmarchia sive mundi respublica* (Munich: apud Claudium, 1620) 5: 10. The text is conceived as a musical drama and has been translated by S. Schaller into German as *Cosmarchia oder das Reich der Erdenguter* (Ettal: 1956).

[4]Henry Ettinghausen, *Francisco Quevedo and the Neostoic Movement* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1972) 4-6.

sylvan solitude devoted to frugality "procul negotiis" (5: 2).

For some Jesuit dramatists of the period preoccupation with this stern moral philosophy can be traced to the influence which neostoic thought, especially of Dutch provenance, had on the Order's early dramatic history. It is no secret that more than one contemporary Jesuit dramatist reveals a hidden sympathy for the philosophy of the Stoa as it was presented by Seneca and the Latin writers of his school. An undeniable sympathy is had for the man of fibre who refuses to compromise his ideals despite the harsh blows of unreasonable fate.

Jacob Masen (1606-1681) places Seneca in the first rank of Latin tragic authors and expresses his admiration for the Senecan orientation of the Jesuits Libens, Malapert, Stefonio, and Petau, as well as gratitude to the Dutch humanists Grotius and Heinsius for translating the idiom of Seneca into contemporary terms.[5]

A play performed in Ratisbonn (Regensburg) as late as 1722 qualifies the *Letters to Lucilius* by the neostoic philosopher Justus Lipsius as the "eight wonder of the world." The Jesuit dramatic theorist Martin Delrio also dedicated the preface of a collection of Senecan plays to Lipsius while Masen praises the neostoic Heinsius as the equal of Donatus. The heroes of contemporary Jesuit martyr dramas bathe in an aura of neo-Christian stoicism, a quality which perhaps made them palatable to Gryphius and his Silesian school.[6]

One possible explanation for the popularity of a neostoic viewpoint among earlier Jesuit dramatists may be the resemblance it seems to bear to the ascetic principles of the Ignatian *Spiritual Exercises*. For the contemporary Jesuit dramatist with his Tridentine interpretation of reality there is an undeniable attraction for the hero of stoic mold who opposes the tragedy of life with the weapons of indifference and constancy. Caussin goes as far as to compare the man of constancy to god.[7]

The earliest records of Jesuit enthusiasm for stoic beliefs can be traced to Dutch and Flemish sources. Delrio believed strongly in the neostoic philosophy of Justus Lipsius. One half century earlier Ignatius of Loyola during his stay at Louvain was apparently influenced by contemporary stoic thought, as can be seen in some of the key principles of his popular ascetical treatise the *Spiritual Exercises* with their stong orientation toward indifference, self-conquest, and his stoic tendency to consider the human body as the prison of the soul.[8] Though Ignatius never denied the role of divine providence in the life of post-Tridentine man, contemporary neostoic thought was inclined to dispense with any need for God. Independent of providence, man was able to "order all things aright" and to free himself from the inordinate passions which were so often to blame for moral chaos in society.

In an age caught up in political turmoil and religious uncertainty, the common man longed for a philosophy which could free the human person from passion, control emotional excess, and provide the strength to meet the blows of life with resignation and constancy. The stoic ideal of indifference, desire without dependence, choice made with subdued passions experienced a strong appeal in a world often exposed to personal and political violence.

The stoic ideal of the "sage like God, but mortal," with power to choose freely between good and evil, was a popular if illusory yearning. It should be stated that the neostoic of the sixteenth and seventeenth century never denies God. In effect he only declares that god has no need of human assistance. Stoic indifference does indeed acknowledge providence but perhaps takes advantage of God's gift of free will to accept whatever happens for good or ill in his life. This view-

[5]Jean-Marie Valentin, *Le theatre des Jesuites* in 3 vols. (Bern: Lang, 1978) 1: 821-22. Valentin's work represents an important relatively recent study of the theatre of the Jesuits in German-speaking areas.

[6]W. Harring, *Andreas Gryphius und das Drama der Jesuiten* (Halle: 1905) 2-5.

[7]Pierre Caussin, "Cour sainte," in *Tragoediae sacrae* (Paris: 1620) 1: 2.

[8]David L. Fleming, *A Contemporary Reading of the Spiritual Exercises* (St. Louis: Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1980) 39; 40-43.

[9]Jacob Bidermann, "Cenodoxus," *Ludi theatrales* in 5 vols., contained in the *Codex latinus monacencis* Nr 797: 151ff. This ms. has been edited and translated into English by D.Dyer, *Cenodoxus* (Edinburgh: 1925).

point seeks to proclaim the grandeur of a human existence which has freed itself from the demands of materialism and self-indulgence.

Nurtured in an atmosphere of political and religious disorientation and a popular tendency to disregard earlier medieval trust in divine providence, many a baroque figure gladly accepted a doctrine which espoused self-control, indifference, and independence from the world in which he lived. Unable to bear up under the harsh blow of fate, baroque man took refuge in the stoic teaching of personal independence often to the extent of turning his back on social responsibility in an ironic twist on the gospel virtues of poverty and chastity.

Evils which neostoic philosophers saw as the result of a corrupt and disorganized society led more than one to abandon society and flee life altogether in the hope of finding solace and self-respect in some sylvan wilderness "procul negotiis" and far from the turmoil of society. What at first sight seems to be nothing more than an ill-conceived mixture of egotism and self-love is transformed into a sense of benevolence and concern for others. The self-declared exile from society frequently maintains helpful contacts with society, though from a distance.

Jacob Gretser was one of the earlier Jesuit dramatists to shift the focus of contemporary neostoic thought from the tragic figure of man struggling alone in a society he did not feel part of to the role of a protagonist who opts for freedom in solitude and flight from a cruel and senseless world. His preoccupation with the role of hermit, however, was not original and had long been held in honor in the pages of Christian hagiography.

After the conversion of Constantine, the period of the Christian martyr was effectively at an end and a new form of witness was discovered in the evangelical counsels of poverty and contempt for material wealth. In the early fourth century this ideal led to a wholesale exodus of laymen and religious who sought to practice the life of a hermit in the solitude of the Egyptian deserts. In the tradition of the early Christian church, the call to the life of an anchorite was generally respected, although it had never been proposed as a form of Christian witness suited to all.

As early as 1584, Gretser had produced his *Timon comoedia*, a Latin humanist play on the misanthrope of Athens, a subject culled from the pages of Lucian (*CD* 65a-99). The decision of the protagonist to flee from the world is based on the classical source. The Jesuit passes no judgment on Timon's decision nor is there any attempt to persuade his audience to the virtues of the solitary life. The door is left open, however, for a more complete treatment of the subject in his *Nicholas of Unterwalden*, which was performed at Lucerne in 1586.

Encouraged by Peter Canisius, his superior and an acknowledged polemicist in favor of the Tridentine Reform, the Suabian schoolman undertook to rework the life of Brother Klaus, a popular Swiss legend, into dramatic form. His first attempt was a polemic dialog, centered on a theologically troublesome aspect of the Swiss hermit's life. This was the miraculous subsistence of Brother Klaus on the eucharist for over twenty years. In the epilog of the dialog the author hints at his intention to elaborate the life of the hermit of Unterwalden into a full-scale drama (*CD* 227: 218-22).

That occasion arrived in 1586 when Gretser was invited to present a drama as part of the celebration of the Borromean League, an alliance of conservative cantons in Switzerland. The civic group for whom the play was written expected a glorification of Nicholas in the framework of the religious and patriotic sentiments of the new league. Gretser, however, only partially satisfied their aspirations. In the play Nicholas plays the role of a latter-day anchorite who abandons wife and children in a typically stoic bid for personal perfection rather than accept the role of patriot prescribed for him in the Swiss legend. The drama itself is a series of tableaux unified around the legend of Brother Klaus's life in the manner of dramatized medieval hagiography. Missing entirely is the polemic aspect of Gretser's early dialog (*CD* 227: 107-60).

The plot dramatizes the gradual withdrawal of Nicholas from society and the rupture of family connections which culminates in the exchange of his citizen robes for a beggar's rags (1: 2-3). A large portion of the action is devoted to a series of trials the hermit undergoes at the hands of demons which lead to his

eventual vindication (2: 1-4).

The acts of physical and psychological violence to which the progagonist is submitted make for interesting diversion, but Gretser is more concerned with identifying his protagonist's stoic determination to turn his back on a faithless world in order to seek personal perfection (3: 8). From the disparate elements of the legend, Gretser constructs a reasonably credible plot which is meant to be a glorification of saintly folly. Curiously, the author finds that submission to the will of Christ offers the highest form of Christian liberty (3: 4).

By translating into dramatic terms the evangelical "foolishness of Christ," Gretser chose to ignore the political potential of his hero and in an admittedly indirect way makes service of God and neighbor the first priority of a Christian. While acknowledging the patriotic contribution of Klaus, the hero of the battle of Stens, he singles out the unifying and healing function which Nicholas can perform for his country in his vocation of hermit. Significantly, in the epilog, Gretser is at pains to suggest that the stoic ideals of constancy and indifference to material gain are not alien to a Christian hero (*CD* 227: 158-60).

The drama also defends the ideal of the hermit vocation. It was certainly not Gretser's intention to praise flight from social and civic responsibility. Such a position would have placed him outside the traditional teachings of his Order. The play makes abundantly clear that only after completing a long life of service to family and country does Bruder Klaus receive his call to witness to the gospel through the life of an anchorite (1: 1,3,4,7).

The hermit theme received considerably more attention in the plays of Jacob Bidermann (1578-1639), Gretser's more famous Bavarian successor. In his *Cenodoxus* (Doctor of Paris) Bidermann portrays the world as a comedy of masks in which a false paragon of virtue meets an untimely end.[9] The atmosphere is undeniably stoic with its emphasis on the vanity of worldly ambition, inordinate pride, and the uncertainty of human fortune.

In a dialog the protagonist defends his contempt for the world and scorn for men of mediocre talents (1: 3). The segment recalls the writings of Justus Lipsius and the Dutch Jesuit dramatist Martin Delrio. In another passage Cenodoxus defends his stoic principles against the warnings of a divine messenger in the guise of the doctor's servant (3: 3). Shocked and confused by the tragic end of his guide and spiritual father, Bruno, who was later to establish the Cistercian Order, decides to turn his back on a world of masks and illusion and with a group of friends enters a forest to begin a life of seclusion and prayer (5: 9). The prevailing mood seems to reflect the neo-stoic philosophy of Justus Lipsius in his 88th *Letter to Lucilius.*

*Carolomanus,* performed around 1600 in Paderborn and attributed to Bidermann, presents the picture of a popular leader who comes to question the value of an active life in society.[10] The apparent freedom of this sovereign to work for the welfare of his subjects proves to be largely illusory. Power is blind and exposed at all times to the winds of chance. It produces blindness in its possessor who can no longer discern illusion from reality (69b).

The monarch is tempted to question the posssibility of reconciling service of God and man in a world where honest effort is often thwarted by callous deception (74a). Even the joys of conjugal life prove fleeting and can never equal the joy of solitude and flight from the world. The protagonist ultimately solves his personal torment by rejecting a life of action in favor of reflection and solitude (75b). The assumption of the author seems to be that Carolomanus finds himself in a position to assist his country more effectively from the wilderness than in the royal palace. This argument seems to recall the position of Klaus in Gretser's *Nicholas of Unterwalden.*

The key role in Bidermann's *Cosmarchia* is shared by a sovereign with the support of an anonymous anchorite. The defeat of Cosmopolis, who sought supremacy by force of arms, invites the audience to reflect in typically stoic terms on the inconstancy of worldly enterprise. The conclusion leaves little doubt that hope for security in an "earthly Jerusalem" is largely illusory. Lasting peace for the Christian soul can only be found in interior purification and a rigorous

[10]Jacob Bidermann, "Carolomanus spretis mundi inanis Sancti Benedicti institutum amplectens," *Staatsarchiv* (Paderborn: 1600) 60-85.

program of asceticism (1: 3; 2: 6).

The protagonist of *Cosmarchia* is typical of Bidermann's world. His fate was to live a life of tension between the apparent security of secular power and the threat of imminent reversal of his good fortune. True to his stoic convictions, Bidermann offers his hero little assurance. Nothing earthly perdures, a chasm yawns at every instant. Even the Christian faith itself must submit to the nagging pain of uncertainty. Deprivation, misery, and solitude become necessary preludes in the evolution of the Christian soul, subject and ruler alike. Through them the protagonist, like Parcifal in the medieval legend, learns only slowly and painfully how to pierce the veil of worldly illusion and come to final truth (4: 5; 5: 8).

The development of Bidermann's stoic thought can be traced further in a cycle of dramas: *Macarius*, *Calybita*, and *Josaphatus*. The plotline of the first two of these plays is basically similar, in which a Roman nobleman abandons his wife and family in a misguided desire to fulfill literally the gospel counsel of poverty.

The author sharpens the dramatic tension by having his protagonists make their decision on the very day of their marriage. Macarius and Calybita take refuge in a desert where each endures a cycle of temptations and demonic attacks before achieving the required degree of detachment from the world. It should be noted that Bidermann does not attack the institution of marriage and family. His heroes are hardly revolutionary by nature nor really opposed to parental authority from which they are only trying to escape.

*Macarius* and *Calybita* are little more than a baroque version of the medieval *Vitae Sanctorum*. The protagonists are pitted in a struggle for personal perfection. Their contemporary world is presented as a kind of diabolic counterforce in the framework of the "Two Standards" meditation of Ignatian asceticism (Valentin 2: 875-80). Bidermann, however, departs from the static tradition of the *Vitae Sanctorum* by trying to establish credibility for his protagonist's decision on a psychological dimension. Through the medium of vision scenes and allegory Calybita's inner life is laid bare as he is revealed to be the victim of delusion, caprice, and insecurity (3: 1-2; 4: 1).

Calybita's personal struggle takes place in a desert wilderness where hostile nature and the absence of material comforts force him to take his first hesitant steps along the way which will eventually lead to inner conversion (4: 5). Fortified by the counsels of an aged hermit, he acquires the art of "discerning the spirits," an important technique of the Ignatian *Spiritual Exercises*. He successfully passes through a series of temptations aimed at reawakening a desire for the riches and comforts of his past life (4: 7). Bidermann uses the role of a relatively sophisticated demon who assumes the role of colleague, servant, brother, and false hermit. He predicts the loss of Calybita's soul if the protagonist perseveres in his new calling (4: 10; 5: 3).

Bidermann has recourse to the same network of demonic intrigue in *Macarius*. A polemic note is struck when this demon in the guise of a monk tries to win the protagonist over to the doctrine of predestination, a theological sorepoint between the Jesuits and the Dominicans (4: 6). In the ensuing debate, Macarius, relying on the voluntarist theology of his author, emerges victorious. In a turn rarely seen for a Jesuit and humanist of Bidermann's calibre, the author questions the values of classical learning and asserts the primacy of evangelical wisdom with its paradoxical "foolishness" in the eyes of a secular world (4: 5).

The finale hints at a relatively sophisticated apparatus for scene changes. In it Macarius is brought to the point of breaking with his commitment to a life of solitude and returning to society and family (5: 11). This time appealing to the principle of stoic "indifference," the protagonist spiritedly argues his way out of temptation. Like his prototype Calybita, he believes his call to the life of an anchorite is permanent so that to turn aside at the last moment would be to betray a vocation from divine providence.

By situating the tragic choice of his protagonist in the tension between the natural love of family and a supernatural call to witness to evangelical perfection, Bidermann was playing to a contemporary post-Tridentine audience that was prepared to accept the tragic choice. As in the case of Gretser's *Nicholas of Unterwalden*, the hermit vocation was viewed as a unique call to Christian witness not intended for all.

The experience of the protagonist in *Calybita* is one of stoic resignation to marital and family happiness. In the drama, Calybita plays the role of an unwilling pawn to a sincere but ambitious father. The politically fortuitous opportunity to marry into the imperial family would undoubtedly have had a positive influence on the family honor and fortunes. Calybita, however, with a certain amount of pain and confusion opts for the difficult path of renunciation of honor, wealth, even love itself in the assumption that he is called to witness to the "folly of the cross," while at the same time protesting against the worldly exaggeration of wealth and honor (4: 5).

The question occurs whether the hermit protagonist, once confirmed in his calling, can ever validly return to his former life. This problem actually occurs in *Calybita*. In a creative twist on the legend, Bidermann actually has his protagonist return to his former life but only to witness to the vanity of secular pretension and material comfort. Unknown to his father, Calybita takes up a beggar's trade outside the paternal house and is exposed to the mistreatment and contempt of his father's servants.

Only at the end of the drama does he reveal himself (5: 5). From his post outside his father's palace Calybita chooses to witness to the stoic virtues of resignation, indifference, and contempt for secular honor. Muller remarks that this play grew in popularity as a result of inevitable war-weariness generated by the Thirty Years War (2: 20). Curiously, Bidermann here seems to use some significant costume changes (*mutatio vestis*) in an attempt to suggest a permanent change of character.

*Josaphat* is the last of the plays in which Bidermann deals professedly with the subject of solitude and flight from the world. Two plays with this title appeared in the Jesuit college repertoire of the sixteenth century. Both appear to have used a medieval source derived from the fourteenth chapter of John Damascene's *Vita Barlami et Josaphati*. The medieval legend apparently was derived from early Buddhist lore. The first reported performance of a Josaphat drama on the Jesuit stage occurs in 1573 in Munich. In it the unknown author interprets the legend to make his protagonist a model, somewhat anachronistically, of conversion to the Christian faith in Bavaria. Josaphat, at first uncertain of his calling to Christianity, is obliged to overcome a series of doubts and conventional court intrigues. At the peak of his power he abdicates his throne and takes refuge in the solitude of the Bavarian Alps (*Program*, Innsbruck, 1645).

In adapting the Damascene legend to his theatre, Bidermann downplays the wheel-of-fortune motif of the medieval source and stays within the orbit of a typically stoic interpretation of pride, ambition, and the need for personal asceticism. His basic motif appears to be a spinoff on the "Foundation" and "Indifference" meditations of the *Ignatian Exercises*.

*Calybita, Macarius, and Josaphatus*, despite a superficial similarity of theme, were never intended to be a trilogy. They do, however, illustrate to a certain degree the stoic orientation of Bidermann's philosophy of life. Each of them develops the neostoic symbolism of the world as an illusory dream. The author offers his protagonists the weapons of indifference and contempt for the world in which he sees them "imprisoned." Not surprisingly for the author, the action of the plot corresponds closely to the conversion experience of the Ignatian *Spiritual Exercises*.

In 1636, the young Alsatian Jesuit poet and dramatist Jakob Balde organized his "Society of Thin People." This was a group of Jesuit students and laymen in Ingolstadt who were devoted to the rules of stoicism. In the pages of Old Testament literature Balde sought to find a solution for the unsettling effect which the contemporary mood of political and religious uncertainty was having on student moral life. His goal was to find an historical personality who could stand up to the blows of life and witness to the stoic virtues of constancy and indifference to the fleeting experiences of the world (Valentin 2: 782-83).

The result of his efforts was *Jephthias*, which he produced in 1637, a drama which was to establish a modest reputation among his contemporaries (Muller 2: 27-28). Poet and dramatist, his work was later to receive the praise of Herder and Goethe. Based on an episode from the Old Testament, *Jephthias* is the author's testimony to his personal faith in the principles of the Stoa. The drama proves to be an amalgam of Senecan thought with interpretations culled from the writings of Martin

Delrio, sometimes called the "Seneca Christianus" of his time.

The fatal flaw of the protagonist in *Jephthias* is hinted at in his boastful assertion in the opening lines of the drama. General Jephthe enters battle against the foes of his country with trust and confidence in his own ability. Confident his prowess will produce victory, he makes the fatal promise to offer providence anything in the skies or on the earth (1: 1). As it turns out, the object of sacrifice will be his own daughter. Balde's interest, however, proves to be less centered on the tragedy of the father than it is on Jephtha, his daughter. In the drama the daughter's name is Menulema, an anagram for Christ (Emanuel).

For the author, her willingness to sacrifice herself is a symbol of indifference and steadfastness. It is also a poetical allusion to the death of Christ (4: 3). The author seems to find in Jephtha's reaction some similarity to Iphigenia with her own stoic acceptance of the divine will. The triumphant return of the general, unaware of the sacrifice that he must make, leads to reflection on the emptiness of worldly glory. Jephthe's acceptance of the sacrifice which he has brought upon himself is in effect an acknowledgement of a providential order in the affairs of men.

In a moving soliloquy before she meets her father, Menulema (Jephtha) works at a tapestry depicting the sacrifice of Isaac by his father, Jacob, in which she finds a similarity to her own fate. Reflecting on the uncertainty of earthly life she is moved to consider the possibility of her own sacrificial death and accepts it in advance as a moral obligation. In an unusually bold image Balde views Menulema's preparation for her sacrifice as a portent of the passion of Christ.

Faced with the inevitable payment of his vow Jephthe finds solace in stoic indifference and resignation. Like the protagonist of the book of Job, he is moved to accept his loss with the rueful admission that earthly blessings are not meant to last (4: 3). In the closing scene the author hints at Jephthe's determination to turn his back on a world of illusion and carry on broken dreams in a life of solitude free from ambition and worldly cares. The drama reflects a curious amalgam of traditional theology interlaced with principles of stoic voluntarism.

With the advent of Nicholas Avancini (1612-1686), who assumed the task of director of the Orderis Viennese stage, the contemporary attraction for stoicism had diminished considerably.[11] The dichotomies of a previous age between individual and society, flight or involvement had finally been resolved in favor of society and responsibility. Avancini's age heralds post-Tridentine optimism, and the author returns to the traditional Jesuit theme of personal and social involvement.

As a consequence, Avancini's hermits have their solitude forced upon them more by external circumstances than by any devotion to the principles of the Stoa. In *Genovefa Palatina* the heroine is forced to flee husband and royal court to protect herself from intrigues which threaten her life. Throughout the drama she accepts her exile only as temporary, and against all traditions of earlier hermit plays she brings her child along with her (*PD* 5: 87).

The sylvan paradise into which Genovefa retires has few of the discomforts of the legendary source but allows her to rear her child peacefully as she awaits her call to return to the court. The reactions of terror evoked in the hearts of Siegfried and his hunters at the sight of her is pure rhetoric (5: 177). The animals that surround her are domesticated. The fears of the child at the sight of dancing fauns require only a word from his mother to calm him (5: 144).

In contrast to Bidermann, the Viennese Jesuit finds in the attraction of one human for another nothing which threatens either purity or nature. Even the false hermit Baradus finds an angelic guide in the person of Almadiel, a counterpart to Raphael in the *Book of Tobias*. True to his role as false counselor the monk urges the heroine to give up her solitude and return to her home. His effort, however, is not an attack on ascetic perfection so much as a dramatic ruse to bring her back to the royal court where she is restored to honor (5: 194).

*Eugenia Romana* was presented in a musical version in Vienna in 1686 (*PD* 2: 445-501). At first sight the drama seems to be a traditional treatment of the hermit theme. Here, in con-

[11]Nicholas Avancini, born near Trent in 1611, had long experience as *choragus* (dramatic director) in Jesuit schools of Graz, Laibach, Trent, and Vienna. He became one of the most prolific writers in the high period of Jesuit drama. His plays are collected in *Poesis dramatica* in 5 vols. (Coloniae agrippinae: 1675-86) and are cited as *PD*.

trast to the author's previous encomia of marriage and family life, he seems to approve the reaction of the heroine in rejecting the love of Aquilinus, a pagan senator, who aspired to be her husband. Eugenia disguises herself in the costume of a man, a ruse which proves to be an effective means of warding off potential attacks on her virtue. A providentially contrived thunderbolt carries off Menantia a seductress who was about to entice Eugenia from the security of her hermitage into the arms of her suitor.

The key to understanding Avancini's apparent enthusiasm for Eugenia's flight from her future husband derives from the fact that in the legend, reported by Baronius and used by Avancini, Eugenia was a Christian convert living in a pagan society which imposed demands her Christian conscience could not accept. Had she succeeded in converting her lover, the story might have turned out differently and a successful marriage might have been assured. Flight and solitude appear to have been the only weapons at her disposal to protect herself from the temptation to apostacize to which her family and the Roman authorities would have exposed her. In the eyes of the author and his Christian audience, she freely chooses to renounce a love which could only lead to her spiritual destruction (*PD* 2: 500-01).

*Evergetes*, performed in 1665, quite uncharacteristically treats the hermit theme in a humorous vein and even appears to call into question the vocation of an anchorite (*PD* 2: 502-610). Through the medium of wit Avancini undermines Evergetes' grounds for rejecting the hand of a wealthy widow and evading family responsibilities (*PD* 2: 505-07). Aretinus,the young man's father, unmasks his son's decision as pseudo-stoicism and egotism. He defends the marriage not as an assault on virtue but as a form of discipline more demanding than flight to a relatively comfortable sylvan wilderness. The ensuing conflict between son and father becomes a humorous "jeu de feints" which serves to create confusion and set both at cross-purposes.

The widow Endoxa's tactless pursuit of the protagonist offers Avancini a chance to develop his penchant for situational humor. In perhaps justifiable desperation, the hapless Evergetes flees to the safety of a nearby forest as much to escape the importunity of his lover as to answer any call to higher perfection. Endowed by nature with little self-discipline his attempts to lead a hermit's life provide a series of humorous setbacks which eventually convince him that the life of an ananchorite is not for him ( 547).

In some respects the play appears to be a light-hearted mockery of Bidermann's *Calybita* with its orientation to stoic constancy in the face of capricious change of fortune. In *Evergetes*, too, the protagonist ends his enforced solitude and returns to the house of his father. Far from taking on himself the role of a beggar outside the paternal palace, however, he adventurously attempts to pass himself off as the personal valet of his father.

Aretinus plays along with his son's disguise in humerous mockery of the graver symbolism of Bidermann's *mutatio vestis*. He even requires Evergetes to call him "father" in memory of his lost son. The plot lends itself to ironic touches as Avancini develops the protagonist's ingenuous attempt to assume a different reality. Avancini's erudite Viennese audience could hardly fail to see through the young man's naive attempt to transform his identity by changing his name into its Latin equivalent "Meritinus."

Almost in anticipation of eighteenth-century Viennese comedy, an anonymous letter informs Aretinus that his son is still living. The father's refusal to accept this fortuitous information only leads to further complications. Avancini appears to enjoy the ironical situation he has created. The drama, however, raises an important philosophical question which could not have escaped his audience. How is it possible to arrive at truth through the medium of deception?

Evergetes eventually provides the answer himself but not before Avancini allows his hero to entangle himself in a web of contradiction (*PD* 2: 583). The whole farce ends with a laugh as Evergetes abandons his attempts at deception and acknowledges his fault. He reluctantly puts aside his valet's costume and reassumes his role as son and lover. Ruefully he agrees to marry the exhausted but delighted Endoxa (*PD* 2: 587).

The productions of these seventeenth-century Jesuit schoolmen point to a more than passing interest in the philosophy of Seneca and his baroque stoic enthusiasts. The fact

that stoicism seemed to acknowledge a place in its pantheon for the Christian god and his role in the affairs of men no doubt rendered it palatable to Jesuit ears. In an epoch of religious and political instability the stoic orientation toward asceticism, rejection of material comforts and emphasis on indifference and self-conquest made it acceptable as well to contemporary audiences.

By and large, however, there were certain stoic pretensions which eventually alienated the majority of Jesuit dramatists from its philosophy. They were quick to note the profound difference between the words and the actions of contemporary stoicism. It is true that Jesuit moral and theological writers praised Justus Lipsius for his apparent approval of Ignatian ascetical principles. But they were not long in condemning his followers for their exaggerated insistence on human self-sufficiency and a general tendency to ignore the need for divine providence in the affairs of society (Valentin 1: 381-83). Such aspects of stoic teaching ran contrary to the basic Tridentine orientation of the Order. For most Jesuit dramatists there could be no ignoring the difference between the Ignatian ascetic of active indifference and merely passive resignation which they uniformly tended to brand as apathy and self-indulgence. □

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# FEATURED ARTISTS

**Joe Bolton's** first book, *Breckinridge County Suite*, was published by the Cummington Press in 1989. He has new work in *The Antroch Review*, *The New Criterion*, *Poetry*, *The Yale Review*, and *The North American Review*. A 1989 NEA Fellow, he teaches at the University of Arizona.

**Thomas S. Edwards** has previously translated two translation chapbooks, Ulrich Schacht's *Nowhere is Near So Far* (1986) and Reiner Kunze's *In the Blue Signature of the Ice Bird* (1987). He is Translation Editor of the *Mid-American Review* and currently teaches at George Washington University in Washington, D.C.

**Julio Flórez,** a late romantic and a precursor to Modernism in Colombian poetry, was born in 1867 and died in 1923. A sonnet by Flórez, *Resurrections*, also translated by Joe Bolton, appears in *The New Renaissance*.

**Reiner Kunze**, the German poet, translator and author of children's books, has been translated into over twenty languages. He is the recipient of the Georg Büchner Prize (1977), the Geschwister Scholl Prize (1981), and the Eichendorff Award for Literature (1984).

**António Ramos Rosa**, writer, translator, and critic of poetry, was born in the Algarve in 1924. His poetry has been translated into various languages, and an anthology of his verse is forthcoming in French. He is the recipient of the Fernando pessoa Prize (1988), Portugal's most prestigious cultural award.

**Diann Blakely Shoaf's** first book of poems, *Huricane Walk*, is forthocming from BOA this fall. New poems will appear in *Harvard Magazine*, *Hubbub*, *The Nation*, *New Virginia Review*, *Southern Humanities Review*, *Webster Review*, and *West Branch*.

**Richard Zenith's** recent translations include *The Loves of João Vêncio*, by Angola's Luandino Vieira, and *An Explanation of the Birds*, by Portugal's Antonio Lobo Antunes.