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Tradition or subversion: questions of identity and technique in the films of Eric Rohmer

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Award date:
2004

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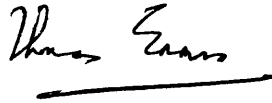AUTHOR: THOMAS ENNIS   YEAR: 2004

TITLE: TRADITION OR SUBVERSION: QUESTIONS OF IDENTITY AND
TECHNIQUE IN THE FILMS OF ERIC ROHMER

Signed :   Date: 1 Nov · 2010

UMI Number: U575997

UMI

Dissertation Publishing

ProQuest

Abstract

The aim of this thesis is to reveal the many complexities and ambiguities in Eric Rohmer's film-making that have been constantly overlooked by contemporary critics in order that his importance in world cinema may be better understood.

This thesis begins with an assessment of the general reputation of Rohmer as a repetitious filmmaker who lacks a sense of the cinematic and does not merit sustained critical attention. The first section examines the Rohmer 'myth' – for he is an extremely private man and information on his private life is frequently contradictory: there is even lack of agreement on his date of birth. His working methods are then described and the use of realism within his films is examined. Rohmer was a key figure within the French New Wave and his role within this movement, including his work as a film critic, is analysed in some detail. A critical framework is then provided in order to examine the function of intertextuality within Rohmer's work. Three forms of adaptation are identified: those involving works by other authors, those involving stories by Rohmer and, finally, those involving stories by the actors in his films. A series of case studies examines these forms of adaptation and explores the role of intertextuality in Rohmer's work over the course of his career. There then follows an analysis of the filmic techniques employed by Rohmer including his frequent use of titles and texts (both diegetic and extra-diegetic), his employment of documentary techniques, the self-conscious nature of his camera, the use of a blank screen, and the role of paintings and songs in his work.

This sustained analysis will reveal the intrinsic cinematic quality of Rohmer's work and the way in which he uses a variety of texts in order to create new material. The aim is to produce a better understanding of the significant role which he has played in French cinema over the last fifty years.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

ABBREVIATIONS

List of Abbreviations used for Rohmer's films:

Lion =	*Le signe du Lion*
Boulangère =	*La boulangère de Monceau*
Suzanne =	*La carrière de Suzanne*
Etoile =	*Place de l'Etoile*
Collectionneuse =	*La collectionneuse*
Maud =	*Ma nuit chez Maud*
Genou =	*Le genou de Claire*
Amour =	*L'amour l'après-midi*
Marquise =	*La Marquise d'O... [Die Marquise von O...]*
Perceval =	*Perceval le Gallois*
Femme =	*La femme de l'aviateur*
Mariage =	*Le beau mariage*
Pauline =	*Pauline à la plage*
Nuits =	*Les nuits de la pleine lune*
Rayon =	*Le rayon vert*
Reinette =	*Quatre aventures de Reinette et Mirabelle*
Ami =	*L'ami de mon amie*
Printemps =	*Conte de printemps*
Hiver =	*Conte d'hiver*
Arbre =	*L'arbre, le Maire et la médiathèque*
Rendez-vous =	*Les rendez-vous de Paris*
Eté =	*Conte d'été*
Automne =	*Conte d'automne*

L'Anglaise = *L'Anglaise et le Duc*

Agent = *Triple Agent*

Page references to the published screenplays are given in parenthesis in the text.

INTRODUCTION

French Cinema in the 1990s: Continuity and Difference was published in 1999 and covers the work of over twenty French film directors during this decade.[1] However, one notable absentee is Eric Rohmer, despite the fact that he released six features in this period. His absence is all the more surprising when the commercial nature of his work is assessed. All of his films since 1966 have received distribution both in France and internationally (with the sole exception of *Arbre*) and at least twenty of his works are currently available on DVD/video in the UK or the USA. This director appears to suffer from a reputation for 'turning out [...] gentle and – for modern moviegoers – perilously talkative examination(s) of human relationships without ever faltering. This is cinema with all the gigantic modern technological edifice discarded'.[2] Thus his work is repetitious, lacks a sense of the cinematic and so deserves little critical attention. At worst watching one of his films is, in the words of *Night Moves*'s Harry Moseby, ' kinda' like watching paint dry'.[3]

A brief overview of books written on Rohmer (in French and English) will serve to reveal the extent to which this view is held by other critics. The first full length study of his films was written in 1977 by Marion Vidal and concentrates almost exclusively on the *Contes Moraux*.[4] While Vidal clearly expresses the importance of Rohmer's work, she also stresses its roots in the past and claims that he searches for order, clarity, discretion and analysis in his films, all qualities at the

heart of classicism itself.[5] Joël Magny (1986) produced the next important study of Rohmer's films and he underlines the discreet nature of a shot by this director which contrasts with the immediately identifiable shots by a Welles or a Murnau.[6] It is thus not surprising that much of this book concentrates on other aspects of the films (plot development, etc.) rather than on the mise-en-scène. This stance is shared by Colin Crisp as the title of his 1988 study of the director makes clear: *Eric Rohmer: Realist and Moralist.*[7] This is another depiction of Rohmer as a man responding to changes to the old ways to produce 'a conservative reaction against [...] marginalizing forces'.[8] Only a few writers have concentrated on aspects of Rohmer's output and have begun to appreciate the complexity of the visual qualities of his work. Maria Tortajada uses the films to analyse ways in which the spectator is seduced through the ambiguity of the cinematic image,[9] while Pascal Bonitzer effectively examines the narrative techniques employed by the director but he also begins to detect the ambiguity present in Rohmer's shots, despite the initial impression of unadulterated reality.[10] However, Michel Serceau's 2000 study of Rohmer's output still concentrates almost exclusively on narrative themes and concludes that the director remains 'fidèle au cinéma de récit et au réalisme ontologique'.[11] Therefore what emerges across the majority of these publications is a sense of a classical director whose interest focuses on narratives, even if they are repetitive, rather than on his cinematic technique.

The screenplay for Rohmer's *Automne* ends with a description of the guests dancing at a marriage: 'Isabelle, dans les bras de Jean-Jacques, évolue tout près des jeunes mariés'.[12] If we imagine how this might be filmed, in accordance with the director's reputation outlined above, then we would expect to see the different couples happily dancing in a conclusion devoid of any ambiguity. Yet this is far from

the case, and indeed the meanings of 'évoluer' (to 'glide about on a dance floor' but also 'to change'[13]) warn us of the possibility of different levels of meaning. In fact, Isabelle has a far away look which invites interpretation from the spectator but finally remains indecipherable. She has come close to having an affair and may well regret her return to 'normality'.

The aim of this thesis is to produce a theoretical structure for reading such moments in Rohmer's cinema. (While Rohmer did make a number of documentaries for television, in the context of this study only brief references will be made to them.) In order to argue for the intrinsically cinematic nature of his work and to counter the received critical opinion, two aspects of his filmmaking will be analysed in detail: issues of identity involving both the filmmaker and his films; and the filmic techniques employed by Rohmer. First, we shall examine Rohmer's reputation and how it intersects with the characteristics of this body of work, and the role of intertextuality within this cinema. We shall begin with an appraisal of Rohmer himself, an unusually difficult task despite his public profession, given his fierce protection of his private life, about which very little is known. This will be followed by an analysis of his working methods with reference to all of his filmic works of fiction. One area which will demand our special attention here is the issue of realism, as Rohmer employs a complex mixture of documentary and fiction within his films and this unusual mix may well be one of the reasons behind his reputation as a 'simplistic' director. In addition, we shall examine his production methods and the wider role of his production companies *Les Films du Losange* and the *Compagnie Eric Rohmer* (*C.E.R.*) in their work with other directors. There will be a particular focus on his influence within the French New Wave, especially through his theoretical writings and editorship of *Cahiers du cinéma*. Roland Barthes and

Jefferson Kline will then provide the critical framework for an analysis of the role of intertextuality in Rohmer's work, a key and, so far, neglected aspect, which emerges through the adaptation of his own texts and those of a small group of other authors. These intertextual references may well put demands on his audience that are far more challenging and inspiring than watching paint dry.

The final section will explore the self-consciously filmic and areas examined will include the use of onscreen text, jump cuts, the use of a blank screen and inclusion of songs and paintings. This will lead to a reappraisal of the importance of Rohmer's *oeuvre* both in terms of its intrinsic cinematic quality, which has frequently been glossed over, and the way in which he uses a wide variety of texts in order to produce innovative material that requires the active participation of the spectator. Finally, we will question the nature of his role within French cinema over the last fifty years: is he a lone voice or does he have a significant influence on his fellow filmmakers?

NOTES

[1] *French Cinema in the 1990s: Continuity and Difference*, edited by Phil Powrie, Oxford: OUP, 1999.

[2] Peter Lennon, 'A Way with Women', *The Guardian Weekend*, February 27 1999, 18.

[3] *Night Moves* was directed by Arthur Penn in 1975. Harry is responding to an invitation to watch *Maud*.

[4] Marion Vidal, *Les Contes Moraux d'Eric Rohmer*, Paris: Lherminier, 1977.

[5] ibid., p.18.

[6] Joël Magny, *Eric Rohmer*, Paris: Rivages, 1986 (2nd edition: 1990, 3rd edition: 1995), p.19.

[7] Colin Crisp, *Eric Rohmer: Realist and Moralist*, Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1988.

[8] ibid., p.114.

[9] Maria Tortajada, *Le Spectateur séduit: le libertinage dans le cinéma d'Eric Rohmer*, Paris: Editions Kimé, 1999.

[10] Pascal Bonitzer, *Eric Rohmer*, Paris: Cahiers du cinéma, 1991 (2nd edition:1999), p.70.

[11] Serceau, Michel, *Eric Rohmer, les jeux de l'amour et du discours*, Paris: Editions du Cerf, 2000, p.143.

[12] Eric Rohmer, *Contes des 4 saisons*, Paris: Cahiers du cinéma, 1998, p.182.

[13] See translations in *Oxford Hachette French Dictionary*, Oxford, New York, Toronto: Hachette/Oxford University Press, 1994, p.328.

SECTION 1

Images and Perceptions of

Rohmer

This section will begin with an exploration of the most widespread perceptions of Eric Rohmer which emerge from a varied range of different sources and provide a useful context in which to begin an analysis of his work. The *Cahiers du cinéma* group of critics, to which Rohmer belonged in the 1950s, put great emphasis on the director as auteur, providing the central artistic impulse in filmmaking and so offering a coherent world view through his or her films.[1] (This concept is developed further on pages 65-67). Indeed, according to this theory, the spectator was allowed access to the intimacy of the auteur's private feelings and Truffaut argued that a director should be able to recognise his/her real self in the portraits provided through film criticism.[2] This would lead in François Truffaut's case to an apparent life/art conflation in his films so that *Les quatre cents coups* (1959), for example, is partly based on his own childhood experiences. As a director working within this auteur tradition, we might expect Rohmer to be a similar public figure whose life is intrinsically connected with his work. Yet, as we shall see, outside his films he is almost obsessively coy and reticent about revealing anything about himself, indeed going to great lengths to confuse and contradict any impressions we may have, so that we find an extraordinary lack of information in interviews and books, or else a series of conflicting details about his private life. This rejection of publicity is so exaggerated that the distance between Rohmer the man

and his public image must be addressed because it reflects much of his own low-key approach to the film-making process and as such affords us further insight into his own filmic methods: his shooting technique may well go hand in hand with his response to public attention. This chapter will therefore examine the constituent elements of the Rohmer myth, and will assess and account for the extent to which the director himself has deliberately manipulated them. For the purpose of this thesis, these components will include biographical details, photographs, film and television appearances, as well as Rohmer's films themselves, the way in which they are made, their general reception and his own critical writings. It is through an awareness of the contradictions both between and inherent in these elements that we shall establish a new perspective on his films.

It is important to begin by observing that Rohmer has been consistently scrupulous in avoiding questions about his past, and his private life, to the extent that books and journals provide a somewhat varied collection of dates and places of birth, amongst which the most common are 4 April 1920 in Nancy, and 21 March 1920 in Tulle.[3] In 2004, Rohmer himself confirmed that he was born in Tulle in 1920, but still omitted an exact date.[4] It will be argued that this apparent desire to confuse extends even to the director's name, for Rohmer, we discover, was more likely than not born Jean-Marie Maurice Schérer, but in the course of his life has employed at least four different pseudonyms. The first of these was Gilbert Cordier, which he used when he published his only novel in 1946.[5] The second is Dirk Peters, which appears on the credits for his own short film *Bérénice*, but only on the occasion of its inclusion in the programme *Les Histoires extraordinaires d'Edgar Poe*, which he made for television in 1965. This was presumably in order to distance himself from the unrealistic, expressionistic style and the overtly melodramatic elements of this

story, whose explicitness (its hero develops a teeth fetish to the extent of pulling out his cousin's teeth) was far removed from his other work of the mid 1960s.[6] The third is Lazare Garcin which he used when shooting *Rendez-vous* in order to avoid unwanted attention from the Parisian authorities who were providing the authorisations for filming.[7] The fourth is, of course, Eric Rohmer. The initials *E.R.* are found after reviews in *La Gazette du cinéma* from 1950 onwards, and the full form appears with issue 5 of *Cahiers du cinéma* for the screenplay of 'La Roseraie'.[8] Nonetheless, later articles of film criticism in the 1950s were still signed *Maurice Schérer*, and it is not until 1955 that Rohmer was adopted as his usual name; however, even then, we find two contributions in *Cahiers du cinéma* signed Schérer.[9] To complicate matters even further, a number of critics have (erroneously) taken Schérer to be a second pseudonym.[10]

Two reasons are generally invoked to explain Rohmer's need for false names. The first, which is his reluctance to admit to his profession, appears to originate from an article written by Michel Mardore in 1969: 'A sa mère, qui vit en province, il cache son activité de cinéaste. Elle croit qu'il est toujours professeur. Et même qu'il a un peu rétrogradé, qu'il est pion dans un lycée minable'.[11] It may well be an exaggeration of this account which led to Francis Wyndham's claim in 1973 that 'it is said that his wife only recently discovered that she is married to a film director: for years she had vaguely assumed that he left for the office "on business"'.[12] The second, mentioned by Joël Magny, revolves around the possibility that Rohmer felt the need to distance himself from his brother, René Schérer, who was a university professor and a left-wing activist for gay rights.[13] We may possibly read a political significance into the fact that the paragraph in which this assertion was made has been removed from later editions of Magny's book, and replaced with Rohmer's

'official' version: it was frowned upon for teachers (his 'day job' until the late 1950s) to be involved with the cinema.[14] This change to Magny's text could be indicative of Rohmer's concern that the original version was getting dangerously close to the truth. Indeed Jean-François Revel, writing in 1997, recalls the Schérer brothers all but falling out in 1951 due to their very different political views: René the supporter of the proletariat and Maurice the Catholic supporter of the Right.[15] However, clearly we cannot know for certain and, indeed, in 1995 we find yet another version of Rohmer's real name being used in the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Sonntagszeitung*: Maurice Henri Joseph Schérer.[16]

This apparently obsessive desire to guard his privacy is continued in Rohmer's refusal for many years to allow accurate photographs of himself to be published. Again we may posit a variety of possible explanations. Michel Mardore, for example, provides one account:

> Obligé un jour de fournir une photo pour un 'dictionnaire de la nouvelle vague', il donna un cliché photomaton hideux, parodie de clerc de notaire ou de pasteur anglican. 'Mais enfin, protestai-je, vous n'avez pas les lèvres pincées, ni ces horribles lunettes rondes, ni les cheveux ridiculement plaqués en arrière! - Justement, dit-il en riant. Il faut que les gens croient que je suis très ennuyeux.'[17]

In other words, Mardore suggests, Rohmer deliberately sets out to hide himself behind a boring persona, perhaps seeing this as a way of guarding his privacy. The photograph of him in Marion Vidal's book on the *Contes Moraux* is blurred;[18] indeed there are very few good quality photographic images of Rohmer, and hardly any of these were published before the making of *Maud*.[19] Françoise Etchegaray (Rohmer's current producer) claims that he wishes to remain anonymous in order to avoid being recognised when filming, which facilitates his desire to shoot on location without people noticing.[20] However, whilst such accounts support

Mardore's thesis, none of the explanations really sheds light on the reasons behind Rohmer's apparent desire for a quasi-anonymous existence, and the contradiction between this and his very public profession is just the first of many we shall encounter in the course of this thesis.

Given his overwhelming desire for privacy, it is somewhat paradoxical that Rohmer actually appears in a number of feature films and documentaries, thus providing us with another source for our impressions of him. In *Suzanne*, he is heard reading out Latin in the course of a telephone conversation in a shot in which his head is entirely obscured by the telephone booth. In Luc Moullet's *Brigitte et Brigitte* (1966) he plays a literature specialist (the appropriately named Dr Schérer); in Jacques Rivette's *Out One: Spectre* (1971-74) he plays a bearded Balzac scholar; in *Marquise* he appears briefly as a Russian soldier; while in Rosette's *Rosette sort le soir* (1983) he plays a school teacher correcting homework. There is a clear difference between the films in which his face is hidden or disguised and those in which he is clearly visible, but in which the role chosen is a deliberate disguise which aims to mislead or confuse the public. The teacher, the soldier or the scholar provide little information on this director, apart from an air of seriousness, even intellectualism, which will inevitably affect our view of his filmmaking. These appearances are thus very different from those of Hitchcock in that they are very infrequent and so could easily be missed.

Rohmer's desire to appear serious is also clear when he interviews François Truffaut in *Postface à L'Atalante, entretien avec François Truffaut* (1968) in which it would be difficult to imagine that the two men were good friends as they soberly discuss Vigo in the most simple of television sets.[21] Rohmer also appears in a number of documentaries: we see him rehearsing and discussing *Perceval* in Jean

Douchet's *En répétant Perceval* (1978) while in *François Truffaut: Portraits volés* (1993), he comes across as an elderly, slightly eccentric academic trying to find the correct page marker in a book of Truffaut's letters.[22] In the same year he was interviewed by Jean Douchet (and filmed by André S. Labarthe) for a two part edition of *Cinéastes de notre temps*. Initially Rohmer only agreed to participate on condition that the programme would not be broadcast until he was dead[23] and, once again, it is he who retains control of how he appears to us: 'Ayant tout préparé en secret dans les moindres détails, de la succession des réponses au réglage des cassettes, il est le véritable ordonnateur de l'émission, celui à qui rien n'échappe.'[24] The introduction, spoken by Arielle Dombasle (and written by Douchet), reinforces the impression of a man for whom film is life: 'hors du cinéma, Eric Rohmer n'existe pas', and, in fact, we must remember that in one sense this is true since the name is merely a cover for the filmmaker who would have us believe that he is 'un homme sans biographie'.[25] His most recent screen appearance, a few fleeting glimpses in Françoise Etchegaray's documentary on *L'Anglaise*, simply serves to further support this impression: even in the case of an account of the making of one of his own films, Rohmer manages to remain discreet.[26]

Whilst Rohmer has given a number of interviews to magazines and newspapers over the years, he has retained in them an image consistent with the above. As late as 1970, he still claimed to be unsure whether he was to continue as a filmmaker after the *Contes Moraux*: 'Je ne me considère pas même encore comme un cinéaste de metier.'[27] This may be a hint at a return to an even more private existence. Secondly, the interviews propagate the image of a man who appears to live entirely through his films, furthering the impression that he leads a completely unexceptional, even boring life: 'il ne m'arrive rien, et heureusement!, depuis que

j'ai 25 ans'.[28] He also tries to dispel some of the mystery surrounding his private life by claiming that: 'Très souvent celui qui cache le plus est celui qui n'a rien à cacher. Je vous ai dit hier que je ne vivais pas [...].'[29] This may appear to be in contradiction with Rohmer's desire for privacy but, on closer inspection, it may well be a device to further this aim by dissuading us from searching into his personal life: he is claiming that there is nothing for us to find.

Despite Jean-François Revel's reference to the director's right-wing views in the past,[30] Rohmer is extremely reticent about his political persuasion: 'Si je m'aventurais à livrer un message politique [...] je serais ridicule [...]. Ce qui ne serait pas grave [...]. Mais ce qui serait plus grave, je sortirais de mon rôle.'[31] However, he is prepared to acknowledge his Catholic beliefs[32]: it is clear, in other words, that reticence or denial is in no way indicative of abdication of choice or responsibility. He is concerned with his 'social role', so that we must seek other explanations for his almost playful refusal to be categorised. This playfulness is a hallmark of postmodernity and an indication that for him the text is all-important as it relegates the artist to, at best, the role of an enabler and reflects 'the end of the distinctive individual brushstroke'.[33] If this is true, he is also presenting himself as a fiction, a sort of text, which we are now attempting to interpret through a reading which already reveals the complexity that belies the straightforward, even dull, reputation which he has acquired.

These interviews do, of course, also provide us with some insight into Rohmer's opinions, even if he himself frequently plays down the importance of his personal views for any understanding of his work: 'Je ne pense pas qu'on puisse attendre d'un cinéaste qu'il dise des choses très importantes sur son oeuvre.'[34] This is in sharp contrast to the behaviour of self-consciously auteur directors in the French

cinema; figures such as Duras, Godard and Robbe-Grillet, for example, freely discuss the content and meanings of their films.[35] It is however significant that Rohmer admits to disliking cinematic references within films and, in contrast to his *Nouvelle Vague* colleagues, direct allusions to cinema rarely occur in his work.[36] The only diegetic reference to another film comes in the course of *Suzanne* when the eponymous character, accompanied by Bertrand and Guillaume, attends a screening of David Lean's *Lawrence of Arabia* (1962). Rohmer thus claims that the contents of a film should speak for themselves, and professes his attempt to reduce the role of the director and the explicit influence of other films so that we would be left with a 'caméra *absolument* invisible' which would depict events in a neutral and unobserved fashion.[37] In this way, (and paradoxically, given his role within the New Wave), he refuses to play the auteur role where a director's style is discernible through 'mise-en-scène or film-making practices' leading to a visual signature immediately identifiable on screen.[38] However, as we shall explore below, this notion was in fact very important in Rohmer's critical writings and indeed, as we have already seen, he is himself a 'cinematic text'. Indeed, the lack of references to cinema-going sits uneasily alongside the frequent filmic intertextuality in Rohmer's work.

Examples of this ambiguous approach emerge in the course of a number of interviews with Rohmer. At one moment he can claim that he is 'un des rares metteurs en scène [...] qui est sérieux'[39] while elsewhere he complains about being taken *too* seriously.[40] However, he clearly takes a certain playful delight in creating mystery, as when he reveals that the music for *Hiver* was written by a 'non-existent' musician. The score is attributed to Sébastien Erms in the credits, but Rohmer recounts that 'ER ce sont mes initiales, et MS celles de Marie [sic] Stephen, ma

monteuse' before he admits that they composed the tune together.[41] Once again Rohmer refuses to 'show' himself or his hand, although one might argue that he is content for the (happy) few who may read this particular interview to know the real division of labour (or, at least, a further version of it). This is effectively another pseudonym to add to Cordier, Rohmer, Lazare and Peters.

Rohmer's collaborators provide further glimpses of Rohmer the man. The following descriptions are typical: 'un vieil oncle intelligent et respectueux', 'un grand frère', 'une sorte de maître d'école', 'un grand cousin austère et généreux'[42] and 'un moine jésuite'.[43] It is therefore not by chance that this impression of a non-threatening, generally familiar and predictable figure is reflected in a number of appraisals of Rohmer's work. Marc Cerisuelo believes that, while Jean-Luc Godard's directing skills evolved after his collaboration with Rohmer on *Tous les garçons s'appellent Patrick*, his colleague stayed firmly positioned within the 'normes de l'esthétique classique'.[44] This view, referring as it does not to the man but to his filmic technique and style, easily fits in with the classical image which Rohmer has forged for himself, whereby a clear relationship is established between the man and his work.

The only view which appears to contradict this generally genial image of Rohmer comes from Paul Gégauff in an interview originally destined for *Cahiers*, but which was never published by them for fear of litigation. Not until some thirty years later, in 1997, did it finally appeared in *Limelight*.[45] Gégauff met Rohmer for the first time in 1948-49 and played the title role in the director's first film, *Journal d'un scélérat*, in 1950. They collaborated on the story 'La Roseraie' (which was to become *Genou*) and Gégauff is credited with providing the inspiration and the dialogue of *Lion*, although he claims to have changed only a few lines of Rohmer's

text.[46] Their relationship was apparently a close one, both personally and creatively, and later characters such as Guillaume in *Suzanne*, Adrien in *Collectionneuse*, Henri in *Pauline*, and Etienne in *Automne* are clearly inspired by Gégauff's 'côté calme, nonchalant, associé à une certaine insolence'.[47] Claude Chabrol describes him as 'un alcool très fort, il était capable de tout' and points to himself and Rohmer as the only ones who could put up with him, adding 'Momo aimait beaucoup Paul'.[48] It appears that Gégauff's influence on Rohmer continued until the latter told Gégauff it had come to an end.[49] This reveals a surprisingly harsh side to Rohmer's character, contributing further to our sense of its ambiguity.

Gégauff claims that when he first met Rohmer, the latter was running after girls, and that the film club he organised had two real aims: to facilitate amorous adventures, and to provide additional income from dipping into the till.[50] He describes Rohmer's screenplay for *Les Petites Filles modèles* as 'dégueulasse'[51] and makes a startling comparison between the director and Godard:

> La chose la plus dominante chez Godard: obsédé sexuel. Myope et obsédé sexuel. Momo: pas myope mais également obsédé sexuel, sur un autre plan. C'est tous les deux des zombies, tous les deux rêvent sur des filles dans les cafés. Ils se ressemblent sur plus d'un plan.[52]

This description echoes Jean-François Revel's description of Rohmer's hotel room at this time as being a 'théâtre à de nonchalantes partouzes juvéniles, dont le maître de cérémonie était Paul Gégauff'.[53] However, Gégauff's statements probably tell us more about himself than about Rohmer and, as André S. Labarthe puts it today, 'c'eut été mal connaître Gégauff et faire peu de cas de sa liberté d'expression que de prendre à la lettre ses exagérations, ses provocations, voire ses mensonges'.[54] Also, Gégauff has been known to ask his interlocutors to make up anecdotes for themselves when he has been interviewed.[55] The resultant ambiguity of these

statements simply adds further to that of Rohmer the man, providing us with yet another persona which might have been also invented by the director himself.

Almost all of these sources, which are to a greater or lesser extent controlled by Rohmer himself, provide us with an overriding impression of a somewhat conventional, even boring, man, in both his private life and in his work. However, this appears to be part of a strategy on the part of the director to draw attention away from his personal life (and indeed the vicissitudes of filmic inspiration), and instead to provide an impression of a creative process that is relatively smooth and unaffected by the moment of its production. We are being made to believe that these films are inherently conventional so that few choices have to be made by the director. In fact, it is entirely possible that this is simply another sleight of hand to cover up the level of Rohmer's personal investment in the final work.

The New Wave

However, perhaps the most important influence on the general perception of Eric Rohmer (both the man and the filmmaker) is his membership of the group of directors known as the *Nouvelle Vague*. These emerged initially as film critics in the late 1940s and early 1950s when there was a sudden increase in the number of regular publications devoted to the cinema with the advent of *Image et Son* (1946), *Télé-Ciné* (1946), *Positif* (1952) and *Cinéma* (1954).[56] France had been devoid of American films for most of the war and the sudden re-emergence of such a cinema, combined with the growth of the ciné-club movement, led to a ready market for these magazines. *Cahiers du cinéma* was one such monthly, founded by André Bazin, Jacques Doniol-Valcroze and Lo Duca in April 1951. Its contributors included

Godard, Chabrol, Truffaut, Rivette and, of course, Rohmer himself. In parallel with their writings, many of these critics were also involved in the production of short films, often working on each other's projects. During this time, Rohmer collaborated with Godard on *Présentation/Charlotte et son steak*, *La Sonate à Kreutzer*, *Charlotte et Véronique ou Tous les garçons s'appellent Patrick* (the latter directed by Godard); with Rivette on *Bérénice*; with Chabrol, who produced *Véronique et son cancre* and *Lion*; and with Truffaut on a screenplay entitled *L'Eglise moderne*.[57] Short films had a ready market since the double programme was abolished in 1940, although from 1953 these shorts did not actually have to be shown with the main feature, and this frequently happened with those directed by Rohmer.[58] Thus, at this point Rohmer's career was emerging as part of a larger, if informal, group of filmmakers, a situation which was to change radically in the years ahead.

The view espoused by the *Cahiers* critics in the 1950s was generally that most mainstream contemporary French films were of little interest. While this is clearly an exaggeration, it is true that directors such as Autant-Lara continued with aesthetic choices from the 1930s and 1940s, perhaps partly due to outdated equipment (ten out of the fifteen existing studios had been built before 1933),[59] but also because of a system which required would-be directors to serve long apprenticeships learning just how the older generation made films. These works tended to concentrate on psychological realism with few references to contemporary events. However, directors such as Leenhardt, Melville, Astruc, Varda, Vadim and Malle may be seen as precursors of the changes to come, producing more marginal work with reduced crews, and their efforts were lauded in the pages of *Cahiers*.

The nexus of the New Wave is generally seen as being made up of the directors who began as critics on *Cahiers* and their original idea was to work as a co-

operative with each film potentially providing the finance for a colleague's production. When it became clear that this was unlikely to happen, Chabrol set up his own production company, AJYM, in 1957 and began shooting *Le beau Serge* in December of the same year. Before its release, he was able to complete *Les cousins* through a 'prime à la qualité', a government subvention intended to encourage French films and which was financed through a tax on cinema tickets. As a result both works were released almost simultaneously in 1959 and Chabrol used the profits to help produce films by de Broca, Rivette and Rohmer. Soon, buoyed up by the success of Godard's *A bout de souffle* and a downturn in the success of the *cinéma de qualité*, other producers were ready to finance unknown directors.[60] The films they made had a number of characteristics in common: the director invariably (co-)wrote the screenplay, improvisation was important, real locations were employed rather than studios, crews were very small, light sensitive film was used and actors were usually unknowns.[61]

What exactly was Rohmer's role in this movement? During the 1950s he directed five short films and two features (one of which was never completed) and so seemed well placed to take advantage of the openings created by his colleagues. However, *Lion*, shot at the same time as Godard's *A bout de souffle*, was only released in 1962, and this, together with its slow-moving plot and repetitive music, contributed to its commercial failure. As a result, Rohmer's impact as a New Wave filmmaker was extremely limited and his influence was almost entirely linked to his role as editor of *Cahiers*. Indeed, even Rohmer appears to have had problems taking himself seriously as a director with any real future and, in a dictionary of new filmmakers which his review published in 1962, the following quotation is used to describe him: 'On ne saurait rien imaginer de plus monotone, une plus totale

obstination à gâcher systématiquement les possibilités dramatiques du sujet.'[62] He is

however regarded as a *successor* to the principal New Wave directors but one who

displays little inspiration: here his perceived temporal distance from the movement is

clear, despite his role within *Cahiers*. By the second instalment of this dictionary, in

1964, there is no explanatory text and only a brief reference to two works for

television (on 18th century pharmacies and industrial architecture) and one short film

(*Etoile*).[63] The implication is that the director is unlikely to make any more major

films. By this point Rohmer is perceived as too classic a director and insufficiently

innovative to succeed in the 1960s.

Critics differ in their assessments of Rohmer's position within the *Nouvelle*

Vague. Some see him as one of the pillars of the movement,[64] while others identify

him as an example of one of those New Wave directors (such as Rivette or Godard)

who were working for small audiences, in contrast, for example, to Truffaut who

appears to be making personal films for a mass audience.[65] Probably the truth lies

somewhere between these two images. Rohmer was at the heart of the *Cahiers* group

in the 1950s both as a theoretician and a director of short films. He was recognised as

an 'éminence grise' by many of his peers and was one of very few of those

enthusiasts who had a regular job and so frequently provided loans to his colleagues.

However, the setback he suffered with the delayed release and subsequent

commercial failure of *Lion* undermined his position considerably. Indeed, this film

can be read as a summary of his ambiguous relationship with the New Wave. On the

one hand it seems typical of the movement: filmed, as we have seen, at the same time

as *A bout de souffle*, set around Saint-Germain-des-Prés, dialogues co-written by

Chabrol's collaborator Paul Gégauff, and shot on location. However, the lack of

dialogue, especially in the scenes of Pierre roaming the streets, contrasts with

Godard's work and the lengthy musical extracts simply add to the impression of a

slower passage of time. Thus Rohmer's subsequent sometimes lacklustre support for

the New Wave, as evidenced through his editorship of *Cahiers*, is not surprising and

led him into conflict with many of his former supporters, including Truffaut, while

the films he made in the 1960s are generally shorts produced in a near amateurish

fashion with 16mm equipment and non-professional actors.[66] It was only the

unexpected commercial success of *Maud*, partly produced by Truffaut, that finally

established him as a major director in the eyes of the public.

However, while the influence of Rohmer's films at the time of the *Nouvelle*

Vague was restricted, and continued to be so through the three subsequent decades,

this was less the case in the 1990s when Christian Vincent, and especially his *La*

Discrète (1990), created a direct homage to the New Wave veteran. Like much of

Rohmer's output, this film is precisely dated (from 24 March to the beginning of

June), has a voiceover, abundant dialogue and is set in a precise geographical area on

the left bank of the Seine in Paris. In addition, Catherine crying near a gate in

Normandy is reminiscent of Delphine (*Rayon*) in the same part of France, and

Vincent even includes a proverb, albeit at the end.[67] Even more telling is the role of

Fabrice Luchini, who has appeared in six of Rohmer's films, and whose presence

leaves the *Cahiers* critic in no doubt that *La Discrète* 'se promène du côté [...] de

Rohmer'.[68] However, Vincent's similarity to Rohmer has appeared increasingly

superficial through the 1990s, and *La séparation* (1994) was produced by Claude

Berri on a scale very different from Rohmer's financial prudence. Claude-Marie

Trémois argues that a number of other directors through the 1990s may also be seen

as inheritors of what she describes as a 'cinéma en liberté' represented by figures

such as Varda, Rivette, Doillon and Rohmer.[69] She includes in this new generation

such directors as Eric Rochant, Arnaud Desplechin and Cédric Klapisch. While their work is clearly different from that of Rohmer, it is true that their depiction of the contemporary world has a similar air of authenticity. Jérôme Bonnell has also been compared to Rohmer and his *Le chignon d'Olga* (2002) as providing evidence of 'the benign spirit of Eric Rohmer'.[70] However, there are also difficulties in Bonnell's case as he claims never to have thought about Rohmer while making his film.[71]

It is becoming clear that if we are to find more compelling evidence of Rohmer's influence on other filmmakers, we shall have to look elsewhere and specifically at his production company, *Les Films du Losange*. This company also produces films by directors other than Rohmer and financed thirty-four such works between 1965 and 1991 alone. These have included works by well known figures such as Jacques Rivette (*Céline et Julie vont en bateau* (1974) and *Le Pont du Nord*, (1981)); films by friends who had problems in raising finance such as Jean Eustache (*Une sale histoire/Une sale histoire racontée par Jean-Noël Picq*, 1977); and works by new directors, as was the case with Jean-François Stévenin (*Le passe-montagne*, 1977) and Jean-Claude Brisseau (*De bruit et de fureur*, 1987). While Rohmer's personal influence over the finished work may be minimal, these films do represent a whole chapter of cinema which he has 'sponsored' and which might never have been shot otherwise. These efforts have even extended to providing personal financial support for much smaller projects such as Graham Guit's second short, *Le Roman de Léo*.[72] In addition, the *Compagnie Eric Rohmer*, formed to produce *Reinette*, has backed collective works which have given a number of new directors the possibility of getting their first films distributed with Rohmer acting as an executive producer. *Anniversaires* (1998) contains four such shorts while *Le Modèle* (1999/2000) contains three. In the case of the former, the finance came from the profits of *Rendez-*

vous and other C.E.R. productions, while the directors have close connections with Rohmer himself. Diane Baratier has been Rohmer's director of photography since *Arbre*, Florence Rauscher worked on the production of *Automne* and *L'Anglaise* and Rosette has acted in *Femme, Pauline, Bois ton café, il va être froid* (music video), *Les jeux de société* (tv), *Hiver* and *L'Anglaise*, as well as directing Rohmer in *Rosette sort le soir*. Similarly actors such as Arielle Dombasle, Eric Viellard and Pascal Gregory, all familiar faces in Rohmer's own films, make appearances. The case of *Le modèle* is a little more complicated in that each short film is attributed to the 'équipe technique de *la Compagnie Eric Rohmer*' with Rohmer himself being credited with the editing. Here there appears to be a high level of collaboration leading to an ambiguity as to who is really responsible for the finished work. While these films differ both between themselves and from Rohmer's own *oeuvre*, they clearly share at least two characteristics: an ability to control a limited budget and an almost complete absence of stars. Indeed one critic claims they can easily be taken as no more than pale imitations of their producer's own work.[73] Whatever one's personal opinion on this, it is clear that Rohmer as producer has passed on a filmic aesthetic which Rohmer as filmmaker has been less successful at persuading others to adopt.

If anything, Rohmer's influence has increased over the years, both in terms of his films and his work as a producer. The New Wave itself was in many ways his least successful time, but forty years later he has emerged as a figure whose importance was unthinkable in the late 1950s.

Working Methods

One of the most striking characteristics of Rohmer's methods of filmmaking, and

therefore of our perceptions of him, is his grouping of films by series within his work, which tends to increase our sense of a consistent authorial hand. Sixteen of his films form part of the three series which he has made and we shall briefly examine each one in turn in order to better understand an approach which, at first sight, may appear restricting and limiting. We shall begin with the *Contes Moraux* before going on to analyse the *Comédies et proverbes* and the *Contes des quatre saisons*.

Contes Moraux

After the commercial failure of *Lion*, Rohmer decided to embark on a series of films with a similar plot outline in order to make production a little easier, a move which also prevented him from being forced to film subjects which did not interest him.[74] The source for this series was five pre-existing short stories and a sixth in outline form. These stories had been written by Rohmer himself at different times, without the idea of their forming a series. The order of writing was as follows: 1) *La Collectionneuse* (originally entitled *Le vase de Chine*), 2) *Ma nuit chez Maud* (which did not have this title and was set in Paris during the Occupation), 3) *La carrière de Suzanne* (also under another title) and 4) *Le genou de Claire* (which was rewritten with Paul Gégauff and published as 'La Roseraie').[75] *La boulangère de Monceau* was a separate project which Rohmer originally intended to publish in a woman's magazine while *L'amour l'après-midi* was written only one year before shooting.

Rohmer's tenacity, and his determination to complete the series, is reflected in his deciding in advance the order in which he intended to make the films, and retaining this numerical order on the opening credits, even when, for financial reasons, *Collectionneuse* had to be shot before *Maud*, rather than afterwards, as in

the original plan. The subsequent publication of the complete stories in 1974 serves as a final act in convincing the spectator that each film is part of a bigger whole.

The series consists of six separate works which are based around the same basic plot: 'Tandis que le narrateur est à la recherche d'une femme, il en rencontre une autre qui accapare son attention jusqu'au moment où il retrouve la première.'[76] *Boulangère* was the first to be filmed and is a near perfect reproduction of the above story line. From the start, the narrator is determined to meet Sylvie, but when she disappears after their initial meeting, he becomes attracted to a woman who works in a local bakery, which he frequents in his search for Sylvie. However, it emerges that a sprained leg is the reason for Sylvie's absence, and once she reappears, the narrator abandons the 'boulangère' and eventually marries his 'first choice'.

With minor variations, four of the other *Contes Moraux* fit into a similar schema. In the case of *Collectionneuse*, Adrien abandons Jenny in order to go to Saint-Tropez, where he is attracted to Haydée, but returns to his original love at the end. *Maud*'s Jean-Louis[77] is side-tracked in his attempts to get to know Françoise, when he all but succumbs to the attentions of Maud, but he too returns to the initial centre of his interest. In the case of *Genou* there are two 'seducers' who threaten to take Jérôme away from his fiancée, but he too returns to her at the end of the film. *Amour* is equally loyal to the initial outline so that Frédéric is tempted to have an affair with Chloé but, albeit *in extremis*, he returns to his wife and their lovemaking in the afternoon.

However, it is more difficult to fit *Suzanne* into this outline. The narrator (Bertrand) is barely involved with either of the women in the story and is, at least most of the time, reduced to the role of an observer of the amorous adventures of his friend Guillaume. Bertrand makes little effort with the women who appear interested

in him, annoying Sophie by praising Guillaume to her, when he knows that she

despises him, and also taking no advantage of the night which Suzannne spends in

his bedroom, not even attempting the kind of feeble advances made by Jean-Louis in

Maud when he finally embraces the eponymous protagonist at the end of the night.

Suzanne emerges as an anti-*Conte* where the narrator ends up with neither woman

and an unusually negative view of himself, admitting 'En me privant du droit de la

plaindre, Suzanne s'assurait sa vraie revanche.'[78]

This level of honesty is rare in the narrators of these *Contes* so that generally

they have a blinkered view of the world and of their own actions. In the case of

Boulangère, the hero clearly has a very high opinion of himself, imagining that

Sylvie would have no problem in acquiescing to his desires. When he does finally

bump into her, he perceives her vague agreement to a future drink as a victory, a fact

which makes her subsequent disappearance all the more difficult to understand. The

narrator's attitude towards the *boulangère* is even more haughty: he takes it as read

that he is attractive to women and yet his dishonesty is evident when he claims that

he accepted the flirtation precisely because he is in love with someone else (as

Fabien argues in *Ami*). However, even this assertion is open to question: the narrator

is only prepared to devote thirty minutes of his time each day to this search for Sylvie

and soon abandons the avenues (where he is more likely to find her) for the rue de

Lévis and subsequently the bakery. We are made aware from the voiceover that this

is a retelling of events from the start and it is only the narrator's knowledge that he

does return to Sylvie which permits him to present his relationship with the

boulangère as temporary. In order to convince himself even further of this, he

suggests that the *boulangère* deserves punishment for daring to assume that he would

be interested in her and has apparently few qualms about abandoning her, without

explanation, at the end. The voice-over does not therefore provide us with any insight into the actual thoughts of the narrator (what he says is with the intention of making himself look good in the eyes of the viewer) but simply allows us to gain privileged access to his 'spin' on events.

The narrator in *Suzanne* is equally blinkered, although as we have seen, he does admit to the superiority of the titular protagonist at the end. However, he remains in awe of Guillaume throughout and accepts being employed as a tool to enhance the love life of his friend. Thus, Guillaume uses him to keep up appearances when he first sleeps with Suzanne, and later Bertrand has few qualms in helping him to ruin her financially. While the narrator is at times reluctant to acquiesce to Guillaume's requests, he generally capitulates in the end and remains convinced that the latter could never have stolen money from him, preferring to blame Suzanne. As Marion Vidal points out, this relationship clearly has homosexual overtones: Bertrand feels that none of Guillaume's conquests is worthy of him and admits to hating all of the girls that his friend goes out with, so displaying sexual jealousy.[79] It may appear surprising, therefore, that the narrator remains oblivious to this: the blinkers remain on in this respect.

Adrien, in *Collectionneuse*, displays a similar hierarchical view of events. Both he and Daniel perceive Haydée as their inferior and yet Daniel has no qualms about sleeping with her while Adrien comes perilously close to doing so. The independence of her position is ignored and Adrien contents himself by imagining that each of Haydée's conquests is made in order to arouse his jealously. His reaction is similar to that of the narrator of *Boulangère* in that he expresses annoyance at a woman being interested in him and yet imagines that all women are. In all of these cases, Pauline's riposte to Pierre (in *Pauline*), 'Tu te prendrais pas pour le centre du

monde, par hasard?'(p.40)[80] is eminently appropriate.

The later *Contes* are examined in more detail in subsequent chapters but there the narrators/narratorial figures are equally blind. Jean-Louis's Catholic beliefs do not prevent him from having a number of affairs and he has no hesitation in lying to Françoise about his night with Maud. Jérôme (*Genou*) appears unaware of the possible repercussions of his relationship with two teenagers, especially given that he is about to be married. In addition, he believes he has carried out a noble act in apparently separating Claire from Gilles whereas the final image of the film shows them together. Frédéric (*Amour*) initially claims to have little interest in Chloé but is upset when she does not see him more often: he would like to think of himself as being in charge of their relationship, whereas it is in fact Chloé who determines when they meet.

Rohmer's reputation for being a maker of films where people talk a lot about their problems and where little 'action' happens is clearly emerging here. There is also a sense of unity between these works which makes it easy to perceive him as a traditional auteur who reworks the same themes and rarely surprises his spectators. The male characters all appear short-sighted in their understanding of what happens to them and attempt to present themselves in the best light possible. Further examples of unity within this series will serve to underline the strength of this impression and enable us to better understand the formative role of the *Contes Moraux* in creating Rohmer's reputation as a filmmaker.

Each of these films contains a punch line or particular moment when there is an unexpected change or twist in the plot. After viewing several of the films we come to expect this in advance and so, in this case paradoxically, may feel these works are more about expectations achieved rather than surprises and innovation. In

Boulangère, this revelation comes when the narrator discovers that Sylvie lives directly opposite the bakery he has been frequenting. After a moment of tension (did she witness his advances to the *boulangère*?) she admits to understanding his comings and goings as evidence of his feelings for her, a belief which he does nothing to dispel. Suzanne's impending marriage to Franck is the revelation in the second *Conte*, all the more so because Bertrand had convinced himself that Franck was only interested in Sophie. We have seen how this sheds new light on the character of Suzanne so that she emerges as less a victim and more a manipulator, or at least someone who 'gets what she wants'.

In the case of *Maud*, the revelation only occurs in the epilogue, set five years after the main body of the film, when Jean-Louis discovers that Françoise had been the mistress of Maud's husband. The Catholic girl emerges as surprisingly similar to the freethinking Maud, even more so in that they shared a lover. This time, both narrator *and* his chosen woman remain silent about the implications of this epiphany and leave us wondering about the solidity of their marriage's foundations.

We have already referred to the revelation in *Genou* when Jérôme is mistaken in believing that he has separated Claire from Gilles. Indeed, it is only observed by Aurora who operates here as a kind of rival narrator, providing the spectator with supplementary information. The surprise in *Amour* comes at a much earlier stage in the plot when Chloé reveals that she has seen Hélène in the company of another man: could she be having an affair? Our doubts, though not the narrator's, are compounded at the end when Frédéric's wife cries when her husband returns unexpectedly, making vague reference to her plans to go out (to meet a lover?). All of these revelations operate within the self-imposed constraints of the ever more familiar story outline so that the impression of repetition increases as the series

progresses.

In addition, this impression is augmented through the intertextual references linking the *Contes* with other works by Rohmer, outside the immediate series. The *boulangère*'s effort to dampen the narrator's ardour by reminding him that she is only eighteen is repeated by Lucie in *Femme* when she evades François's questions about her love life by reminding him that she is just fifteen. In *Suzanne*, Bertrand is from Saint-Brieuc, as is Margot in *Eté*, while Jean-Claude Biette appears in this *conte* and thirty years later in *Hiver*.

The links between *Maud* and *Hiver* are explored in Section 3, but Jean-Louis's search for Françoise is akin to Gaspard's efforts to find Léna in *Eté*, while both of these films are (in one case partly) filmed on location in Brittany. The fact that holidays can keep people apart is alluded to here (Maud's holiday is over) as it is in *Ami* where one couple is going to Brittany (again) and the other to Sardinia.

Collectionneuse involves Adrien and Daniel attempting to think about nothing, precisely the kind of thing we are later warned is impossible through the proverb which accompanies *Femme* ('on ne saurait penser à rien'). The earlier film also has the narrator admit that he felt that 'les jeux étaient truqués'(p.19) when he is about to find Daniel in bed with Haydée. In the first dancing scene in *Nuits*, the song proclaims 'les dés sont pipés' as we see Louise with her lover to be and Rémi meeting the woman with whom he will fall in love. Daniel's claim that he has not wasted his time with Haydée is akin to the painter in *Rendez-vous*: 'Mère et enfant 1900' who 'loses' two women but returns to his art, convincing himself that he has therefore not wasted his time. The end of *Collectionneuse*, where Adrien decides to leave Saint-Tropez and telephones to find out times of transport, is echoed in *Rayon* and *Eté*. Delphine decides to flee from Biarritz and telephones the train station while

Gaspard will abandon all three women in his life and enquire about the ferry times.

There are parallel discussions on the difference between love and friendship in *Genou* and *Pauline*. Jérôme states that there is no difference between the two while Laura claims only to experience friendship after love. The adult/adolescent roles are reversed in the later film where Pauline sees no difference between these emotions and claims she would never fall in love with someone she did not know.

Amour also contains elements picked up in later films. Teachers are treated rather harshly in Rohmer's work (ironically given his previous profession). Fréderic's wife is considered to be too pretty for the job while Chloé dismisses a man she saw with Hélène as ugly and therefore probably a teacher. This theme is taken up in *Printemps* when Natacha claims that she guessed that Jeanne was a teacher, although 'toutes les profs ne soient pas nécessairement moches'(p.17). The way in which Frédéric and Chloé wander around the streets is reminiscent of the couple in *Rendez-vous*: 'Les Bancs', although the latter couple will split up *before* they manage to move indoors.

These examples of intertextuality between this series and other films by the same director serve to increase the impression of Rohmer as a typical auteur with an identifiable hand across the totality of his work, and not just within one series of films. This emphasis on the filmmaker as an artist serves to provide a sense of coherency through his career: he continues to explore the same themes in a similar fashion. However, this concept has also contributed to the impression of him being a conservative director who rarely takes risks and has spent his time making slight variations of the same film: one of our aims is to disprove this theory. We shall now examine the *Comédies et proverbes* series in order to understand their role in the reputation of Rohmer as filmmaker and the ways in which they might seem to

represent a development from the *Contes Moraux*.

Comédies et proverbes

Rohmer's second series presents a number of immediately striking differences from the previous *Contes*. The *Comédies* do not rely on a set of pre-existing stories (even if individual films are based on earlier writings) and the plots display a greater degree of theatricality where the characters frequently put forward images of themselves, as if they were playing a part on the stage. While this second series does provide some prescriptive proverbs as to ways of living, the concentration is more on ways of dealing with individual problems as experienced by characters who, while they are still presented in an impartial way, appear to be more down to earth and less intellectual than those encountered in the first series. Finally, from a gender viewpoint, the *Contes* revolve around male characters while the *Comédies* generally have female central protagonists. The one exception to this is the first in the second series, *Femme*, which thus appears as a bridge between these two parts of Rohmer's career.

We shall now examine the narrative elements of the *Comédies* series in order to assess the extent to which similarities may be traced between the different films while, at the same time, recognising the greater variety inherent in the avoidance of a *Contes*-style template. It is perhaps significant that the narrative in each film revolves around the finding or keeping of a partner. For the characters involved, the first of these aims may be seen as an attempt to compensate for a lack. This lack may be simultaneously their own ('I do not have a boyfriend') and that of someone else ('he does not have a girlfriend'). Conversely, the efforts to keep a partner reflect a desire to maintain an equilibrium, albeit at the expense of the autonomy of the other's

desire. However, the desiring subject may well appear to be punished if the object of desire expresses his/her own wishes and finds his/her own new object of desire. This is precisely what happens in *Nuits*, when Louise returns to Rémi after spending a night with Bastien only to find that her boyfriend has also been unfaithful, and in his case it is the start of a serious relationship. Her tears reflect just how much she is being made to suffer.

The first and fourth films in the series involve attempts to keep a partner, and in both cases the plot is complicated by the existence of a rival love interest. François (*Femme*) wishes to stay with Anne, but spends an afternoon with Lucie, before he returns to his original love. Louise (*Nuits*) spends a night with Bastien before realising that Rémi is the one she really loves. However, unlike the outcome of most of the *Contes*, the result here is far from a happy reunion with the original partner.[81] Anne appears to be close to abandoning François while Rémi has decided to live with Marianne.

These films provide what may be seen as a frame around another pair of works where varying levels of commitment to finding a partner go unrewarded. Sabine (*Mariage*) believes most in the successful completion of her enterprise and, at the end, appears to be on the point of taking up with another man. In contrast, Marion (*Pauline*) seems to have little belief in the long-term prospects of her relationship with Henri, and Pauline is all too eager to reject Sylvain.

Rayon introduces a change into this sequence by charting the first successful quest of the series, which leads to Delphine finding her 'Prince Charming'. *Ami* continues, at least on one level, with this optimism in that both Blanche and Léa have partners at the end. However, we would be right to be suspicious at the relative ease with which this is achieved and the uncertain future is already underlined by the

contrasting colours in the clothes of each couple in the final scene: Blanche/green - Fabien/blue; Léa/blue - Alexandre/green. This incompatibility, as conveyed by the costume code, is open to question in its turn, however, since these colours *do* represent a sense of balance between these two couples (opposites attract) and so we are left with an ambiguous ending, far removed from its surface certainty.

However, this film also operates on another level. In order to achieve this 'happy' ending, the plot necessitates the break up of the two couples which were extant at the start: Fabien/Léa and Alexandre/Adrienne. Thus, this final film in the series contains a mixture of the narrative elements which occur individually in the other *Comédies* as it first splits couples, only to create new ones. Despite its position within the series, *Ami* sets the scene for the other films, for, as Rohmer himself points out, 'c'est plutôt un film inaugural'.[82]

As was the case with the *Contes*, there are a number of references within these films to other works within the series and these undoubtedly serve to increase the unity of the *Comédies* as a whole. The issue of marriage is raised a number of times, not surprisingly, and most explicitly, in *Mariage*, where Sabine's decision to marry parallels that of Jean-Louis in *Maud*, with the distinction that she has no prospective partner in mind. However, even in *Femme*, marriage is referred to, albeit unwittingly, by Lucie in the German phrase she reads while Christian and his 'wife' go past: 'Also, du hast dich verheiratet' / 'So you've got married'(p.42). Later on, Mercillat claims he has heard that Anne is going to marry her 'aviateur'. As we have already seen, while marriage per se is rarely the aim of the protagonists of this series, they are all searching, at one time or another, for a partner.

Chance meetings between people in places they do not frequent provide the basis for a discussion between Jean-Louis and Vidal in *Maud*, when this is precisely

what happens to them. In *Nuits*, however, such encounters are dismissed as highly unlikely. Louise rejects Octave's suggestion that Rémi met Camille in the same café in which Louise herself is meeting Octave. However, the principle that people's meeting points are 'dans l'extraordinaire'[83] is still upheld: in fact there has been only one chance meeting since Rémi is quite deliberately with Marianne (and not Camille). This way of meeting people is witnessed in a number of crucial encounters in this series: in *Femme*, François meets Lucie only when he follows Christian, instead of sleeping after his night shift, and she is not at school, due to a strike (or so she claims). The characters in *Pauline* meet only when they go to a different place and holiday near Granville, while the initial meeting between Blanche and Léa (in *Ami*) is caused by the latter's decision to eat in a *different* place and the former's to lunch at all. In addition, Blanche's meeting with Alexandre depends on his being at the pool, a place he claims rarely to visit.

As was the case with the *Contes*, there are also many links with works outside the *Comédies* series itself. These are both to previous films, as in the examples of chance meetings outlined above and first discussed in *Maud*, and also to later films, as in a woman's desire to be married being revisited in *Automne* after its initial exploration in *Mariage*. Indeed, in this case, the same actress (Béatrice Romand) plays the character in question. As before, these apparently repetitive intertextual references serve to further underline the apparent unity within Rohmer's *oeuvre* and might make it easy to produce a simple description of him as an uninventive filmmaker, although the reality is already emerging as much more complex.

Rohmer himself points out two links between the *Comédies* and the work of Truffaut. Mathilde, the wife of the air traffic controller in *La femme d'à côté* (1981),

is referred to in the film as 'la femme de l'aviateur', while a scene in *Mariage*, when

Sabine lights candles in Le Mans cathedral, is reminiscent of similar scenes in *La*

chambre verte (1978) when Julien Davenne lights candles to celebrate the dead.[84] As

we have seen, overt filmic references of any kind are extremely rare in Rohmer's

work and so this kind of exchange between two *Nouvelle Vague* directors is evidence

of the continuing contacts between the two and the long-term influence of this

movement on their working relationship.

The *Comédies* are less obviously carefully constructed than the *Contes*, and

use their new freedom, especially evident in *Rayon*, to approach Rohmer's initial aim

of inventing a story 'à partir d'images tournées au bonheur de l'instant'.[85] In some

ways Rohmer appears to be getting closer to the stereotypical freedom of film-

making of the New Wave (improvisation, shooting in the street) some twenty years

after the movement itself, and here we begin to be aware of an intricate

intertextuality that is fundamental to all his work which clearly challenges the

accusation that he constantly remakes the same film by merely filming conversations.

At this point it is therefore becoming clear that Rohmer's work is far more complex

than it first appears, and we shall now examine his third series of films, *Contes des*

quatre saisons, in order to assess the extent to which it too may support this

discovery.

Contes des quatre saisons

This third series of films (*Saisons*), released between 1990 and 1998, lacks the unity

of plot evident in the *Contes moraux* but has a more obvious unity of theme than the

Comédies et proverbes. As a starting point, it is perhaps helpful to employ Rohmer's

own division of the *Saisons* into two parallel pairs of films: *Automne/Printemps* and *Hiver/Eté*.[86] The first of these pairings contains both references to processes of thought and to various supposed, or actual, machinations within the plot. The thought processes are directly linked to the presence of a philosophy teacher as a character in each film, and while Etienne (*Automne*) never speaks a word on his subject, Jeanne (*Printemps*) appears constantly preoccupied by her classes and even uses them to analyse her reaction to Igor's kiss. It is thus not surprising that *Printemps* also features a lengthy discussion on Kant and that there is even a photograph of Wittgenstein in Jeanne's room (which might easily be assumed to show her absent boyfriend). In contrast to this, the characters in *Automne* concentrate entirely on their own view of their problems and avoid using any pre-existing theories to describe their existence. In this, *Printemps* is closer to the intellectual conversations of *Maud* while *Automne* appears more akin, and not just on a superficial level, to the protagonist's preoccupations in *Mariage*. Thus, it is possible to suggest that the reliance, or otherwise, upon the discourse of philosophy through which characters analyse their actions may constitute a further indication of the differences between these two *Saisons* films, rather than providing an example of Rohmer's repetition or predictability.

The characters' machinations all revolve around their efforts to bring potential couples together, although their reasons for this differ widely. In *Automne*, Isabelle goes to great lengths to find a suitor for Magali, and her efforts may be viewed as essentially altruistic although she undoubtedly enjoys the excitement of 'vetting' Gérald, and admits she could easily have fallen in love with him. Rosine has her own potential suitor for Magali in the person of her former lover, Etienne, but we view her efforts with more circumspection: she hopes that a new relationship

for Etienne will enable them to remain friends. In both cases the manipulators are very clear about their objectives and plan their acts in a self-conscious fashion. This is less clear-cut in *Printemps*, with Natacha's efforts to bring her father and Jeanne together. She may not in fact 'forget' to warn Jeanne that Igor will come back home to collect his suitcase, leading him to see Jeanne all but naked. She also fails to mention his telephone confirmation that he will help with the gardening (allowing a second meeting with Jeanne) and in the course of this chore she arranges to go off with her boyfriend (William) so that Jeanne and Igor are left together. All this after admitting to Jeanne that such a relationship would delight her and with the additional motive of removing Eve, her father's girlfriend whom she detests, a situation reminiscent of Sagan's *Bonjour tristesse*.[87] However, despite all the 'evidence' it remains uncertain how conscious she is of her actions. Clearly she would like her new friend to go out with her father but much of the above could be explained by forgetfulness and an understandable desire to spend some time trying to cement her crumbling relationship with William. The contrast between the relative clarity of the protagonists' motives in *Automne* and the ambiguity of Natacha's may well be seen to provide yet another indication of the fundamental variety which exists in Rohmer's work, even within pairs of films in the same series where some sort of continuity might be anticipated.

Despite such differences, a number of other comparisons may be drawn between the two films: both contain close relationships between women. At their first meeting, Jeanne is 'picked up' by Natacha and is invited to spend the night in her new friend's flat while Rosine admits to loving Magali herself rather than her son: 'Le coup de foudre, ça a été avec elle'(p.136). Both Isabelle and Jeanne provide us with looks full of ambiguity. Isabelle's gaze at the start of *Automne*, when she

watches her daughter Emilia and the latter's fiancé, appears as a mixture of happiness and sadness: her daughter is going to be happy, but she is also going away. After the closing credits, Isabelle's look undermines the previous images of her happy family at Emilia's wedding, and presents us with the possibility of her regretting the missed opportunity with Gérald. Jeanne stares ahead as she listens to Natacha playing Schumann and also after Igor returns to the Fontainebleu house, having brought Eve to the station. Again, *Printemps* is the more ambiguous of the two films: unlike the conjectures in *Automne* it is impossible to discern what Jeanne might be thinking, although these looks reflect a depth of character which complicates our impression of her motives.

Etienne and Igor are of a similar age and both have a preference for relationships with very young women. Meanwhile, Isabelle and Jeanne have experiences which echo those of the male heroes of the *Contes*. Both have an 'élu' (Jean-Jacques and Mathieu respectively) whom they come perilously close to abandoning, before finally returning to this initial choice. These intertextual links between the two series serve as a unifying factor in films made over thirty-five years apart and, once again, reflect the strength of the argument for considering Rohmer as an auteur, while the differences we have found are clearly to be expected as an individual's work develops and changes over time.

The second pairing in *Saisons* is between *Hiver* and *Eté*. As Rohmer points out, their plots are mirror images of each other: *Hiver* involves one woman and three men while *Eté* concerns itself with one man and three women.[88] Each film is structured around a series of discussions between the protagonist and his/her potential partners, and which foreground the importance of choice so that Félicie initially chooses Maxence because she believes a choice must be made, before finally

deciding to wait for Charles. Gaspard spends most of *Eté* attempting to avoid choosing between Margot, Solène and Léna before deciding to further his musical interests instead. (Indeed the actor playing the part, Melvil Poupaud, has since released an album.)[89] Thus both protagonists reject the palpable, the *real*, in favour of the potentially unattainable: musical success or the return of a long lost lover.

This similarity in subject matter is also evident in their settings. The summer prologue of *Hiver*, and *Eté* in its entirety, are set in Brittany. This echo invites the spectator to view the later film as a kind of fairy tale or *conte* which echoes the idyllic atmosphere of the opening of *Hiver* where we are presented with moments of romantic happiness. However, there are ambiguities about Félicie's future with Charles. When we compare these two films, Margot's comment about the photograph of Léna ('Une photo ça ne prouve rien', p.19) casts fresh doubts on the nature of the idyllic prologue in *Hiver*, as well as drawing attention to the ambiguities of the cinematic process itself, particularly as it is used by Rohmer. Charles and Félicie pose for photographs which depict their happiness but we may well question the probable longevity of their relationship. It could easily be argued that it is only Charles's enforced absence which keeps them 'together'. All of this invites us to be equally circumspect about the likely success of Gaspard's relationships. Our reading of a given film is here 'contaminated' by our remembrance of previous Rohmer texts, producing an increasingly complex mesh between his different works. In this way intertextuality serves to deepen the narrative structure, rather than simply reflect a lack of originality on the part of the director.

Both films involve one partner who has 'disappeared' without leaving an address. Gaspard has no details of where Léna lives while Charles never provided Félicie with a forwarding address (or even a family name!), and the one she supplied

wrongly states she lives in Courbevoie, rather than Levallois.

However, the technique of filming provides an important contrast between the two works. *Hiver* contains many zoom shots, perhaps the most noticeable occurring near the start of the theatre scene when the camera picks out Félicie and Loïc in the audience in order to emphasise the importance of Félicie's experience, as well as isolate the couple from the other spectators. *The Winter's Tale* is the first example, in all of Rohmer's feature films, of a scene filmed with two cameras simultaneously (this technique is later employed in *L'Anglaise*). The result is that the unity of the theatrical performance is retained: we are presented with an actual performance of Shakespeare's play. In contrast, *Eté* employs many tracking and panning shots as the characters walk along the beaches and there is much less use made of shot/reverse shots. Thus, there is more of a documentary feel which fits in with the natural surroundings of the beaches. In both cases Rohmer uses contrasting filmic techniques in order to achieve an illusion of 'reality'. It becomes clear that the camerawork provides us with examples of variety within Rohmer's work and further undermines the view that he simply repeats himself from one film to the next.

Contes des quatre saisons: written text and film

Following the completion of the *Saisons* series, in 1998, Rohmer published a book containing the scripts of the four films. No indication is given of the status of these scripts, and an apparently planned interview with Rohmer is omitted, but we are clearly given the impression that these are the shooting scripts of the series. The title and the cover illustration from *Hiver* make the contents of this book very clear while the line 'Précédés d'un entretien avec Eric Rohmer' has been removed from the back

cover.[90] It is thus surprising that there are a number of differences between the printed version and the final filmic dialogue, especially given the attention Rohmer gives to the rehearsals of the script. Many of these changes appear as no more than rewordings of the original, as exemplified in this example from *Hiver*:

> que je continue à prendre une extra, ou que je trouve une nourrice. Qu'est-ce que tu en penses?... Je sais très bien que tu ne peux pas à la fois t'occuper de ta fille, surtout pendant les vacances, et coiffer les clients. Alors à toi de décider. (p.217)

becomes, in the film:

> Il faut qu'on s'organise. Je sais bien que pendant les vacances, tu peux pas à la fois t'occuper de ta fille et coiffer les clients ... mais peut-être garder un[e] extra[91] ou prendre une nourrice. Qu'est-ce que tu en penses? C'est toi qui décides?(p.44)

Here the initial dialogue is tightened up so as to reflect the vernacular rather than the written register. This provides evidence of Rohmer's willingness to develop his original texts and undermines somewhat the notion of one creative mind behind the film: here the actors may well be responsible for particular turns of phrase in the version of the script that finally appears on the screen. This adds further to the possibility of multiple authorship within Rohmer's work.

Other elements of the script are frequently added or removed in the final version. In *Printemps*, Jeanne's description of Corinne as an old friend whom she is delighted to meet again is omitted. Its presence simply contributes to a feeling of unease about Jeanne: she is hardly delighted to hear from Corinne, given her attempt to avoid going to her party, and later leaves the same party without ever meeting her. Additions to the text generally consist of elements which are simply alluded to in the book version: Maxence may be telephoning when we see him for the first time, but the words he speaks only exist in the film (*Hiver*); Magali may introduce Rosine to Isabelle, but again it is only in the film that we find out what is actually said

(*Automne*). Thus, we may assume that these details are developed much closer to the moment of shooting.

The most important change between book and film, and indeed between source and film, emerges in the case of the representation of *The Winter's Tale* in *Hiver*. The book omits at least twenty lines from Shakespeare's play, principally to avoid developing the character of Camillo. In turn, the film omits further lines from Rohmer's printed version and attributes Camillo's lines to Polixenes so that we are not being presented with a faithful production of the play, but rather with a version which has been altered so as to better concentrate on its similarities with Félicie's situation. Thus the parallel projected marriage of Camillo to Paulina is not referred to in the film and the role of the King's jealousy as the cause of his wife's 'death' is obliterated. At first sight Rohmer appears to live up to our expectations of him as a straightforward adapter of texts while, in fact, he is manipulating a source text in a far from classical fashion. This ability to play with, and even undermine, the expectations of his audience, emerges as an increasingly important aspect of Rohmer's work.

This series builds on the previous ones and has a wider intertextual resonance within his *oeuvre*. These intertextual references increase the complexity of the text, introducing into its meaning other and different layers of significance. Instead of impoverished repetition, there is a real sense of development and a continuous questioning of what has gone before. This is far from a case study of a declining auteur 'remaking the same film again, and again'.[92]

The Filming Process

Within the context of Rohmer's identity as a director it is, of course, important to consider his working methods, which are essentially characterised by precisely the thoroughness and attention to detail that one might expect. Again, evidence will be provided both by a study of his own comments and by those of his collaborators. It is clear that each film involves a lengthy period of preparation (two years in the case of *Maud* and *Ami*[93]) during which Rohmer lets it be known quite widely that he is considering making another film, without offering any definite clues as to its identity. In an interview in *The Guardian* in 1999 he mentions his search for an actress fluent in French and English for his next work but gives no further plot details of what is to become *L'Anglaise*.[94] During this period, he has long conversations with the actors and actresses who might be concerned, sometimes about subjects which turn out to be far removed from the final narrative.[95] '[...] On le voit dans son bureau, toutes les semaines. On passe deux heures avec lui autour d'un thé avec des petits gâteaux au gingembre. [...] On parle de la pluie et du beau temps.'[96] In the case of *Nuits*, he talked of women and seduction with Fabrice Luchini, and about architecture and painting with Pascale Ogier.[97] Sometimes these conversations are recorded so that certain phrases used quite naturally by the cast can be blended into the script,[98] an element of 'improvisation' which at first sight suggests a more playful facet of his otherwise serious approach. However, it must be recognised that this is a very controlled form of improvisation; the phrases are gradually crafted into the script which evolves over the succeeding months, and once they are placed within a definitive version, this must usually be faithfully followed.[99] Meanwhile, there are visits to possible locations, which may sometimes need meticulous preparation:

Nestor Almendros recounts, for example, how Rohmer planted roses a year in advance so that they would bloom on time for the shooting of *Genou*.[100] In the case of *Ami*, the town of Cergy (a new town just outside Paris) was to play such an important role that over a period of eighteen months the cast and Rohmer went there at least once every month, the director taking photographs of cast members in the future locations, even as they were being built.[101] Here again, this suggests a meticulous attention to detail that is an integral part of Rohmer's nature as well as his working techniques: he clearly wishes to exercise a very high degree of control over the preparation of his films, which fits in with the received idea of an auteur.

From about six months before the beginning of shooting, rehearsals begin in earnest: 'lectures à la table, enregistrements-audio, puis ce qu'on pourrait appeler des "répétitions-repérages", au cours desquelles les acteurs se familiarisent *en même temps* avec le texte et avec certains lieux de tournage [...].'[102] Some of the scenes are shot by Rohmer himself in Super-8 or digital video as an intermediate step between the writing and the shooting processes.[103] During this time the cast are expected to learn their lines perfectly in a process which involves constant repetition. Rohmer explains his reasons for this as follows: 'Su par coeur, assimilé, usé jusqu'à la corde, le texte reprend alors une nouvelle vitalité.'[104] Perhaps the most extreme example of this was *Perceval* where the complete text was put on as a play for a group of school children prior to its filming.[105] This almost excessive degree of preparation reflects Rohmer's desire for control that we have seen in the elaboration of his scripts.

Typically, therefore, a period of some two years' careful preparation precedes the actual filming and this initial care accounts perhaps for the extremely restricted number of takes he needs, although this equally could result from financial constraints, as was the case with *Collectionneuse*.[106] Over twenty years later, while

making *Nuits*, 'il y avait tous les jours la prise unique, celle dont il n'existerait pas de double'.[107] Such an approach clearly puts pressure on both cast and crew, but the initial meticulous preparation considerably reduces the risk of failure and in this phenomenon we can again observe the contradictions which have coloured other aspects so far looked at: this director's desire for flexible control. However, Rohmer does not shoot in a constant orderly fashion but, instead, may disappear from the set for several hours at a stretch, subsequently making up for lost time with an unheard of ten minutes of usable film in a day.[108] Here again our expectations are not fulfilled: this director does not film methodically, but rather in spurts of activity which depend more on inspiration than on planning. This insight into Rohmer's way of producing films adds to our impression of a complex figure who strives for a high level of control over his work, while clearly depending on his collaborators not just to reproduce his text, but also to help with its very elaboration. The impression of naturalness in the development of his plots hides a wealth of preparation and the role of realism in Rohmer's work must now be addressed in order to better understand his approach.

Realism

Rohmer frequently appears to be striving for realism in his work (a concept discussed below), as is evidenced by the precision of his locations and his insistence on shooting at the time dictated by the diegesis. In addition, there is a widespread temptation to see filmic images as realistic or mimetic, simply because of the nature of the image on the screen. We must remember, though, that such principles can be subverted or manipulated in a number of ways so that a sense of ambiguity returns.

In the case of *Amour*, for instance, both the offices and Chloé's second room were constructed in the studio at Boulogne. Enlarged photographs of nineteenth century buildings were put outside the office windows and the intensity of the light was altered to fit in with the time of year depicted.[109] More recently, much of the backgrounds for *L'Anglaise* were created using computer technology. This may appear commonplace in mainstream cinema, but it does serve as a warning not to take things at face value in Rohmer's work, and while, until *L'Anglaise*, there was no question of creating a special effects cinema, some manipulation of reality is clearly taking place.

The 'realism' or otherwise of Rohmer's films is a problematic concept for a number of reasons, many of them associated with the difficulties with this term itself. It is generally accepted that realism is a notion developed by nineteenth century novelists which was subsequently applied to film in such areas as neo-realism and documentary. The term itself may at first sight seem straightforward, so that realism appears to be about the mimetic representation of the world 'as it is'. However, as John Hill points out, much depends on the definition of the real which is being espoused (differing views of how things are), and this in turn is linked to a large extent with conventions which can change in the course of time: the British 'new wave' working class film may well seem dated today.[110] In addition, we may perceive certain filmic forms as closer to 'reality' than others: documentary is one such form. However, even here the mere presence of the camera, coupled with other features such as editing, voice over and music, has an effect on the final representation. The subjects in front of the camera may react differently from their normal behaviour and the rhythm of cutting and the arrangement of sequences will inevitably imply a meaning which may well not have been present at the moment of

filming. Indeed, Jean-Louis Comolli argues that without such interventions, the final result would be total confusion. He cites the example of Andy Warhol's film *Empire* (1964) which consists of a day's shooting of the Empire State Building from one angle: the result lacks any signification and belongs to the realm of dreams.[111] Rohmer admits to have been tempted by the possibility of filming images at random and then inventing a story afterwards, but he feels that a miracle would be needed for this to work in practice, especially given the precise nature of his project and the paucity of his finances.[112] It was only with *Rayon* that he approached this working method with a highly developed level of improvisation.

Colin MacCabe identifies a number of discourses within nineteenth century fiction, amongst which one in particular (the narrative discourse) denies its status as an articulation, and simply claims to present the truth about human nature.[113] He distinguishes between the comments of individual characters, which may well be flawed, and those of the narrator, which are presented as having access to a final reality. In the case of the classic realist text in film, MacCabe identifies the camera as providing a similar truth, against which we can measure the other discourses present. Thus, such a text could not deal with a contradictory real since the 'real is not articulated - it is'.[114]

In Rohmer's films, we are presented with the point of view of a narratorial figure within the diegesis, as well as the images from the camera, in a process that at first sight appears similar to the one outlined by MacCabe. However, the camera provides only one possible (re)telling of the tale: as Louise admits in *Nuits*: 'Je pourrais vous raconter l'histoire autrement'(p.107). We are presented with one version of events, on the understanding that many more are possible. Thus, as we have seen, the 'happy ending' in *Ami* is fraught with ambiguity: a different version

could easily underline the essential fragility of the newly formed couples.

Linked with these views of reality is the influence of *direct cinema*. Jean-Louis Comolli claims that this type of cinema only asserts itself when fiction is allowed to imbue the subject being filmed: paradoxically, manipulation is needed if we are to accept what we see as 'real'. Otherwise it will appear as artificial or 'too good to be true'.[115] This is not far removed from Rohmer's own call for fiction films to reproduce the beauty of objects and claim that realism is no more than a scrupulous search for this beauty.[116] In order to achieve this, the camera in such a film can be carefully placed at the heart of the action and so appears to depict things naturally (the audience does not miss anything), whereas the documentary camera always suffers from a time delay in its attempt to capture the real (we miss the start of the action), and so the subjectivity of the filmmaker enters the screen.[117] Thus, paradoxically, Rohmer sees artificiality as a way to an authentic portrayal of the world, although, unusually, his notion of authenticity concentrates on the positive or beautiful aspect of the world depicted.

This use of the planned in order to produce a 'natural' view of the world becomes even clearer through a comparison of the narrative structures in Rohmer's work with those employed in classical Hollywood cinema. Bordwell and Thompson identify five characteristics of such films.[118] Firstly, although natural or societal causes may be responsible for setting a narrative in motion, the action is generally centred on the individual, their choices and characteristics. This is clearly the case throughout Rohmer's features: *Maud* is centred on Jean-Louis while *Hiver* takes Félicie as the source of its action. Secondly, desire to achieve a goal is a key instigator of the narrative. In Rohmer's work this desire frequently centres on the getting or keeping of a partner, with *Mariage* serving as the archetypal manifestation

of this. In addition, classical narration requires a resistance to this desire, frequently in the guise of another character. Again, this is a linchpin of the narratives we are analysing, indeed it forms part of the 'formula' on which the *Contes Moraux* are based, with the seductress (Maud or Laura or Chloé) performing this oppositional role.

In classical Hollywood narrative, time plays a less significant role than the development of the plot, and so there is a concentration on events of causal importance. While we are presented with the everyday (even the mundane) in Rohmer's work, such scenes are always connected in some way to the narrative itself. Shots of Jean-Louis talking with his colleagues serve to underline his independence and lack of close friends, while the scene of Delphine moping in a Biarritz apartment (*Rayon*) is used to reflect her loneliness: she hides the family photographs she finds there, which represent people she does not even know. Finally, classical narrative displays a high degree of closure as each thread of the plot is resolved. This sense of closure is evident in Rohmer's films and, indeed, the entire *Contes Moraux* series is premised on this: if we are familiar with their structure, then we know in advance that the narrator will return to his 'first choice' in any individual case.[119] In general, we are presented with a limited time span during which the plot may develop, as dictated by holidays in *Collectionneuse, Genou, Pauline, Rayon* and *Eté*. Narrative loose ends are tied up by the final scene, even if sometimes this imperative leads to a degree of awkwardness: the reason for Octave mistaking Marianne for Camille (she was wearing the latter's 'toque') is revealed in the midst of Louise and Rémi's final argument (*Nuits*).

Rohmer, as will be clarified below, uses a combination of documentary-inspired techniques ('real' locations, improvisation, direct sound, sometimes a 50mm

lens) with many elements of classical Hollywood narrative in order to provide a 'realistic' background to a fictional construct. This is akin to many World War II British pictures that balanced the national interest with individual desires 'by the interweaving of the various documentary modes of address with the mode of [...] narrative fiction'.[120] Rohmer may well not be attempting to bolster national morale, but his use of different filmic traditions also leads us to admitting that his 'world view' is somehow the most logical one, if only for the duration of his film.

Christopher Williams refutes MacCabe's claim that the nineteenth century novel has a stranglehold on film with its use of a metalanguage that provided an absolute truth.[121] Instead, he argues that such novelists did not deny that their writing was indeed an articulation in itself, as opposed to being an invisible means to tell a tale. Williams goes on to show that a similar situation pertains in film where many factors, apart from the camera, provide information, so that narrative is multiple, rather than homogenised: it does not impose a truth.[122] He is also critical of Bordwell and Thompson's concept of Classic Hollywood Cinema: spectators *do* notice the devices used in a film and this theory takes no account of technical differences between films.[123] He also claims that the excitement in a text comes from its particular mix of realism, its opposite, antirealism, and 'their nonidentical different', nonrealism.[124] Thus, Rohmer's narrative technique can be seen as a combination of realist and non-realist, while his filmic technique is both realist and anti-realist. These combinations structure the two major parts of this study.

This complex relationship with realism is reflected in the discrete nature of Rohmer's shooting of *fiction* films, where other directors would close off streets or use a studio back lot in order to control what appears on the screen. Many of his works do contain scenes shot in the street, but he is proud of the fact that few people

notice the presence of the camera. This is perhaps not surprising, given his use of small crews, which he explains as follows: 'En général, lorsqu'une équipe a tourné, le lieu du film ressemble à un champ de bataille. Je mets au contraire un point d'honneur à respecter un lieu de tournage.'[125] It is clearly laudable to leave things as you expect to find them, but the filming process does have an effect on the environment shown while the actors still remain aware of and 'play' for the camera: even if the background may be close to unadulterated reality, this is simply a *trompe-l'oeil* for a fictional foreground.

In a similar fashion, realist and anti-realist demands characterise Rohmer's favoured choice of lens. Almendros explains his frequent use of 50mm lenses by the fact that they are closest to human vision (and so are assumed to provide the spectators with a view of the world 'as if they were there').[126] This view is echoed in the director's refusal to film from a position in which it would be impossible for a human to find themselves and have a clear view (such as inside a chimney or wardrobe),[127] reflecting his apparent straightforward classical stance, which posits the screen as a window onto the world, as well as his insistence on clear justification for camera movements.[128] However, Rohmer himself claims that the lens which he prefers is a 32mm one, adding 'Some of my colleagues systematically use a 50mm lens, which corresponds more closely to human eyesight, but I do not prefer that lens.'[129] In this he is similar to Godard who uses such a lens to obtain a simultaneous feeling of closeness to the subject *and* depth of field.[130] The effect is to draw the spectator into the image, albeit through the manipulation of the image. This admission simply adds further to the ambiguous relationship which Rohmer increasingly appears to have with the world he is filming: what we see appears to be from a human point of view and so seems familiar, even as we learn that his choice

of lens has a distorting effect on the perspective of the final image.

Sound

The soundtrack accompanying any film is essentially composed of speech, music and ambient noise and this can be edited in a similar fashion to the image track to produce either diegetic or non-diegetic sound. Diegetic sound has a recognisable source in the world of the film, such as characters talking or instruments we see being played, while non-diegetic sound has its source outside the space of the story, as is the case with music which is added to accompany the images. [131] Such music is a common device in classical narratives where it is used to enhance the image track and underline the emotions being depicted. As well as its position within the story world, most of the sound in a film is simultaneous or synchronous with the images: when we hear a character talking we also see their lips moving. However, sound can also precede or follow the moment represented by the image. In the latter case, a narrator may recount a story from a vantage point which post-dates the time of the narrative in a process which Bordwell and Thompson refer to as internal displaced diegetic sound.[132] It is precisely such a process that is employed by Rohmer in many of the *Contes Moraux* where there is frequently a temporal distance between the 'present' of the narrator and the narrative depicted. Thus, the trees which we see at the start of *Boulangère* have been cut down in the time gap between the story and the moment of its recounting; the narrator of *Suzanne* is recalling events which occurred when he was eighteen; and Jean-Louis recounts the events depicted in *Maud* at a distance of at least five years. It is precisely this distance which enables the narrators to present themselves in a particular light and increases their apparent control over

the way events are depicted to us. However, as we shall see later, Rohmer's camera provides an additional distancing device which forces us to critically re-examine the narrator's version.

Since the coming of sound to filmmaking, there has been much debate as to the nature of its effect. Kracauer, for example, argues that for sound films to be aesthetically successful, 'their significant communications must originate with their pictures'.[133] In contrast, Rohmer argues that we are wrong to believe that the best films could do without words, and that they would therefore lose little if seen with the original soundtrack by a foreign audience. He is particularly critical of what he identifies as a tendency to relegate dialogue to a poor second place, so that the director can concentrate on the image, and argues that the director's art 'n'est pas fait pour faire oublier ce que dit le personnage, mais, tout au contraire, pour nous permettre de ne perdre aucune de ses paroles'.[134] This interest in the text, rather than the visual, seems to reflect an earlier age, somewhat removed from the concerns of his *Nouvelle Vague* colleagues who were aiming for a more visual notion of meaning.

It is thus necessary to compare Rohmer's use of sound with that of his colleagues in the New Wave in order to ascertain the extent to which his aims in this area were similar to theirs. When they began making films, most of them used the same type of camera, the Cameflex, which was portable enough to use in the street. However, the noise of its motor made it virtually impossible to use direct sound, and so these works, despite being filmed on location, were in fact post-synchronised like their predecessors in the *cinéma de qualité*.[135] Rohmer himself followed this practice and all of his films, until *Maud*, had a soundtrack recorded in the studio. Thus, these early works are constantly one step further away than they appear from the world

they depict and this is equally true of Rohmer as it is of other New Wave directors.

Even when Rohmer employs direct sound (and he refuses to use foley[136]), the recording of the soundtrack can display a high level of manipulation and so we cannot take this to mean that everything we hear in a film took place at the moment of filming. The following examples will serve to illustrate this. In the case of *Nuits*, Georges Prat (the sound engineer) recounts how Rohmer heard some children playing, while he was shooting in Marne-la-Vallée, and decided that this could provide an excellent background noise, a decision which led to two days of searching around Paris for a similar sound which this time could be recorded for the soundtrack. Finally they succeeded in doing so.[137] The result is a seamless manipulation of reality that is all the more difficult to detect in a director who has long had a reputation for avoiding any kind of special effect. In *Hiver*, the music that appears to come from the merry-go-round in Belleville was, in fact, added during editing, the original tune being Ravel's 'Bolero'.[138] Thus, while the music we hear at this point is in fact non-diegetic, it appears, as is almost always the case in Rohmer's work, to have a source within the filmic world. In *Automne*, the editor Mary Stephen reveals that the sounds of the church bells ringing in the Rhône valley were actually recorded by Rohmer himself in Paris.[139] In each case appearances are deceptive and this adds to the need for a more complex response from the spectator in order to fully appreciate the extent of Rohmer's manipulation of the raw material provided by the world around him.

Production

During the 1950s, feature film production in France was in the hands of a small

number of generally cautious producers. The New Wave clearly gave new directors the possibility of breaking into the profession, but only a few of them managed to become successful producers themselves. Only Truffaut's *Films du Carosse* remained a successful production company, while Chabrol's AJYM went bankrupt and Godard and Rivette have both used a variety of producers over the last five decades. Given Rohmer's position as an 'independent' filmmaker, we might possibly expect him to have little interest in production (although it is increasingly the case that directors, such as Almódovar, who wish to maintain their artistic independence, do decide to establish their own production company), and in all probability to have major difficulties in raising funds for projects. However, here again, it would be dangerous to make such an assumption, as a brief assessment of his system of financing will show. Rohmer's first feature, *Lion* (1959), was produced by Claude Chabrol, but was a commercial disaster which attracted fewer than 5000 viewers.[140] Consequently Rohmer had great difficulty in finding the money to make a second film and as a result conceived the idea of the *Contes Moraux*, the first two films of which were shorts which would cost very little to make. It was while filming *Boulangère*, in an amateur fashion, that Rohmer was approached by the twenty-year-old Barbet Schroeder who offered to become the producer, and so *Les Films du Losange* was born.[141] This company also produced the second *Conte* (*Suzanne*), but neither of these works was commercially distributed and so Schroeder came up with the idea of *Paris vu par...*, where shorts by well known directors, such as Godard and Chabrol, were mixed with those of lesser known directors, including Jean Rouch and Rohmer himself. It was the subsequent commercial success of *Collectionneuse* that made the production of *Maud*, which needed a professional cast, a possibility. However, Rohmer was turned down twice for an *avance sur recettes* and it was only

the intervention of Truffaut, when he persuaded seven companies each to put up small amounts of money, which finally allowed shooting to go ahead.[142] This penury contrasts sharply with the successful company that *Losange* has become today, producing a range of films by different directors, as described above.

While Rohmer's own films have had a variety of distributors over the years (including Gaumont, Pathé and Colombia Pictures), *Losange* now has its own distribution arm which allows control even over this aspect of a film's reception.[143] With *Reinette*, Rohmer used his own company, C.E.R., to produce the film and he has persisted in this with smaller projects such as *Arbre* and *Rendez-vous* while simultaneously using *Losange* to finance the *Contes des quatre saisons*. The result has been a surprisingly safe and stable environment for an 'independent' filmmaker to work in and one in which he can exercise a high degree of control and an unusual degree of freedom: he could make radical experimental films if he so chose. However, Rohmer's constant ability to surprise us is also evident in this area. For his two most recent features he has abandoned *Losange* and instead C.E.R. has entered into co-production with Pathé in order to make *L'Anglaise* for 40 million francs and with Rézo Productions in order to make *Agent* for €4million, figures unheard-of in Rohmer's filmography.[144] Indeed *Agent* involved eight production companies and was turned down for the *avance sur recettes* and by ARTE, prompting Rohmer to claim that his films are entirely commercial since they receive no government aid.[145] All of this seems some distance from the image of him as a conservative director who constantly remakes the same film with no eye to cinema attendance figures.

Eric Rohmer is simultaneously an auteur, a producer and a distributor, which allows him to have near absolute control over his projects: he appears open to suggestions and frequently incorporates the ideas of others into his work, and yet the

final product clearly bears witness to his control, and his personal meticulous attention to detail. The impression on screen may be of an innocent, seamless depiction of the world but Rohmer is quite prepared to manipulate image and sound in order to create this effect. He uses sets and computer technology on occasion and the soundtrack may contain elements recorded in different places. Finally, this 'art house' director emerges as an astute producer who controls a third of a highly successful production company.[146] The focus of our attention will now turn to Rohmer's writings as a film critic and the extent to which similar ambiguities, particularly in the issue of cinema, exist there.

Rohmer as critic

Rohmer, in common with the other future New Wave directors, wrote a large body of film criticism in the 1950s and early 1960s, and it is essential that we study his contribution to critical debate and film theory in order to understand the context of his filmmaking. In 1948 Rohmer was still a teacher in Vierzon when he published his first works of film criticism in *Temps modernes* and *La Revue du cinéma*.[147] He gave up the idea of obtaining the 'Agrégation' (a high level competitive exam for recruiting teachers) after twice failing the oral and, although he continued teaching (now at Sainte-Barbe), he also presented the Thursday afternoon showing at the 'Ciné-Club du Quartier Latin', and, in 1949, he created the *Bulletin du ciné-club du Quartier Latin* which counted Jacques Rivette and Jean-Luc Godard among its contributors. This journal developed into the *Gazette du Cinéma* which lasted for only five issues but nevertheless played a key role in giving Rohmer the opportunity of meeting André Bazin, so that by 1950 Rohmer was not only making short films

but also was emerging as a widely read critic.[148] As we have seen, this combination of roles emerges as one of the cornerstones of the New Wave movement since Truffaut, Chabrol, Godard and Rivette all wrote film criticism for *Cahiers* while they were beginning their directorial careers. Rohmer's move into film criticism may well have initially constituted a risk for a school teacher with a secure job, but it certainly is an indication of his multiple talents, as well as his fundamental willingness to be unpredictable. He is a man with interests ranging from film and literature to music and painting and he has combined commercially successful feature films with programmes for schools' television. This level of intellectual and critical ability is, not surprisingly, reflected in the variety of influences which we are discovering in his work.

When *Cahiers du cinéma* was founded in 1951, Rohmer became a frequent contributor, and in March 1957 he was invited to join the three-man editorial committee, before becoming effectively the sole editor, following Bazin's death in 1958. By now he was married, and soon had two children, and yet he was prepared to take a sabbatical from his teaching post, in order to devote himself to the magazine. However, while Truffaut, Godard and Chabrol began to make successful feature films as part of a New Wave of filmmakers, Rohmer, in charge of *Cahiers*, was in a sense sidelined as a director. The situation was exacerbated by the delayed release of *Lion* and its subsequent commercial failure, as we have noted above. As the *Nouvelle Vague* faltered in the early 1960s, there was a call from these new directors for the journal to support them and their works; however Rohmer fought to retain his independent editorial line devoted to the promotion of a pantheon of directors such as Hawks and Hitchcock. Truffaut, Doniol-Valcroze, Kast, Rivette and Godard delivered an ultimatum to Rohmer to support the New Wave, but the latter refused to

resign, claiming that the success of the review depended on it keeping its distance from the *Nouvelle Vague*.[149] A compromise was reached in August 1962 which meant that henceforth *Cahiers* took a more positive line on the New Wave, whilst retaining Rohmer as editor - clear evidence of the tenacious side of his nature.

However, in the Spring of 1963 there was another move to replace him when he was criticised for his continued lack of interest in the radical experience of the New Wave, his frequently doctrinaire and authoritarian attitude, and his 'ivory tower' approach, which was seen to indicate that he was out of touch with contemporary culture.[150] As the battle grew increasingly intense, two separate issues of *Cahiers* were produced in June 1963, one by Rohmer's group and the other by the rival faction led by Rivette. The former featured a biography of Auguste Renoir (written by his son Jean), along with articles by Rohmer and Michel Mardore, while the rival version favoured a defence of Godard's *Les carabiniers* and provided an account of *cinéma vérité*. The major shareholders, Truffaut and Doniol-Valcroze, supported the Rivette team, and Rohmer lost his post of editor from the July issue onwards. Rivette took over at the head of an editorial committee which included Rohmer, but the previous editor's name appears for the last time in the 'comité de rédaction' in the issue dated November 1963. His career as a critic was thus brought to an end at this point, but it does nonetheless provide ample evidence of the degree of his commitment to this role, and of his unexpected determination to fight for his job, although it brought him little long term success. It is especially significant that his critical line became increasingly independent during the early 1960s, despite the fact that expediency would have dictated a more supportive attitude towards the now struggling New Wave directors. Rohmer is clearly stubborn and it cannot be claimed that he simply acts in his own best interest.

It is clear that opinion of Rohmer's critical work remains divided. For some, he is the champion of transparent realism for whom the 'politique des auteurs' is an alien position,[151] while for others he is the grand old man who was responsible for *Cahiers*'s auteurist line whereby the director was credited as the creative force behind filmmaking, a position exemplified by François Truffaut's 'Une certaine tendance du cinéma français'.[152] He is perceived as an atrocious literary stylist,[153] but also as a straightforward and serious writer.[154] Given that here, as in other areas we have so far explored, we are faced with starkly contradictory opinions on the nature and quality of his work, it is important to explore his film criticism in greater detail to identify the source of these conflicts.

Rohmer's most important study of cinema and its relationship with other art forms is to be found in 'Le Celluloïd et le Marbre' which was published in five instalments in *Cahiers* in 1955. Successive articles examine literature, painting, poetry, music and architecture, and aim to point out, in so doing, the ultimate superiority of the cinema. Rohmer claims that the newest art form has a unique permanence; that, with the advent of safety base film and cinematheques, its works will survive the years more successfully than other visual arts such as painting and sculpture which may suffer attacks by the elements or the deterioration of paint; equally that it has a relevance and permanence which will outlast many literary works of the 1950s which suffer from the difficulty of using real life incidents as inspiration (as Stendhal had done) due to the ubiquitous nature of the press.[155] These views may appear to be somewhat unrealistic, possibly even naive: film prints are subject to deterioration on a greater scale than Grecian statues, and the relevance of specific films from the past will always be as questionable as that of books or paintings, at any given time. Here Rohmer can be seen as simply providing an

exaggerated defence of cinema at a time when it was frequently viewed as a secondary art form, rather than providing comments to be taken at face value. These are perhaps polemical articles anchored in a particular time, rather than assessments which have proved their accuracy over the years.

Equally, Rohmer's comparisons of the cinema with specific art forms, while accurate, can often appear somewhat simplistic: recognising that filmic metaphor is crucially different from literary metaphor, since film can show the object itself,[156] is hardly original. The same is true of his identification of temporal/spatial dimensions as playing a key role in the artistic nature of film.[157] It is thus perhaps understandable that Rohmer has refused permission for this series of articles to be reprinted and distances himself from opinions which he now sees as extraordinarily naive, admitting that film is not the saviour of all other art forms.[158] However, we may well question the extent to which he believed this at the time, given the frequent ambiguity we have encountered in each part of his filmic career.

In 1966, Rohmer made a more measured version of 'Le Celluloïd et le Marbre' for television produced by ORTF for the series *Cinéastes de notre temps* and this version was clearly enriched by the number of different voices in it: painters, sculptors, writers and architects are involved in a round table discussion about their reaction to cinema. The general response to film is a positive one (after all Rohmer chose the speakers) and cinema is acknowledged as an art form which uses space in a fashion akin to that of architecture. Michel Butor is the only negative voice, being especially critical of cinema's narrative technique, which he argues has evolved little from that used by nineteenth-century novelists such as Balzac. Rohmer himself emerges as a strong supporter of films which depict 'reality', which attempt in other words to show life 'as it is', but the serious nature of his message contrasts strongly

with the playfulness or self-consciousness of his 'form' so that he himself is seen only once, filmed from behind in one shot at the start. Thus, at the very moment of making a documentary, the genre normally seen as the most 'realistic' and least playful form of filming, Rohmer the man 'disappears' and so reflects, perhaps, his own complex relationship with the question of filmic realism.

Rohmer's obsession with the 'realistic' nature of film images is explored and articulated repeatedly in his articles in *Cahiers* and elsewhere, but he tends to concentrate on the need for fiction and an 'organised' depiction of the world. Film shots, even in documentaries, reduce and deform the world, even when they claim to be mere recordings of it. Rohmer calls for an exact reproduction of things in order to represent the world about us.[159] We have already seen that he repeatedly argues that a fiction film should reproduce the beauty of objects through the positioning of the camera, and the role of the auteur is thus of vital importance since his/her choice of camera position (in collaboration with the director of photography) has a direct effect on what we see and, perhaps more importantly, on our impressions of it. Thus, paradoxically, Rohmer sees artificiality as a way to an authentic portrayal of the world, although, unusually, his notion of authenticity concentrates on its positive or beautiful aspect. The mix of realism and anti-realism which we remarked on earlier is clearly evident here. Almost forty years later we will find Rohmer still emphasising the importance of such a portrayal: in modern painting the world is given a sense of order by the viewer and so beauty is found in even the most insignificant elements of reality.[160] In general, a work of art will be judged to be close to what it portrays if it concentrates on its beauty, although this will lead to a corresponding emphasis on the positive in its depiction of the world. Rohmer ignores the problems inherent in applying this to such works as war paintings and in this his

theory does have its own limitations. I will explore the implications of this view of art in the section on *Maud*, a film which reflects this clear sense of continuity in Rohmer's critical thinking. He is ready to accept many apparently 'unrealistic' art forms, as long as they contribute to the sense of beauty of the world: for Rohmer the problem remains one of deciding which objects are 'worthy' of being depicted in this way.

This issue of choice is also reflected in another linchpin of Rohmer's film criticism, the selection and consecration of auteurs. Along with Godard and Rivette, he defined an auteur as a 'metteur-en-scène' whose task was the recording of a 'construction spatiale ou [...] expression corporelle'.[161] This depiction of the body in space superseded any interest in a subject matter or a context. On occasions, Rohmer claims that the best directors are incapable of producing bad work since it is impossible to produce a bad film if you have previously made works which are generally considered to be masterpieces.[162] For him, this is as true in the case of Hawks, as it is with Renoir. When there is doubt about the value of an auteur's film, critics must simply renew their efforts to follow the developments of the artist's work which have a logic of their own.[163] Critical attention should begin by concerning itself with what is 'beau' in a film and then move on to discover the success of what might at first sight appear a failure.[164]

This concentration on the director, even in commercial Hollywood, is reflected in the choice of Hitchcock for Rohmer and Chabrol's book-length study which ends with the claim that in all of this director's films: 'La forme [...] n'enjolive pas le contenu; elle le crée'.[165] Once again the emphasis is on the form, the mise-en-scène, as content and Rohmer's doctoral thesis, which was later

published, also concentrates on this, through its analysis of the depiction of space in Murnau's *Faust*.[166]

This close attention to the works of specific directors is hardly unusual but Rohmer's apparent insistence on the 'infallibility' of certain artists may appear as an especially extreme application of the *politique des auteurs*, and indeed one warned against by Bazin since it denies that 'le génie même était menacé d'une stérilité'.[167] In the light of our earlier analysis of Rohmer's role within the New Wave, it is now necessary to examine other aspects of Rohmer's position on auteurism. Even in 'Le Celluloïd et le Marbre', he makes it clear that we have become too accustomed to considering art as just a personal statement from its creator, and cinema's role of translating the universal makes it even less of a statement.[168] This reduction in the personal role of the director is in accord with the kind of discretion which we have seen observed by Rohmer himself in his creative life. Not alone is the personal role of the auteur reduced, but Rohmer is even prepared to question the infallibility of the 'greats', even Hitchcock and Renoir. He admits to not especially liking the first part of *Lifeboat* (Alfred Hitchcock, 1941) and is especially critical of its lack of passion and violence, and its studio setting. Likewise, he is critical of the stereotypical nature of the protagonists in *La grande illusion* (Jean Renoir, 1937).[169] He has also applied these kinds of doubt to his own work: he hesitated before deciding to give *Rayon* a commercial release and he prevents many of his films of the 1950s from being seen.[170] We seem to be confronted yet again with a paradox: Rohmer often appearing to apply auteur theory in an extreme fashion, but at the same time being critical of an individual director's works. He himself explains this ambiguity as resulting from his adherence to the *Cahiers* line when he praised the work of directors such as Ophuls, Minnelli and Preminger.[171] However, it must be remembered that from Bazin's death

in 1958 onwards, Rohmer was co-editor of the journal and would have had an important influence on the editorial line. Just as we have perceived an ambiguity in other aspects of this director's work, so here we must exercise care in taking his critical writings at face value: the polemical writer is ready to exaggerate his case in apparent displays of naivety, as in claiming that film is more resilient than marble, but there are also glimpses of a refreshing pragmatism in Rohmer's approach, as when he admits that all films by a director are not of equal merit.

One final example will serve both as evidence of the ambiguity of Rohmer's approach, and evidence for the links between his critical writings and his films: this is his rejection of non-diegetic music in a film. He argues that these two art forms, music and film, are incompatible since film music smoothes over the gaps between the images, gaps which Rohmer sees as intrinsic to this visual medium. (It must be pointed out that this is only true of mainstream Hollywood: some directors may well use it to enhance ambiguity.) He further claims that filmic music inevitably serves to remove the objectivity and sense of ambiguity which are inherent in the cinematic image by influencing the spectators' emotional responses to the images.[172] Here, once again, Rohmer is arguing in favour of the ambiguous, and he goes on to compare the way in which reality is presented to the spectator in cinema with the effect of listening to music. Music can inspire whereas cinema may at first sight appear to go no further than the images it presents. This would be true if film were no more than the simple recording of events but it is precisely here that the 'génie de l'artiste' comes into play in order to communicate to us 'quelque chose de plus sur l'être du monde que le plus sensible [...] des peintres'. Even allowing for the hyperbole, Rohmer is repeating that the principal aim of cinema is the revelation of beauty to us in nature, which we paradoxically can reveal through an art. Film

emerges as a representation of the world which allows us to become aware of the true form of creation. Rohmer admits that this is far from being the only contradiction in an art form whose abiding artistic principle is to refuse to appear to be an art.[173] Indeed, this paradox goes some way to explaining why this director's films are frequently seen as unadulterated representations of reality: in fact they simply require a greater degree of analysis in order for their filmic form to be revealed.

Despite occasional naivety, Rohmer as critic emerges as an astute intellectual thinker whose concept of realism is far more complex than has generally been assumed until now. He realised from the start that both fiction and documentary do, of course, involve the manipulation of reality. We can see that he constantly questions the nature of the medium of cinema, both in relation to reality and to other art forms, and while he does indeed emerge as a supporter of the *politique des auteurs*, he does not subscribe to the simplistic notion that these authors are infallible figures in a pantheon. We are yet again forced to reassess the initial impression of Rohmer as a traditional theorist and filmmaker. Rather, he must be recognised as a complicated and seminal figure in French cinema since the 1950s and it is now necessary to examine his own films in detail in order to ascertain the extent to which their complexity reflects that of their maker.

NOTES

[1] See Pam Cook and Mieke Bernink (eds), *The Cinema Book* 2nd edition, London: BFI, 1999, pp.240-241.

[2] See Antoine de Baecque and Serge Toubiana, *François Truffaut*, Paris: Gallimard, 1996, p.149.

[3] The former is given in *Cinéma 71* no.153 (April 1971), 65 and the latter in *Cinématographe* no.44 (February 1979), 10. In addition, English Showalter finds these other dates/places from various sources: December 1, 1920, in Nancy; April 14, 1923 and April 4, 1923. See English Showalter, *My Night at Maud's*, New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1993, p.29. The fact that Rohmer's brother gives Tulle as his own birthplace gives cognisance to the family home being situated there. See note at the beginning of René Schérer (avec la participation de Guy Hocquenghem), *Pari sur l'impossible. Etudes fouriéristes*, Vincennes: Presses Universitaires de Vincennes, 1989.

[4] See interview with Rohmer, *Libération*, 17 March 2004, http://liberation.fr/imprimer.php?Article=186623. Accessed 17 March 2004.

[5] *Elizabeth ou les vacances*, Paris: Gallimard, 1946. To further complicate matters Rohmer has, on occasion, denied ever publishing a novel. (See interview in *Film and Literature Quarterly* vol.10, no.4 (1982), 222.) However, the reissue of this book in a German edition in December 2003 (and with the author given as Eric Rohmer) makes this denial all but impossible to sustain.

[6] *Bérénice* was made in 1954 and the part of the hero is played by Rohmer himself. This film is examined further in the section on *Genou*.

[7] See interview with Serge Renko, *Vertigo* no.25 (March 2004), 18.

[8] *Cahiers du cinéma* no.5 (September 1951), 4-12.

[9] These are his nominations for the ten best films of 1954, in no.43 (January 1955), 5 and 'La terre du miracle' in no.47 (May 1955), 38-41.

[10] See Francis Wyndham, 'Rohmer's Choice', *The Observer*, 25 March 1973, 23.

[11] Michel Mardore, 'Rohmer: l'anti-Vadim', *Le Nouvel Observateur*, 30 June 1969, 39.

[12] Francis Wyndham, 23.

[13] Joël Magny, (1986 edition), p.9.

[14] ibid., 1990 edition and 1995 edition, p.9.

[15] See Jean-François Revel, *Mémoires: le voleur dans la maison vide*, Paris: Plon, 1997, pp.175-176.

[16] See *Frankfurter Allgemeine Sonntagszeitung*, Sunday 29 October 1995, 39.

[17] Michel Mardore, 39. This photograph appears in *Cahiers* no.138 (December 1962), 79.

[18] Marion Vidal, p.6.

[19] One from the shooting of *Maud* appears in *Cahiers du cinéma* no.219 (April 1970), 49. There is one sharp earlier photograph of Rohmer with his *Cahiers* colleagues, but he is depicted as a critic rather than a director and his name is not mentioned. See *Cahiers du cinéma* no.100 (October 1959), 68.

[20] Françoise Etchegary was speaking in the course of a round table discussion at the Cinémathèque Française on 27 March 2004.

[21] This interview was recorded for schools' television in order to present Vigo's film.

[22] Directed by Serge Toubiana and Michel Pascal (1993).

[23] Frédéric Bonnaud, 'Télévision: Eric Rohmer, *Preuves à l'appui'*, *Libération* 29 March 1996, 41.

[24] Emmanuel Burdeau, 'Rohmer, maître chez lui', *Cahiers du cinéma* no.502 (May 1996), 17. The interview with Rohmer was recorded in 1993 and broadcast on ARTE on 29 March and 26 April 1996 as part of the *Cinéma de notre temps* series. It was appropriately entitled *Preuves à l'appui* given the range of material which Rohmer uses to illustrate his points.

[25] This also comes from the introduction to this documentary and is a theme developed below. It is noteworthy that these interviews were co-produced by *Les Films du Losange* so that Rohmer's influence affected their very production.

[26] Françoise Etchegaray's documentary is entitled *L'Anglaise et le Duc: un film révolutionnaire* (2002) and was released on the French DVD version of *L'Anglaise* in 2002.

[27] *Cahiers du cinéma* no.219 (April 1970), 49.

[28] *Bulletin de liaison du centre d'information cinématographique de l'Institut Français de Munich*, no.4, 44.

[29] *Le Monde* 23 March 1983, 19.

[30] See Jean-François Revel, p.175.

[31] *Télérama* no.2249 (20-26 February 1993), 27.

[32] See for instance the interview in *Positif* no.309, November 1986, 15.

[33] Frederic Jameson, 'Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism', quoted in Philip Hayward and Paul Kerr, 'Introduction', *Screen* vol.28, no.2 (Spring 1987), 5. On Postmodernism see for instance the entry in *The New Oxford Companion to Literature in French*, edited by Peter France, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995, p.634.

[34] *Cinématographe* no.44 (February 1979), 8.

[35] See, for example, Godard's lengthy comments on *Sauve qui peut (La Vie)* (1979) in *Jean-Luc Godard par Jean-Luc Godard*, pp.458-471 and Marguerite Duras's contributions to the special issue of *Cahiers du cinéma* nos.312-13 (June/July 1980).

[36] See *Cinématographe* no.122 (September 1986), 37.

[37] See interview, *Cahiers du cinéma* no.172 (November 1965), 34.

[38] For this definition of an auteur see Susan Hayward, *Cinema Studies. The Key Concepts* (2nd edition), London and New York: Routledge, 2000, p.21.

[39] *Le Monde*, 24 March 1983, 19.

[40] *Le Figaro*, 23/24 October 1982, 13.

[41] See interview with Alain Bergala and Laure Gardette in *Eric Rohmer*, Dunkerque: Studio 43 M.J.C. de Dunkerque, 1992, p.153. Some of the music in *Eté* is also attributed to Sébastien Erms while Mary Stephen also collaborated on the song in *Femme*. See interview with Mary Stephen, *Senses of Cinema* no.7 (April 2000), 3. Also http://www.sensesofcinema.com/contents/00/5/stephen.html. Accessed 6 August 2003.

[42] These come from, respectively, Emmanuelle Chaulet, Anne-Laure Meury, Rosette and Arielle Dombasle. See *Télérama* no.1963 (29 August-4 September 1987), 14, 15, 16, 18.

[43] This description comes from Jean-Claude Brialy in his autobiography *Le ruisseau des singes*, Paris: Robert Laffont, 2000, p.96.

[44] Marc Cerisuelo, *Jean-Luc Godard*, Paris: Lherminier, 1989, p.34. *Tous les garçons s'appellent Patrick* (1957) was directed by Godard from a screenplay by Rohmer.

[45] Interview, *Limelight Florilège* (no. hors série June 1997), 56-65. This was conducted by André S. Labarthe, Jean Eustache and Bernadette Lafont.

[46] ibid., 64. Claude Chabrol claims that Gégauff disappeared for two years while he spent his grandfather's inheritance, thus providing the outline for *Lion*. See François Guérif, *Conversations avec...Claude Chabrol: un jardin bien à moi*, Paris: Denoël, 1999, p.47.

[47] Quotation from Rohmer in Magny, p.11.

[48] Interview with Chabrol in *Cahiers du cinéma* (Numéro spécial Claude Chabrol), 17. 'Le grand Momo' was one of Rohmer's nicknames. (See for instance the interview with Gégauff in *La Nouvelle Vague 25 ans après*, edited by Jean-Luc Douin, Paris: Cerf, 1983, p.125.)

[49] ibid., p.17.

[50] Interview, *Limelight*, 57-58.

[51] ibid., 58.

[52] ibid., 65.

[53] See Jean-François Revel, p.175.

[54] Introduction to the interview with Gégauff, *Limelight*, 57.

[55] See for instance the interview with Gégauff in Jean-Luc Douin, p.127.

[56] The initial source for this background information is René Prédal, *Le Cinéma français depuis 1945*, Paris: Nathan, 1991. See also his *Le Cinéma français contemporain*, Paris: CERF, 1984, p.25.

[57] *L'Eglise moderne* was never filmed, although it has a number of points in common with *Arbre*: the peace of a village is threatened by a modernist architectural project involving the Mayor and a teacher. It was published in *Cahiers du cinéma* nos. 467/468 (May 1993), 75.

[58] Of the seven films which Rohmer directed in the 1950s, four have 'disappeared': *Journal d'un scélerat, Les petites filles modèles, Bérénice*, and *La Sonate à Kreutzer*.

[59] Truffaut's article 'Une certaine tendance du cinéma français' published in *Cahiers du cinéma* no.31 (January 1954), 15-29 is the most famous of the magazine's broadsides against the 'cinéma de qualité'. See also René Prédal, *Le Cinéma français depuis 1945*, p.78.

[60] See René Prédal, pp.129-130.

[61] See Michel Marie, *La Nouvelle Vague*, Paris: Nathan Université, 1998, p.63.

[62] *Cahiers du cinéma* no.138 (December 1962), 79. This is after the first attempt to remove Rohmer as editor and is noteworthy for its inclusion of equally damning assessments of Chabrol, Godard and Truffaut. It is perhaps not surprising that Rohmer's term in charge was soon to end definitively. The quotation comes from G. Charensol writing in *Les Nouvelles Littéraires* (12.5.1962).

[63] *Cahiers du cinéma* no.155 (May 1964), 20.

[64] See introduction to the interview with Rohmer in Jean-Luc Douin, p.158.

[65] See Alan Williams, *Republic of Images: A History of French Filmmaking*, Cambridge Massachusetts and London: Harvard University Press, 1992, p.374.

[66] *Boulangère* and *Suzanne* only received a commercial release in 1974. See Crisp (1988), p.40.

[67] See Claude-Marie Trémois, *Les Enfants de la liberté. Le jeune cinéma français*

des années 90, Paris: Seuil, 1998, p.210.

[68] Frédéric Strauss, 'Un remède contre la peur', *Cahiers du cinéma* no.437 (November 1990), 75. Luchini has appeared in *Genou, Perceval, Femme, Nuits, Reinette* and *Arbre*.

[69] See Claude-Marie Trémois, p.22.

[70] See Peter Bradshaw, 'Le Chignon d'Olga', *The Guardian*, 12 September 2003, http://film.guardian.co.uk/News_Story/Critic_review/Guardian_review/0,4267,1039 9. Accessed 20 September 2003.

[71] See interview with Jérôme Bonnell at http://www.objectifcinema.com/interviews/155c.php. Accessed 12 February 2004.

[72] See Claude Marie-Trémois, p.60.

[73] Olivier Séguret, '*Anniversaires,* trop d'airs de Rohmer', *Libération* 27 March 1998, 30. *Anniversaires* consists of four short films : 'France' (Diane Baratier), 'Des goûts et des couleurs' (Anne-Sophie Rouvillois), 'Heurts divers' (François and Florence Rauscher) and 'Les amis de Ninon' (Rosette). *Le modèle* consists of 'Une histoire qui se dessine' (1999), 'La cambrure' (1998) and 'Un dentiste exemplaire' (1997). 'La cambrure' was released as a supplement on the DVD of *Genou* and shown as part of the Rohmer retrospective at the Cinémathèque Française in 2004.

[74] Interview with Rohmer, *Cinématographe*, no.122 (September 1986), 33.

[75] This information comes in part from Marion Vidal, pp.9-10. 'La Roseraie' was published in *Cahiers* no.5 (September 1951), 4-12.

[76] Interview with Rohmer quoted in Marion Vidal, p.30.

[77] The character of Jean-Louis is not named in the film but it has become customary to refer to him as Jean-Louis (Trintignant).

[78] Rohmer, *Six Contes Moraux*, Paris: Ramsay Poche Cinéma, 1987, p.59.

[79] See Marion Vidal, p.51.

[80] References to the published screenplays of Rohmer's works are given in parentheses.

[81] The exception is *Suzanne*, although we do not actually witness the reconciliation in the case of *Collectionneuse* or *Genou*.

[82] Interview, *Positif* no.350 (April 1990), 4.

[83] Eric Rohmer, *Six Contes moraux*, p.67.

[84] Eric Rohmer, 'La vie c'était l'écran', *Cahiers du cinéma* (Numéro spécial François Truffaut), (1983), 23-24.

[85] Eric Rohmer, *Six Contes moraux*, p.8.

[86] See interview with Rohmer, *Cahiers du cinéma* no.527 (September 1998), 32.

[87] See Françoise Sagan's *Bonjour tristesse*, Paris: Julliard, 1954.

[88] See interview with Rohmer, *Cahiers du cinéma* no.527 (September 1998), 32.

[89] He released the album *Un simple appareil* on 25 June 2002.

[90] Eric Rohmer, *Contes des 4 saisons*.

[91] The published screenplay has Maxence say 'un extra'.

[92] Ian Freer in a review of *Automne* for *Empire* and quoted in *Halliwell's Film and Video Guide 2003*, edited by John Walker, London: HarperCollins, 2003, p.179.

[93] For *Maud*, see Nestor Almendros, *Un Homme à la caméra*, Paris: Hatier, 1980, p.54. For *Ami* see the interview with Emmanuelle Chaulet in Alain Hertay, *Eric Rohmer, Comédies et proverbes*, Liège: Editions du Céfal, 1998, p.135.

[94] See Peter Lennon, 25.

[95] This information comes from Alain Bergala and Alain Philippon's article entitled 'Eric Rohmer. La Grâce et la rigueur', *Cahiers du cinéma* no.364 (October 1984), 8-15.

[96] Interview with Anne-Laure Meury about *Ami*, *Cinéma 87* no.407 (9-15 September 1987), 3.

[97] Alain Bergala and Alain Philippon, 10.

[98] Anne-Laure Meury, 3. We hear one such interview with Amanda Langlet in the course of the *Preuves à l'appui* programme.

[99] Alain Bergala and Alain Philippon, 10.

[100] Nestor Almendros, p.62.

[101] See interview with Rohmer, *Première* no.125 (August 1987), 49. One such photograph was subsequently published in *Cahiers du cinéma* nos.467/8 (May 1993), 72.

[102] Alain Bergala and Alain Philippon, 10.

[103] See interview with Rohmer, *Première* no 125 (August 1987), 49. An example of such preparation filming for *Pauline* is seen in *Preuves à l'appui*.

[104] ibid., 50.

[105] Nestor Almendros, p.156.

[106] ibid., p.38.

[107] This quote comes from Georges Prat, the sound recordist on *Nuits*, and is cited in Alain Bergala and Alain Philippon, 11.

[108] Nestor Almendros, p.62.

[109] ibid., pp.75-76.

[110] John Hill, *Sex, Class and Realism: British Cinema 1956-1963*, London: BFI Books, 1986, p.57.

[111] See Jean-Louis Comolli, 'Détour par le direct - Un corps en trop', *Cahiers du cinéma* no.278 (July 1977), 5-16. Partly reprinted in *Realism and the Cinema*, edited by Christopher Williams, London: Routledge & Keegan Paul/BFI, 1980. The references are to this edition, p.228.

[112] Eric Rohmer, *Six Contes Moraux*, pp.8-9.

[113] Colin MacCabe, 'Realism and the Cinema: Notes on some Brechtian Theses', *Screen* vol.15, no.2 (Summer 1974), 7-17, and reprinted in part in Christopher Williams (1980). My references are to the latter edition: see pp.154-155.

[114] ibid., p.157.

[115] See Jean-Louis Comolli, p.27.

[116] Eric Rohmer, 'Vanité que la peinture' in *Le Goût de la beauté*, Paris: Editions de l'Etoile, 1984, p.54.

[117] ibid., p.86.

[118] D. Bordwell and K. Thompson, *Film Art: an Introduction*, New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2nd ed., 1986, pp.98-99.

[119] The only exception to this is *Suzanne* where he never makes the initial choice.

[120] Andrew Higson, '"Britain's Outstanding Contribution to the Film": The documentary-realist tradition' in *All Our Yesterdays. 90 Years of British Cinema*, edited by Charles Barr, London: BFI Publishing, 1986, p.84.

[121] Christopher Williams, 'After the classic, the classical and ideology: the differences of realism', *Screen* vol.35 no.3 (Autumn 1994), 275-292.

[122] ibid., 277 and 280.

[123] ibid., 284.

[124] ibid., 289.

[125] Interview, *Cahiers du cinéma* nos.467/468 (May 1993), 66.

[126] Nestor Almendros, p.42.

[127] ibid., pp.113-114.

[128] ibid., p.75.

[129] Interview, *Cinema* vol.7 no.1 (Autumn 1971), 22.

[130] See Jean-Luc Godard, 'Propos rompus', in *Jean-Luc Godard par Jean-Luc Godard*, p.466.

[131] David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson (pp.232-260) provide a useful introduction to theories of sound which serves as the starting point for the discussion which follows.

[132] ibid., p.248.

[133] Siegfried Kracauer, *Theory of Film. The Redemption of Physical Reality*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997, p.103. Kracauer cites both Eisenstein and René Clair as examples of those with serious misgivings at the arrival of sound.

[134] Eric Rohmer, 'Pour un cinéma parlant' in *Le Goût de la beauté*, p.39. The points referred to here all come from the same article, pp.37-40.

[135] Alain Bergala, 'Techniques de la Nouvelle Vague', *Cahiers du cinéma* (Hors-Série: La Nouvelle Vague), 38-39.

[136] See interview with Mary Stephen, 2.

[137] Alain Bergala and Alain Philippon, 14.

[138] Alain Bergala and Laure Gardette interviewing Rohmer, p.153.

[139] See interview with Mary Stephen, 2.

[140] Colin Crisp (1988), p.27.

[141] The information on *Les Films du Losange* comes from Jean Douchet, speaking in June 1991 and published in the programme produced to coincide with the 30th anniversary of the founding of the company.

[142] See Eric Rohmer, 'Mes dates clés', *Libération*, 17 March 2004, http://www.liberation.fr/imprimer.php?Article=186623. Accessed 17 March 2004. See also English Showalter, p.33.

[143] See Christian Boudier, 'Le Losange vu par...' *Le Film français* no.2499 (9 April 1993), 7. Colombia distributed *Genou* and *Amour* while Gaumont distributed all of Rohmer's films from *Marquise* until *Femme* inclusive. Pathé co-produced and distributed *L'Anglaise*.

[144] See Jean-Michel Frodon, 'Eric Rohmer donne sa vision de la Révolution française en vidéo numérique', *Le Monde*, 31 May 2000, 32. On the *Triple agent* project see 'Rézo produit le 23e film d'Eric Rohmer', *Le Film français* 1 November 2002, http://www.lefilmfrancais.com/011102/actu2.htm. Accessed 3 November 2002.

[145] See interview with Rohmer, *Le Figaro*, 17 March 2004, http://www.lefigaro.fr/cgi/edition/genimprime?cle=20040317.FIG036. Accessed 17 March 2004.

[146] The other partners are Barbet Schroeder and Margaret Menegoz.

[147] 'Pour un cinéma parlant', *Temps modernes* (September 1948) and 'Le cinéma, art de l'espace', *La Revue du cinéma* no.14 (June 1948). See Antoine de Baecque, *Les Cahiers du cinéma. Histoire d'une revue. Tome I: A l'assaut du cinéma 1951-1959*, Paris: Cahiers du Cinéma, 1991, pp.220-228.

[148] ibid., p.222.

[149] Antoine de Baecque, *Les Cahiers du cinéma. Histoire d'une revue. Tome 2: A*

l'assaut du cinéma 1959-1981, Paris: Cahiers du Cinéma, 1991, pp.24-25. Most of the details of Rohmer's involvement with *Cahiers* are outlined in this book. See especially pp.20-24 and pp.77-87.

[150] ibid., p.77.

[151] Colin Crisp (1988), pp. 8-9.

[152] See Dudley Andrew, *André Bazin*, Paris: Editions de l'Etoile, 1983, p.204. See also Antoine de Baecque (*Tome 1*), p.223.

[153] Colin Crisp (1988), pp. 8-9.

[154] See Antoine de Baecque (*Tome 1*), p.223.

[155] 'Le bandit philosophe', *Cahiers du cinéma* no.44 (February 1955), 33 and 37.

[156] 'De la Métaphore', *Cahiers du cinéma* no.51 (October 1955), 6.

[157] 'Beau comme la Musique', *Cahiers du cinéma* no.52 (November 1955), 26.

[158] Interview, *Le Goût de la beauté*, p.10.

[159] Eric Rohmer, 'Nous n'aimons plus la peinture' in *Le Goût de la beauté*, pp.45-46.

[160] Eric Rohmer, *De Mozart en Beethoven*, Paris: Actes Sud, 1996, p.99.

[161] See Antoine de Baecque (*Tome 1*), pp.157-158. The quotation from Rohmer is quoted by de Baecque and is taken from 'Joseph L. Mankiewicz: The Quiet American' in *Le Goût de la beauté*, p.169.

[162] Eric Rohmer, 'Howard Hawks: *The Big Sky*' in *Le Goût de la beauté*, p.139.

[163] Eric Rohmer, 'Renoir Américain' in *Le Goût de la beauté*, p.188.

[164] See Antoine de Baecque, (*Tome 1*), p.163.

[165] Eric Rohmer and Claude Chabrol, *Hitchcock*, Paris: Ramsay Poche Cinéma, 1987, p.159.

[166] Eric Rohmer, *L'Organisation de l'espace dans le Faust de Murnau*, Paris: Union Générale de l'Edition, 1977.

[167] André Bazin, 'De la Politique des auteurs', *Cahiers du cinéma* no.70 (April 1957), 11.

[168] 'De la Métaphore', *Cahiers du cinéma* no.51 (October 1955), 8.

[169] Both of these comments are in 'La nef des fous' (*Lifeboat*), *Cahiers du cinéma* no.60 (June 1956), 36.

[170] Rohmer claims 'J'aurais pu abandonner au bout de huit jours, ou même ne pas monter le film une fois terminé.' See interview in *Cinématographe* no.122 (September 1986), 34.

[171] Interview in *Le Goût de la beauté*, p.18.

[172] Rohmer, *De Mozart en Beethoven*, pp.105-106.

[173] ibid., pp.107-110. The quotations come from pages 108 and 109 respectively.

SECTION 2

Notions of Adaptation

Having examined Rohmer the person, the filmmaker and the film critic, we have become increasingly aware of the often tortuous relationship which exists between the differing images which emerge. The initial impression given by his approach may frequently appear simplistic, even boring, and yet, as we have seen, closer observation reveals his acute awareness of the complexities of the filming process and of the relationship between fiction and documentary. This apparent dichotomy between first impressions and more detailed observations may also be seen to characterise his use of source material. The issue of adaptation is of course of central importance in this context, as Rohmer's films all involve some process of adaptation of a pre-existing text, however short, usually written by the director himself.[1] The initial script can then be 'adapted' in its turn to suit the actors, so that changes may well occur between the first draft of the script and the finished work. In many cases, a story by Rohmer himself (the *Contes Moraux*) provides the starting point for a work, although sometimes the film may be based upon a text by another author (*Marquise*, *Perceval* and *L'Anglaise*).[2] In the case of the scripts which he writes himself, Rohmer is acutely conscious of his role as adaptor: 'Mes histoires sont toutes écrites au passé. Ensuite je les adapte.'[3] Whatever the source material, all his films can therefore be viewed as 'adaptations'.

This approach, particularly when contrasted with the way in which adaptation was largely avoided by the New Wave directors (at least in their early work), has done much to consolidate popular opinion of Rohmer as a solid, traditional director, whose films are devoid of innovation or originality. However, as I shall show, this view is fundamentally flawed. As is always the case with Rohmer, appearances are deceptive. Before examining in detail ways in which his working methods might indeed be innovative from *within* his reliance upon adaptation, it is important to look in slightly more detail at the factors that have shaped traditional attitudes to adaptation. On the one hand, clearly, adaptation (of novels in particular) has been the mainstay of mainstream classical narration. However, at the same time, there has long existed a widespread perception that film is not as worthy an art form as literature, so that filmic adaptations are at best perceived as a way of illustrating a text, the traditional criterion of success being fidelity to the original.[4] The film is valued for its ability to bring 'great' literature to the attention of a wider audience, and possibly even encourage spectators to have a fuller cultural experience by reading the novel itself. Within this traditional and still widely held approach, therefore, the literary work is perceived as a starting point and the film does little more than approximate and reflect the model as closely as possible; to be entirely 'faithful' to its source. This clearly diminishes the role of film and George Bluestone, in one of the seminal early studies of adaptation, admits that the adaptation of the classics has had a negative effect on filmmakers and he comes close to suggesting that they abandon this practice entirely.[5] If films were not based on novels, then they could not be accused of being merely poor imitations. This has traditionally been the dominant view in critical theory and film study, although, as we shall see below, scholars such as Brian McFarlane have gone some way to contest it.[6] The following

section will show the extent to which Rohmer's work relates to this traditional approach, especially in the cases where he appears to keep faithfully to a text by another writer, as in his adaptations of *Marquise*, *Perceval* and *L'Anglaise*. This will provide insight into the innovative elements of Rohmer's approach and serve to further undermine the view of him as a conservative director.

The problems involved in transferring novels to the screen are well known and obvious, even if in fact, as we shall see, they are often more complex than may appear at first sight. First and foremost, as Morris Béja points out, there is the problem of length. It would be impossible to squeeze all of the events of 800 or so pages into the average feature length of 90-120 minutes and even Hitchcock's notion of film being closer to the short story is also over simplistic,[7] although Rohmer does in fact claim that his adaptation of *Marquise* works precisely because Kleist's text is 'an extremely short, short story'.[8] Also, the novel, especially when it employs omniscient narration, may appear to be better equipped to present subjectivity while 'the film is seen as being better able to show what people do and say than what they think or imagine'.[9] However, voice-over narration and dialogue can supply the spectator with information which can overcome this problem, as when Bertrand talks about his problems to Sophie (*Suzanne*). And, essentially, of course, it is the camera which has the primary role of supplying us with a subjective point of view,[10] as in the out of focus and unsteady shot from the drugged Alicia's perspective in Hitchcock's *Notorious* (1946) or the shot of the setting sun which invites us to participate in Delphine's emotion at the end of *Rayon*. Gould Boyum claims that this understanding of a character's emotions is more difficult to produce from the viewing of a film due to the differing structures of each of these art forms. Literature uses words which may have a number of meanings while film employs images which

appear to do no more than show what they show (although clearly editing also has a role to play).[11] Thus, ambiguity may be more difficult to achieve in the cinema so that it appears a less complex art form. However, mixing a dream world with the 'reality' of a film is just one way of creating such ambiguity, as David Lynch has shown in *Mulholland Drive* (2001) which combines Diane's life with her dreams so that it is actually difficult to distinguish one from the other. In addition, there may be difficulties with long passages of indirect speech which have to be transcribed, and the sweep of place and time of the plot might be very expensive to film. Finally, the complexity of a novel may be all but incomprehensible in a film which is watched once only. Since film is different from literature, in historical terms it was automatically perceived as inferior because it was required to ape it. It was not until people started to analyse the nature of filmic 'language' that its specificities, including that of telling stories differently, were recognised and valued.

These traditional criticisms have all been revealed as flawed since, for instance, *Nouvelle Vague* directors and modernist films show how challenging and ambiguous this art form can be. Absolute fidelity to an original text is less important than the success, or otherwise, of the final film, and the camera can provide the spectator with a subjective point of view analogous to that provided by an omniscient narrator. Perhaps most important of all is the realisation of the essential differences between written language and visual images which can nevertheless achieve similar results. However, the difficulties of adapting novels for the screen remain and we shall now examine how Rohmer, who can appear to be such a traditional director, responds to these problems.

In the early fifties, when Rohmer was making his first short films, French quality cinema frequently consisted of adaptations of French novels which had been

selected so as to tap into national patrimony and compete with the many films imported from Hollywood.[12] According to François Truffaut, many of these filmic adaptations used a process of 'équivalence': 'Ce procédé suppose qu'il existe dans le roman adapté des scènes tournables et intournables et qu'au lieu de supprimer ces dernières [...] il faut inventer des scènes *équivalentes* [...].'[13] Thus, certain events in the novel were replaced in the film with new ones which were deemed to be more visual. The result was a 'new original' generated with due consideration for the specificity of the cinema.[14] Brian McFarlane sees transfer and adaptation as key ways in which the cinema can use these equivalences in order to depict the 'unfilmable'[15] and so transfer a greater or lesser proportion of the cardinal functions of the precursor narrative.[16] These functions, as defined by Barthes, are those narrative actions which have a direct bearing on the development of the plot and cannot be removed without affecting its progress.[17] They refer to a choice on the part of the narrator which can affect the unfolding of the story and so provide an element of uncertainty. Barthes provides the example of a telephone ringing: the alternative is whether or not to answer it and the decision taken will have a direct effect on the subsequent narrative.[18] Clearly, if any of these functions is changed in the film, then there will be a greater distance from the source text, although it remains open to debate whether this is a betrayal on the part of the filmmaker. One of the critical paradigms which this thesis will examine in the next chapter is precisely this one provided by McFarlane, as it helps throw fresh light on Rohmer's work by allowing us to assess the extent to which he uses equivalences in his adaptations and/or remains 'faithful' to the literary texts he employs.

It was the process of 'équivalence' which was vilified by the critics of *Cahiers du cinéma* of the 1950s who were to form the nexus of the *Nouvelle Vague*

(Truffaut, Godard, Chabrol, Rivette and Rohmer himself). They saw the *cinéma de qualité* of the time as being controlled by a handful of screenwriters who betrayed the literary classics they adapted through their inclusion of 'equivalent scenes', and called for directors to take control of their own screenplays and cease adapting someone else's ideas.[19] In Rohmer's words: 'L'ambition du cinéaste moderne [...] est d'être l'auteur à part entière de son oeuvre, en assumant la tâche traditionnellement dévolue au scénariste.'[20] This enhanced role for the director should lead to a greater degree of control over the final film, although it is by now not surprising to find Rohmer displaying ambiguity in his approach to such an aim: after all he wrote screenplays for other directors (Godard and Truffaut).[21]

It is within this theoretical framework that we will now examine Rohmer's own films and the ways in which he deals with the problems inherent in any adaptation. As we have seen, his works can all be classified as adaptations of one kind or another: some are based on short stories written by himself, others on novellas or writings by others, and in some cases the actors provide stories which Rohmer then adapts (e.g. *Reinette*). Short stories or novellas are, by definition, easier to adapt for the screen than longer works, and so it is not surprising that these provide the starting point for the *Contes Moraux*. *Perceval*, which is a novel, is short because it was never completed, and it also contains a long digression involving Gauvain which Rohmer uses only in part. None of the director's own stories, published as the *Contes Moraux*, provides much insight into the thoughts of the characters, and so their descriptions are all the more easily translated into images. However, for the most part, these stories predate any intention to film them and indeed would never have reached the screen if Rohmer had been able to achieve, through description of the characters, actions and setting, a perspective which

provided a point of view separate from that of the narrator and which could allow the reader to be critical of him.[22] As we shall see later, it is precisely the cinematic images that provide such a distinct perspective on the events depicted and so enable the spectators to appreciate the narrators' essential ambiguity which is reflected in the ever present gap between what they say and what they do. The short stories, therefore, emerge, albeit with hindsight, as an intermediary stage in the creative process, for otherwise 'Pourquoi filmer une histoire, quand on peut l'écrire? Pourquoi l'écrire quand on va la filmer?'[23] Rohmer is here using a process of adaptation in order to create a film out of a 'limbo text' which reaches its potential only on the screen. This is akin to Graham Greene's collaboration with Carol Reed on *The Third Man* (1949) where the novelist produced a short story version of the plot, not intended for publication, prior to producing the final screenplay. Greene claims that 'it is almost impossible to write a film play without first writing a story' since it is precisely this story which provides the material for the film.[24] Rohmer's interest here is in the intersection between written language and film and their mutual interdependence. This is a concern shared by fellow directors such as Resnais and Duras who also use written texts as part of the process of arriving at a cinematic text. Examples of such works include *Hiroshima mon amour* (1959) (directed by Resnais, text by Duras) and *India Song* (1974) (directed by Duras, and linked to a number of her novels including *Le Ravissement de Lol V. Stein* (1964) and *Le Vice-Consul* (1966)). Indeed Rohmer lauds Duras for using the same story to produce a novel, a play and a film.[25]

Rohmer chooses source texts which provide precise visual description: we shall see how in Kleist's *Marquise* the exact movements of the characters are given so that the director can tell his actors precisely how to conduct themselves, and in the

more complex case of *Perceval*, the Chorus provides any necessary elucidation of the events depicted. Direct speech generally provides few problems in *Perceval* and *Marquise*, since the original dialogue is frequently used and in *L'Anglaise* the original indirect speech is easily adapted to become part of the shooting script. In the other films, the actors often inspired the actual script, as is seen below. Despite not being specifically written for the cinema, the *Contes Moraux* do not involve any costly settings (especially important in the early stages of Rohmer's career) while *Marquise* could be filmed in one castle and *Perceval* and *L'Anglaise* on a relatively small studio set. At first sight, Rohmer's judicious choice of sources appears to allow him to deal with the problems of adaptation, while remaining faithful to the original texts.

It is against this background that Rohmer's output must be examined. Is his approach to adaptation as straightforward as it might at first appear or does it contain the kind of ambiguities which exist in other areas of his self-image and work? What does this tell us about his understanding of filmic adaptations and do these adaptations evolve in the course of his career, changing their filmic, as well as literary, qualities?

Types of adaptation in Rohmer

It is possible to identify three main approaches to adaptation used by Rohmer, and these may be categorised as follows: (1) self-adaptation, (2) secondary adaptation and (3) screenplay adaptation. The *Contes Moraux*, for example, fall into the first of these categories, being based on Rohmer's series of short stories of the same title. As we have seen, each *conte* is itself derived from the same plot outline: 'Tandis que le

narrateur est à la recherche d'une femme, il en rencontre une autre qui accapare son affection jusqu'au moment où il retrouve la première.'[26] The resulting variations examine differing ways of narrating the same story, reflecting a level of playfulness not normally associated with Rohmer's work. The ideas for these tales predate any desire on the director's part to make films, but Rohmer claims that they were written in the form in which they were published (a process involving painstaking revision) precisely in order to film them.[27] Thus the published versions were themselves 'adaptations' of earlier stories, so that the original version of *Maud*, for example, was not set in Clermont-Ferrand and contained no references either to Pascal or Marxism.[28] This example provides clear evidence not only of the extent to which the desire to film helped the original stories to evolve but also of the importance of topography in Rohmer's work: Clermont-Ferrand is omnipresent in the film and its grey colours match the black and white photography, while Pascal's *pari* and its use to justify belief (even in Marxism) emerge as a central theme. Given that Rohmer himself argues that it is unnecessary to film a successful literary work, it is unlikely that this creative process would have resulted in the *Contes* if, in the ways outlined above, it had achieved its plenitude in a written form.[29] Other auteurs, such as Duras and Robbe-Grillet, also insist upon the pointlessness of mere duplication between versions and indeed Duras's *Son Nom de Venise dans Calcutta désert* (1976) provides an extreme example of this. This film uses the same soundtrack (allied with different images) as Duras's previous work *India Song* (1974). Rohmer is engaged in a similar process (even if both the image and soundtrack change) but over a series of films which share essentially the same plot. Thus, in addition to changes in locale and themes, Rohmer's adaptation of his 'imperfect' texts, and creation of variety, centres around the provision of an exterior viewpoint through which the account of

the first person narrator can be evaluated: the camera is used to provide an ironic distancing from the teller of the tale. This distancing is achieved through the contrasting of oral and visual articulations of the same events: Jérôme tells of his heroic feelings as he put his hand on Claire's knee, ostensibly to comfort her,[30] but the images of him rubbing a vulnerable adolescent girl's knee lack any sense of heroism. In such examples, the images are generally 'objective', while the spoken account provides a subjective viewpoint within the diegesis. It is precisely in the tension or distance between these two accounts that irony emerges, providing further evidence of the complex nature of the narrative structure of these films, and indicating a self-consciousness (akin to post-modernity) not generally accredited to Rohmer's work.

In terms of our earlier classification, it is possible to identify three examples of secondary adaptation in Rohmer's *oeuvre*: *La Marquise d'O...* (a novella published by Kleist in 1807), *Perceval le Gallois* (based on Chrétien de Troyes's Arthurian romance dating from 1180) and *L'Anglaise et le Duc* (based on Grace Elliott's memoirs of her life during the French Revolution which were published only in 1859). In the first of these, Rohmer claims to follow Kleist's text word for word, citing three main factors which make this possible.[31] First, the dialogues are written in direct speech or in an indirect speech which is easy to adapt. Secondly, the narrator avoids any references to the thoughts of the protagonists, so that the director can ignore the 'problem' of subjective viewpoint referred to earlier. Finally, the actions and gestures of the characters are described in such detail by Kleist that the director can use them directly. There is, for example, no narrative reason (apart from the creation of a realistic effect) to record such details as the doctor dropping one of his gloves as he examines the Marquise, and yet this is precisely what Kleist

describes, and Rohmer in turn exactly replicates the incident.[32] This appears to represent a somewhat naive view of the process of adaptation, where film simply reproduces the source text, but this is not borne out by a close analysis of the film itself which, as we shall see below, goes on to produce an independent text of its own. Once again ambiguity surrounds Rohmer's methods as his stated aim of producing a close adaptation conflicts with the reality of the final film.

In the case of *Perceval*, Rohmer is more willing to identify openly the elements which make up his adaptation. Rohmer himself is responsible for translating the original text into modern French (although many of the original words are retained, implying the need for an erudite audience) so that a renowned twelfth-century book may be more easily understood by a modern spectator. Somewhat daringly, he uses the theatrical device of a Chorus, to provide passages of description, and he also allows characters to speak in the third person: 'Ainsi en la forêt il entre'(p.9) is thus Perceval's self-conscious description of himself. Clearly, what we are dealing with here is something very different and more complex than the seamless representation of events normally found in classic film adaptations. Nevertheless, Rohmer admits to having left out those elements of the tale which detract from the coherent depiction of a protagonist who gradually changes as a result of the experiences he encounters.[33] He admits, instead, to concentrating on those elements of the tale which, he believes, were invented by Chrétien, and he thus has no qualms about reducing the role of Celtic folklore for the purpose of his own version. Thus, as the dramatic significance of the quest for the Grail is reduced, the emphasis shifts to Perceval 'the man' and away from the magical story. Once again, however, our analysis of this film will indicate complexities in Rohmer's stated working methods: the film omits Perceval's discovery of his own name, which

would have added to our impression of following a journey of personal discovery, and it actually contains more legend-like magical events than does Chrétien's text. Rohmer's pronouncements on his work must clearly be approached with some caution, a fact which adds to the intriguingly ambiguous meanings which are inherent in his films.

L'Anglaise is based on Grace Elliott's account of her experiences during the French Revolution, but, as in *Perceval*, Rohmer chooses to concentrate on a single aspect of the story: the relationship between Grace and the Duke of Orleans. This leads to the omission of a number of events described by Grace, such as her trip to Brussels in the Spring of 1790, since these do not involve her former lover. The film is based on the nineteenth-century French translation of the original text but Rohmer is aware that its language differs considerably from that current at the time of the Revolution itself.[34] These differences are further complicated by the fact that, as we have noted, the first publication of this work (in English) dates from 1859, so that it itself is removed from the speech patterns of the people it describes. Thus Rohmer sees his adaptation as adding to the authenticity of the original text, while he is simultaneously changing it, thereby providing yet another example of his complex and highly ambiguous relationship with his source texts.

There are three other literary adaptations by Rohmer, but none of them is actually 'visible' today. The first of these, dating from 1952, was a screenplay based on the Comtesse de Ségur's children's book *Les petites filles modèles* (1857) but filming was never completed and the negative is said to be lost. The second, made in 1954, was an adaptation of Edgar Allen Poe's *Bérénice*[35] but the only part of it visible today is a short extract which is attributed to the imaginary Dirk Peters and used by Rohmer in his television documentary on Poe. As we noted above, the

distance of this film from his later cinematic technique may go some way to explain the reluctance on the part of the director to let this work be seen today. The final adaptation, from 1956, is based on Tolstoy's *The Kreutzer Sonata* (1891) and tells the story of a jealous husband who kills his wife (again not a topic we would associate with Rohmer) and, at least according to Jean-Claude Brialy, both parts were played by the director himself.[36] Again, Rohmer appears to be covering up an early work which he deems not to fit in with his subsequent self-image.

All of the other films, with the exception of *Rayon* (where the script, against all expectations, was improvised), are based on the director's own screenplays and so come close to the primary characteristic of the auteur approach. However, it is important to recognise that the divisions outlined above are not discrete, so that two or more categories are often present in any one work. Thus, for example, at least four films involve a mixture of types one and three. *Genou* appears to have been written in its present form specifically for the film, a notion which is confirmed by Jean-Claude Brialy's claim that Rohmer was writing the story just a year before production began.[37] In addition, there are a number of significant differences from the earlier story version, entitled 'La Roseraie', which was written by Rohmer and Paul Gégauff and published in 1951.[38] The melodramatic elements of the plot, such as Claire's pregnancy and her subsequent suicide, have disappeared and the emphasis has moved to a reflection on modes of narrative, resulting in the introduction of the character of the writer Aurora who listens to Jérôme's 'narrative' and sees him as a guinea pig for the story which she is writing. Unlike the other *Contes Moraux*, *Amour* was written up as a short story only after the earlier films in the series were completed and specifically for the purpose of filming it, and so its role is much closer to that of a screenplay. Indeed, Rohmer dismisses questions about its content as late

as 1970 as he had presumably not finished writing it at that point.[39] He reveals that

Femme was based on an unpublished short story, but the preparation for the film

itself involved the completion of a screenplay which had much evolved from these

origins.[40] *Mariage* was written in short story form, but with the specific intention of

being filmed,[41] while *Pauline* also has its roots in a story, this time one which

Rohmer had originally hoped to film with Brigitte Bardot in the 1950s.[42] When his

own material is being adapted, Rohmer has no qualms about changing it significantly

as his ambitions develop over time, so that absolute fidelity is not an issue here any

more than with texts by others.

Other films combine secondary adaptation with original screenplays. As we

shall see below, *Rayon* is a very free reworking of a novel by Jules Verne, but it is

also based on a story devised by Rohmer about a woman who wants to go on holiday

but does not know where to go as she is alone. The different stages of her adventures

were not written out by Rohmer, but the ending was, he claims, always clear to

him.[43] The improvised script is reminiscent of the work of Jean Rouch, and

particularly *La punition* (1960) where the screenplay consisted of one typewritten

page, and the film follows the improvised meetings between Nadine and people

whom Rouch had arranged for her to talk to.[44] This work presents other points of

similarity with films by Rohmer: it employs lapel microphones (cf. *Femme* and *Eté*)

and 16mm film blown up to 35mm (cf. *Femme, Rayon, Mirabelle, Hiver, Arbre,*

Rendez-vous) and its heroine describes herself as 'sous le signe du Lion' (cf. *Lion*).

This attempt to remove the mediation of a script between the director and the world

he or she is depicting moves Rohmer closer to his early aim of inventing a story from

a series of random images.[45] The line between documentary and fiction is blurred as

fictional characters mix with 'real people' and make up their own script.

Nevertheless, it is Rohmer himself who ultimately determines the development of the plot.

Hiver is essentially the filming of an original screenplay, but there is an interposition of an extract from Shakespeare's play of the same name, which, in addition to changes from the original text noted above, undergoes one further significant change. When Perdita exclaims 'Mes seigneurs, / Si l'on vous racontait seulement qu'elle vit, / Vous diriez tous que c'est un vieux conte de fées. / Or elle vit, c'est sûr...'(p.54)[46], she looks at and addresses the theatre audience and, by extension, the spectators of the film who are being made to question the basis of this *conte* in reality, and the likelihood of Félicie being rewarded by the return of her long lost Charles. Rohmer is filming in a self-conscious fashion involving dual levels of narrative. The first is that of Félicie and Loïc: it is their story we have been following and we await its conclusion. However, this scene of the couple *watching* Shakespeare's play provides them (and us) with a commentary on the remainder of the film so that, in a way that is far removed from the classic realist text, Rohmer is simultaneously presenting a narrative *and* an analysis of it.

Rohmer produces his narratives using a diversity of approaches and methods, some involving his adaptation of literary texts by other authors, others emerging from his own work, sometimes from writings never intended to be filmed. What they have in common is their interest in constantly re-exploring new ways of relating text to film. He displays levels of innovation which are unexpected, in terms of the received view of him as a traditional director whose significance seems not to have been grasped by contemporary critics, and he emerges as committed to the filmic process and not a mere teller of tales. Nevertheless, Rohmer does frequently involve other people in the development of his films and this feature can lead him to use

actors to help with both dialogue and plot, a significant phenomenon which we shall now examine in greater detail.

The role of the actors in the screenplay

It is both interesting and significant that the actors in Rohmer's films are frequently accorded a creative role in the development/adaptation of the final script, so that a period of intense discussion and debate generally precedes Rohmer's writing of the final version. The director seems to want to allow the actors the freedom to shape the characters at this stage. However, once the shooting begins, they are expected to adhere closely to the script so that the director generally assumes more or less absolute control. In the case of *Femme*, the original story dates back to 1946 but, as Rohmer himself tells us, his adaptation reflects the language of the actress herself, so it is clear that she 'helped' him to update the script.[47] With *Ami*, Rohmer actually taped conversations with the actresses involved over a period of two years, and then used a number of their expressions verbatim in the final script, as well as their ideas as to how the characters might react in different situations.[48] This approach is reminiscent of the way in which Ferrand, the director (played by Truffaut himself) in *La nuit américaine* (François Truffaut, 1973), uses in his film the words which the actress, Julie Baker, has said to him in private. Here the ambiguity of Rohmer's approach may again be seen. He is happy to accept collaborators, but only on *his* terms: the director (as elsewhere in the *Nouvelle Vague*) retains overall control.

There are other works where the involvement of the actors in the script is even more extensive and crucial; for example in *Collectionneuse* the words of the characters, their literary tastes and the works they quote from, have been directly

lifted from the actors.[49] *Rayon* is particularly dependent upon its cast (many of whom are non-professionals) since the words are entirely their own. Some of the scenes in *Reinette* are improvised, whereas others are entirely scripted,[50] while in *Arbre* the questions asked of the local people are improvised by the actress Clémentine Amoureux.[51] It is only through a close analysis of Rohmer's working methods that this director's playful originality begins to emerge from behind what, at first sight, seems a very traditional approach.

This use of improvisation in fact contrasts with the working methods of many of Rohmer's New Wave contemporaries. While Truffaut and Godard used a similar technique on occasion, the former spent much time in co-writing screenplays and the actors were accorded little or no influence on the script before shooting, while Godard provides a script, even if sometimes *in extremis*, which is inspired by *his* readings rather than those of the cast.[52] Rivette may allow chance to play a large part in the development of his films, even on set, but the actors are nonetheless required to follow a precise text in the course of the shooting.[53] Rohmer, on the other hand, involves his cast much earlier in the creative process so that any improvisation, which is based on his ideas, occurs *before* the filming stage. It becomes clear that the initial screenplay is in no way perceived as a straitjacket but rather as a flexible frame within which the filmic narration can take place, and instead of representing authorial power it is in fact the product of a more democratic process. The director as auteur remains, but he relies to a surprising degree on his collaborators for words and ideas.

As well as influencing the script in this way, the participants in a Rohmer film have frequently played an active role in the development of their characters. Thus, Rohmer's original outline is a flexible one within which the filmic narration

can develop. An early example of this is Catherine Sée in *Suzanne*, whom the director closely identifies with the eponymous character she plays.[54] Antoine Vitez inspired Vidal's comparison of Pascal's 'pari' with the beliefs of a communist in *Maud*,[55] while Béatrice Romand was part of the inspiration for Laura in *Genou*, Rohmer having based much of the development of the role upon conversations he had with her.[56] He also 'used' her to ascertain the possible reactions of a female character much younger than himself to, as Romand recounts, a man putting his hand on her knee.[57] (Irène Skobline, who appears in *Amour* and *Rayon*, claims that she herself was the inspiration for both Claire and Laura[58].) A similar account comes from Sophie Renoir (Léa in *Ami*): Rohmer wanted to know if she could fall in love with someone very different from herself.[59] The reactions of the protagonists are, at least to some degree, inspired by their embodiments who become an inherent part of the creative process leading to an inclusive, rather than a domineering, working method.

There are two cases where the plot itself was directly influenced by Rohmer's collaborators. In her account of the genesis of *Mariage*, Marie Binet-Bouteloup tells how she discussed her weekly journeys to the Sarthe with Rohmer and how this provided him with a subject: a woman dividing her time between Paris and the provinces.[60] In other words, although the development of this outline belongs to the director, he is nevertheless willing to integrate and develop other people's ideas, as he had done in the case of *Reinette*; indeed the idea of making a film about the adventures of two girls only became clear to Rohmer after conversations with Joëlle Miquel, whose stories formed the basis for the 'aventures' of Reinette and Mirabelle.[61]

Another area of the role of Rohmer's collaborators is in their provision of minor details which are used to bring their characters to life. The fact that in *Printemps* Jeanne is a teacher and Natacha a pianist is a direct reflection of the interests of the actresses themselves,[62] while the idea of a mediatheque in *Arbre* was provided by the architect who appears in the film and thus defends *his own* project.[63] This helps to break down the barriers between fact and fiction in an increasingly familiar and playful fashion, which is certainly accentuated by the man using his own words, rather than a script. The political language, in the same film, has a number of sources: a speech by the former Socialist Minister Jean-Pierre Chevènement, and the discourse of the real Mayor of the village in question, for example, but Rohmer claims that the film as a whole involves a moulding of these discourses into a reconstruction of a certain type of political language.[64] Thus the script of the film is seen to have a number of origins which Rohmer integrates into the finished work.

This is by no means unusual in a work of art, but Rohmer manages to use ideas from a number of sources in a way which makes it difficult to see where they end and his own begin. *Rayon* is perhaps the epitome of this, since the improvised dialogue has been described as 'du Rohmer'[65] where the relationship between the different source texts (the improvised words of all the participants) is seen to produce an original work which remains identifiably Rohmer's. Rohmer emerges once again as an ambiguous figure to the extent that he simultaneously occupies a position as auteur and yet relies heavily upon the ideas and suggestions of his collaborators. However, there are a number of other influences on his films and now we need to examine the primordial role of space in his work.

The role of space in the screenplay

As Henri Lefebvre points out, Christian society has lived according to the Augustian disjunction between time and space[66] and in the next two sections we shall examine the importance of these two factors in Rohmer's work, a body of films influenced on some level by the director's Catholicism. In recent years the role of space in film has received new attention and it is recognised as not merely providing the setting for the plot, but also generating narrative and 'assuming the status of a character and becoming the fabric of the narrative itself'.[67] This renewed importance of space in the twentieth century, and particularly urban space, may be traced back to Baudelaire's depiction of the *flâneur* in *Tableaux parisiens*, who walks among the crowd and provides an account of everyday life and its series of events which resists any control.[68] This contributes to a Parisian modernity which Marc Augé describes as 'an active existence of various temporalities' which comes about through the depiction of both old and new buildings within the city. The result is not a post-modern patchwork of the past and the present but rather a new assertion of the historicity of each element involved.[69] This is reflected in the Surrealists' use of urban space to provide insights into the people depicted, as much as into the city itself.[70] Thus the urban street becomes an area of possible events and meetings, as depicted in André Breton's *Nadja*, which of course itself provides a perfect example of the Surrealist concept of 'le hasard objectif' whereby experience appears to depend on coincidence or telepathy so that traditional views of reality are undermined.[71] Thus space, which constitutes an integral part of the 'real' world, becomes associated with chance and luck: the certainties of our visible surroundings no longer apply.

This distance from the concrete world would appear, at least initially, to distance Breton's text from Rohmer's work, and yet it is important in analysing the representation of space in Rohmer's films, given that a number of interesting parallels in the use of place may be drawn between the two texts. The street is the preferred location for Nadja: 'la créature toujours inspirée et inspirante qui n'aimait qu'être dans la rue, pour elle seul champ d'expérience valable [...].'[72] and this view of the street is echoed in *Nuits* by Octave, for whom the street is the location for a myriad of possible meetings: 'les rencontres avec des femmes sublimes. Les milliers de possibilités que m'a... qu'exprimait la rue, c'était là, possible, en bas'(p.98). Thus, the street allows these encounters to take place but, according to Breton, it is precisely in the change of our routine that we may allow these experiences to occur. The first time he meets Nadja he is wandering aimlessly and even claims he does not know the name of the square he had just passed through (p.72). Later, he will meet her when he changes his usual route: 'Contrairement à l'ordinaire, je choisis de suivre le trottoir droit de la rue de la Chaussée-d'Antin'(p.88). The role of chance in these events is to operate as a catalyst so that changes in routine are seen as inevitably to lead to these meetings. This concept is important in Rohmer's work and is perhaps most explicitly explored in *Maud* when Jean-Louis explains that he and Vidal could only meet in a place which neither of them frequent. The development of the narrative clearly depends on this overlapping of individual spaces (otherwise there would be no 'night at Maud's') and similar examples abound in Rohmer's work. Neither Jérôme nor Aurora lives in Annecy, and yet that is where they meet; and similar situations, in which at least one of the characters breaks their routine, may be seen with Adrien and Haydée (*Collectionneuse*), the Marquise and the Count (*Marquise*), François and Lucy (*Femme*), Delphine and Jacques (*Rayon*), Reinette

and Mirabelle (*Reinette*), Blanche, Léa and Alexandre (*Ami*), Jeanne and Natacha (*Printemps*), Félicie and Charles (*Hiver*), and the painter and the young woman in the street in *Rendez-vous*: 'Mère et enfant 1907'.

However, these meetings are all pre-ordained by the writer of the respective screenplays (almost always Rohmer himself) so that there is, in fact, no real element of chance present, a fact that seems to echo the director's own claim that chance is not fortuitous: 'tout est fortuit sauf le hasard.'[73] Once again the Surrealists' influence is clear here, for, as we have seen above, this idea accords perfectly with their own view of 'chance' meetings. Because of Rohmer's reputation for 'classical' filmmaking, critics have tended to ignore the influence the Surrealists may have had on his depiction of space (despite references to their movement in the course of discussions in *Rendez-vous*: 'Les bancs de Paris'), and yet it is clear that Breton's *Nadja* is an important reference point in Rohmer's conception of space and the role played by chance within it.

It is clear then that for Rohmer, place generates both narrative and character development and so aids in their filmic adaptation by providing them with a concrete representation. He tells us : 'Dans *Le Signe du Lion* par exemple, je voulais donner à voir la Seine, les quais, une impression de soleil dans l'eau, etc. Je suis parti de cette volonté [...].'[74] Wesselrin, the protagonist, is all but defeated by the ever present stone walls of the buildings and bridges of the French capital, while his counterpart in *Etoile* is also influenced by the urban feature of the title, and Rohmer wrote in the pressbook: 'Le sujet du film est déduit de la structure géographique de la Place de l'Etoile.'[75] In other words, the narrative structure actually imitates a geographical one. Moreover, the two structures display a high level of interdependence in that the layout of the avenues around the Arc de Triomphe both shapes the plot and allows it

to develop. The remarks of colleagues and friends enable us to appreciate the very detailed manner in which Rohmer investigated the ways in which a pedestrian could circumnavigate the Place de l'Etoile without stopping for a red light, so exercising some degree of control over a depersonalised environment.[76] Rohmer is evidently not alone in being inspired by Paris (indeed the French capital plays a central role in many New Wave films[77]) but the way in which its specific geographical mapping provides the direct inspiration for the plot itself is remarkable, and enables further appreciation of his extreme modernity (cf. his debt to the Surrealists) and originality as a director. Moreover, the fusion and overlapping of real and fictional space reinforces our earlier suggestion of the complexity of Rohmer's reading of the concept of 'realism'.

The central importance of place is implicitly acknowledged in the opening scene of *Boulangère*, for example, where the narrator provides a precise description of an urban cross-roads, which at first sight may appear redundant since we can actually see the setting before us on the screen. However, the simultaneity of image and narration in fact produces a doubling or mirroring effect, in that these initial images themselves are presented as future time in relation to the diegesis itself which, thus, appears as a flashback: 'un chantier de démolition marque actuellement la place de l'ancien Cité-Club [...où] je dinais tous les soirs' is accompanied by an image of the building site in question but the body of the plot takes place when the *Cité-Club* still existed. Thus the secure status of the image as a reflection of present reality is attacked and the spectator is invited to play a creative role in interpreting this temporal and spatial tension. The commentary thus provides a distancing effect, as well as underlining the fact that the narrator is retelling the tale in order to show himself in a specific light. It is the nature of this geographical space that determines

the movements of the characters: the café provides a perfect vantage point to look out for Sylvie who passes on her way to shop at the local market, while the avenues provide a delimited space within which the hero subsequently decides to look for her. It is also noteworthy that the *foyer* where the narrator goes to eat (in the past of the diegesis) was apparently being knocked down as filming took place (1961)! Thus it appears that the reality of the image (its mimetic power) is destroyed, even as it is created, along with our belief in the narrator himself: Rohmer is clearly producing a modernist text where objective reality has been subsumed into the subjective.

The geographical location of the lake in *Genou* obviously plays an important role in the film, indeed Rohmer claims to have conceived the definitive screenplay only when he visited this area which provides both the 'dangerous' mountains (where Jérôme kisses Laura) and the water of the lake (reflected in Claire's tears as her knee is caressed).[78] Here the setting not only influences the practicalities of the plot, but also its general development. In the case of *Perceval* there is one semi-circular set which gives a sense of repetition to Perceval's adventures (he constantly covers the *same* space) and so reduces the Christian sense of advancement present in the original. In the *Comédies*, place plays an equally dominant role in the plot. The Buttes-Chaumont provides an ideal terrain for the detective work in *Femme,* enabling characters to watch, while remaining unseen, while the opposition between town and suburb/country provides the basis for the plots of *Mariage* and *Nuits.* In both these latter cases, the heroine spends much time in limbo, moving *between* the spaces that represent her two homes: spatial excess leads directly to her emotional uncertainty in terms of narrative as she attempts to reconcile Paris with Marne-la-Vallée or Le Mans. *Ami* is so embedded in its setting of Cergy-Pontoise that this new town can even be seen as a character in its own right, actively influencing the action, as well as

providing the location for almost all of the film. In addition, it lends a plausibility to the many chance encounters: the urban layout is akin to that of a traditional village with all paths leading to the central square. Appearance and reality are shown to be deceptive as this 1980s architecture is seen as a return to a much earlier notion of 'community'. Significantly, Rohmer delayed filming until the buildings and areas shown had been completed and the predominant colours in the film are blue and green, a self-conscious reference to those of the town's emblem.[79] In addition, he encouraged Emmanuelle Chaulet to live in 'Blanche's apartment' throughout the shoot, underlining the importance of place to the character she was playing.[80] Cergy-Pontoise is portrayed as a pleasant place with many facilities: 'avec les quinze chaînes de télévision, les lacs, les tennis, bientôt le golf, les deux théâtres, on aurait du mal à s'ennuyer'(p.28). This is not said with irony but if a woman is looking more for a long term relationship, then the two 'mecs à peu près baisables ici'(p.34) would severely limit her possibilities.

The Rhône valley plays a somewhat similar role in *Automne* and Rohmer makes clear his willingness to adapt his original plot outline to take account of the place of shooting. In this case, the river provides a dividing line: the vineyard is on one side while the book shop is on the other and the journeys made by the characters are forced upon them by this topography. The villages and towns resemble the *arrondissements* of Paris and so this structure helps to explain the meetings (chance or otherwise) between the protagonists.[81] In *L'Anglaise*, the creation of filmic space is the key creative characteristic of the film so that the characters are transferred into specially prepared paintings, using green screen techniques. This results in a unique representation of Paris two hundred years ago, as well as the creation of crowd scenes with the need for relatively few extras.

These examples make clear that the role of place frequently affects the development of character and plot, and is a key source of inspiration for Rohmer. We shall now examine how time might have a similar role in his work.

The role of time in the screenplay

Like geographical space, temporal space is now clearly recognised as a key area within film studies and, indeed, there is a close relationship between the two in the case of any given film since moving images inevitably occupy both space and time. While watching a motion picture, the spectator attempts to make sense of it by putting what happens into chronological order and assessing the duration of the events depicted.[82] This internal time intersects with the time of the production of the film and it is the role of this temporality which will help to unravel Rohmer's filmic technique.

Clearly, filming at different times of day or year will create different effects, and the film itself will generally give hints as to the length of time its narrative covers. Rohmer goes to extraordinary lengths to ensure that diegetic time is synonymous with shooting time, as well as providing an important role for time in the plausibility of plot development. Georges Prat, the sound engineer on *Nuits*, recounts that: 'on a tourné à peu près toutes les scènes aux heures réelles où elles sont censées se passer.'[83] Many of Rohmer's films involve a 'slack time' which creates the space in which the narrative events can occur. This may take the form of holidays (*Lion, Collectionneuse, Genou, Pauline, Rayon, Hiver, Eté*) or breaks in the working day (*Amour, Femme, Printemps, Automne*). The essential point is the creation of a break in the normal routine during which characters explore their

individual interests, often from within a non-space or limbo between their habitual geographical locations; for example, Jérôme can explore his interest in teenage girls far from his fiancée (*Genou*) and Frédéric can meet a woman he is very tempted to have an affair with (*Amour*).

In the case of *Lion*, time is also the key theme of the film, which is summarized as follows: 'Que peut-on devenir à Paris, au mois d'août, sans ami, sans argent, sans métier?'[84] The protagonist is cut off from his normal environment and left to his own devices. It is because Pierre's friends have left Paris for the traditional July/August exodus that he finds himself leading an increasingly 'fragile' existence: the capital is transformed and, because of that, so is Pierre. He has borrowed money on the strength of an inheritance which turns out to be a false dawn, and thus finds himself unable to pay his bills and is forced to live in ever more squalid lodgings before ultimately living in the street. Thus the narrow internal space appears to open out but, as we constantly find with Rohmer, appearances are deceptive and Pierre is soon overwhelmed by the stone walls which literally block his path.

Seasonal differences are of fundamental significance to the tone and plot of many of these films especially, as one might expect, those of the *Contes des quatre saisons* where the impact is made explicit. *Printemps* is represented in a fairly discreet fashion through the judicious placing of flowers indoors, and the shots of characters working in the garden outdoors. In terms of plot this provides an impetus for the Fontainebleau part of the story (the garden there needs attention), with the result that Jeanne and Igor find themselves alone and *almost* make love. *Hiver* has a much greater physical presence as a season (reflected primarily in the weather and clothes) but perhaps is most important in providing a contrast to the summer happiness which is depicted in the prologue and which Félicie is trying to regain. The

fact that the couple are finally reunited in winter is just one factor which serves to undermine their future prospects: they remain surrounded by greyness. *Eté* is a time of holidays which provides a parenthesis during which Gaspard has to 'choose' between three women but finally puts his devotion to music ahead of any of them. The limited nature of this temporal space is reflected in the framing device of Gaspard's ferry rides, which determine the beginning and end of the plot. Finally, autumn emerges as the time of the grape harvest, which provides Magali with a convenient excuse to leave a wedding reception early as she needs to tend to her vineyard, but also the opportunity to invite Gérald to the 'reboule' which follows the hard work of harvesting the grapes. In addition, the vividness of the autumnal colours in the South adds to this sense of time.

All but one of Rohmer's films provide a chronological depiction of time and contain neither flashforwards nor flashbacks. This approach is relatively unusual in the work of 'serious' European directors, and so therefore deserves our further attention. Could it lead us to deduce, for example, that Rohmer is only interested in a linear or 'realistic' depiction of time? It also serves to increase our interest in the one exception to this pattern, *Marquise*, for this film does indeed contain a flashback which may simply reflect the director's efforts to remain faithful to the original text. In Kleist's novella, a newspaper advertisement placed by the Marquise is referred to at the beginning, and then a lengthy flashback informs the reader of the events which have led up to this strange request for the father of her unborn child to present himself to her so that she may marry him. Rohmer's film also begins with the advertisement, which in this case is being discussed by a number of drinkers in an inn. The background of the Marquis d'O-'s death, and the previously unblemished reputation of his wife, can be both approached through the device of the conversation

rather than by the narrator, which would be far more artificial in filmic terms. Then one of the drinkers begins to tell the story proper: 'Et, après la mort du Marquis, elle quitta la terre qu'elle habitait et retourna, avec ses deux enfants, à la maison paternelle. Lorsque la guerre, soudain...'(p.7). The voice suddenly falls silent, and after a fade-out we actually witness the events which he is, we presume, recounting. However, there is no further reference to this narrator and so his status with regard to the subsequent narration remains uncertain. Thus, on two levels, Rohmer's film is more complex than his depiction of time might have led one to believe: he embellishes Kleist's flashback and constructs a narrator whose exact role remains unclear. In other words, once again he is prepared to 'break' his usual practice when he perceives this to be necessary.

While the *Contes Moraux* all adhere to a strict chronological order, almost all of them depend on the memory of a first-person narrator who is recounting events which finished some time ago. From this protagonist's point of view the entire filmic text constitutes an extended flashback. This is immediately made clear at the start of *Boulangère* when the narrator precisely situates his narrative in geographical, but also, as we have seen above, in temporal terms: the hall of residence where he dines is now being demolished. The images in the film are accompanied by the voice of a homodiegetic narrator who is aware of what happened and so is exercising a choice over the events to be depicted in order to recount the story. This role of narrative control is underlined by N. (the narrator is not named) in the first sentence of the short story version of *Maud*: 'Je ne dirai pas tout dans cette histoire. D'ailleurs il n'y a pas d'histoire, mais une série, un choix d'événements très quelconques....'[85] Not only are we dependent on the memory of the narrator, but we also must remember that he is making a choice as to which events are to be presented to us, sometimes

precisely those which put him in the best light. There is thus an underlying ambiguity in these films which belies their apparent narrative simplicity, evidence which appears, once again, to justify the notion that Rohmer's techniques are indeed complex in nature.

In one of Rohmer's films from the 1990s, *Hiver*, there is an even more obvious manipulation of time, in that images do not represent a single event in the narrative but combine in a sequence denoting what appears to be a romantic idyll. This feature occurs at the start where we are presented with a series of 'snapshots' ('j'aurais très bien pu coller des photos qui avaient été prises à ce moment-là les unes après les autres'[86]) which represent Félicie's relationship with Charles. Indeed, some of the images represent the couple photographing each other or posing for an automatic exposure. However, we are still watching a film, rather than a series of photos and, despite Rohmer's protestations to the contrary, the effect is not the same. Barthes explains this distinction as follows: 'dans la Photo, quelque chose *s'est posé* devant le petit trou et y est resté à jamais [...] mais au cinéma, quelque chose *est passé* devant ce même petit trou: la pose est emportée et niée par la suite continue des images [...]'[87]. A photograph contains one version of events while, in the cinema, subsequent images may contradict the initial one. Thus, photos of the relationship would have provided certain evidence that it was as extraordinary (at least for one moment) as Félicie's continuing belief in it would indicate, while the (moving) images actually presented allow for future rereadings. These include the distinct possibility that the life proposed by Charles at the end (working in his restaurant) is little different from that suggested by Maxence (working in his hairdressing salon): will Félicie really be any happier now? Rohmer's choice of film over photo emerges as a subtle comment on the nature of his protagonist's happiness,

as well as providing yet further evidence of this filmmaker's complex aesthetic choices.

Perhaps the most striking cut in this opening sequence from *Hiver* is between two shots of the protagonists cycling, but where their clothes change: they went out cycling on a number of occasions which are being presented together. This is an example of what Christian Metz calls an episodic sequence: a series of brief scenes which are presented in chronological order and must be assessed in their totality.[88] In some films, optical effects, such as dissolves or wipes, are used to indicate that the sequence should be considered as a whole, while in *Hiver* it is the music which performs this unifying function. This unity clearly reflects the unison on a narrative level between the two protagonists and so the absence of any music at the end of the film is, as we shall see below, yet another marker of a problematic reunion. Temporal space here contributes to an ambiguity of meaning which only reveals its true significance retrospectively. Once again, the images are used to provide at least two readings, leading to a 'happy' or a 'sad' ending, which Rohmer characteristically leaves us to decide upon.

Arbre, Rohmer's next film, contains an even more extreme example of the manipulation of time. Much of the initial section depicts Bérénice's discovery of the countryside in the company of Julien. They seem to constantly change clothes in the course of their walk, but it is of course possible that we are dealing with a number of walks over a number of days, linked by the ever present urban dweller's discovery of the countryside. However, when the couple examine the site of the proposed mediatheque, and, in particular, an example of the stonework intended to be used in its construction, there is an almost magical change of clothes within what certainly appears to be the same scene. A shot from behind shows Julien and Bérénice looking

at the site while the former explains: 'il faut voir sur les plans, avec l'architecte. Ça va être construit avec les pierres du pays.' An insert of the wall of a farm follows, while Julien continues: 'C'est-à-dire ça va garder le cachet, tu comprends? Le cachet du pays, sauf que ce sera un édifice moderne'(p.21). However, when we see the two of them now, they are yet again wearing different clothes. Rohmer admits that this is a far cry from realism but it does introduce aspects of a fable into a film which constantly plays with reality: temporality reaches a surprising level of flexibility so that past and future are fused into a present 'screen time'. [89] The inhabitants depicted are the actual people who live in this village but they are integrated into a fictional world. Filmic form is being used in a self-conscious and playful way in order to create differing and innovative temporal spaces which contribute to an overall ambiguous realism.

Thus, in conclusion, we can note that Rohmer's adaptation technique encompasses at least three strands: the adaptation for the screen of an existing literary text; the integration of actors' words and concepts into this text; and the use of a physical space and time to influence the final plot development. Clearly, a flexible and varied approach is a necessity, on some level, for any director, but Rohmer makes direct links between his inspirations and his depiction of the world, so that a pervading ambiguity consistently undermines any initial sense of certainty about the nature of what is being represented. The 'photographs' in the prologue to *Hiver* provide evidence of an idyllic relationship which is subsequently undermined as we realise that they are simply a cinematic representation of a liaison. 'Safe' texts are revealed as innovative, and received opinions of Rohmer's work are shown to be inaccurate. The next section will examine how this may be observed in specific films which display a wide variety of adaptation devices. This will serve to reveal the key

role that intertextuality plays in Rohmer's work and so provide further evidence of his complexity as a director.

NOTES

[1] In the case of *Rayon* this was a short story which Rohmer recounted to those involved in the film. See interview with him, *Cinématographe* no.122 (September 1986), 34.

[2] *L'Anglaise* is based on the French Revolutionary memoirs of Grace Elliot. See Jean-Michel Frodon, 'Eric Rohmer donne sa vision de la Révolution française en vidéo numérique', *Le Monde*, 31 May 2000, 32 and Grace Elliott, *Journal of my life during the French Revolution*, London: Richard Bentley, 1859.

[3] Interview in *Cinématographe* no.67 (May 1981), 30.

[4] This view is described by Etienne Fizellier in *Cinéma et Littérature*, Paris: Les Editions du Cerf, 1964, p.15.

[5] George Bluestone, *Novels and Film*, Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1957, p.218.

[6] See Brian McFarlane, *Novel to Film. An Introduction to the Theory of Adaptation*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996.

[7] For a discussion of the differences between film and novels in terms of length, as well as this reference to Hitchcock, see Morris Béja, *Film and Literature*, New York and London: Longman, 1979, p.59.

[8] See interview, *Film and Literature Quarterly* vol.10, no.4 (1982), 222.

[9] Béja, p.57.

[10] ibid., p.58.

[11] Joy Gould Boyum, *Double Exposure: Fiction into Film*, New York: Universe Books, 1985, p.21.

[12] See Alan Williams, p.278.

[13] François Truffaut, 'Une certaine Tendance du cinéma français', *Cahiers du cinéma* no.31 (January 1954), 16. This is a version of McFarlane's equivalences, see p.27.

[14] See Colin Crisp, *The Classic French Cinema 1930-1960*, Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1993, p.292.

[15] Brian McFarlane, p.13.

[16] ibid., p.24.

[17] Roland Barthes, *Image, Music, Text*, London: Flamingo, 1984, p.94. See also Gerald Prince, *Dictionary of Narratology*, Aldershot: Scholar Press, 1988, p.11.

[18] Roland Barthes (1984), p.94.

[19] Truffaut cites the example of Jean Aurenche's adaptation of Bernanos's *Journal d'un curé de campagne* where substitute scenes reflect 'assez peu d'invention pour beaucoup de trahison'. See Truffaut, 19.

[20] Eric Rohmer, *Six Contes moraux*, p.8

[21] Rohmer wrote the screenplay for Godard's *Charlotte et Véronique ou Tous les garçons s'appellent Patrick* (1957). As mentioned on page 19 he also wrote a film project, *L'Eglise moderne*, with Truffaut in 1953.

[22] Eric Rohmer, *Six Contes moraux*, p.12.

[23] ibid., p.7.

[24] See Graham Greene, Preface to *The Third Man* and *The Fallen Idol*, London: Penguin 1977, p.9.

[25] Quoted from Rohmer's programme notes for his production of Kleist's *La petite Catherine de Heilbronn*, cited by Joël Magny, p.162.

[26] Rohmer quoted in Joël Magny, p.46.

[27] Eric Rohmer, *Six Contes moraux*, p.7.

[28] Interview with Rohmer in *Literature/Film Quarterly*, 222.

[29] See Eric Rohmer, *Six Contes Moraux*, p.12.

[30] ibid., p.202.

[31] *Marquise* in *Avant-Scène cinéma* no.173 (1 October 1976), 5. Our analysis below will indicate a more complex situation where differences do occur between novella and film.

[32] Heinrich von Kleist, *The Marquise of O- and other stories*, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1985, p.86.

[33] See Eric Rohmer, 'Notes sur la traduction et sur la mise en scène de *Perceval*', *L'Avant-Scène cinéma* no.221, 1 February 1979, 7.

[34] See interview with Rohmer, *Cahiers du cinéma* no.559 (July-August 2001), 52-53.

[35] *Les petites filles modèles* was made in 1952 while *Bérénice* was shot in 1954. See Magny, pp.101-102.

[36] See interview with Jean-Claude Brialy in Peter Lennon, 'Me, Godard and the boys', *The Guardian 2*, 4 December 2001, 12.

[37] See Jean-Claude Brialy, *Le Ruisseau des Singes*, p.245.

[38] Eric Rohmer and Paul Gégauff, 'La Roseraie', *Cahiers du cinéma* no.5 (September 1951), 5.

[39] Interview, *Cinéma 71* no.153 (February 1971), 58.

[40] Interview with Rohmer, *Cahiers du cinéma* nos.323/324 (May 1981), 35.

[41] Interview with Rohmer, *Cinématographe* no.67 (May 1981), 30.

[42] Interview with Rohmer, *Cahiers du cinéma* no.346 (April 1983), 18.

[43] Interview with Rohmer, *Cinématographe* no.122 (September 1986), 34.

[44] The film was shot in two days and Rohmer interviewed Rouch about it in *Cahiers du cinéma* no.144 (June 1963), 1-13.

[45] Eric Rohmer, *Six Contes moraux*, p.8.

[46] The section below on *Hiver* reveals there are some discrepancies in the film's representation of Shakespeare's play. Again the straightforwardness of Rohmer's approach is open to question.

[47] Interview, *Cahiers du cinéma* no.346 (April 1993), 20.

[48] Interview, *Première* no.125 (August 1987), 50. See also interview with Emmanuelle Chaulet in Alain Hertay, *Eric Rohmer, Comédies et proverbes*, Liège: Editions du Céfal, 1998, p.135.

[49] Joël Magny, pp.126-127.

[50] Interview with Rohmer, *Positif* no.309 (November 1986), 18.

[51] Interview with Rohmer, *Cahiers du cinéma* nos.467/468 (May 1993), 67.

[52] See interview with Godard in *Jean-Luc Godard: Interviews*, edited by David Sterritt, Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1998, p.7.

[53] Marc Chevrie, 'Jacques Rivette: la ligne de l'aventure', *Cahiers du cinéma* no.364 (October 1984), 22.

[54] Interview, *Cahiers du cinéma* no.219 (April 1970), 52.

[55] ibid., 50.

[56] Interview with Rohmer, *Cinéma 71* no.153 (February 1971), 52-53.

[57] Interview, *Télérama* no.1963 (29 August-4 September 1987), 17.

[58] Irène Skobline's uncle was the inspiration for the character of Fiodor Voronine in *Agent*. See interview with her, *Vertigo* no.25 (March 2004), 24.

[59] Interview, *Télérama* no.1963 (29 August-4 September 1987), 17.

[60] Marie Binet-Bouteloup, 'Eric Rohmer tourne *Le beau Mariage*', *Cahiers du cinéma* no.332 (February 1982), 35.

[61] Interview with Rohmer, *Cahiers du cinéma* no.392 (February 1987), 8.

[62] Interview with Rohmer, *Cahiers du cinéma* no.430 (April 1990), 28.

[63] Interview with Rohmer, *Cahiers du cinéma* nos.467/468 (May 1993), 67.

[64] ibid., 68.

[65] Vincent Ostria makes this point in the course of an interview with Rohmer, *Cinématographe* no.122 (September 1986), 35.

[66] Henri Lefebvre, *La Production de l'espace*, Paris: Editions Albatros, 1974, p.285. For the importance of time see, for instance, Saint Augustine, *Confessions*, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1961, pp.253-280.

[67] Myrto Konstantarakos, 'Introduction' to *Spaces in European Cinema*, edited by Myrto Konstantarakos, Exeter and Portland: Intellect, 2000, p.1.

[68] Charles Baudelaire, *Tableaux parisiens*, Paris: Editions de la Bibliothèque, 2001. See Tom Conley, 'Le Cinéaste et la vie moderne: Paris as Map in Film', in *Parisian Fields*, edited by Michael Sheringham, London: Reaktion Books, 1996, pp.72-73.

[69] Marc Augé, 'Paris and the Ethnography of the Contemporary World', in Michael Sheringham, p.177.

[70] See Michael Sheringham, 'City Space, Mental Place, Poetic Space: Paris in Breton, Benjamin and Réda', in Michael Sheringham, p.89.

[71] See ibid., p.92. See also Elenore Koffman and Elizabeth Lebas, 'Introduction: Lost in Transposition - Time, Space and the City', in Henri Lefebvre, *Writings on cities*, selected, translated and edited by Elenore Kofman and Elizabeth Lebas, Oxford and Cambridge, Massachusetts: Blackwell Publishers, 1996, p.11.

[72] André Breton, *Nadja*, Paris: Gallimard, 1963, p.133. Further references are given in the text.

[73] This expression is used as an epigraph to *Eric Rohmer*, Dunkerque: Studio 43-MJC de Dunkerque/Ecole Regionale des Beaux Arts, 1987.

[74] Interview in *Cahiers du cinéma* no.219 (April 1970), 53.

[75] See Press book for *Place de l'Etoile*, 1965, p.3.

[76] Michel Mardore, 39.

[77] See Susan Hayward, *French National Cinema*, London: Routledge, 1993, p.209.

[78] Interview, *Avant-Scène cinéma* no.336 (January 1985), 4.

[79] Eric Rohmer, 'Les Citations picturales dans les *Contes Moraux* et les *Comédies et Proverbes*' in Carole Desbarats, *Pauline à la plage d'Eric Rohmer*, Crisnée: Editions Yellow Now, 1990, pp.117-118. Rohmer sees each of his films as having one or more dominant colours and tells us 'j'avais écrit le scénario sur un cahier qui avait la couleur que je voulais lui donner' (p.117).

[80] See interview with Emmanuelle Chaulet in Alain Hertay, p.135.

[81] See interview with Rohmer, *Positif* no.452 (October 1998), 12.

[82] See David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson, p.87.

[83] Quoted in *Cahiers du cinéma* no.364 (October 1984), 14.

[84] This quote is attributed to Rohmer in Jean Douchet, 'Photo du Mois', *Cahiers du cinéma* no.98 (August 1959), 54. The photo in question depicts Pierre Wesselrin in bed with his girlfriend but we are warned that this does not mean that the editor (Rohmer himself) has been stricken with 'une quelconque volonté de libertinage'.

[85] Eric Rohmer, *Six Contes moraux*, p.61.

[86] Interview with Rohmer, *Cahiers du cinéma* no.452 (February 1992), 24.

[87] Roland Barthes, *La Chambre claire. Note sur la photographie*, Paris: Cahiers du Cinéma/Gallimard/Seuil, 1980, p.123.

[88] See Christian Metz, *Film Language, a Semiotics of the Cinema* (Translation), New York: Oxford University Press, 1974, pp.130-131.

[89] Interview with Rohmer, *Cahiers du cinéma*, nos.467/468 (May 1993), 69.

SECTION 3

Case Studies

La Marquise d'O...

In this section, we shall be providing a detailed account of the adaptation techniques used by Rohmer and, more generally, of the key role which intertextuality plays in his films. This will provide evidence of the diverse use he makes of his source material and serve to further undermine the widespread perception of him as a 'straightforward' director.

Our analysis of specific cases of adaptation will begin with three films by Rohmer which are directly adopted from works by another author: *Marquise*, *Perceval*, and *L'Anglaise*. In the case of the first of these, the source is a novella by Kleist, and Rohmer has repeatedly emphasised in interviews his attempts to remain essentially faithful to it: 'il [Kleist] ne donne que des indications de scène comme dans un scénario [et] un cineaste [...] n'a qu'à suivre ces indications! Ce que j'ai fait rigoureusement, aussi bien au niveau du dialogue que des mouvements et gestes....'[1] In addition, Rohmer made the film in German, the language of Kleist's original tale, although he also supervised a dubbed version in French.[2] Given the numerous ambiguities in the image of Rohmer which have already come to light in the course of this study, the question of fidelity assumes particular importance: is there a link between our revised perception of him as a man and filmmaker and the way in which his statements on adaptation for his own films should be viewed? If the image which

he provides of himself is at best misleading, then perhaps the same may be true of his statements on his adaptation methods?

As we have already noted, Kleist's novella begins with the account of a newspaper advertisement in which Juliette, the Marquise of O-, asks the father of her still unborn child to make himself known. The narrative then returns us to the events leading up to this occurrence, before moving forward from the advertisement to the denouement. The whole is recounted by an omniscient but unidentified narrator, and a textual signifier informs us that the story is based on a 'true incident'.[3] Clearly, Kleist is concerned with realistic narration and we shall now seek to establish the extent to which Rohmer shares, or subverts, this aspect of the source text.

The Narrative

Just as in the story, the film begins with the newspaper advertisement, although this time it is being read and discussed by a group of drinkers in an inn. After a fade (a traditional indicator of a flashback), the narrative depicts events which have led up to this point, before continuing to the resolution. The main elements of the plot are retained and are reproduced in an (almost) identical order to Kleist's novella. Thus we do indeed appear to be watching a film which attempts total fidelity to its source text. However, there are in fact some interesting and significant changes introduced by Rohmer, some of which will be analysed below.

In an attempt to compare the plot structure of the film with that of the novella, I have made use of Barthes's cardinal functions, as outlined in the previous section (page 81).[4] Barthes develops his analysis of these key moments of a narrative as part of his investigation into the structure of narratives, and contrasts these

cardinal functions with catalyses, which can be removed from the narrative without damaging its causality. However, both are essential, since the cardinal functions provide the nucleus of the story while the catalyses have a phatic role, keeping the contact between the narrator and the receiver. Despite the possibly over simplistic nature of this approach, it is nevertheless used successfully by Brian McFarlane in his comparison of literary texts and their cinematic adaptations.[5] We shall make similar use of it here since it enables us to recognise clearly those narrative actions which cannot be removed without affecting the development of the plot, reducing the latter to its simplest events. We shall begin by outlining the cardinal functions from Kleist's novella, in chronological order, and then examine their presence (or absence) in Rohmer's film in order to ascertain the nature of the relationship between the two:-

1. The Marquise of O-'s husband dies.

2. She and her two children move back home with her parents.

3. War breaks out.

4. The family home (the citadel) is captured by the Russians.

5. The Marquise is saved from rape by the Count.

6. [While she is asleep the Count rapes her.]

7. He leaves her when the Russian troops withdraw from the Citadel.

8. The family learn of the Count's death.

9. The Marquise is ill as if she were pregnant.

10. The Count returns (he had in fact not died).

11. The Marquise rejects his proposal of marriage.

12. He only continues his journey when she agrees to remain unmarried until his return.

13. Medical evidence proves that the Marquise is indeed pregnant.

14. Her family force her to leave home.

15. She decides to put an advertisement in the newspaper in order to find the father.

16. The Count returns but the Marquise rejects him.

17. He answers her advertisement anonymously and proposes a meeting in the family home.

18. Having used a ruse, the Marquise's mother becomes convinced of her daughter's innocence.

19. Father and daughter are also reconciled.

20. After a brief hesitation, the Count and the Marquise marry.

21. Initially, the couple live apart.

22. They are reconciled.

23. They celebrate a renewal of their wedding vows one year later.

Immediately clear is the fact that the film faithfully retains all of these points, with two exceptions: there is a change in the details of point 6 while point 23 is omitted entirely. In the novella, after the Russian soldiers attack the Marquise, the Count rescues her and leads her to safety, at which point she faints and there is an ellipsis (represented thus in the German original '...') in the account: it later emerges that the Marquise was raped by her saviour at this time. In the film, a 'tisane' is given to the heroine, after the Count has returned to the battle. He later comes back to rape her. The director gives as his reason for this change that otherwise 'il était à craindre que la Marquise n'apparût que comme une sotte ou une hypocrite, et son personnage aurait perdu en pathétique et en profondeur'.[6] In other words, Rohmer maintains that the modifications help to preserve the Marquise's credibility as a character. While

this may well be true, the explanation ignores the effect that such changes will introduce to the character of the Count. Instead of someone who committed a horrendous crime on the spur of the moment, we now see him as a cold-blooded, calculating rapist who sets out with the intention to commit this act. In addition, he assures her parents that he will take personal care of the Marquise, just minutes before raping her. This diminution in his morality is balanced by a corresponding increase in that of the Marquise. Not only has Rohmer felt it necessary to put her to sleep, he also reduces her potential guilt by increasing that of her attacker. Why might this be so?

Part of the answer may be found in the central problem addressed by the film: was the Marquise aware of what was happening and could she possibly (at least on some level) have allowed herself to be raped? The line adopted by Rohmer suggests, at the very least, an element of desire on the part of the widowed Marquise. Further evidence for this appears in another element added by the director. In the novella we find the following comment on the wedding: 'During the ceremony the Marquise stared rigidly at the painting behind the altar [....].'[7] In the film, however, we *see* the painting, which depicts the Archangel Michael condemning Lucifer to Hell, thus the painting plays a metaphorical role, implying that this Christian sacrament of marriage allows the legitimate satisfaction of desires which are otherwise taboo. Good appears to have finally overcome evil. Angela Dalle Vacche sees this painting as reflecting the Marquise's understanding of the limits of 'one-sided self-righteousness'.[8] However, the protagonist's self doubt persists and she forces herself into a period of penance involving sexual abstinence, before finally consummating her marriage. This eventual submission does not, as in Kleist's story, involve the official blessing of a second marriage, but instead emanates from the heroine's own feelings: it is only

later that she comes to believe in a duality of human nature, where, unlike in the case of the fallen Lucifer, angel and devil can co-inhabit the same person. She tells the Count, in both novella and film, that she would not have seen him as a devil if he had not appeared such an angel when he initially saved her. We are thus forced to view the Marquise in a new way, in that she is ready to acknowledge some of the contradictions she only belatedly accepts in her husband.

There is another change which similarly appears to contribute, this time on a symbolic level, to the increased sense of the Marquise's moral character. In Kleist's work the Count enters the Marquise's garden through 'a door which he found unlocked [...]'.[9] Freud sees doors and gates as 'symbols of the genital orifice', a fact which may encourage a reading that the Marquise was, at least on one level, willing to have intercourse even if she later denies this to herself.[10] Rohmer's heroine is protected by a high wall which bolsters her position and must be scaled by the Count in order to gain access to her garden. However, the Count claims (albeit falsely) that he gained access through a door: the filmic Marquise may appear purer but doubts remain that she might still have been a willing participant.

Rohmer constantly rejects any element of the original tale which might cast doubts on the Marquise's innocence. For instance, her admission that once, on waking, she had seen the groom Leopardo walking away from where she lay,[11] is replaced by a shot of that servant looking at her in her 'tisane'-induced sleep, so that any suggestion that Julietta might have enjoyed Leopardo's presence is thus eradicated. A taboo remains a taboo, and even if the Marquise's husband is dead, sex outside marriage is perceived as wrong in Rohmer's reading of this strict society. However, these changes draw attention to the artificial nature of the heroine's purity and serve as another reminder of the ambiguous nature of her character.

Cardinal point 23 is omitted altogether, although this is likely to be more for reasons of brevity and coherence than anything else. A second marriage ceremony would take up at least a few screen minutes while Kleist can indicate this event with six words ('they even celebrated a second wedding'[12]). The film compensates for the loss of this scene through the final conversation between the couple, which culminates in a long kiss. However, the main difference between novella and film is to be found in the precise timing of this kiss: in Kleist's story it occurs *after* the second wedding/blessing of the couple while Rohmer gives them greater independence from outside constraints (and the desirability for a second 'real' wedding). *They* decide when the time is appropriate for a closer relationship so that, while on one level Rohmer may appear to be creating an extremely moral tale where sex outside marriage is even less acceptable than in Kleist's work, he is also giving us characters who, ultimately, are capable of taking decisions for themselves.

Once again, Rohmer retains the narrative framework but subverts it from within so that we are obliged to alter our original assessment of the nature of his apparently faithful adaptation. Barthes's cardinal functions have provided us with a useful tool in order to compare the narrative structure of these two texts and provide evidence of Rohmer's adaptation technique.

Narrational Mode: Film

There are a number of other differences between Kleist's text and Rohmer's film which provide a telling insight into the variance between the two art forms, and which perhaps further modify our initial perception of Rohmer's 'innocent' adaptation of a pre-existing written text. This, in turn, will enable us to better

appreciate the ambiguities which lie at the heart of this director's reputation as a classical film director.

The film frequently uses intertitles to provide information which forms part of the narrative of the novella. The intertitles may mark the passing of time, provide an insight into the thoughts of the protagonists, or serve as a (self-conscious) authorial comment: 'Révélée à elle-même par cette belle fermeté, elle [la Marquise] sut émerger toute seule de l'abîme où le destin l'avait précipitée'(p.48). In filmic terms, this is a reference to the days of silent cinema, but it also reveals a high level of filmic self-consciousness since the moving images are forced to stop, and the spectator is provided with a new source of plot information through a distancing device not generally used in realistic narration. Mary Rhiel sees this as using 'the trope of the author in order to lend itself the authority to equate the literary source with the visual by postulating a truth about the text that can be reproduced without loss'.[13] This would lead to a direct transposition between the two art forms and suggests, somewhat naively it must be said, that images could not provide the information provided by the printed word. Rhiel goes on to claim that Rohmer's mise-en-scène 'subscribes to the belief in film's unique ability to capture reality'.[14] This is contradicted by this use of intertitles, as well as being at odds with Rohmer's theoretical work in which, as we have seen, he recognises the limits of documentary, acknowledging that even where the filmmaker seriously attempts to depict the real, nevertheless, he/she inevitably introduces elements of subjectivity into the work.[15] In contrast, in the case of a fiction film the camera is at the centre of the events it depicts and makes them appear natural, whatever the artifice which may be at the heart of their existence.[16] Here film is not so much capturing reality as

acknowledging its representation and it is precisely this retelling of the tale that the titles emphasise, just as the voice-overs do in the *Contes*.

What then is the depiction of 'reality' in this film and to what extent does Rohmer remain faithful to the reality of his source text? Despite our initial comments, Rohmer does not provide us with a straightforward realistic rendition of the novella, but rather with a self-conscious and ironic representation of it. The melodramatic gestures, the rich lighting and the repeated references to painting hardly support Rhiel's dubious claim that Rohmer 'fails to consider the proposition that the real is not only something we construct, but a controversial construction at that'.[17] A similar problem arises with her insistence that absolute closure and unity exist only in the film, making it less modernist than its source text.[18] This use of the term 'modernist' in relation to Kleist is problematic given that he was writing at the start of the nineteenth century. However, more importantly, while it is true that Rohmer makes a number of changes to the ending (the final reconciliation now precedes mention of the series of children which the couple will have), both texts involve the Marquise displaying an increased degree of pragmatism, when faced with events far removed from her routine existence, and recognising that good and evil can exist in the same person. Increasingly, the changes effected by Rohmer can be seen to give his version post-modern qualities, to the extent that it challenges aspirations to unity and order.

An analysis of other changes between written and filmic versions will serve to emphasise this point further. There is one divergence from the third person narration of the novella which comes from a voice-over followed by the character 'talking to herself' to produce a cinematic soliloquy. This occurs when the Marquise is knitting in her garden, and reflecting on her changed situation. Kleist's text

provides an indirect account of her thoughts which she develops over a number of restless nights, while the film depicts this in a single scene which begins with her voice-over, as she muses on her position, and then develops into direct speech, as the Marquise thinks aloud. Two alternative approaches could have been chosen by Rohmer: an invented conversation could have been filmed, in which the Marquise reveals her feelings (perhaps to a trusty servant); alternatively another intertitle could have been employed. Rohmer rejects both these clichéd approaches in favour of a fundamentally self-conscious device: our need to intellectualise the Marquise's dilemma is signalled by our awareness of the artificiality of its representation. We cannot merely accept what is set before us but are forced to analyse it as we decipher the words and images: could the Marquise be prepared to marry the father of her child *because* she knows his identity, at least on some level? This supports the view of Rohmer as a more challenging and complex director than is generally allowed.

The exposition scenes in the film provide the same information as the novella, but the drinkers' account of the Marquise and her advertisement are only to be found in Rohmer's version. The difficulty facing the director - the provision of essential plot information - is the same as in the example above but the different solution reflects Rohmer's constant inventiveness. A voice-over would have created an authorial presence not present in the written original and so has been rejected, but Rohmer does provide us with an insert of the advertisement. Here again he is using the text in a self-conscious fashion, this time to indicate a key element of the story. This scene is directly linked to the Count's discovery of the actual advertisement much later in the film, an event which takes place in the same inn and in the company of the same people, although the Marquise's brother is more than an onlooker on this occasion. In fact, it appears that these scenes take place

consecutively since the brother borrows the newspaper from the same men who were discussing it at the start. While this later scene *is* present in the novella, its earlier appearance in the film not only gives a greater sense of unity to the filmic text, as otherwise the move from narrative past to narrative present would go unnoticed, but also adds to the sense of a self-conscious retelling of Kleist's text. Thus, as we have seen, two thirds of the film consists of a long flashback beginning with the appearance of the advertisement which is followed by the remainder of the story set in a narrative present. Rohmer retains the structure of the original and in doing so provides us with the only use of a flashback in his work: on a structural level he seems determined to follow that of the original text, albeit in his own fashion.

However, another much shorter flashback is avoided in the filmic version. Kleist, having described the Marquise's banishment by her father, and her subsequent meeting with the Count, returns to earlier events at the Commandant's house. Rohmer avoids this temporal device by giving some of these details before he follows the Marquise to her country retreat (her mother's reaction to events), and further information when the advertisement is published (her father removing portraits of her). These may only be minor changes, but they do provide further evidence of Rohmer's willingness to adapt the original text so that it better suits his style, even if this means abandoning absolute fidelity.

In addition, there are a number of modifications in the account of the Count's illness and 'death' which centre around the elision of his last words and the division of the account of the swan into two parts. In the novella, he shouts out when he is injured in battle: 'Giulietta! This bullet avenges you!'[19] and the Marquise (when she hears of this) simply muses on the coincidence of him having loved someone of the same name as herself, and attempts to find this woman. This is omitted by Rohmer,

perhaps feeling that a modern audience would be less likely to accept her apparent naivety, although it also, once again, reduces our sense of the Count's feeling of guilt.

The Count's comparison of the Marquise with a swan, at which he had thrown mud only to see it emerge cleansed from the water, appears in its entirety in the novella, when he stops with the family on his way to Naples. This leaves the reader in little doubt that the Count is the father of the Marquise's child and is trying to make amends (for sullying her) by saving her honour and her status. In the film there is already less ambiguity about the identity of the father, and Rohmer has the Count begin his story only to stop almost immediately. It is only at the end that he reveals it to the Marquise, just before they kiss. It now forms part of his rehabilitation process and signals his good faith for the future, as well as reinforcing her understanding of the complexity of human nature.

Reference has already been made to the painting of the Archangel Michael, and paintings play an important part in Rohmer's depiction of Kleist's work and in his mise-en-scène, as they increase the symbolic and metaphoric readings of the film. The most obvious pictorial citation is the shot of the reclining Marquise, after she has taken the tisane, referring as it does to Fuseli's *Nightmare* and its depiction of a woman in almost exactly the same position, amidst similar red drapes. Pascal Bonitzer sees this as an unusual case in which a reference to a painting is directly integrated into the fictional work, rather than remaining 'a-narrative', as he claims would tend to be the case in films by Godard or Pasolini.[20] However, surely what Rohmer achieves here is a symbiosis of the two by multiplying the narrative levels of the film in a mise-en-abîme effect and introducing into it some of the complexities of the word. Narrative action does stop (the rape remains unseen), but there is a

narrative element in the shot which consists of an absence. In the original painting there is an Incubus on the woman's chest and a horse in the background. Rohmer replaces these (in the reverse shot after that of the reclining Marquise) with the Count, the camera dollying in to end with a close up of his face. This is what Edward Brannigan convincingly refers to as implied authorial narration: 'The hyperdiegetic [...] stands for the barest trace of another scene, of a scene to be remembered at another time, of a past and future scene in the film [...] or of a scene that is evaded and remains absent.'[21] Here the visual mimetic is unambiguous while the painting reintroduces a sense of ambiguity (what did happen?) and so once again the illusion of the film is destroyed. The remainder of the plot consists of the Marquise trying to maintain the absence of this scene in the face of the increasing evidence of her pregnancy. It is only when she can come to terms with its existence that the film can reach some sort of resolution with the creation of the happy couple.

Rohmer contends that the shot of the reclining Marquise is no more than a bad imitation of Fuseli's original and cites Fragonard's *Le Verrou* as being of greater importance, despite the absence of direct references to it. It was a postcard of this painting, though, which the director gave to the actors, Edith Clever and Bruno Ganz, when he first met them. This depicts (in Rohmer's words) 'un jeune homme, tenant une jeune femme dans ses bras, [il] est en train de fermer le verrou, la jeune femme essaie de l'en empêcher avec un geste très emphatique'.[22] It is precisely these dramatic gestures which are so well captured in the completed film, as when the Marquise throws herself before her father in an effort to reverse his rejection of her. It is also significant that Rohmer attempts to play down the importance of Fuseli's work so as to take our attention away from the complexity of what he *himself* is doing: once again we have to look very carefully indeed in order to see the extent of

this director's innovations. In this, Rohmer, despite his earlier criticism of painting, provides viewers with a creative space of their own where this careful analysis can be carried out. This invites repeated viewing of the filmic text in a fashion not unlike the lengthy examination of a painting so that meaning becomes a function of the creative response of the spectator. Recognition of this aspect clearly refutes the notion of an immediate and unambiguous depiction of meaning.

It is clear that Rohmer's film has in many ways remained close to Kleist's text so that his work, at least initially, can be characterised as a faithful adaptation of its literary source. For instance, almost all of the narrative functions are retained, and even the characters' physical movements, as described in the original story, are reproduced. However, Rohmer uses intertitles, voice over and explicit references to paintings in order to invite us to analyse what we see. In other words, the apparently transparent text of the film still, in fact, requires of the spectator a creative reading. Such changes both exploit the advantages of a different medium, and allow us to retain some belief in the innocence of the Marquise. Narrative transfer and adaptation are combined to produce a version for another medium, but one which also emerges as surprisingly self-consciously filmic, given Rohmer's reputation as a traditionalist. Rohmer is in fact an innovative director because, while appearing to make straightforward 'faithful' adaptations, he actually subverts the text from within as he presents the viewer with *one* possible retelling of a tale, while making us aware of the possibility of many others.

NOTES

[1] Interview, *Ecran* no.47 (May 1976), 20.

[2] See *Avant-Scène cinéma* no.173 (1 October 1976), 4.

[3] Kleist, p.68.

[4] Roland Barthes, *Image, Music, Text*, pp.94-95. See also Gerald Prince, p.11.

[5] See Brian McFarlane, pp.13-14.

[6] Eric Rohmer, *Notes sur la mise en scène* in *Avant-Scène cinéma* no.173 (1 October 1976), 6.

[7] Kleist, p.112.

[8] Angela Dalle Vacche, *Cinema and Painting. How Art is Used in Film*, London: Athlone, 1996, p.105.

[9] Kleist, p.96.

[10] Sigmund Freud, *1. Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis*, Harmondsworth: Pelican, 1976, p.189.

[11] Kleist, p.103.

[12] ibid., p.113.

[13] Mary Rhiel, *Re-viewing Kleist: The Discursive Construction of Authorial Subjectivity in West German Kleist Films*, New York: Peter Lang 1991, p.27.

[14] ibid. p.44.

[15] Eric Rohmer, 'Le Goût de la beauté ' in *Le Goût de la beauté*, p.86.

[16] ibid., p. 86.

[17] Mary Rhiel, p.48. She is quoting from Toril Moi's *Sexual/Textual Politics*, London: Methuen, 1985, p.45.

[18] ibid., p.47.

[19] Kleist, p.73.

[20] Pascal Bonitzer, *Peinture et Cinéma. Décadrages*, Paris: Editions de l'Etoile, 1985, p.31.

[21] Edward Brannigan, *Narrative Comprehension and Film*, London/New York: Routledge, 1992, p.190.

[22] The information in this paragraph, as well as the quotation, comes from Eric Rohmer, 'Les Citations picturales dans les Contes Moraux et les Comédies et Proverbes' in Carole Desbarats, p.110.

Perceval le Gallois

Rohmer's second literary adaptation, *Perceval*, provides a point of comparison with *Marquise* as, once again, there is a declared intent of fidelity to a source text, in this case Chrétien de Troyes's work dating from 1180. Rohmer wrote that 'Ce n'est pas tant le thème qui nous importe ici, que le *texte...*'[1] He claims that a primary objective was to bring this important text to the attention of a twentieth-century audience. Therefore, clearly, he had to find a translation into modern French as his starting point, and it is interesting (and tells us much about his cultural awareness) that Rohmer decided to do this himself. In his version, he rejects prose in order to retain the poetic nature of the original, a decision which again indicates the importance he accords to textual fidelity.

Chrétien's novel begins with a note from the author in praise of Count Philippe de Flandre, which suggests that the latter had shown him a book upon which this telling of the story is based. Thus the tale is given a previous existence outside this particular version, and it can be referred to by the narrator to prove the veracity of his account, as, for example, when Perceval kisses the *pucelle* against her will: 'C'est d'affilée que le garçon l'embrasse, qu'elle le veuille ou non, sept fois de suite, *nous dit le conte.*'[2] The effect of this is to hint at a pre-existing reality or truth: these events really happened and indeed there are few magical happenings which might

undermine this claim. On the other hand, extraordinary events do occur in the continuations by other authors (Chrétien left his novel unfinished) and also, albeit to a lesser extent, in Rohmer's version. At first sight, this appears strange for a director so interested in a realistic depiction of the world and will be analysed in further detail below.

The tale itself follows the adventures of Perceval, from the moment he leaves home to become a knight, until he is finally tracked down by King Arthur and his Court. There follows a long digression which recounts some of the adventures which befall Gauvain (a fellow knight), before the tale briefly returns to Perceval, only to revert again to Gauvain. Unfortunately Chrétien died before he finished this Arthurian romance, and the novel ends abruptly with a messenger arriving from Gauvain at Arthur's court.

There are few physical descriptions of the characters, and there are elements of repetition in Perceval's succession of adventures so that one battle can easily resemble any other. This myth has Eastern, Celtic and Christian origins, and while the Greek or Phrygian Perceval, once he has participated in the rites of salvation, returns to the circular path of fatality, the Christian version of the tale invokes the destiny of a man who does not return to the past.[3] Instead, he has clearly made progress in his journey of self-discovery. However, the unfinished nature of Chrétien's work makes the extent of Perceval's maturing unclear: we leave him as he becomes aware of Christ's Passion and takes Communion but there are no hints as to his future.

Clearly *Perceval* is part of a much larger cycle of novels based on the Knights of the Round Table, six of which were written by Chrétien,[4] while the quest for the Holy Grail is a recurring theme in this and subsequent works by other authors. A

number of continuations appeared shortly after Chrétien's death, most notably the 'manuscrit de Mons' and 'le texte de Gerbert de Montreuil'.[5]

We shall now turn our attention to an examination of the structure of the film itself. This adaptation omits Chrétien's opening dedication and so Rohmer's version signals a return to the abrupt beginnings used by the 'trouvères des chansons de geste'.[6] Thus, the film loses a textual framing with its implication of objective veracity through an external authority and introduces the role of Rohmer as translator. The opening credits tell us that the text is by Chrétien de Troyes but that it is 'traduit et mise en scène par Eric Rohmer'. Rohmer's contribution, exemplified by the introduction of a chorus, provides us with a re-enactment or theatrical representation of the *conte*. Like all earlier versions, the film acknowledges its role in *retelling* the story; however, ironically, the nature of film ensures that *this* version will be precisely the same at each subsequent hearing. All of the major events of the original are included, even the tale's long digression to follow Gauvain. However, the film ends with a representation of Christ's Passion (only referred to tangentially in the novel) before Perceval leaves to continue his journey while the subsequent (unfinished) adventures of Gauvain are omitted. Once again there is a clear attempt at fidelity, although, as before, it may be that the changes involved have much to tell us about Rohmer's methods. The effect of these and other differences between book and film will be examined in more detail below.

Transfer of Narrative Functions

Previously, we applied Barthes's cardinal functions to *Marquise* in order to identify those narrative actions which cannot be removed without affecting the development

of the plot, and used this to compare Kleist's novella with Rohmer's film. We shall now apply the same procedure to *Perceval*. The main events of Chrétien's story may be summarised as follows to provide cardinal functions:-

1. Perceval meets some knights and vows to become one himself.

2. His mother gives him advice before he leaves but he does not pay full attention.

3. He kisses a betrothed *pucelle* and steals her ring.

4. Her fiancé swears vengeance.

5. Perceval kills the *Chevalier Vermeil* outside Arthur's court in order to obtain his armour.

6. He vows to avenge the *pucelle* whom Keu struck at Arthur's Court.

7. A *prudhomme* (Gorneman) teaches Perceval to fight.

8. Perceval leaves to find his mother.

9. He arrives at Beaurepaire which is under siege. Blanchefleur spends the night with him and asks for his help.

10. Perceval defeats the leader of the besieging forces (Angingueron) and sends him to Arthur to remind him of his vow of vengeance (cf.6).

11. A boat brings supplies of food which helps avoid defeat.

12. Perceval defeats the opposing king and also sends *him* to Arthur.

13. Perceval leaves Beaurepaire but vows to return when he has news of his mother.

14. The *Roi-Pêcheur* gives him a powerful sword.

15. Perceval sees the Grail but asks no questions.

16. A grieving *pucelle* tells Perceval he should have asked about the Grail and reveals that his mother has died.

17. Perceval defeats the *pucelle*'s fiancé and sends him to Arthur (cf. 4).

18. Perceval unwittingly gets revenge by defeating Keu (cf. 6).

19. Gauvain persuades Perceval to join Arthur.

20. After hearing the *Demoiselle Hideuse* Perceval leaves, vowing to find out the truth about the Grail.

21. Digression: Gauvain leaves Court to defend his honour at Escavalon.

22. Gauvain defends a young girl's honour at a tournament.

23. Gauvain is offered shelter but it is in Escavalon, where he is hated (cf. 21).

24. Gauvain escapes the wrath of the crowd by agreeing to find the lance that pierced Christ's side.

25. After five years, Perceval repents to his uncle who is a hermit.

26. His sin was to cause his mother to suffer.

27. He discovers the meaning of the Passion of Christ and receives Communion on Easter Sunday.

The novel continues with the adventures of Gauvain before ending abruptly, as outlined above. It is important to recognise that this list covers only the section of the novel which appears in Rohmer's work, and that other cardinal points would need to be established in relation to Gauvain's later adventures.

The first issue to note is that, as was the case with *Marquise*, Rohmer's film includes almost all of the points outlined. Again, however, we must acknowledge that there are exceptions: 11 and 14 and aspects of 16 and 24. Some of these omissions can be easily explained. The description of the food arriving in Blanchefleur's town in order to help the besieged inhabitants is not of vital importance to the development of the film, while the sword provided by the *Roi-*

Pêcheur does not reappear in this part of the tale and so its true significance would not become clear in any case. Cardinal point 16 in the book provides us with at least seven pieces of information: the background to the *Roi-Pêcheur*; the fact that he could have been cured if Perceval had asked some questions; Perceval's discovery of his own name; the link between his sin of silence and his mother's death; the fact that the *pucelle* is his first cousin; his agreement to chase her knight's killer; and the characteristics of Perceval's sword. Cardinal point 20 has the *Demoiselle hideuse* telling Perceval of the destruction of the *Roi-Pêcheur*'s people because of the *Gallois*'s lack of questioning, while she also gives a challenge to the knights. Rohmer combines these two points in a new point sixteen in which the *Demoiselle hideuse* addresses the hero as Perceval (although he does not react to this) and reveals the effect of his silence on seeing the Holy Grail. What is the role of these changes? One notable absence from the film is the moment of Perceval's discovery of his name, which might appear all the more surprising given Rohmer's claim to be concentrating on the evolution of his central character rather than on the role of the Celtic mythological elements of the story.[7] The link between a person's character and his/her name was very strong in Medieval times[8] but this, as Rohmer acknowledges, is ignored in the film, which instead allows identity to develop through the protagonist's actions and so a name is far from producing a predetermined type of person. However, the other changes are more easily explained in terms of plot consistency and avoidance of repetition: the hermit will later provide similar details (to those provided by the *pucelle*) of the fate which befell the *Roi-Pêcheur*, and will give Perceval the particulars of his mother's death, avoiding an unnecessary digression at this point.

The next change to be noted is in point 24, for here we are told 'le conte se tait de Messire Gauvain et revient à Perceval'(p.58). In fact this is not the case in Chrétien's text for, before abandoning Gauvain, an account is given of the task he is set.[9] Thus, Rohmer removes this link with a part of the tale which he has omitted in order to increase the unity of the remaining sections.

As with *Marquise*, the film follows the original plot very closely. However, since *Perveval* creates a representation of a *retelling* of a tale through its introduction of a Chorus, there are inevitable changes at the level of reception by the spectator. We are at one further remove than the reader of Chrétien's text and, as we watch the Chorus's account, we quite literally see the story being told and thus are even more aware of its fictional status. The effect is similar to that created by the first person narrators in the *Contes Moraux*, as when Jean-Louis admits that he will not tell everything in his account, a strategy which invites us to analyse what is depicted, as well as to be aware of the possibility of alternative versions of the same narrative.[10] This effort on the part of the spectator is part of Rohmer's project to actively involve his viewers in the creation of meaning in his films and further evidence of his distance from classical cinema. We shall now consider in some detail the various devices which Rohmer employs in order to question both his narrative and our responses to it.

Narrational Mode: Film

Clearly, the addition of the Chorus is the first significant difference between the film and the original text, and it serves to draw our attention to the telling of the tale, in order to create a layer of self-consciousness not present in Chrétien's work. The fact

that they sing their commentary, and that they accompany it by creating artificial sound effects of birds and horses in the opening scene, further contributes to Rohmer's distancing technique; in other words, the self-consciousness is a significant, if rarely recognised, part of his representation of nature. Such techniques further weaken Rohmer's widespread reputation for straightforward realism.

Indeed, Rohmer's non-mimetic representation of the natural world is further reinforced by the deliberately artificial décor (very different from Robert Bresson's natural exteriors for a similar subject in *Lancelot du lac*, 1974), and the basic theatricality of the set, which insistently draws attention to its limited space and to its artificial boundaries beyond which the characters never venture. Here Rohmer appears to be providing the alert spectator with an insight into the role of this set in the drama: again we are being presented with a retelling of a story and other 'productions' are equally possible. This point is all the more significant since such a theatrical approach is unusual for Rohmer. In his other films his camera depicts multidirectional space, so that there is no area designated as 'behind the camera'. This is the case, for instance, in *Printemps* where we see Natacha's apartment from a variety of angles. However, it is precisely the restrictions within the space which force us to recognise the role of the camera and the technicians in every shot in *Perceval*, again highlighting the artificial nature of the representation. The set is elliptical in shape, movement is limited and inevitably involves repetition, as the eponymous hero quite literally traverses the same terrain time and time again. There is only *one* castle (with varying drapes or flags), and variety is provided by changing the position of the camera so that Arthur's castle is shot from the right while that of the *Prudhomme* is seen from the left, a difference that is also reflected in the education that Perceval undergoes with the wise man which contrasts with the hero's

emotional responses to events in Arthur's castle. In this, Rohmer is again referring back to the conventions of Medieval theatre as well as displaying an acute awareness of the covert encoding of filmic images. Similarly, there is only one room, one courtyard, one moor and one forest. This amounts to one (theatrical) space which is both the setting for, and the place of retelling of, the *conte*, and its very design draws attention to, rather than masks, its artificiality. The castle itself is small and schematic in outline, while the forest contains trees which are markedly artificial; indeed Rohmer suggests that he wanted them to resemble children's drawings, another element of the self-conscious filmic representation evident in this film.[11] Interestingly, these trees contrast sharply with those which form part of the set in this director's only play, *Le Trio en mi bémol*, where the naturalness extends to the leaves falling as the seasons change.[12] In Rohmer's hands, therefore, theatre is stretched to overcome its limits of realism, while film, which, as we have seen, has traditionally been accorded a more realistic role than theatre, is made to reveal its highly artificial nature.

This deliberate artificiality in *Perceval* is continued in Rohmer's representation of Blanchefleur's town. The original text does not offer a detailed description: the town is depicted simply as deserted and in ruins.[13] However, in Rohmer's sets we can surely identify the expressionist influence of Murnau (the subject of his doctoral thesis) in the steep angles of the houses and roofs which strikingly recall those of the town in *Faust*,[14] and it is even possible to apply Rohmer's words about the German director to himself: 'Toutes les formes [...] sont modelées ou remodelées à sa guise avec une science consommée de l'effet. Jamais oeuvre cinématographique n'a spéculé si peu sur le hasard.'[15] The presence of this Murnau-inspired town must surely be regarded as one of the most potent signs of

Rohmer's recognition that film involves the manipulation of images in order to create narrative drama and to play with the spectator's emotions. This awareness reflects both Rohmer's understanding of his chosen medium, and his distance from his widespread reputation.

Just as the mise-en-scène is used to create an artificial setting for the film's narrative, one which both disturbs the spectator and requires of him/her an active creative reading, so too the characters are deliberately created so as to distance, rather than involve, the viewer. Their gestures and movements are deliberately artificial, and all of the characters, apart from Perceval, move and hold their arms in a (melo)dramatic fashion to which no reference is made in the novel, but which has its origins in thirteenth-century miniatures.[16] This has a dual effect of drawing attention to the inherent theatricality of these events, through this deliberate stylisation, while simultaneously distancing them from a present-day audience. The self-conscious language of film is once again being highlighted as we are obliged to recognise the artificiality of the images on screen and must strive to establish their meaning. In this way, Rohmer is revealed as demanding much from his spectators rather than spoon feeding them, and this quality firmly positions him as a creator of complex works made up of layers of meaning.

The fundamental theatricality of Rohmer's approach (further emphasised by the fact, as previously mentioned, that the text was even performed as a play for school children before the actual shooting began[17]) is further underlined by his decision to present us with what appears to be a continuous series of events, rather than segments of action which would then be joined together. Clearly, the single 'set' is important in creating unity, but his use of editing is perhaps even more important in creating this particular effect given that Rohmer uses considerably fewer shots

than usual, an average of just 2.62 per minute compared with 3.56 in many of his other films.[18] To this end, there are very few shot/reverse shots, and frequently a scene will be filmed from a single point of view with panning shots used to reflect the characters' movements. When Blanchefleur comes into Perceval's bedroom, shot 139 depicts both of them, as she explains the reasons for her extreme sadness. At the end, a pan follows her as she leaves, and Perceval is no longer visible, so that here it is the camera, rather than the editing process, that is instrumental in dictating precisely what the spectator sees. One major exception to these long takes is the depiction of the Grail, which encompasses fourteen shots, cutting between Perceval the onlooker, watching the procession as it passes, and inserts of the lance and the chalice carried by the young people. The effect is to underline the extraordinary nature of what is happening: this is a magical moment and Perceval will eternally regret having wasted it by taking too seriously the advice 'Qui trop parle commet méfait'(p.25).[19] He fails to ask for an explanation which, had he done so, would have resulted in the restoration of the health of the *Roi-Pêcheur*, and, as a result, he is doomed to continue his roaming. Thus, editing is used to add to the theatricality of the film through the use of long takes, while simultaneously drawing the spectator's attention to key moments in the narrative.

This deliberate theatricality which we have noted, combined with the overriding artificiality of the set, reminds us that this film is a representation of Chrétien's text. However, our suspension of disbelief could perhaps allow us to forget this at times and this process is reinforced, within the deliberate non-realistic parameters of the film, by the inclusion of a number of entirely authentic details, including the costumes, armour and weapons. These provide a vivid and fascinating contrast, which serves to render the artificial elements even more apparent. The

knights' armour is historically authentic, and the costumes reflect careful research into the clothes worn at the time. Indeed, Rohmer uses such devices as these to date the setting of the film very precisely as being 'plus proche des années 1160 que 1180, date à laquelle le roman a été composé'.[20] There is a similar concern with authenticity in Guy Robert's score, based upon original twelfth-century melodies.[21] The net effect of this strange mix of authenticity and artificiality is, once again, to underline the overall theatricality of the film which has the effect of drawing attention to the status of myths and legends, as well as forcing spectators to re-evaluate constantly the status of the images they are watching.

Yet more differences between the book and Rohmer's film are apparent in their respective depiction of violence. Chrétien's book describes Perceval's first victorious combat using a violent and visual language: 'Le garçon, blessé, prend colère, le vise à l'oeil le mieux qu'il peut et lance droit son javelot. Le trait crève la prunelle et ressort par la nuque en répandant la cervelle et le sang.'[22] However, in the film, although we do see the lance sticking out of the knight's eye, we are nevertheless spared the sight of details such as the brains spilling out of his skull. A further example of this avoidance of physical details is when the novel refers to Perceval as having 'trop jeûné, c'est vrai! Il meurt de faim',[23] while the representation is not so detailed in the film. One possible explanation is that Rohmer is less concerned with the physical than with the cerebral. Indeed, he himself admitted as much when he discussed the fights which occur in the text: 'Quant aux combats, j'ai voulu qu'ils soient brefs. [...] Ce qui est intéressant c'est le rapport entre les personnages.'[24] Such an explanation clearly reveals the need for a creative and imaginative reading by the spectator, and the net effect may, as a consequence, be far more potent than when the events are fully *shown* onscreen.

One element of Chrétien's text which is visualised, however, and even greatly enhanced, is the treatment of the elements of magic in this story of the Arthurian knights. In the film, the *Roi-Pêcheur* has a castle which appears and disappears, losing any remaining link it may have to an actual castle. Similarly, the *Demoiselle Hideuse* actually materialises, and then vanishes, before Perceval's very eyes, which is much more dramatic than Chrétien's version suggests: 'Puis, le troisième jour, devant eux voient venir une pucelle allant sur une mule jaune [...].'[25] Such changes may well indicate Rohmer's awareness of, and fascination with, the illusory nature of film; a trait which might appear to relate his work more closely to the fiction of Méliès than to the documentaries of the Lumière brothers. It is clear that his filmic technique is highly self-conscious, drawing the spectators' attention to the film as process, and to the medium's ability to show the impossible.

Undoubtedly, one of the problems involved in adapting this unfinished novel is its long digression, which describes the adventures of Gauvain on his way to Escavalon in order to defend his honour. This has no clear link with the Perceval narrative, apart from following the meeting between these two protagonists. Within the terms of classical film narrative, Rohmer might have been expected to concentrate on the hero in order to aid clarity and avoid confusion for the spectator. Nevertheless, he includes much of the Gauvain story, a fact which clearly reflects his fascination with this aspect of the plot, and argues for the inclusion of digressions in films, even if they are currently absent from even the most audacious works.[26] While it would be possible to take issue with his final remark, it is certainly true that a digression which has so little to do with the main plot is rare in classical mainstream film, and such a statement recalls Rohmer's New Wave roots, where we do find a more flexible view of plot development. However, it may equally be argued that

Rohmer retains the character of Gauvain with the sole purpose of increasing the spectator's understanding of Perceval. Initially, Gauvain appears to provide an example for *Le Gallois* to follow, and he is the only knight to understand Perceval's need to be alone as he dreams of Blanchefleur. However, Gauvain's usefulness as a role model is limited since he has no private self, just a public persona and emerges as 'un personnage statique [qui ...] ne cherche pas à se dépasser lui-même'.[27] In this way the differences between the Arthurian traditional Gauvain and the more forward looking Perceval (who focuses on the Christian Grail) become apparent. However, while it may be argued that it is only when Gauvain *leaves* the Court that he 'loses his way', surely what happens is that the 'real' Gauvain emerges at this point and that what we have been presented with up until then is, in fact, an idealised image of him: his character and behaviour when he is not under pressure. It is significant that Rohmer does not actually depict this change in Gauvain, instead leaving this character immediately after his escape from Escavalon, so that this side of the Arthurian/Christian debate is not developed to any great extent: the focus remains on Perceval. In other words Rohmer's other characters exist only in as much as they relate to Perceval, so that even this apparent digression remains, in fact, a tightly controlled element of the narrative.

The ending of the film provides further evidence of Rohmer's adaptation of Chrétien's text, though again not necessarily in the most obvious way. Perceval's discovery of Christ's suffering on the cross is given much greater prominence in the film, so that instead of reflecting its original status as a one line reference, in Rohmer's version it becomes a full re-enactment of a Passion play entirely in Latin (the language of the Catholic Church until the late twentieth century). The actor playing Perceval (Fabrice Luchini) takes the part of Christ, further underlining the

significance of these events in his future life: instead of Perceval watching a re-enactment of Christ on Calvary he becomes so intimately involved that he in some way *becomes* Christ. The film does not end with this moment of revelation, but concludes instead with Perceval continuing with his wandering journey, while a voice from the chorus sings: 'Le chevalier sans nul arrêt / Va chevauchant par la forêt'(p.64). As we have seen, this seems closer to the Greek version of the legend than to the Christian one and it is thus clearly significant that the final shot has one major difference from previous representations of Perceval making his way through the forest: this time the camera does not pan in order to follow him. Instead, after an initial camera movement, we are presented with an empty space which is an echo of the intrinsic theatricality of the film: Perceval's adventures will continue but, just as when a character leaves the stage, Rohmer does not permit us to follow them. Rohmer's changes enable his Perceval to exist as an individual character rather than merely as a cipher for particular beliefs, so that the representation of the story becomes increasingly complicated and multilayered, requiring of the spectator increasingly creative and multiple readings.

Thus, in conclusion, while Rohmer has kept the major part of Chrétien's work intact, the highly theatrical representation which he creates destroys any illusion on the part of the spectator that he/she is being presented with a straightforward depiction of reality. The Celtic myth is neglected in favour of the Christian one, but even the latter is approached from the standpoint of the late twentieth century: we are being invited to analyse what we see in a version of the story which emerges as surprisingly self-consciously filmic. Rohmer's innovative directing is once again made clear as he subverts the text from within what appears

to be a faithful adaptation, and makes the spectator increasingly aware of the possibility of many different tellings of this tale.

NOTES

[1] Eric Rohmer, 'Notes sur la traduction et sur la mise en scène de *Perceval* ', *Avant-Scène cinéma* no.221 (1 February 1979), 6.

[2] Chrétien de Troyes, *Perveval ou le Roman du Graal*, Paris: Folio, 1974, p.47. My italics.

[3] See introduction by Armand Hoog to Chrétien de Troyes, pp.21-28.

[4] See notes in Chrétien de Troyes, p.361.

[5] ibid., pp.221-222.

[6] See Jean Frappier, *Chrétien de Troyes*, Paris: SEDES, 1979, p.47.

[7] Eric Rohmer, 'Notes sur la traduction et sur la mise en scène de *Perceval*', 7.

[8] See Jean Frappier, pp.120-121.

[9] See Chrétien de Troyes, pp.152-153.

[10] See Eric Rohmer, *Six Contes Moraux*, p.61.

[11] See interview with Rohmer, *Cinéma 79* (February 1979), 13.

[12] This play is set over a period of twelve months and all of the action takes place in a Parisian apartment. The major marker of the passage of time is the changing state of the naturalistic trees outside. See Eric Rohmer, *Le Trio en mi bémol*, Paris: Actes Sud-Papiers, 1988. This is the only play written and directed by Rohmer, although he directed Kleist's *La petite Catherine de Heilbronn* at the Maison de la Culture de Nanterre in 1979.

[13] Chrétien de Troyes, p.66.

[14] *Faust* was made in 1926 and Rohmer produced the shot by shot description of this film for *Avant-Scène cinéma* nos.190/191 (July/September 1977).

[15] Eric Rohmer, *L'Organisation de l'espace dans le Faust de Murnau*, Paris: Union Générale d'Editions, 1977, p.10.

[16] Interview with Rohmer, *Cinéma 79*, (February 1979), 13-14.

[17] See interview with Nestor Almendros, *Cinématographe* no.44 (February 1979), 42.

[18] Examples of the number of shots per minute include *Rayon*: 3.32, *Ami*: 3.43, *Hiver*: 3.99, *Arbre*: 3.99, Eté: 3.26 and *Automne*: 3.24.

[19] In the continuations of Chrétien's work, Perceval does find the Roi-Pêcheur again and this time asks the *right* questions, which results in happiness for all concerned. See Chrétien de Troyes, pp.333-336.

[20] Interview, *Cinéma 79*, (February 1979), 12.

[21] Mireille Amiel, 'Eric Rohmer *Perceval le Gallois*: Des arts, des armes et des lois...', *Cinéma 79* (February 1979), 10.

[22] Chrétien de Troyes, p.54.

[23] ibid., p.47.

[24] Interview, *Cinéma 79*, 17.

[25] Chétien de Troyes, p.120.

[26] Interview, *Cinématographe* no.44 (February 1979), 5.

[27] See Rupert T. Pickens, *The Welsh Knight, Paradoxicality in Chrétien's CONTE DEL GRAAL*, Kentucky: French Forum Publisher, 1977, p.42. The quote is taken from Jean Frappier, p.216.

L'Anglaise et le Duc

L'Anglaise et le Duc is the third of Rohmer's films to be based on a literary text by another author, in this case Grace Elliott's memoirs of her experiences during the French Revolution (*Journal de ma vie durant la Révolution française*). However, this time Rohmer is prepared to admit that a number of changes have occurred between the source text and his film, referring to the process by which he found different ways of respecting the historic facts and recreating the atmosphere described in the book as 'équivalence' – or the creation of an 'equivalent' telling.[1] In addition, he points out that he has filmed only the first part of Grace's account in order to concentrate on her relationship with the Duc d'Orléans (p.9). This is clearly reflected in the change of title between the book and the film, which did not occur in the previous adaptations that we have studied. This is no longer an account of Grace's life during the Revolution, but rather the story of her relationship with the Duc d'Orléans during that time. Here there is a mixed message: Rohmer is remaining faithful to his source text but is more willing than before to acknowledge the changes inherent in the process of adaptation.

The original preface to Grace's memoirs tells the reader how she came to write them at the request of King George III in 1801, and provides some background on her life before the Revolution. Such comments serve as a marker of authenticity

for a text which was only published in 1859 at the behest of her granddaughter, thirty-six years after Grace's death. However, we may still question the veracity of Mrs Elliott's account, and the inaccuracies in this preface only add to our suspicions: it gives her date of birth as 1765, whereas it was more likely to have been 1755 (p.16). Even Rohmer admits that this book contains a number of flagrant errors of dating. The Princesse de Lamballe, for example, was murdered on 3 September (not 2 September, as Grace suggests) and the result of the King's trial was not known on the same day as the Duc cast his own vote (p.9). This lack of care with historical detail may seem odd in a source text being used by such a precise director as Rohmer, and it is worth looking at it in greater detail.

Grace's account begins on 12 July 1789 and finishes abruptly while she is still in prison in 1794. A publisher's note tells how she was finally released, after the fall of Robespierre (27 July 1794). Rohmer's film, in contrast, begins on 13 July 1790 and the opening titles reveal that it is indeed based on Grace's account. This leads to sense of a retelling of an earlier tale, which is reinforced by the omniscient masculine voice-over that provides the viewer with information about the historical context and the background of the protagonists. The diegesis then begins, and its frequent use of apparently direct quotations from the source text, in the form of intertitles, adds to an impression of the film's fidelity to the original.

Transfer of Narrative Functions

In the analysis of Rohmer's previous literary adaptations we used Barthes's cardinal functions to ascertain the key narrative actions in the text and we shall now do the same with *Journal* to produce the following key narrative moments:-

1. July 12 1789: Grace returns with the Duc to find Paris in turmoil.

2. Summer 1789: Grace goes to stay at Ivry.

3. October: she returns to Paris.

4. The Duc goes on a mission to England.

5. Spring 1790: Grace goes to Brussels.

6. Grace returns to Paris.

7. July 13 1790: the Duc returns to France.

8. Grace rents a house in Issy.

9. She subsequently moves to Meudon, due to the Jacobin nature of the inhabitants of Issy.

10. Grace goes to Brussels on a mission for the Queen.

11. August 10 1792: the Tuilleries are attacked and Grace narrowly escapes to Meudon.

12. September 2 1792: Grace returns to Paris to help Champcenetz.

13. September 3 1792: refused exit from Paris with Champcenetz.

14. She hides Champcenetz in her bed when her home is searched.

15. Grace tells the Duc that she is hiding Champcenetz.

16. The Duc eventually helps Champcenetz to escape to England.

17. The Duc promises not to go to the *Convention* for the vote on the King's future.

18. The Duc votes for the King's execution.

19. Grace looks on from Meudon as the King is executed.

20. She meets the Duc: he cannot help her escape.

21. Grace shelters Madame de Périgord.

22. Grace receives a last visit from the Duc.

23. Grace is arrested for possessing a letter addressed to Charles Fox.

24. Seals are not put on her door and so Madame de Périgord can escape.

25. Grace sees the Duc for the last time.

26. She is questioned and released by the *Comité de surveillance*.

27. The Duc is arrested.

28. Madame de Périgord flees to England.

29. May 1793: Grace is re-arrested.

30. She is released.

31. She is re-arrested and sent to Recollets prison.

32. Grace meets her likely executioner.

33. The Duc is executed.

34. Grace is moved to the Carmes prison. (The manuscript ends).

Thus the book begins with a description of the events from 1789 to 1790 and continues with Grace's account of her own subsequent incarcerations before coming to an inconclusive end, as outlined above.

Rohmer uses the following cardinal points in his film: 7, 12-20, 22-23 and 25-27. In addition, references are made to points 4 and 10 in the course of conversations between Grace and the Duc. The effect is to concentrate on the events which involve these two characters, a strategy which has already been made clear by Rohmer's choice of title for the film. Thus we never see Grace's trips to Brussels and points 21 and 24 are omitted since they have no bearing on the heroine's relationship with the Duc. In addition, the film all but ends with Philippe's execution and there are only fleeting references to points occurring after 27, a fact emphasised by the conflation of this cardinal point with number 33: there is almost no information on Grace's life from the news of the Duc's arrest until his execution.

Narrational Mode: Film

However, the most immediately apparent change between the film and the original text is the effect of the use of paintings to provide complete exterior sets. The descriptions in the book are of real places, while the places shown by Rohmer never existed in the form under which we see them. Instead of constructing sets or filming in real places, he commissioned Jean-Baptiste Marot to produce 36 paintings for the locations of the film, based on Rohmer's own outline drawings, and then used green screen computer technology to allow the actors to walk around in these 'non-existent' settings.[2] Rohmer argues that this provides a more authentic depiction of the past since our only images from that time are indeed paintings.[3] Thus, instead of the initial painting coming to life (as at the start of many period films) the backgrounds remain painted while the characters 'come to life'.

In a similar, if less immediately obvious fashion, the interiors were all filmed in the same 100 square metre studio, with much of the backgrounds consisting of paintings produced for the film by Antoine Fontaine.[4] However, the effect appears less artificial than that achieved in *Perceval* so that it is easier for the spectator to suspend disbelief and be convinced that a variety of different interiors are shown. Here Rohmer is quite prepared to use modern technology in order to create 'false' interiors and yet the spectator is aware that this is a 'trompe l'oeil': after all, the city visible outside of the windows is clearly a painting.

In this film, Rohmer's depiction of the past produces a much more complex image than would ever have been imaginable from this director if we kept to our initial image of him. However, this use of the blatantly artificial in order to create a

fictional world (even if it is based on many historical events) is evidence of just how complex Rohmer's relationship with his filmic world actually is.

In addition to leaving out elements of his source material, the concentration on the central eponymous characters leads Rohmer to invent a number of details which are not in Grace's account. The most obvious of these is the mise-en-scène involving a painting of the Duc, which Grace orders to be removed from the wall after he has voted for the death of the King. When Philippe pays his final visit to Grace, his hand touches the space where the painting has been: the gesture makes his disappointment clear and the exchanges (written by Rohmer and not featuring in *Journal*) accentuate the sense of isolation felt by the Duc: he has no one to live for. Grace reassures him ('Sachez que je vous aime') and kisses him on the cheek as he leaves. This painting appears a third time in the film when Grace asks for it to be put back and the text telling of the Duc's execution is then superimposed under it, reminding the spectator once again of the close relationship between these two former lovers.

However, this is clearly not the first use of titles in *L'Anglaise* and their overall effect requires further analysis. From the opening credits we are told that the film is based on (apparently) authentic memoirs and the initial didactic voice-over adds to this sense of the neutral representation of actual events, taking the form of a historical documentary. The accompanying series of still scenes, reminiscent of the shots at the start of *Automne*, only serves to reinforce this. The subsequent titles are presented as quotations from Grace's account, a move which serves to further emphasise the veracity of Rohmer's transposition. However, two problems arise from this view. First, these titles are, in fact, rarely direct quotations from Grace but rather, as in the case of Champcenetz's escape, have been adapted by Rohmer from

the original narrative. Thus 'je gardai Champcenetz chez moi jusqu'à l'ouverture des barrières [et...] je l'emmenai à Meudon'(p.86) becomes 'Dès que les barrières furent rouvertes, j'emmenai Champcenetz à Meudon' in the film. Indeed, the final titles make their omniscient status clear as they provide a point of view outside of *Journal*: 'A cette date [...] elle attendait son tour qui ne vint pas.' This phrase, along with the final one ('la chute de Robespierre lui rendit enfin la liberté') provide an external narrator akin to the professorial voice at the start. Secondly, Grace (as we have seen Rohmer acknowledging) is not a reliable witness, and yet the director makes no attempt to correct her errors as part of his adaptation process, rather treating her writing as a work of fiction. However, if this is not understood by the spectator, the effect can be a misunderstanding of the film as a whole. Such careless readings have led to some critics seeing the film as a vindication of the monarchy, because of its simplistic view of the Revolutionaries: 'les aristocrates y sont dépeints comme des saints, et les sans-culottes comme des démons'.[5] In a work of fiction such representations would not be of great importance, but the effect in this case may have been that *L'Anglaise* was turned down at the Cannes Film Festival because of a political reading of the film.[6]

The ending of the film provides another example of Rohmer's efforts to adapt Grace's text and to provide it with a sharper focus. Subtitles tell us that many nobles were being executed, and they are shown walking towards the camera, which simultaneously zooms in on them, as they stare straight ahead at the spectator. We are being interrogated by these looks, as a basic rule of fiction film (that the actors should not look directly at the camera) is broken. Again, Rohmer employs a self-conscious device in order to draw us further into his fiction, and leading us to

question the appropriateness of the events which lead to the death of these Monarchists.

While Rohmer clearly remains faithful to many aspects of Grace's account, this is another example of a self-conscious retelling of a story, albeit one based on actual events. The self-conscious devices such as the titles, the voice-over and the ending described above all emphasise the film's status as representation, based on this pre-existing text. Indeed, the historical nature of these events serves to remind us that we are being presented with one account of what took place: many others are possible and both Rohmer's playfulness and creation of layers of meaning are once again clearly revealed in his admission of this fact.

We have already noted that while *Marquise*, *Perceval*, and *L'Anglaise* are based on texts by other authors, the vast majority of Rohmer's films are based on his own scripts. We shall now examine the questions of adaptation and intertextuality in a range of his other films in order to ascertain whether the characteristics we have found so far are widespread, even dominant, in his work. This will enable us to better understand the nature and intrinsic self-referentiality of his films.

NOTES

[1] See Rohmer's preface to the new edition of the book to coincide with the film's release: Grace Elliott, *Journal de ma vie durant la Révolution française*, Paris: Les Editions de Paris, Max Chaleil, 2001, p.7. Further references are given in the text.

[2] See Jean-Baptiste Marot, 'L'Anglaise, le Duc et les tableaux', in *Cahiers du cinéma* no.560 (September 2001), 46. Some of Rohmer's outline drawings were published in *Positif* no.500 (October 2002), 45.

[3] See interview with Rohmer, *Cahiers du cinéma* no.559 (July-August 2001), 56.

[4] See Patrick Caradec, 'Rohmer marie numérique et décors peints', *Le Film français*, 2 September 2001, http://www.lefilmfrancais.com/070901/actu_02.htm. Accessed 9 September 2001.

[5] See the subtitle to Angelo Rinaldi, 'La Révolution selon l'UDF', *Le Nouvel Observateur* no.1922 (6 September 2001), http://www.nouvelsobs.com/arts/art2.html. Accessed 9 September 2001.

[6] See Antoine de Baecque in 'Trois absents de taille', *Libération*, 9 May 2001, http://www.liberation.fr/cinema/cannes2001/asuivre/20010509absent.html. Accessed 16 May 2001.

Le Genou de Claire

Genou, one of the *Contes Moraux*, provides an especially fruitful example for analysis of a film based, as it is, on a short story by Rohmer. However, there are two previous texts by the director which also have roles to play in the development of this project. The first is his novel *Elizabeth*, published under the pseudonym Gilbert Cordier in 1946. One of its main characters is called Claire and she is blond and has a knee which attracts the attention of a male onlooker: 'Le genou de Claire faisait au delà de la ligne nette de la robe un petit triangle foncé et brillant.'[1] However, the plot itself has little specific connection with *Genou* and a more obvious source is 'La Roseraie', a tale which, as we have seen, Rohmer wrote in collaboration with Paul Gégauff and published in *Cahiers du Cinéma* in 1951.[2] In previous sections we applied Barthes's cardinal functions to *Marquise*, *Perceval*, and *L'Anglaise* in order to recognise those narrative actions which could not be taken away without affecting the development of the plot and used this to compare the written sources with Rohmer's films. We shall now apply the same procedure to 'La Roseraie'. The major events of the story may be summarised as follows to provide cardinal functions:-

1. N. (the narrator) sits hidden in his garden.

2. A tennis ball comes into the garden.

3. He puts it into his pocket.

4. He pretends to help Claire (who has been playing tennis) to find it.

5. Next day he throws the ball at her friend Jacques.

6. Claire comes to complain (assuming that someone else has been using the garden) and invites N. to play tennis.

7. N. gives Claire a piano lesson during which he caresses her arm and neck.

8. After a party, N. forces Charlotte (Claire's sister) to let him kiss the back of her neck.

9. N. photographs Jacques with another girl.

10. Claire is pregnant by Jacques and the only solution seems to be an abortion paid for by N.

11. Claire comes to ask N. for money.

12. He intimidates her and she leaves while he is on the telephone.

13. Claire subsequently commits suicide.

14. A year later, N. tells Mme de B. that finally tonight (married as he now is) he will exorcise this memory in talking to her.

The subsequent film (and short story) retains elements of the first five of these points, but not as part of the main narrative. Instead, they form the basis for the beginning of the story which the novelist Aurora outlines to Jérôme and which she now wishes to complete, using him as her guinea pig. Thus it becomes part of a secondary narrative in the film, no longer under the control of the narrator. (While Jérôme provides no voice over, he is clearly a narratorial figure to be compared to those of *Boulangère* or *Suzanne*.) The effective existence of two narrators in the same film is another device which results in the spectator having to judge between differing accounts of similar events: once again we have a challenging view of the audience from this reputedly traditional director. Apart from Jérôme watching Claire's boyfriend with another girl (point 9), the other cardinal points are omitted

but a number of details do carry over into the film, which specifies that the narrator is also preparing to get married and becomes fascinated by two girls who live nearby. He confides in a female friend what he is doing and keeps her informed of developments. He then decides to try to separate one of the girls from her boyfriend, after seeing him with another girl. This he appears to do successfully, although there is a twist at the end: in the story Claire commits suicide while in the film she is reconciled with her boyfriend (now called Gilles).

However, even on the level of basic plot, there is much which is set aside or altered. 'La Roseraie' has the narrator marrying a Lucile (not Lucinde) since 'c'est le mariage que je veux [...] parce ce qu'il reste tout ce que j'ignore de l'amour'.[3] By the time of the film, marriage is not a new experience to be tasted but rather the natural result of Jérôme's inability to leave Lucinde, despite their successive arguments. One of the girls changes name from Charlotte to Laura, perhaps because the original name was felt to have served sufficiently in the series of short films involving Charlotte and Véronique, which Rohmer made in tandem with Godard through the 1950s.[4] This alteration thus serves to distance Rohmer from the time in which this story originated and reflects his desire to be seen as more straightforward than his New Wave origins might indicate. The essential ambiguity of this position is becoming increasingly apparent in the course of our analysis.

However, perhaps the most significant change concerns the conspicuous absence from the film of the melodramatic components of the original, in particular Claire's pregnancy and her subsequent suicide. These changes are in sharp contrast to the director's willingness to make an apparently faithful adaptation of Edgar Allan Poe's short story *Bérénice* in 1954.[5] In it the hero, Egaeus, played by Rohmer himself, extracts the teeth from his dead cousin only to find that she is in fact still

alive. This obsession with her teeth ('I felt that their possession could alone ever restore me to peace, in giving me back my reason'[6]) is reminiscent of Jérôme's interest in Claire's knee but in the later film the emphasis has moved to a reflection on the (re)telling of the narrative, rather than the depiction of dramatic events, a task facilitated by the much enhanced role of (the renamed) Aurora. She is a novelist, and is acutely aware of the development of events around her. What is more important, though, is her attempt to influence what happens. She claims that 'Les héros d'une histoire ont toujours les yeux bandés'[7] at which point the camera zooms in to a close-up of the mural inside Jérôme's villa, a depiction of Don Quixote and Sancho Panza on a wooden horse as they believe they are flying through the air. In fact their eyes are covered and the adventure is entirely invented by the onlookers with bellows providing the wind and torches the heat that Don Quixote expects to feel as he approaches the sun.[8] Rohmer uses Aurora to interpret this mural, and make us aware of the similarities between Jérôme and Don Quixote: both are not seeing clearly and have an erroneous belief in the nature of what has happened to them (separating young lovers or flying) which is firmly contradicted by images of the events (the lovers reunited or the mural showing the artificial devices used to give the impression of flight). In each case, the protagonists themselves are unable to see these images which the reader/spectator is privy to: Jérôme has already left Talloires when Aurora (and the spectator) witness the reconciliation between Claire and Gilles, while Don Quixote has his eyes covered.

However, even before then, Jérôme has at best a partial view of what he sees: he may have binoculars to spy on Gilles and the 'other woman' but perhaps Gilles is just comforting her after all (this is the excuse he will later give to Claire and which results in their reconciliation). There is a sense of ambiguity here which is absent in

'La Roseraie', where N.'s photograph of Jacques kissing another girl has only one meaning (he is betraying Claire). The complexity of meaning signified by the photographic image appears to have increased in the twenty years between draft story and final film. However, a photograph in itself forms only one part of the creation of ambiguity. Indeed, as Barthes has remarked, its effect has rather been to allow us to believe in the past in the same way that we believe in the present since the photographic image is complete and nothing can be added to it.[9] In contrast, and still according to Barthes, the cinema is supported by the presumption that the experience shown in the image will continue in the same style, as is the case in real life.[10] The ambiguity of the 'photograph' of the boyfriend comes from its presence *within* the filmic medium and we are once again confirmed in our belief in the multilayered meanings present in Rohmer's work. We are far from Bazin's claim that cinema is the apotheosis of photographic objectivity and instead made acutely aware of the distinction between photograph and film through Rohmer's self-conscious use of the image.[11]

In her desire to control, Aurora clearly tries to set up a relationship between Laura and Jérôme, despite all the time denying that she does anything but observe her 'guinea pigs'. Initially she is successful as she leaves them alone (ostensibly in order to prepare her secret drink) and prevents Jérôme mentioning his forthcoming marriage in the presence of the adolescent. The couple even kiss in the course of a mountain walk but subsequently Laura spends more time with Vincent while Jérôme loses interest. It is at this point that Jérôme puts his own stamp on events and tells Aurora of his designs on touching Claire's knee. However, his confidante has the final word, since, after his departure, she observes the utter failure of his attempts to persuade Claire to leave Gilles.

The plot of both film and (final) short story versions of *Genou* may be thus represented as a battle between two narrators, with now one and now the other reaching an apparent supremacy in terms of their knowledge of the plot. Both film and short story reveal Aurora as being the one with the most information at the end where, as we have noted, she watches the reunited Claire and Gilles. However, while the camera ultimately adopts her point of view, it also reveals to the spectator a whole range of other happenings of which Aurora remains oblivious. Thus, if Jérôme and Aurora are, at least on one level, narrators, then Rohmer requires us to recognise that the camera provides a third level of narration, the defining level which ultimately mediates our experience, as spectators, of the tale as a whole.

The location of the film (near Annecy) and the narrator's fundamental and overwhelming need to exorcise his fetishistic desire for a girl through touching part of her body, in this instance her knee, is reminiscent of the 'idylle des cérises' incident which appears at the start of Book IV of Jean-Jacques Rousseau's *Confessions*.[12] Memory plays a key part in Rousseau's text and its juxtaposition of a narrative with a simultaneous commentary upon it is echoed in Jérôme's comments on the moment when he touched Claire's knee.[13] Indeed, this reference serves as another reminder of the spectator's need to take account of the gaps (deliberate or otherwise) in the tales told by Rohmer's narrator and the consequent tension between word and image. In addition, the fact that the short story tells us that Aurora is staying with Mme W. constitutes a direct reference to Rousseau's friend Mme de Warens. Other links abound. The date of Rousseau's adventure is probably 1 July.[14] On the same date in the film the cherries are said to be almost ripe and the time of actual shooting was arranged to coincide with this.[15] In Rousseau's account he is out walking when he meets two young women and helps their horses over a stream. As a

reward he is told that he is a hostage and must go with them to Toune. While there, they pick the ripe cherries: 'Je montai sur l'arbre et je leur en jettois des bouquets [...] je visai si juste, que je lui [à Mlle Galley] fis tomber un bouquet dans le sein; et de rire.'[16] Later on, Jean-Jacques kisses her hand, but this is the only tender gesture that they exchange. This reference is acknowledged, even foregrounded, in the cherry picking scene in *Genou*, as it is then that Jérôme first becomes fixated by Claire's knee as she stands on the ladder and he stares at it. He also goes on to perform one gesture, in this case fondling her knee, as she sobs at his claim that Gilles has been unfaithful to her. However, there are differences in the responses of Claire and Mlle Galley. The centre of Rousseau's fixation is clearly aware of the meaning of the gesture, and slowly retracts her hand after he has kissed it, looking at him with some pleasure (p.138). This contrasts with the uncertainty with which Claire interprets Jérôme's gesture; it is, as he claims, possible that she perceives it as a mere gesture of consolation. However, reference to a similar physical act occurs a couple of pages later in the *Confessions*, in a description of Juge Simon, whom Rousseau meets soon after the cherry picking incident: 'Une Madame d'Epagny disoit que pour lui la dernière faveur étoit de baiser une femme au genou'(p.142). Here there is no possible ambiguity in the meaning of the gesture, at least from the point of view of the male involved, and we are left with a clear sense of the importance of the act for Jérôme. When talking to Aurora, he describes this experience as being absolute pleasure and so we must question his assertion that he does not want it to happen again: as before, the inherent bad faith of the hero is made clear to us through this literary reference.

The attitude and role of the narrators are also quite different in the story and in Rohmer's version. There is an innocence in Rousseau's account, which may

possibly reflect the fact that he was only eighteen at the time of the incident, and found himself at the mercy of apparently more experienced women. In Rohmer's version, however, we are shown a mature and experienced hero, who is almost a quarter of a century older than Laura and Claire. As a result, Rohmer creates a far more disturbing atmosphere: these girls could very easily be Jérôme's daughters, and hints of incest and voyeurism inevitably colour the spectator's reading of the film, as they do when Henri wakes up the fifteen-year old girl by kissing her legs in *Pauline*. Indeed, there have been many French films where middle aged men are linked with much younger women (examples might include *Noce blanche* (Jean-Claude Brisseau, 1989) and *Charlotte forever* (where incest is also present, Serge Gainsbourg, 1986)) and the disruption they cause to male hegemony is further evidence of the uncertain future of Jérôme's marriage.[17] The situation in *Genou* reflects Igor's desire to go out with women the same age as his daughter in *Printemps*. There, however, the tension is dissipated through Jeanne's appearance making her seem older than her years.

Laura, especially the first time we see her, is represented as a schoolgirl, through her clothes and satchel, so that the scene in which Jérôme kisses her is all the more disturbing. This is not just a last dalliance with a woman his own age, as would be the case with Aurora, but a more troubling need to be dominant in a relationship. This becomes even more evident when we recall his precursor of 'La Roseraie' describing *his* attempt to kiss Charlotte behind the ear: 'Je dis en plaisantant que, si elle m'en prive, elle m'amènera à convoiter plus et lui conseille d'obéir. Je sens qu'elle a peur, je la serre de plus près et la sens frémir quand je l'embrasse à l'endroit voulu.'[18] This in turn echoes the scene in Rohmer's novel, *Elizabeth*, when Michel (calling himself Bernard at the time) makes a similar

demand of Jacqueline: 'Laissez-moi mettre simplement ma main à plat contre votre ventre et je vous lâche aussitôt.'[19] These are descriptions of a real threat of rape and their absence in *Genou*, like the disappearance of Claire's suicide, reflects the way in which Rohmer's work has moved away from the melodramatic. The result, however, is to create a different and ultimately more challenging sense of disquiet.

When Rousseau writes that in his *Confessions* 'je peindrai doublement l'état de mon âme, savoir au moment où l'événement m'est arrivé et au moment où je l'ai décrit',[20] he provides us with an excellent description of what happens in the film and this depiction and retelling of events is exemplified in the incident when Jérôme finally touches Claire's knee. Initially we are shown what happens, and then we hear Jérôme's account of the same events when he talks to Aurora. However, while Rousseau acknowledges the potential gap between the experiencing and the telling, Jérôme seems to be unaware of this. Thus, as we listen to his account of what happened when he touched Claire's knee, we have already seen this for ourselves, and therefore cannot agree with his claim that the act constitutes the most heroic moment of his existence. It is precisely here that we become aware of the extent of the camera's contribution to the development of the short story, providing as it does the equivalent of Rousseau's distance from the actual events. Rohmer uses the camera to create an ironic distance between the spectator and Jérôme's narrative, a distance which Rousseau recognises in his initial comments. Thus, film is here being used to provide a (critical) commentary on the spoken word. Indeed, Rohmer draws attention to this attribute of his narrators in his introduction to the published *Contes* where he insists that these tales only reach their plenitude on the screen in instances when the camera provides a point of view which does not coincide with that of the narrator.[21] We can thus see that it is precisely this tension between word and image

which contributes further to the self-conscious layerings within the film and leads to a dialectic which forces the spectator to constantly reassess both the film as narrative and its hero.

In addition to these dense literary references, this film also explicitly draws on painting in its visual representation: Jérôme's hat and beard, for example, clearly evoke Renoir's *Le Déjeuner des canotiers* (1881), whereas Gauguin is cited by Rohmer himself as a major reference. We notice, for instance, the copy of Gauguin's *Naféa foa ipoipo* (Quand te maries-tu?) in Laura's bedroom. While it is almost apologetically that Rohmer admits that the link between this painting and the plot of the film is fairly tenuous,[22] marriage is in fact a subject discussed by the occupant of the room and the question of when to marry is one that could well be addressed to the hero himself: he is planning to marry, and yet he is still flirting constantly with young girls. There is no mention of this painting in the short story which inspired the film (or in the published version of the *Contes Moraux*) and here too, as with its depiction of Jérôme touching Claire's knee, the camera provides an extra level of commentary on events through what it allows the spectator to see.

The influence of Gauguin goes beyond the level of subject matter so that it is also reflected in the way the countryside is filmed. Indeed, Rohmer claims there is a resemblance between the area around the Lac d'Annecy and the Tahitian landscapes painted by this artist.[23] Moreover, the flower motifs on Aurora's dress also pick up this theme of exotic nature. The key concept here is that the countryside resembles Gaugin's *representation* of Tahiti and not necessarily the reality of that island so that we are provided with an image of an image, rather than a reality. Thus, the French countryside and Jérôme's hat are, on one level, no more than they appear but they can also recall an exotic other for the attentive spectator. These layers of meaning

reflect the levels of narrative where we experience a number of retellings of the same tale.

Once again, behind an air of apparently unmodified reality, we find a variety of literary and pictorial influences which are used in a playful self-conscious fashion in the adaptation of a source text, in this case written by the director himself. Elements of the plot, especially the incestuous nature of Jérôme's relationship with Laura and Claire, create an uneasy atmosphere and this, along with the self-consciously filmic elements, add further to our need to reappraise Rohmer as he provides us with different versions of what at first appears to be the same tale, each with its own narrator, rather than the straightforward seamless representation of reality which his reputation would have deemed more likely. We shall now consider a second film in the *Contes* series in order to ascertain the extent to which Rohmer uses similar techniques elsewhere in his work and so enable us to better chart the self-conscious nature of his film making.

NOTES

[1] Gilbert Cordier, p.196.

[2] Eric Rohmer and Paul Gégauff, 'La Roseraie', pp.4-12.

[3] ibid., p.5.

[4] These were *Présentation* ou *Charlotte et son steak* (1951) and *Charlotte et Véronique* ou *Tous les garçons s'appellent Patrick* (1957).

[5] Edgar Allan Poe, 'Bérénice', in *Selected Tales*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980, pp.18-25.

[6] ibid., p.23.

[7] Eric Rohmer, *Six Contes moraux*, p.168.

[8] Miguel de Cervantes Saavedra, *Don Quixote*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999, pp.865-866.

[9] See Roland Barthes (1980), pp.136-40.

[10] ibid., p.140.

[11] André Bazin, 'Ontologie de l'image photographique' in *Qu'est-ce que le cinéma ?*, Paris: Les Editions du Cerf, 1994, p.14.

[12] See Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Oeuvres Complètes 1*, Paris: Gallimard/Pléiade, 1959, pp.136-138 and also Colin Crisp (1988), p.63.

[13] See Jean-François Perrin, *Les Confessions de Jean-Jacques Rousseau*, Paris: Gallimard/Folio, 1997, p.109.

[14] See Jean-Jacques Rousseau, note on p.1296.

[15] Interview with Nestor Almendros, *Cinématographe* no.44 (February 1979), 40.

[16] Jean-Jacques Rousseau, p.137. The spelling is as in the Pléiade edition. This incident is depicted in Camille Roqueplan's painting *Gathering Cherries*, part of the Wallace Collection in London. Further references in this paragraph are given in the text.

[17] This aspect of French cinema is discussed by Susan Hayward in *French National Cinema*, pp.292-294.

[18] Eric Rohmer and Paul Gégauff, p.10.

[19] Gilbert Cordier, p.173.

[20] See Jean-François Perrin, p.23. The quotation from Rousseau is from p.1154 (*Ebauches des Confessions*).

[21] Eric Rohmer, *Six Contes Moraux*, 'Avant-propos', p.12.

[22] Eric Rohmer, 'Les Citations picturales dans les Contes Moraux et les Comédies et Proverbes' in Carole Desbarats, p.115.

[23] ibid., p.115.

L'amour l'après-midi

As we have seen to be the case in the previous films by Rohmer which we have analysed, there are also a number of reference texts for *Amour*, the final film in the series of *Contes Moraux*. Indeed, as Rohmer himself admits, the title provides an immediate link to the American cinema supported by the New Wave, translating as it does directly into English as *Love in the Afternoon*, a film made in 1957 by Billy Wilder.[1] Ariane is the principal female character in that work, and the same name is given to the narrator's second child in Rohmer's film. However, there also appears to have been some attempt to distance the two works: when Rohmer's film was released in English speaking countries, for example, it was entitled *Chloe in the Afternoon*. This was partly to avoid confusion between the two films[2] but it is to be noted that the literal translation was in fact employed for subsequent video release in the 1990s, possibly in order to more clearly evoke the French title. There is some resemblance in plot between the two works, the American picture depicting the attempts of a young girl (Ariane/Audrey Hepburn) to seduce an older man (Frank/Gary Cooper), who is himself suspected of seducing another man's wife, and Ariane uses the excuse of warning him that his life is in danger in order to make her own declaration of love. However, the heroine of Rohmer's film is older and more calculating: she is not interested in taking Frédéric away from his wife but rather has picked him as the father of the child she wishes to conceive. This intertextuality does

not go much beyond the superficial, and ultimately must be acknowledged as a relatively minor point of reference for Rohmer's film; nevertheless it does reflect the level of ambiguity which we are increasingly identifying as a hallmark of this director's work.

A more fundamental source of inspiration for *Amour* is one of the books which Frédéric (the narrator) is seen reading: Louis-Antoine de Bougainville's *Voyage autour du monde*.[3] In this work, first published in 1771, Bougainville describes his experiences in the course of sailing around the world between 1766 and 1769: the book therefore offers Frédéric the sense of adventure which is clearly lacking from his own ordered existence. Passages in this book also provide descriptions of polygamy, especially among Tahitians: 'La polygamie paraît générale chez eux, du moins parmi les principaux.'[4] Here the Tahitian reference is of course reminiscent of Gauguin's representation of that country, as evoked in *Genou*. Frédéric tells Chloé that he would be polygamous in such a society but that, in the one in which he lives, he already hides too many things from his wife. She retorts that his wife may well be having an affair: she has seen her in the company of another man. Thus, the couple formed by Frédéric and Hélène is made to appear much closer to their 'adventurous counterparts' than might at first appear, with something of a polygamous nature about it. As was the case with the incestuous undertones we saw in *Genou*, Rohmer creates a far more disturbing atmosphere than might seem to be the case as urban correctness is displaced by far off adventure. This is especially evident at the end of the film, when the couple are reunited to finally make 'love in the afternoon'. Frédéric has come rushing home after deciding at the last possible moment to reject Chloé's advances: the sight of himself in her mirror, as he takes off his pullover, reminds him of playing with his children, when he

combined making faces at them with the same gesture. Hélène seems very ill at ease, bursts into tears and refers to an errand which is now 'sans importance'. There is no attempt at an explanation for what is happening and so there remains a serious communication problem between them: could the 'errand' have involved seeing another man? In this way, while they may not be physically making love to someone else, they might as well be. Thus, Crisp's description of Frédéric's 'escape back to his marriage and rigid morality, now "revealed" as true freedom',[5] while true at first sight, is not an accurate description of the ending. It is true that such a freedom is not precluded by Rohmer, but it is important to recognise that he *is* depicting a relationship from which it is clearly absent. Earlier heroes of these Moral Tales decided to opt for the 'safe' relationship at the end: the narrator of *Boulangère*, Adrien (*Collectionneuse*), Jean-Louis (*Maud*) and Jérôme (*Genou*) all return to their first choice of woman, and usually to a future marriage. It is thus ironic that the only hero of these Moral Tales to be in such a relationship when we first meet him should so reluctantly return to it. Indeed, Frédéric's situation may be seen to reflect Gauguin's disappointment at the overbearing European colonialists he finds in Tahiti in 1897, since both have an intense interest in the exotic: 'Une tristesse profonde s'empara de moi. Avoir fait tant de chemin pour retrouver ce que je fuyais!'[6] This sense of sadness might well be Frédéric's reaction after making love in the afternoon to his wife: he has 'escaped' from Chloé but only back to a marriage which seems to promise little in the line of any real communication or fulfilment, particularly since he feels obliged to lie about his reason for returning home. As a final image in the *Contes Moraux* series, we are again brought face to face with the bad faith of a narrator figure who seems entirely unaware of the ambiguous nature of the situation which we, the spectators, clearly recognise.

It must also be significant that Frédéric has chosen precisely *this* adventure story as his reading matter on his journey to work. Bougainville did indeed circumnavigate the globe, however his voyage was anything but a success in terms of discoveries: 'A vrai dire il n'a rien découvert: Wallis est passé par là [Tahiti] quelque six mois avant lui.'[7] In addition, having reached Tahiti, the Frenchman spent just eight days there. This unsuccessful journey contrasts sharply with that of the hero of another book which Frédéric also claims to be reading, Captain Cook. The latter spent much longer on Tahiti, bringing back detailed maps and drawings, both of which are conspicuously absent in the case of Bougainville. In general, the French expedition failed to elicit scientific information of any importance and also did little to improve the accuracy of existing maps.[8] This lack of success in a dangerous undertaking may be seen to echo closely Frédéric's dalliance with adultery, which in the end fails because he rejects his would-be mistress. It must be admitted that Cook was much more successful in his adventures: he proved the non-existence of a Southern Continent (other than Antarctica); he mapped eastern Australia and New Zealand; he re/discovered islands in the Pacific; explored the Arctic and Antarctic seas; and helped to improve navigation and the health of crews. However, in the film the account of Cook's voyages appears to be linked to Hélène, rather than to her husband, since she is a teacher of English (the language of the book which recounts them), and her husband tells friends that he is reading this book in English because of her. Thus, on one level, these two books provide a parallel with the married couple, one partner successful, the other not. However, the sense of adventure shared by both these eighteenth-century explorers is best represented by a character never seen with a book: Chloé. She travels to California and Italy and lives with, and apparently loves, a number of men in the course of the film so that she has no

problems with polygamy (as found by Cook and Bougainville on Tahiti). Here the intertextuality operates on two levels and provides the spectator with information which escapes the control of the narrator, so that Rohmer is employing it as a distancing device in a self-conscious fashion or to increase the multiple layering of his narrative.

Rohmer's apparent belief that his audience is both erudite and committed is reflected in the link between two elements of Bougainville's account and other films by Rohmer. Firstly, Bougainville did not share Jean-Jacques Rousseau's belief in the 'noble' savage and wrote of the natives of Patagonia as follows: 'Ceux-ci pissent accroupis, serait-ce la façon de pisser la plus naturelle? Si cela était, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, qui pisse très mal à sa manière, aurait dû adopter celle-là. Il nous renvoie tant à l'homme sauvage [...].'[9] There is a gap between this opinion and that of Rousseau as invoked in *Collectionneuse* and *Genou*. Secondly, Bougainville describes the Spanish efforts to drive out the Jesuits from South America. We remember that Jean-Louis (in *Maud*) spent time in Valparaiso (which is also the title of a song sung by Gaspard in *Eté*) and that Maud identified him as professing a 'jesuitisme'. Bougainville is not especially negative towards the Jesuits and writes that, instead of repeating rumours about what has been found in their papers, 'J'aime mieux rendre justice à la plus grande partie des membres de cette Société qui ne participaient point au secret de ses vues temporelles.'[10] In this case there are closer links between the fictional character and the French explorer. Here there is a series of references within the filmic text both to Bougainville and other writers and then, in turn, to other films by Rohmer. It is only by following this series of references that we begin to understand the intertextual web that this director is producing and the

self-conscious nature of his own text, which invites the spectator, albeit in a playful fashion, to follow a series of clues.

One essential part of this web is the original short story, and in his preface to the published version of the *Contes Moraux*, Rohmer admits that there are differences between the written dialogue and what the actors actually say. By way of explanation, he claims that he simply corrected their memory lapses in the published version.[11] An analysis of the relationship between *Amour* as short story and as film will serve to bear out the exactness or otherwise of this statement and allow us to assess the nature of Rohmer's adaptation of the written text for the final film.

Three key categories of change may be observed in Rohmer's reworking of the original short story. There are, indeed, the minor changes referred to by Rohmer but there are also more important ones, as well as a significant displacement of certain episodes. The minor changes involve such transpositions as 'que Chloé' to 'qu'elle' and are merely linguistic in nature. The more important changes generally revolve around the move from a first person written narrative to a film, albeit with a first person narrator. In these new circumstances, some narrative information may be more easily conveyed through the image than the commentary. We *see* Frédéric's copy of *Voyage autour du monde* and also the female teacher he notices in the train. Sometimes the voice over remains, but is supplemented by illustrative images. Both narrators tell us: 'Ce qui donne tant de prix, à mes yeux, au décor de la rue parisienne, c'est la présence constante et fugitive de ces femmes croisées à chaque instant [...]'(p.129), however it is only in the film that we are provided with images of these women, the short story providing no equivalent description of them. On other occasions, the voice over provides us with apparently redundant information which we could reasonably deduce from what we see. Thus, in the dream sequence,

for example, it provides adjectives for each of the women accosted by Frédéric: 'pressée, hésitante, occupée, accompagnée, solitaire', words which for the most part are not present in the short story and which tightly coincide with what we see. This 'informational overload' draws attention to the differences between these two modes of narration, one verbal, the other imagistic, and contributes again to the self-conscious nature of Rohmer's relationship with his spectators.

In addition there are changes that clearly originate from events which took place during the shooting of the film. The printed version of the tale describes Fabienne's telephone call from her worried fiancé, but it is only in the film that Frédéric becomes entangled in the telephone wire as she takes the call. This image, even more clearly than the need to recount their personal calls, sums up his relationship with his secretaries: more than a little attracted to them but retaining a certain distance. An example of a similar change comes in the description of Chloé's phone call after she has met the narrator and his wife in *Galeries Lafayette*. In the short story we simply read: 'A six heures, au bureau, Chloé me téléphone qu'elle va passer'(p.226). In the film, Frédéric returns to his office to be greeted by the two secretaries chiming together 'Chloé a téléphoné'. This enhanced role for Fabienne and Martine is also noticeable a few days later when Chloé is introduced to Gérard, Frédéric's associate. Once the would-be-lovers have left, Gérard and the secretaries exchange a knowing laugh. They clearly are more aware of the boss's private affairs than he might wish. Here the narration moves away from Frédéric's point of view to produce a more objective viewpoint and point out the blindness of Frédéric's belief that no one is aware of his relationship with Chloé, as the camera continues to roll after he has left the room and simultaneously gives the spectator the space in which to consider the ambiguity of Frédéric's relationship.

There are also occasions when there is a transposition of the moments when we acquire certain pieces of diegetic information. On the second page of the short story we find out that Hélène is a teacher at the *Lycée St. Cloud.* This only emerges in the film in the course of Chloé and Frédéric's first conversation in a cafe. In this way we increase our knowledge of the film hero, and his wife, at the same time as Chloé, and so we are made to identify (at least to an extent) with her. This again augments our critical distance from the narrator. This identification with Chloé also pertains when Frédéric explains to her that he deliberately hired pretty secretaries, information which appears at an earlier point in the short story. These may appear to be relatively minor changes but they augment the distancing effect between the hero and the spectator, an effect which we have seen to be initially created by the camera. Thus, the adaptation process contributes to the ever-increasingly self-conscious relationship between viewer and film.

However, it is possible to identify changes which are even more significant. For example, when Chloé is reacting to Frédéric's refusal to let her stay for a few days (after she has left Serge) she asks where the new baby will sleep. The reply in the story is: 'Avec sa soeur, ou, si nous prenons une gouvernante, dans une pièce qui sert pour l'instant de débarras et qu'il faut aménager'(p.228). In the film the equivalent reply is: 'Je pourrai te répondre "avec sa sœur" mais, en fait, il aura sa chambre qu'il partagera avec une gouvernante, mais pour l'instant c'est inhabitable.' Here we witness a change in the attitude of the narrator as he effectively rejects the first part of his original statement and acknowledges it for the lie that it is. This type of change serves to sustain our sense of the film narrator's warped relationship with the truth. Since the short story is written in the first person, we can readily become aware of events being filtered through Frédéric's eyes. For instance, when he dries

the naked Chloé, he writes that he did this 'consciencieusement'. This appears to give a sense of practical, even moral, necessity to an erotic action. In the film it is more difficult to create this sense of the narrator's interventions since the camera appears to observe events dispassionately. Thus, the differences outlined above between the short story and the film serve to increase the spectator's awareness of the existence of the narratorial figure through these contradictions between word and image. This is further evidence for Rohmer's use of his spectators in order to provide meaning in his films as they read 'between' word and image.

As we saw to be the case in *Genou*, there are a number of visual references to paintings in *Amour*. The director cites Ingres as being the main influence in the film, particularly in the depiction of 'une chaire blanche et non pas bronzée [qui] rappelle la chair des modèles du début du XIXe siècle, Ingres ou bien Girodet, Chassériau, etc'.[12] In fact, it is precisely in this film that we are confronted with the first nude in Rohmer's work. Since it is filmed in the way outlined above, the pale colours help to depict not just a luscious temptress but also a cold calculator. This is very much how Frédéric would like to see Chloé as it helps to justify his escape: he has avoided a trap which she has set in order to find a father for the baby she desires. Thus, it appears that we get to see Chloé through the narrator's eyes. However, the camera shows the simple surroundings of her bedroom, especially the cheap furniture and the single bed, and so creates an air of pathos, even desperation. Chloé appears to be betting on Frédéric in a fashion akin to Félicie's 'pari' on the return of Charles (in *Hiver*), so that she is far from being like a scheming aristocrat from another century (cf. Ingres) and her would-be-lover's leaving is seen in all its heartlessness. This impression is, as we have already noted, subsequently added to by the objective camera that shows a problematic reunion with Hélène in which her tears at

Frédéric's unexpected return may be evidence of her own infidelity: after all, Chloé did claim to have seen her with another man. Once again, the additional perspective provided by the camera is used by Rohmer in order to provide the spectator with a second reading of the narrative and the meaning of the film comes to exist in the dialectic between these two sources of information.

Thus, *Amour* is revealed as much more than another reworking of the same basic plot. In many ways it goes furthest of all the *Contes Moraux* in using a variety of textual starting points in order to create a coherent whole. Intertextuality exists both within the film (eg Bougainville) and between the references in this film and those in other works by Rohmer (eg Bougainville's opinions of Rousseau). In addition, the camera is being used in a self-conscious way in order to provide a new point of view through the process of adaptation, a process through which *Amour* is revealed to be a film of multi-layered meanings. The spectator is made part of the creative process as he/she produces meaning through the different, even conflicting, accounts provided by the voice-over narration and the camera itself. This section has added further to our understanding of Rohmer's place as a complex director and we shall now employ a comparison of the role of intertextuality in two of his films from different series (*Maud* and *Hiver*) in order to expand further on this and begin to explain how his films can be self-reflexive.

NOTES

[1] *Love in the Afternoon* (1957) directed and produced by Billy Wilder, with Gary Cooper and Audrey Hepburn. A review of this film by Serge Parmion, under the title 'Ariane de sa vieillesse' was published in *Cahiers du cinéma* no.73 (July 1957), 51-52. It criticises the abstract nature of the screenplay. Rohmer briefly discusses Wilder's film in relation to his own in an interview in *Positif* no.309 (November 1986), 15.

[2] See *Film Facts* vol.15 no.15 (1972), 334.

[3] Louis-Antoine de Bougainville, *Voyage de la frégate La Boudeuse et de la flûte L'Etoile autour du monde*, Paris: La Découverte, 1997.

[4] ibid., p.157.

[5] Crisp (1988), p.74.

[6] Paul Gauguin, *Noa-Noa* (1897), quoted by Louis Constant in his introduction to Bougainville, p.xxix.

[7] ibid., p.xxii.

[8] ibid., pp.xxii-xxiii.

[9] Quoted in ibid., p.iii from Etienne Taillemite, *Bougainville et ses compagnons autour du monde*, Paris: Imprimerie nationale, 1977.

[10] ibid., p.71.

[11] Eric Rohmer *Six Contes moraux*, p.10. Subsequent references are given in the text.

[12] Eric Rohmer, 'Les Citations picturales dans les *Contes Moraux* et les *Comédies et Proverbes*' in Carole Desbarats, p.116.

Ma Nuit chez Maud and *Conte d'hiver*

Although separated by twenty-three years, there are two films by Eric Rohmer, *Maud* (1969) and *Hiver* (1992), which may be linked by shared sources of inspiration and similarities of plot.[1] Both of them are tales of winter, (partly) set in provincial towns, and, moreover, there are shots in *Hiver* which are direct citations from *Maud*, such as those of decorated streets seen out of car windscreens. More significantly, in both films, invocations of Pascal's 'pari'[2] establish a context for the contrast between distant ideal and available reality in the realm of human relationships.

What sets these films apart from the rest of Rohmer's *oeuvre* is their further shared characteristic of reproducing lengthy conversations devoted to different possible readings of certain literary texts (by Pascal, Forster and Shakespeare).[3] In this way these films provide a contextualisation of versions of reality and telling of a story so that, once again, we are made aware of the self-conscious nature of Rohmer's work. In the case of *Maud*, within the first ten minutes, there are two insert shots from Pascal's *Pensées*, one of its title page and another of an extract from the 'Article III: De la Nécessité du pari'. In this section, which is also directly quoted from in the course of the evening at Maud's, Pascal employs a comparison with

gambling in order to convince sceptics that their self-interest lies with Christianity and its attendant belief in God:

> 'Dieu est, ou il n'est pas.' Mais de quel côté pencherons-nous? [...] il faut parier. Cela n'est pas volontaire: vous êtes embarqué. Lequel prendrez-vous donc? Puisqu'il faut choisir, voyons ce qui vous intéresse le moins. Vous avez deux choses à perdre: le vrai et le bien, et deux choses à engager: votre raison et votre volonté, votre connaissance et votre béatitude; et votre nature a deux choses à fuir: l'erreur et la misère. [...] Pesons le gain et la perte, en prenant croix que Dieu est. Estimons ces deux cas: si vous gagnez, vous gagnez tout; si vous perdez, vous ne perdez rien.[4]

Pascal argues that since a choice must be made on the subject of God's existence, then it is logical to take the most advantageous decision which (in his opinion) is to believe in God. However, this will not lead to an instant and total faith, and so the prospective believer must follow the example of those who went before and begin by pretending to believe (p.116). This effort will lead to a revelation, perhaps like that experienced by Pascal himself on 23 November 1654 which resulted in him forgetting everything but God (p.43).

In the course of their first drink together for fourteen years, Vidal, Jean-Louis's former school friend (in *Maud*), claims that this text is of crucial importance for Communists, since their beliefs also depend on a 'pari': that history does in fact have a meaning, rather than consisting of a random series of events. (Rohmer reveals that the idea for this position came from Lucien Goldmann, who links Marx to Pascal's 'pari'.[5]) Vidal argues that even if there is only a ten per cent chance of this being the case, the risk is worth taking since it provides their lives with a purpose. The words we hear are based on a recorded conversation with Antoine Vitez, who plays Vidal in the film, and whose words Rohmer took as 'ceux d'un marxiste, bon ou mauvais marxiste, cela importe peu'. Rohmer's interviewers from the by now left-wing *Cahiers du cinéma* were very critical of this argument, claiming that what Vitez

says in the film means that he is *not* a Marxist. However, Rohmer only concedes that

he may not be a *good* Marxist, in the same way that Jean-Louis may not be a perfect

Catholic.[6] Indeed, it quickly becomes clear that Jean-Louis *and* Vidal are both

hesitant in their respective beliefs, and that both are ready to usurp Pascal's formula

if necessary, in order to bolster their own position. Ironically, it is the Catholic Jean-

Louis who is less convinced by Pascal's 'pari' since, as he explains: 'ce que je

n'aime pas dans le pari, c'est l'idée de donner en échange, d'acheter son billet

comme à la loterie'(p.19). He dislikes this notion of an exchange in order to obtain

what one wants, in this case salvation. This view of the *Pensées* as a lottery is

strengthened by the fact that we see Jean-Louis looking at a copy of *Cours Moderne*

de Calcul des Probabilités just before the insert shots from Pascal's work, while,

later, Jean-Louis talks to Vidal about calculating the probability of their meeting over

a period of three months. However, these hints at a probabilistic reading are in many

ways misleading since this bet is more akin to a guessing game and, anyway, the

notion of calculating the likelihood of success in this did not exist when Pascal was

writing his text. As Henri Gouhier explains: 'Le pari de Pascal ressemble plus à une

devinette qu'à un jeu ou une loterie [...]. On se méfiera donc de l'expression "calcul

des probabilities" dans la mesure où elle risque d'introduire [...] l'idée d'un gain à

venir [et aussi ...] ce calcul n'existe pas encore à l'époque où Pascal écrit son texte.'[7]

If we were to follow Jean-Louis's personal opinions too closely, our reading of

Pascal could easily become potentially misleading with an overemphasis on

mathematical calculations, so that we would lose any overall view of the narrator's

motives in his account. However, yet again, Rohmer's camera distances us from the

narrator's point of view, an action which is evident from the very start when we see

Jean-Louis as he looks out of the window. As Jefferson Kline points out, he is shown

from an angle which appears to reproduce his point of view, yet the camera is far enough behind him to allow the spectator to take up a separate position from which to better judge this narrator.[8] This distancing later allows us to discern a more probable reason for his dislike of Pascal: the latter's lack of flexibility on moral matters. As has already become clear in the other cases of adaptation by Rohmer which we have analysed, it is this camera which provides the spectator with the freedom to provide his or her own interpretation of the narrator's point of view.

This distancing of the spectator from Jean-Louis's point of view, which will automatically lead to a critique of his opinion of Pascal, is perhaps most clearly revealed during the scene at mass when we see Françoise for the first time. The church service is initially filmed with an appropriately detached and distant camera. Then, at the 'Our Father', there is a shot of Jean-Louis looking straight ahead and subsequently looking down as Françoise's voice can be heard on the soundtrack: thus we are given the first sign of his attention being diverted. A reverse shot allows us to see her, also looking ahead. However, the camera in both instances is positioned to the left of the protagonist in question and while these shots appear to be from their respective points of view, they must be recognised as actually from the viewpoint of an omniscient narrator. In other words, this is presented as an objective view of events, although Rohmer clearly wants us to be aware of the attraction between the two characters. This objective view also serves to underline Jean-Louis's divergence from Pascal, for the latter was very critical of those who 'eyed up' women while at mass, one of the practices which the seventeenth-century Jesuits excused. Pascal quotes Escobar, one of his detractors, to show how ridiculous he perceived their position to be: 'une meschante intention, comme de regarder des femmes avec un

désir impur, jointe à celle d'oüir la Messe comme il faut, n'empesche pas qu'on n'y satissfasse'.[9]

The following day, Jean-Louis is seen driving through the streets of Clermont-Ferrand, which are decorated for Christmas, whilst his voice over tells us of his determination to marry Françoise: 'Ce jour-là, le lundi 21 décembre, l'idée m'est venue, brusque, précise, définitive,... que Françoise serait ma femme'(p.12). However, as has been revealed through his interpretations of Pascal, Jean-Louis is not reliable in what he tells us directly, and what is evident in his version of events is the almost total exclusion of an intellectual process leading to a choice: the decision is presented as instantaneous and irrevocable. However, the scene during the mass leads us to an awareness that twenty-four hours have passed between idea and decision, and while Jean-Louis may claim that his life is being guided by luck, which he maintains always allows him to make simple and correct decisions ('Je ne veux pas dire que je choisis ce qui me fait plaisir, mais il se trouve que c'est pour mon bien, mon bien moral', p.36), we, the spectators, are aware that he actually spends much more time than he would care to admit on deciding what he thinks will be best for *himself*. Pascal may assert that a choice must be made since a bet must be laid but Jean-Louis endeavours to reduce the inevitable element of risk through a mixture of belief in God and a careful, intellectual and non-spiritual weighing up of the facts. His suspicion of Pascal emerges as centring on his own need for a certainty which is clearly at odds with belief, for even Pascal admits that he may be wrong. Here Rohmer is using the intertextuality provided by his film to expose the bad faith of his central character as well as to provide a commentary on the plot from within. These multiple levels of meaning are indicative of the efforts that he expects of his audience in order to achieve an understanding of his work and are clearly far

removed from a straightforward classical reading which traditional views of this director would lead us to expect.

Félicie, the heroine of *Hiver*, has an experience in Nevers cathedral which has a similar important effect on her life. She has lost contact with her beloved Charles, five years after conceiving her child Lise with him, and now is torn between two men, Loïc and Maxence, both of whom wish to settle down with her. Rohmer presents this moment of choice in an even more unequivocal way than that of Jean-Louis: Lise is fascinated with the Nativity crib and persuades her mother to bring her to see it in the cathedral. This desire to look at the figures in the stable brings to mind one of St. Ignatius's examples of a spiritual exercise which takes place 'devant les acteurs de la Nativité' where the meditator 'les regarde, les contemple et les sert dans leurs besoins [...]'.[10] There are two consecutive close-up shots of the child Jesus, but the camera abandons the subject of Lise's interest, and the sound of her footsteps on the ground fades from the soundtrack as the camera pans to follow her mother, who first stands and then sits on the other side of the cathedral. This shot is followed by a point of view general shot of the altar and the sequence ends with a final reverse shot of Félicie's face, which indicates that it is not from the building itself that her inspiration comes: she looks into the *distance* with an air of intense concentration. At first it appears that her revelation is akin to a vision, even a religious one given its setting, and Barthes, writing on St. Ignatius, reminds us that there was a move at the end of the Middle Ages from hearing to sight as the most important sense from the Catholic Church's point of view.[11]

In this film, however, a key factor of the revelation involves the retention of the Medieval element of inspiration (sound) and, while Rohmer does not employ a voice over, we do become aware of Félicie's emotions. This is achieved through the

soundtrack where a few notes from the opening music, used for the idyllic scenes between Félicie and Charles, are heard. This has a clear resonance, given the very sparing use of non-diegetic music in Rohmer's films: we are ready to give it a special significance, in this case that of a marker of memory. Félicie had taken a decision to move in with Maxence and to attempt to forget Charles, but her experience in the cathedral leads to a renewal of her memory of the past with him and so she resolves to hope for his return. As we have seen before, the meaning comes from the spectator's interpretation of a number of elements, both visual and aural, in order to understand what is happening. Rohmer's insistence on a creative relationship with his audience is particularly apparent here.

The audience's perception of Félicie's experience is also shaped by her subsequent description of what she felt, in the course of a conversation with Loïc, when she claims to have understood what she had to do in an instant of lucidity: 'j'ai vu ma pensée. Tous les raisonnements que je faisais pour savoir si je devais partir, ou pas partir, je les ai faits, en un éclair - et là j'ai vu ce que je devais faire, et j'ai vu que je ne me trompais pas'(p.55). She was able to read into her own soul and analyse her feelings clearly - an experience shared by another of Rohmer's heroines in his *Comédies et Proverbes* series. In *Rayon*, Delphine waits to witness the natural phenomenon of a green ray before deciding if she has found her ideal partner. We are shown *this* ray to give substance to Delphine's belief and, in a similar fashion, Félicie's recounting of a 'vision' results in what Barthes calls 'une garantie réaliste' which anchors the extraordinary in the ordinary so that it cannot be simply an hallucination.[12] Félicie's willingness to describe her experience contrasts with Jean-Louis's reluctance to describe his. Despite this information being provided in the

form of a voice over, Jean-Louis remains misleading about the timescale of his revelation, which may have in fact involved twenty-four hours of personal reflection.

Félicie goes on to agree with Jean-Louis's view of choice, namely that the final decision should be self beneficial, for while initially she felt compelled to make a decision and so had chosen to live with Maxence, from her moment of lucidity she tells Loïc: 'j'ai vu qu'il n'y avait pas à choisir, que je n'étais pas obligée de me décider pour quelque chose que je ne voulais pas vraiment'(p.55). This may appear to contradict Pascal, who tells us that we must choose, but she is in fact deciding to wait for Charles and continues with her own unwitting reference to 'De la Nécessité du pari' in using a similar argument to justify her belief in finding Charles: 'si je le retrouve, ça sera une chose tellement... une joie tellement grande, que je veux bien donner ma vie pour ça. D'ailleurs je ne la gâcherai pas. Vivre avec l'espoir, c'est une vie qui en vaut bien d'autres'(p.55). Loïc's reaction is to point out the reference to Pascal, which is all the more obvious to us given its use in the earlier film. This appears to contrast the thought processes of Félicie and Loïc: she thinks for herself in a somewhat naive way while Loïc needs the approbation of a great philosopher in order to vindicate a point of view. In fact, he too reveals a certain naivety akin to the 'penseurs politiques de notre temps [qui] cherchent toujours, chez Stendhal, un écho de leur propre réflexion. Ils refont un Stendhal révolutionnaire ou un Stendhal réactionnaire au gré de leurs passions.'[13] In both cases a text is being used to vindicate personally held views and this device is used by Rohmer, as we saw it previously employed in *Maud*, in order to create a distancing effect on the spectator.

As we have seen, both of these films take a Catholic man as the protagonist and, in the light of the references to Pascal, it is important to see how they each respond to Pascal's ideal of Catholicism. Jean-Louis attends mass on a regular basis

and being a Catholic is a prerequisite for his future wife, while Loïc also attends mass and is prepared to defend his position against Edwidge and Félicie's shared belief in reincarnation. However, both men fall short of Pascalian ideals: Jean-Louis admits that he does not want to become a saint and lies on two occasions to his wife over his *Nuit chez Maud*, while Loïc is prepared to forgo his attendance at mass to be with Félicie ('Je ne veux pas t'embêter avec ça', p.60) and has no qualms about living with a woman before marrying her.

Even more important is the fact that both of these men (the only overtly practising Catholics in Rohmer's work) produce their own readings of Pascal, which are open to question. We have already examined how Jean-Louis does this, and Loïc's interpretation is also questionable: 'Il [Pascal] dit qu'en pariant pour l'immortalité, le gain est si énorme que cela compenserait la faiblesse des chances et que, même si l'âme n'est pas immortelle, le croire permet de vivre mieux que si on n'y croit pas' (p.56). The 'pari' is in fact more about the existence of God and not the immortality of the soul and it is precisely Pascal's application of it which makes him original since the analogy of a 'pari' for explaining belief in life after death had already been frequently used by a number of seventeenth-century Apologists such as Sirmond and Caussin.[14] Perhaps unwittingly, Loïc has reduced Pascal to a pale imitator of an existing tradition and so Rohmer gently mocks this character, although only for those in his audience familiar with Pascal. Once again, it is necessary to recognise and respond to at least some of the intertextual references if we are to understand a character in a Rohmer film.

This apparent misreading of the meaning of Pascal's 'pari' by Löic is echoed in the comments relating to another text which is evoked at length in *Hiver*, E.M. Forster's *The Longest Journey*.[15] This text is important both for the way in which it

is discussed by Loïc, Edwige and Quentin, and also for the links which are forged between the film and the novel. The spectator is initially placed in the position of overhearing the conversation about the book in the company of Félicie, and so is encouraged to share her point of view. She has not read the book, and is unable to contribute anything to the debate; Rohmer might perhaps assume that most members of a French audience would be in a similar position, particularly given the fact that even E.M. Forster himself describes it as the least popular of his novels (p.lxvi). *The Longest Journey* recounts part of the life of a young man called Rickie, who graduates from Cambridge with many hopes, only to see them dashed one by one as each person he idolises comes to disappoint him.[16] Three points may be made about the discussion within Rohmer's film concerning the novel. Firstly, Edwige avoids reading any symbolism into Rickie's physical lameness, which certainly reflects weakness and may possibly, as Elizabeth Heine posits, stand for Forster's own homosexuality.[17] Secondly, Edwige argues that Rickie is not the most important character in the novel, when clearly he is, being present from start to finish as well as being involved in all of the elements of its plot. Here, the intellectuals are being ridiculed for pretending to know what they do not, especially given Edwige's pompous opening comment to Félicie: 'on est en pleine discussion'(p.30). Finally, Quentin refers to the opening of the novel where discussion centres on whether a cow exists when no one is present to perceive it. This incursion into Berkeleian idealism reflects Forster's respect for the relative objectivity of George Moore, who argued that 'the sun and stars would exist if no one was aware of them [...]'.[18] In the film Félicie shares this belief: Charles will be steadfast in his desire even if she wavers in her own. In fact, a similar assumption was made by Louise in *Nuits* with disastrous consequences; this hardly augurs well for the future of Félicie's

relationship, the spectator suspects, even if she is reunited with Charles. Here an awareness of this intertext within Rohmer's *oeuvre* adds further, and in a self-conscious fashion, to our understanding of *Hiver*.

As we would expect, there are a number of similarities between novel and film, particularly, for instance, the fact that both refer at length to the close links between humans and nature. Loïc quotes from Victor Hugo to show the latter's belief in reincarnation into the natural world: 'Et, sous ces épaisseurs de matière et de nuit, / Arbre, bête, pavé, poids que rien ne soulève, / Dans cette profondeur terrible, une âme rêve / Que fait-elle? Elle songe à Dieu...'(p.33).[19] In Forster's text, Rickie writes a short story about 'getting into touch with Nature'(p.71), which involves a man's fiancée who deserts him: 'Near the[ir] house is a little dell full of fir trees, and she runs into it. He comes there the next moment. But she's gone. [...] She's turned into a tree'(p.71). The title, *The Longest Journey*, comes from Shelley's *Epipsychidion*, the lines being quoted by Rickie: 'With one sad friend, perhaps a jealous foe, / The dreariest and the longest journey go'(p.127). In this metaphor 'our life is our longest journey, and the problem is our choice of companions [...].'[20] This directly echoes Félicie's problem in the film of choosing between Loïc and Maxence before she discovers that there is no choice to be made, or that it lies elsewhere rather than between the two of them. Once again, the intertext provides the spectator with information which allows him/her the possibility of a creative reading of the plot and so a deeper understanding of what is at stake.

This role of Forster's novel to inform our reading of Rohmer's work is also clear in the comparisons which may be drawn between the opening idyll between Félicie and Charles in *Hiver* and Rickie's time in Cambridge, particularly as described in the early chapters of the novel. Rickie has not yet been corrupted by

Agnes, his wife to be, and retains an imagination. His tragedy is that each successive person whom he trusts - his mother, Agnes, and then Stephen (his half-brother) - turns out to be fallible, and not the idol that he seeks. It is only as Rickie is dying that he bitterly comes to understand the fallibility of human nature for himself, which has been allied to his own unrealistic expectations. His last words, after he is run over by a train while saving his half-brother, are to his aunt, Mrs Failing: 'You have been right'(p.282). This gives credence to her final assessment of him as 'one who has failed in all he undertook; one of the thousands whose dust returns to the dust, accomplishing nothing in the interval'(p.282). The spectator's knowledge of this reference serves to undermine our belief in Félicie's future happiness, for although she idolises Charles and relies on her experience of revelation in the cathedral to bet on him, any bet, even Pascal's, may always be lost. Furthermore, through the comparison with Rickie, the spectator is warned that Félicie may become equally bitter. She would have given up the possibility of relationships with Loïc and Maxence in favour of Charles, who will have found it very difficult to live up to her image of him built up over the five years of his absence.

A misreading of another text occurs later on in *Hiver*, in the course of a discussion of Shakespeare's *The Winter's Tale*, a play which Félicie and Loïc have just seen. This play, of course, recounts the story of King Leontes, who orders his wife Hermione to be killed, since he suspects her of adultery with Polixenes, a visiting monarch. Many years later a repentant Leontes is taken to see a remarkably life-like statue of his dead wife. In the extract used in the film, this statue 'comes to life', an issue which frustrates Loïc's attempt at analysis: 'On ne sait pas si la statue s'anime par magie ou si la reine n'a jamais été morte'(p.55). Félicie, on the other hand, has no problem with this dramatic event, since she believes that it is faith

which has brought the Queen back to life. Although during most of the scene used in the film the audience is unaware of the fact that Hermione has been in hiding, so that the ambiguities explored by Loïc are indeed present, the end of the scene makes it clear that she has been saved and hidden away for sixteen years; that, in fact, she had never died.[21] The statue whose heart beats is of course reminiscent of the lovers turned into statues at the end of *Les visiteurs du soir* (Marcel Carné, 1942). Hermione, then, only *appears* to come back to life, and this is (metaphorically) what happens to Charles. In *The Longest Journey* Rickie also wishes for someone close to him, in this case his mother, to come back to life: 'only one thing matters - that the Beloved should rise from the dead'(p.249). Thus, these two references combine to force us to reflect on Félicie's desire to find the missing Charles and, in a fashion akin to the use of Pascal in *Maud*, where the critique of Jean-Louis's opinion of Pascal distances the spectator from the narrator's point of view, serve to separate us from the central protagonist. It is only after much suffering that Leontes discovers his wife; and Rickie's life, as we have seen, ends in despair. We are therefore forced to consider that similar sufferings may lie ahead for Félicie. In this way, spectators are invited to reread the 'happy ending' of the film and play their part in achieving a deeper understanding of Rohmer's work.

The misreading of Shakespeare's play mentioned above is natural on Félicie's part, for she needs to believe in the possibility of being rewarded for waiting for Charles if her initial happiness with him in Brittany is not to appear totally banal. However, we would have expected the more intellectual Loïc to realise the truth. Is it his love for Félicie which allows him to see the possibility of a magical intervention? The truth is revealed in the structure of the final section of the film, which revolves around the joint expectations of both Félicie and the spectator that Charles's return is

imminent. The likelihood of such an event is signalled very clearly by one key factor in the extract from *The Winter's Tale*: the music. Almost identical notes are used at two previous points in the film: firstly, during the opening idyll in Brittany where they become associated with Félicie's happiness with Charles and later, as mentioned above, in the course of Félicie's revelation in Nevers cathedral, when they serve as a marker of her memory of earlier happiness. It is no surprise, therefore, that we immediately associate the use of this same music in Hermione's 'resurrection' scene from Shakespeare with a kind of magical return, especially given that the statue of Leontes's wife appears to come to life. The fact that, for the first time, this music is diegetic makes it appear even more likely that it is forecasting developments in the diegesis itself and we are therefore not surprised that it is precisely this possibility of the beloved (Charles) returning that the two protagonists come to believe in. Rohmer has to make them misread the scene in order that the spectator becomes aware of the certainty that Charles will reappear: 'on est sûr nous aussi qu'elle va le [Charles] rencontrer, et ça crée une espèce d'attente de et dans chaque plan [...].'[22] This lends a special intensity to the final section of the film.

Given the above examples of the use of this music, and its association with the memory of Charles, the spectator might assume that it would also be heard either when he does reappear, or at least at the end of the film. The fact that this does not happen clearly implies that Félicie's happiness has more to do with searching than with discovery: all Charles can offer her at the end is the role of 'patronne' in his restaurant, the very word which led to her ending her relationship with Maxence. Once again, we are forced to question how long the magic will last as filmic narrative devices cause the spectator to read more meanings than the straightforward

story would suggest. The creative demands made by Rohmer on his viewers are more than ever present here.

Thus, it is only by unravelling the influence of these different texts that Rohmer's intentions begin to emerge, though this too reveals a depiction of the world which is far from straightforward. We have seen here how *Maud* and *Hiver* employ a variety of texts to multiply the narrative readings and introduce both a textual ambiguity and the need for creative reading by the spectator. Rohmer goes beyond the apparent realism of the filmic image, attaching a multi-layered signification to fictional representations and thereby giving the lie to the opinion of critics such as Marc Cerisuelo, who maintain that his films remain within the norms of aesthetic classicism.[23] It is precisely the rich intertextualities of his films which, as in the other examples which we have examined so far, invite a questioning on the part of the viewer and add to our awareness that we are witnesses to a work of fiction.

NOTES

[1] This section is based in part on my 'Textual interplay: the case of Rohmer's *Ma Nuit chez Maud* and *Conte d'hiver*', *French Cultural Studies* no.21 (October 1996), 309-319.

[2] See Pascal, *Pensées*, Paris: Garnier-Flammarion, 1976, pp.114-115.

[3] *Printemps* does contain an 'intellectual' conversation but the subject is transcendental philosophy in general rather than a text by one author.

[4] See Pascal, p.114. Subsequent references are given in the text.

[5] See Lucien Goldmann, *Le Dieu caché: étude sur la version tragique dans les Pensées de Pascal et dans le théâtre de Racine*, Paris: Gallimard, 1955.

[6] For the quotation and the comments see interview with Rohmer, *Cahiers du Cinéma* no.219 (April 1970), 50.

[7] Henri Gouhier, *Blaise Pascal Commentaires*, Paris: Vrin, 1971, p.282.

[8] See T. Jefferson Kline, *Screening the Text: Intertextuality in New Wave French Cinema*, Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992, p.129.

[9] Pascal, *Les Lettres provinciales*, edited by by H.F. Stewart, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1951, p.105. See also Kline, p.136.

[10] Roland Barthes, *Sade, Fourier, Loyola*, Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1971, p.69. Barthes is quoting from Ignatius.

[11] ibid., p. 70.

[12] ibid., p.72.

[13] Réné Girard, *Mensonge romantique et vérité romanesque*, Paris: Bernard Grasset/Le Livre de Poche, 1961, p.156.

[14] See John Cruickshank, *Pascal Pensées*, London: Grant & Cutler, 1983, p.47.

[15] E.M. Forster, *The Longest Journey*, London: Penguin, 1989. Subsequent references to the novel are given in the text.

[16] Rickie's name is spelt 'Ricky' in both the English subtitles and in the *L'Avant-Scène cinéma* script.

[17] Elizabeth Heine, 'Editor's Introduction' to E.M. Forster, *The Longest Journey*, p.xviii.

[18] See ibid., p.xv. Heine quotes from *The Philosophy of Bertrand Russell*, edited by P.A. Schilpp, Evanston and Chicago: Northwestern University Press, 1944, pp.11-12. This debate also refers to the long philosophical tradition of Idealism. See, for example, St. Augustine, *Confessions*, London: Penguin Classics, 1961, pp.221-225.

[19] The extract in question comes from Hugo's *Les Contemplations, Livre sixième:* 'Au bord de l'infini' and forms part of a poem entitled 'Ce que dit la bouche d'ombre'. See Victor Hugo, *Les Contemplations*, Paris: Gallimard, 1973, pp.396-397. Rohmer had made a television programme in 1966 devoted to books five and six of Hugo's *Les Contemplations*.

[20] Forster, 'Editor's Introduction', p.xxxiii.

[21] The lack of ambiguity is made clear by J.H.P. Pafford in his introduction and notes for the Arden Shakespeare edition of *The Winter's Tale*, London: University Paperbacks and Routledge, 1991, pp.li, lxii and159.

[22] Alain Bergala interviewing Rohmer, *Eric Rohmer*, Dunkerque: Studio 43 M.J.C. de Dunkerque, 1992, pp.139-140.

[23] Marc Cerisuelo, p.34.

Le rayon vert

This film shares at least one characteristic with *Marquise* and *Perceval* in that

its title comes directly from a book, in this case by Jules Verne, and our analysis here

will reveal the role of this, and other intertexts in Rohmer's film.[1] However, it is

clear from the outset that we are not dealing with a relatively faithful adaptation, as is

the case in those earlier films, but with a far freer interpretation of the original story.

As we shall see, Rohmer's film is set in the present, rather than the nineteenth

century, the plot has only a few similarities with that of Verne's novel, and the

dialogue is largely improvised. Accordingly, this analysis will concentrate on two

essential issues: the role of the original novel in the spectator's understanding of the

film and the level of control exerted by the director when the words spoken by his

characters are essentially their own. We shall also examine the documentary qualities

that are a significant component of the film.

Since they at least share a title, we shall begin by analysing the nature of

Rohmer's adaptation of his initial source text. Verne's novel (set in Scotland) forms

part of his *Voyages extraordinaires*, although it has little in common with the

voyages of Bougainville or Cook (cf *Amour*), being more about a journey of self

discovery than a trip around the world.[2] Here again a Rohmer character is searching

for adventure in daily life. In Verne's narrative, the heroine, Helena Campbell, sets

out with her two uncles to see the eponymous ray. She has read that it will allow her to understand her true feelings, and has decided that she will only consider marrying her uncles' choice of husband, the scientist Aristobulus Ursiclos, once she has witnessed this natural phenomenon. Her efforts (combined with those of her uncles) are thwarted on a number of occasions by the scientific investigations of Ursiclos, and soon Helena is joined in her search by the artist Olivier Sinclair. When the green ray is finally seen, Olivier and Helena miss it since at that moment they are gazing into each other's eyes: 'leurs regards se croisaient, [et] ils s'oubliaient tous deux dans la même contemplation!'[3] Not surprisingly, perhaps, the story concludes with their marriage.

In his film version, Rohmer retains some of the original features of the novel. For example, his heroine, like that of Jules Verne, is essentially listless, and has great difficulty in staying for any length of time in the same place; and similarly, the sea plays a key role in both. Indeed, the almost deafening sound of the waves breaking against the Biarritz cliffs closely reflects Verne's description of the Atlantic breakers: 'elles se brisaient avec un fracas assourdissant'(p.440). Clearly, the green ray itself plays a dominant role, and an explanation is provided of its mysterious powers and its scientific origins in both texts.

The narratives of film and novel alike are fundamentally shaped by the intervention of chance, which plays an important part in the heroine's meeting with the supposed 'man of her dreams'. In the book, Helena happens to be in the boat that rescues Olivier; and subsequently her croquet ball happens to knock over his canvas, an event which leads to their first meeting. In the film, the meeting between Delphine and Jacques, which occurs in the station, is entirely random: quite simply these two characters happen to be leaving Biarritz at the same time. Thus, in both cases,

coincidence is presented as an important catalyst for narrative events. However, on closer analysis, Rohmer's heroine, unlike Verne's protagonist (and despite her protestations to her friends), *is* searching for a partner and we suspect that she may well be prepared to accept almost any man, as her holidays draw to an end. Thus, the possibility of Jacques's advances being accepted is very high. In addition, we must remember that in a largely improvised film, where even such developments as the trip to Cherbourg were determined by the off the cuff suggestion to go there by one of the actresses, the actor who plays Jacques was hired in advance of the shooting specifically for the final meeting with Delphine in Biarritz.[4] Rohmer emerges as still very much in control of his film's development and so of his audience's response to it: despite appearances, the way in which he puts demands on his actors remains intact.

However, despite these important similarities, Rohmer's version differs from the original in a number of radical ways. The book is almost entirely devoted to a search for the *rayon vert*, while it is only at the very end of this search that Helena falls in love with Olivier. Rohmer's work, however, seems to be more concerned with Delphine's desire for a boyfriend, and it is only towards the end of the film that she pursues the green ray with any real vigour, in the course of the final part of her travels, in Biarritz. She overhears a conversation about its mythical properties and the scientific explanation of its origin, which contains explicit references to Verne's work. However, she makes no effort to witness it at this time: it is at the very end of the film that she makes one successful attempt to see it. Indeed, Rohmer is less interested in the supernatural qualities of the green ray than in its existence as a natural event, and so while its appearance may appear to guarantee the future happiness of Delphine and Jacques, the film's ending emerges as much more

ambiguous than that of the book. The way in which one of the rays of the setting sun becomes green has been explained to us and so it has become a more rational scientific phenomenon. Therefore, at the end of the film, it is very possible that we are being presented with just another holiday romance, not unlike that offered to Delphine by the sailor she meets in Cherbourg. The fact that Verne's heroine finds happiness *without* ever seeing the ray simply adds to the spectator's doubts about Delphine's new relationship. Rohmer is once again using the intertextual references in order to challenge the audience to question the surface level meaning and appreciate the complexity of what is being represented.

Significantly, the role of the *rayon* in the book might seem to be more closely allied to Rohmer's own search for a natural green ray to include in his film. Sophie Maintigneux, the director of photography, tells of the effort she put into this as she spent hours on the beach waiting to film one: 'Eric était très nerveux. C'était devenu une obsession. Il a même envoyé quelqu'un aux Galapagos.'[5] She claims that the ray in the film is a 'trucage', while Joël Magny claims that it is an authentic shot, but one filmed in the Canary Islands.[6] Philippe Demard is thanked in the credits for the green ray and he explains that it was indeed filmed in the Canaries but that the original shot was very short in duration. Consequently it was necessary to slow down and recalibrate it in order to produce a far more intense shade of green in the film.[7] Such manipulation of the image is significant in as much as it appears to contradict Rohmer's assumed desire for authenticity. However, as we have seen throughout this study, his reputation, whether calculated and encouraged by himself or not, does not adequately reflect his far more complex representation of the 'real world'. If a green ray is needed so that the audience can grasp the full meaning of a source text, then this green ray will be depicted, even if it calls for the use of a special effect. The

need to challenge the spectator emerges as more important than any supposed principles which we may believe underpin Rohmer's representation of his fictional world.

It is possible to date precisely the events in both the film and the book but Rohmer has decided to set his work over a shorter period of time than Verne, so that the spectator is constantly aware of Delphine's holiday time trickling away, and this increases tension as to the eventual outcome. The presentation of the green ray is also different. Verne's Ursiclos is a figure of ridicule who describes the ocean as a 'combinaison chimique d'hydrogène et d'oxygène, avec deux et demi pour cent de chlorure de sodium'(p.390) and this scientific attitude is reflected in his dismissal of Helena's interest in the *rayon* as childish (p.341). In contrast, the scientist in the film gets a neutral hearing, apart from a seemingly heavily ironic comment from one of his listeners: 'Vous me faites penser au savant dans le livre, qui s'appelle *Aristobulus Ursiclos*' (p.62).[8] However, it is not clear to what extent the speaker is aware of this rebuke, while the man in question was under the impression that he was participating in a science documentary and Rohmer claims that he came across him (during location scouting) talking, fortuitously, about the green ray.[9] While this claim may increase our belief in the role of chance in the making of the film, this character's principal role is to undermine the supposed mystical qualities of the *rayon vert* and so add further to our questionings of the possibility of a 'happy end'.

One of the most significant ways in which Rohmer departs from the original story is by cutting Verne's most dramatic scenes. We have already seen a similar approach in his adaptation of *Genou* (the absence of Claire's suicide) and *Perceval* (the modification to the battle scenes). In this case, the drama of Olivier's battle with the sea in order to rescue Helena from Fingal's Cave has no counterpart in Rohmer's

film. One possible explanation for this omission might, once again, be that the director is making a conscious attempt to eliminate melodramatic elements from his work, perhaps with the aim of being taken more seriously as a filmmaker. This would fit in with the fact that his early attempt to film Edgar Allan Poe's 'Bérénice', in which the narrator steals the teeth from the body of his dead cousin, and Tolstoy's 'La Sonate à Kreutzer', in which the hero stabs his wife in a fit of jealousy, seem far removed from Rohmer's later work where he strives to create a calmer, more intellectual approach. However, while this type of event is clearly missing, melodrama of a different kind may still be found: for example, Delphine waits for the green ray as if her life depended on it, and when she finally does see it, her response is to cry out in extreme pleasure. This very public 'orgasm' creates a disturbing atmosphere and a sense of voyeurism, akin to that which we noted in Jérôme's relationships with young girls in *Genou*.

One other narrative difference between film and book concerns issues of social class. The characters in Verne's work come from wealthy and respected Scottish gentry. They have two large residences and have no problems whatsoever in embarking on this costly search for the *rayon vert*. Delphine, by contrast, works as a secretary, and has neither money nor property. The length of her search is entirely confined to her vacation time, which serves to increase dramatic tension: will she find a boyfriend before she must return to work? However, more general issues of language and expression provide an even more fertile area of differences between these two texts. Helena Campbell has no difficulties in expressing her wishes, whereas Delphine is relatively inarticulate. When defending her vegetarianism, the best she can do is provide a fairly inadequate explanation: 'peut-être que je ne suis pas consciente des choses, mais pour l'instant, bon, au stade où j'en suis, comme je

suis, peut-être que je me trompe.... C'est une question instinctive'(p.24). This is in sharp contrast with Helena's declaration of love for the islands: 'je suis [...] passionnée pour notre archipel calédonien! Il est superbe, et je l'aime jusque dans ses fureurs!'(p.389). The very obvious problems Rohmer's heroine has in expressing herself clearly invite the spectator to 'think' for her, and thus add to the creative burden that Rohmer puts on us as viewers as we self-consciously interact with the film.

In addition to the textual references to Verne's novel, one of Rohmer's own films provides an important reference point for *Rayon* and can throw light on our analysis of the later work: *Lion*. This is Rohmer's first completed feature, and poses the question of how to survive alone in Paris without any money. Clearly, the extent of Pierre's problems (he finds himself sleeping on the streets) is not replicated by those of Delphine, nevertheless her peregrinations around France are echoed by his constant perambulation around Paris. Moreover, both films are precisely situated in time through a series of dates appearing on screen, which make the audience aware of the authorial control that lies behind the images, and contribute to their self-consciously filmic nature. The two narratives are set in summer (*Lion* runs from 22 June to 22 August). The protagonists in both films believe in horoscopes and the associated role of fate in their lives: Delphine listens to the predictions for Capricorn, for instance, while Pierre describes himself as 'né sous le signe du Lion'. Indeed, they would both claim that there is truth in these astrological predictions as Delphine finds her Prince Charming and Pierre experiences a very difficult time and then has a stroke of luck. These links extend to the role of the sun in both films, provider of the green ray and ruler of Pierre's star sign.

As was the case with *Hiver*, music plays an important role in these films too. For instance, it becomes clear that the violin piece that accompanies much of *Lion*, and which Pierre is attempting to complete, is replicated by the violin notes heard at key moments (the discovery of playing cards and witnessing of the ray itself) in *Rayon*. In both cases, the music draws our attention to a non-diegetic world and thus adds to the sense of an outside force, whether God or the filmic auteur, at work. The diegetic effect of such a force is reflected in the key role played by chance in the plot development of many of Rohmer's works, the reappearance of Charles in *Hiver* being one of the more extreme examples. Thus it seems responsible for Delphine's discovery of the playing cards (most significantly the Jack of Hearts before she meets Jacques) and a (green) notice about friendship in *Rayon*; and also Pierre's uncertain inheritance, as well as the stain on his trousers and his loss of a métro ticket in *Lion*. Small incidents take on large proportions as Delphine uses the ray to determine her personal life, and Pierre's lost métro ticket appears to play a role in his homelessness, as it makes his existence that bit more difficult.

The final scene in both *Lion* and *Rayon* would seem to leave the spectator in no doubt about the active role played by an outside force (chance or whatever) in our lives. *Lion* ends with Pierre being driven away by his friends, after he has discovered that he will inherit from his aunt after all. There follows a series of shots of photographs of the stars, which gives us the impression of going ever further into the heavens. Pascal Bonitzer sees this image as 'une sorte de miroir truqué tendu aux spectateurs, doubles du héros superstitieux'[10] so that the initial question as to whether Providence has intervened or not is of limited interest, since it will make little difference to Pierre's future: he may now die of excess, rather than poverty, but the result will be the same. The real issue is that he has wasted his musical talent.

The shot of the green ray in *Rayon* similarly leaves us pondering on the role of Providence: is this a chance appearance of a natural phenomenon, or a sign of approval from some superior force? If we apply Bonitzer's theory to *Rayon*, we quickly run into trouble: what is the talent that Delphine is wasting? However, this turns out to be an inappropriate question, since Rohmer here avoids delivering a straightforward message. Instead, chance leads to certain events such as Delphine reading *The Idiot*: Marie Rivière happened to be reading Dostoevsky's novel at the time of filming. However, as this could have been changed through the director's intervention and, as Rohmer acknowledges: 'les hasards heureux, je les accepte, et les hasards malheureux j'essaie de ... (rires)',[11] we are invited to remember that 'tout est fortuit sauf le hasard.'[12] Both endings use a natural phenomenon (the stars or a green ray) to comment on the plot and point out the ambiguities in what might appear to be a happy ending: in fact Pierre is unlikely to enjoy his wealth for long and Delphine's new relationship may well be short lived.

While chance as an element of plot may be of the director's own making, invention by actors might well undermine his/her control over the film. We shall now examine the role of improvisation in *Rayon* in order to ascertain the extent to which this might be the case. Rohmer himself claims that 'Dans les scènes de discussion, les gens ont complètement improvisé'[13] and yet an interviewer points out that 'Beaucoup de personnes sont persuadées que la plupart des dialogues ne sont pas spontanés'(p.35). In actual fact, the dialogue is improvised, with a greater or lesser intervention from Rohmer in order to further the plot (p.35). This is clearly a departure from the carefully crafted dialogues of his earlier films and yet his authorial control appears barely diminished by this. The original story is his and was recounted to all of the participants in the film. It outlined the tale of a woman who

wants to go on holiday, but does not know where to go because she is alone (p.34). His professional on-screen collaborators are almost exclusively chosen from people with whom he has already worked. Marie Rivière, Rosette, and Béatrice Romand were in two previous films by Rohmer, while Vincent Gauthier appeared in *Mariage*, Lise Heredia in *Femme* and Irène Skobline in *Amour*. In this new work, while they may not have a detailed script, they clearly are perfectly aware of the working methods of this director and are in a position to give him exactly what he is searching for, so that his control over the film remains at a high level.

Ironically, one of the results of making this film, and the subsequent *Reinette*, was that Rohmer gained a reputation (at least among certain critics) as an improvisational filmmaker. Thus the formal script of *Printemps* has been described as 'something of a departure for a director hitherto known for the improvisation nature of his films'.[14] This misunderstanding indicates the perceived documentary realism of these works, with *Rayon* appearing to be the purest example. However, it is already clear that a large degree of authorial control was retained in this film so that it is far from a collective work. An analysis of the evolution of the script of *Ami* will further underline the level of Rohmer's control in the earlier film.

The director recounts that everything was written down for *Ami* but that the actresses did, in fact, have an input into their lines: 'Les rôles féminins, je les ai écrits, comme je le fais en général, après avoir eu des conversations avec les actrices, quelquefois fixées par le magnétophone de façon à leur emprunter certaines tournures.'[15] The technique was different in the case of Anne-Laure Meury who has said: 'J'étais la seule [...] à improviser.'[16] Clearly the actors had an important influence when it came to the actual words used, although, equally clearly, the message of these words was that of the director. A similar system may be seen to

pertain, at least to an extent, in the case of *Rayon*. Here the actual words employed 'belong' to the speakers, without this in any way diminishing the part played by Rohmer in the development of the script, a fact compounded by the past associations between actors and director and their shared understanding of precisely what was required for this film.

As we have found throughout Rohmer's work, the world represented in *Rayon* can be seen to consist of a variety of elements carefully arranged by the director. These include the people who appear in the film, the places involved, Verne's novel and his own *Lion*. These can operate by setting up a network of intertextual references, referring the spectator to other works, but also to other films by Rohmer. This latter aspect adds to our impression of a sense of unity in the director's output while simultaneously challenging us to re-evaluate our readings as the film advances: even when Rohmer is not directly adapting a written text, he is creating different levels of meaning for us to unravel. We shall now examine a particularly complex example of such intertextual readings in the case of *Printemps*.

NOTES

[1] Jules Verne, *Le Tour du monde en 80 jours* et *Le Rayon vert*, Paris: Hachette, 1977.

[2] Verne's *Le Tour du monde en 80 jours* would clearly be closer to the adventures of Bougainville and Cook.

[3] Verne, p.466. Subsequent references to the novel are given in the text.

[4] See interview with Rohmer, *Cinématographe* no.122 (September 1986), 34-35.

[5] See interview with Sophie Maintigneux in ibid., 39.

[6] Magny, p.195.

[7] Philippe Demard, 'La vraie histoire du "rayon vert"', *Libération* (14 March 1998), http://www.liberation.fr/quotidien/debats/mars98/demard1403.html. Accessed 12 August 2002.

[8] The character's name is incorrectly spelt 'Aristobulos Ursicloss' in the *L'Avant-Scène* transcript.

[9] Interview with Rohmer, *Cinématographe*, no.122 (September 1986), 34.

[10] Bonitzer, p.83.

[11] Interview, *Positif* no.309 (November 1986), 19.

[12] As previously mentioned, this is the epigraph to *Eric Rohmer*, Dunkerque: Studio 43/MJC de Dunkerque/Ciné 104/Ville de Pantin, 1992.

[13] Interview *Cinématographe* no.122 (September 1986), 35. Subsequent references to this interview are given in the text.

[14] Phillip Bergson, 'Telling Story' in *What's On* (13 June 1990), 63.

[15] Interview, *Première* no.125 (August 1987), 50.

[16] Interview, *Cinéma 87* no.107 (9-15 September 1987), 3.

Conte de printemps

This film belongs to Rohmer's most recent series of films, *Contes des quatre saisons*, and contains a particularly complex set of intertextual references which provide further evidence of this director's demands on his spectators. The plot concerns a teacher, Jeanne, who refuses to sleep in her boyfriend's flat while he is away. Her problems are compounded by the discovery that her cousin is staying longer than expected in Jeanne's own apartment and so she feels effectively 'homeless'. At a party she meets a music student, Natacha, who provides her with a room for the night. Natacha's father, Igor, is away on business but he returns the following day and the development of his relationship with Jeanne is one of the lynchpins of the plot, a relationship complicated by the fact that Igor already has a girlfriend, Eve. The film contains the by now familiar multiplicity of textual and other references but specifically uses mythical and fairy-tale elements in its basic narrative structure, containing three separate tales of this kind.

Jeanne provides the initial tale when, on their first meeting, she recounts the details of her day to Natacha and admits that for a wearer of Gyges's ring (who would therefore be invisible as he/she followed her), they would have been incomprehensible.[1] The irony here is that the spectator has indeed witnessed the heroine's journey between her two apartments and so shared in this bafflement

described by Jeanne. Thus, the tale provides a commentary on the response of the spectator to the film so far.

Later on, when Jeanne spends an evening alone with Igor, in the course of which she gives in to his three demands and kisses him, she recounts the fairy-tale of the couple granted three wishes. The husband wishes for a black pudding; his wife, angry at the wasted wish, wishes for it to be stuck on his nose; and they then wish for it to be removed. She draws a favourable comparison between the wishes granted to the elderly couple in the story, and those requested by Igor. However, the final tale, which has served as a leitmotif throughout the film, calls on the spectator to speculate that the future of the Jeanne/Igor relationship is far from certain.

This *Mystère du collier* is told by Natacha to Jeanne and, through this tale, she reveals her belief that Eve has stolen a necklace which Igor intended as a present for his daughter's birthday. It is only at the end of the film that these suspicions are shown to be false: the necklace had fallen into one of Igor's shoes. As Iannis Katsahnias has pointed out, this story itself makes a reference to a real event which happened 200 years previously: 'l'affaire du collier de la Reine'.[2] This affair involved Cardinal Louis de Rohan who, in an attempt to regain favour at the French Court, agreed with Madame de la Motte's suggestion to serve as an intermediary in the purchase of a necklace by Marie-Antoinette. However, it emerged that the Queen was not involved and it was suspected that the whole episode was part of an elaborate plot on the part of Madame de la Motte in order to make money through the sale of the jewellery.

Paradoxically, it was the Queen who suffered most from these events particularly since, despite her innocence, this did much to sully her relationship with her subjects. Similarly, despite Igor's innocence in any plot to bring himself and

Jeanne together, the spectator is invited to suppose that they will not have any future together. Thus, the reference to an actual event has an important role to play in our interpretation of the narrative and in Rohmer's continuing challenge to our interpretative skills as viewers. While these are stories *within* the filmic text and reverberate through it, there are also texts from *outside* which are used by Rohmer in order to increase our grasp of character and plot. These texts include a collection of short stories by Valéry Larbaud, the philosophical writings of Plato, Kant and Wittgenstein, a painting by Matisse, and music by Beethoven and Schumann, all of which complicate the possible readings of what we actually see on the screen.

One such key text makes only a very fleeting appearance in the film. It is read by Jeanne during her second visit to the holiday home in Fontainebleau, and its title (*Enfantines*)[3] is revealed to us when Igor looks at the book while Jeanne is on the telephone to Natacha. This brief glimpse belies the centrality of this text to the depiction of the relationship between Natacha and Jeanne and is indicative of Rohmer's use of intertextual sources to build up his spectator's understanding of the characters. *Enfantines* is in fact a collection of short stories by Valéry Larbaud, the first of which, entitled 'Rose Lourdin', is the most directly relevant to this film. It recounts the infatuation of the eponymous character, then aged twelve, with a thirteen-year-old fellow boarding school pupil, Röshen Kessler. The first meeting between Natacha and Jeanne also has sexual undertones. Natacha hints that Jeanne may have come to the party in order to meet someone new and becomes especially interested when her new friend reveals that she has nowhere to sleep. An offer is soon made to Jeanne to sleep in Natacha's apartment; to be precise in her father's (empty) bed. Within a few minutes of knowing each other they are going back to

'her' place and both there and in the house at Fontainebleau Natacha is anxious to show Jeanne *her* bedroom.

In 'Rose Lourdin' the relationship between Röshen and one of the teachers, Mlle Spiess, also throws light on the female friendships in *Printemps*. The relationship involving Mlle Spiess is a more physical one than that between Rose and Röshen ('on dit qu'elles s'enfermaient ensemble dans la salle de discipline et que Mlle Spiess lui montraient des images'[4]) and both teacher and pupil are subsequently forced to leave the school as a result of their love affair being revealed. While *Printemps* avoids depicting a physical side to the relationship between its two central characters, the roles they take on are not dissimilar in that relations of power are involved in both cases. Jeanne is presented as a teacher, as is made clear from the opening images of her emerging from the *Lycée Jacques Brel*. Her job, or at least her subject, takes up much of her energies, so that when she has just kissed Igor, she admits to thinking immediately about it in relation to her Monday afternoon philosophy lesson. Natacha *is* a student, at the *Conservatoire*, and a year earlier could well have been in Jeanne's class, although this possibility is not confirmed within the text. This pupil is very conscious of her friend's job which she guesses almost from the start, not because of Jeanne's looks ('toutes les profs ne soient pas nécessairement moches', (p.17)) but from her assured way of talking, and of expressing her thoughts. It is in the course of the meal in the apartment that the pupil/teacher relationship is at its most evident. Natacha has already expressed her negative feelings about her father's girlfriend, Eve, and watches attentively as her 'teacher' argues for the need to share philosophical knowledge. It is in Natacha's look that we see a mix of respect and gratitude for having such an ally and friend.

This relationship between Natacha and Jeanne clearly throws light on the way in which Natacha attempts to manoeuvre Jeanne into her father's arms: indeed, from the start she gives Jeanne his bed, claiming that her brother's room is untidy. She subsequently tells her friend how she would like to see her father with another woman such as Jeanne and conveniently forgets to tell her friend that Igor *will* be present at Fontainebleau, and finally leaves Jeanne alone with him. Natacha is clearly aware of what she is doing, but she is also experiencing problems in her relationship with William which dictate that she be with him: the reason for her efforts to bring her father and her friend together therefore remains ambiguous. She claims that she simply made a mistake in imagining neither Igor nor Eve would come to the house in Fontainebleau, and this type of misplaced daydreaming is also behind her perception of a relationship between her father and Jeanne. The two characters become united in Natacha's imagination, although both the *Collier de la Reine* and the Larbaud references invite caution on the part of the spectator.

Natacha is studying the piano at the *Conservatoire* and in this film, as in so many of Rohmer's other works, music plays an especially important role, with four different themes being used throughout its narrative to produce a number of emotional effects on the spectator. Both the opening credits, and the final sequence and credits, are accompanied by Beethoven's 'Spring Sonata'.[5] It is obvious that the title of this piece provides a non-diegetic reference to the season and also to its characteristics of hope and new beginning (cf. Natacha's final cry of 'La vie est belle!'(p.85)). This music thus provides a frame within which the plot evolves (akin to the opening and closing of the gates in *Pauline*) but, at the end, its repetition also hints that not much may have changed for Jeanne: despite her clear doubts about her relationship with Mathieu, she is going back to him and will perhaps marry him.

Thus the Beethoven sonata effectively provides us with another point of view that encourages us to question any progress Jeanne may believe she has made. It is being used by Rohmer to augment the spectator's creative involvement in the film.

The piano piece, which is played at the party where Jeanne and Natacha first meet, is entitled 'Montmorency Blues', a dual reference to the town they are in and to their respective states of mind, given that both of their boyfriends have had to go away. It is the only music specifically written for the film, and its diegetic presence is no more than a discreet background in a scene where the concentration is on the words spoken.[6] Later on the same night, Natacha plays Schumann's 'Les Chants de l'aube' (cf the matutinal 'L'Heure bleue'), whose title (which is highlighted by being mentioned in the film) is in conflict with the late hour of her playing and so gives a clear sense of discord that will be reflected in the future problems in her relationship with Jeanne. Most of the accompanying images show a Jeanne whose thoughts remain impenetrable, and the music is cut at the end of the scene between two chords: we are thus left wondering if Jeanne is even listening to her new friend.

The remaining music in the film is a rendition by Natacha of Schumann's 'Etudes Symphoniques'. It serves to introduce her presence into the final conversation between Igor and Jeanne since they listen together to this piece on a cassette which has been recorded by her. She may be physically absent but, because of the music, both her father and her friend are made to question her role in attempting to bring them together. In a more conventional fashion, this music also reflects the changing mood of the scene when Eve telephones, since rhythmically it immediately changes to a staccato beat, similar to that signalling the arrival of the villain in a silent movie. Here the music makes it clear that we need to think of the role of Natacha in this scene and hints that she may be at least partly responsible for

the doomed nature of the relationship that she is manipulating. Schumann's piece reflects Rohmer's expectations of cultured and educated spectators who use this direct conduit between the director and his viewer to comprehend the true extent of narrative developments.

Perhaps the most surprising element of the music in *Printemps* is the way in which the Beethoven sonata is also used to provide links with other aspects of the film: these include the display of a large Matisse poster and a discussion of Kant's critique of pure reason. The poster of *La Perruche et la sirène* (and a reproduction of Matisse's *La Blouse roumaine* is seen in *Pauline*) is shown in the background during the telephone conversation in which Jeanne agrees to attend the party in Montmorency. The title of the painting could be taken as a reference to the relationship between Natacha and Jeanne, Natacha being the mermaid trying to tempt her friend (through her music) into a doomed relationship with Igor. Jeanne could thus emerge as the parakeet, being told what to do/repeat by her friend. However, the ambiguity of the plot, which has already been noted, obliges us to recognise this as only one of many possible interpretations: Natacha may well be unaware of what she is doing and Jeanne may be happy to consider a relationship with her friend's father. We shall see in a moment how this text is tightly linked to Beethoven's sonata but, in order to do this, we need to examine another key reference in Rohmer's film, this time involving the philosopher Kant.

The discussion on Kant, in which all of the main characters are involved, occurs when Jeanne describes her efforts to teach transcendental philosophy to her students. A visual reference to Kant is made at the start of the film when we observe Jeanne taking a copy of *Critique de la raison pure* from Mathieu's flat, and now the discussion turns to that book's analysis of synthetic *a priori* judgements. The true

significance of this scene becomes clear only much later, when Igor reveals that it was precisely at that time that he first desired Jeanne.

The relationship between music, painting, and philosophy is made explicit on reading Rohmer's own book length study of Mozart and Beethoven, in which he describes the role of Kant in provoking philosophical change at the end of the eighteenth century by moving the emphasis away from knowledge that results from the intellectual analysis of objects, towards a vision of the world about us as entirely dependent upon *our* knowledge. Rohmer comments that this shift led directly to a change in our relationship with Nature, in which the objectivity of the model (the world) was replaced by the subjectivity of the artist (the work of art). Thus, through this philosophical shift, the beauty of the world is seen only to exist through the artist's representation, rather than through any original.[7] According to Rohmer, therefore, the music of Beethoven is 'Kantian' in that it does represent the beauty of the world through the notes used (and not through any direct reference to Nature) and indeed the reprise of the 'Spring Sonata' immediately follows Natacha's final comment, 'La vie est belle!'(p.85). Rohmer's own filmic depiction aims to do the same thing, in that we have already seen his awareness of the artificiality of the image as he attempts to do justice to Nature.

If this is the link between Beethoven and Kant, what of that between Beethoven and Matisse? Rohmer sees Matisse's paintings as being not so much the colouring in of the spaces between the drawn lines but rather that it is the lines themselves that 'choose' the colours which then expand their ideas in a different way. In this, he suggests Matisse's work contrasts strikingly with that of an artist such as Picasso, where colour appears to have been superimposed over the lines, without there being any clear relationship between the two. Similarly, Rohmer

maintains that in Beethoven (at least in his later quartets), the basic melody obtains its maximum effect only through counterpoint and harmony. Thus, in both cases, there is an intermingling of ornament and structure or form and meaning, so that the apparently straightforward means of expression turns out to be the source of its richness and even its content.[8] Such a link between form and content is also emerging as fundamental to Rohmer's films as a whole, in a way not widely perceived by most critics.

It gradually emerges on viewing *Printemps* that three disparate texts (by Kant, Matisse and Beethoven) are tightly linked together in Rohmer's mind but it is perhaps only by reading what amounts to a fourth text (*De Mozart en Beethoven*) that the extremely complex nature of their relationship becomes clear. Indeed, this final text was published six years after the film's release, and so Rohmer appears to expect his audience to be ready to re-evaluate his films in the light of its (and his) subsequent experiences.

Once again it is the readings which the spectator brings to the film that enable him or her more fully to understand the nature of Rohmer's text. Such readings may involve paintings, works of theory, novels or music and the creative role of the viewer is paramount if the intricacies of the filmic text are to be appreciated. Two major aspects of Rohmer's approach have become increasingly apparent in the course of this analysis of his use of intertextual references: he makes rigorous demands both on the cultural awareness and on the creative responses of his spectators and he shows an acute awareness of the artificiality of the medium in which he works. It is precisely this latter factor, the role of the self-consciously filmic, which we shall examine at some length in the next section.

NOTES

[1] Gyges, in Greek mythology, found a ring that made him invisible and subsequently seduced the Queen of Lydia, killed the King and took over the throne. See, for example, *Quid 2000*, Paris: Robert Laffont, 1999, p.1063.

[2] See Iannis Katsahnias, 'Rohmer fait le printemps', *Cahiers du cinéma* no.430 (April 1990), 21. The 'affaire du collier' is recounted by Madame Campan in *Mémoires de Madame Campan, première femme de chambre de Marie-Antoinette*, Paris: Mercure de France, 2000, pp.234-251 and Rohmer's *L'Anglaise* is, of course, set during the French Revolution.

[3] Valéry Larbaud, *Enfantines*, Paris: Gallimard, 1950.

[4] ibid., p.26.

[5] No.5 in F Major Op.24. Beethoven's Kreutzer violin sonata (no.9 in A Major Op.47) gives its name to Rohmer's 1956 short film *La Sonate à Kreutzer*, based on the story by Tolstoy.

[6] This piece is written by Jean-Louis Valéro, who also wrote music for *Pauline*, *Rayon*, *Reinette*, *Ami* and *L'Anglaise*.

[7] Eric Rohmer, *De Mozart en Beethoven*, pp.19-22.

[8] ibid., pp.219-220.

SECTION 4

The Self-consciously

Filmic in Rohmer's Work

Rohmer has earned a reputation for providing a realistic view of the world, as has been shown in the first section. However, it has also become evident in our analysis that his fictional representations are in fact considerably more complex than they at first seem, as evidenced for instance by the way in which he questions the texts he uses in a self-conscious way. Now we shall extend our analysis of the extent to which this is also true on a filmic level.

Use of titles

Rohmer's use of titles clearly provides one of the most visible examples of the self-conscious in his films, and the *Comédies et proverbes* series provides a useful case study of his use of non-diegetic text in opening titles. The generic title is taken from that of a series of plays by Alfred de Musset published in 1840, although we should remember that it is also the title of a collection of plays by the Comtesse de Ségur (1865), an author whose nineteenth-century stories for children clearly interest Rohmer, as reflected in his abortive attempt to film *Les petites filles modèles* (1857) in 1952. This theatrical influence is further underlined when we recall that 'comédies' are plays which intend to entertain by showing the ridiculous side of

characters and morals of a society.[1] The third word of the title ('proverbes') indicates that this will be done through the use of the popular wisdom of proverbs.

The titles of the individual films, as well as the proverbs which go with them (all of which appear on screen), also provide us with valuable information. *La femme de l'aviateur*, for example, has an anachronistic feeling since the term is associated with the pioneering years of flying and not the present day. In addition, the eponymous character is never seen in the flesh, and so the fact that the film is as much about an absence as a presence is underlined. The title also encourages us to go along with François's idea (albeit an erroneous one) that the blond woman he sees with the aviator is really that man's wife.

The proverb used is 'on ne saurait penser à rien' and is also inspired by Musset, inverting his 'on ne saurait penser à tout'.[2] This continuing highbrow agenda of literary references is undermined somewhat in this, and subsequent films, by the youthfulness of the characters, and the often banal nature of their conversations. Intellectual discussions, like the one on Pascal in *Maud*, are absent from this series. The effect is to draw attention to the lighter treatment of similar preoccupations involving personal relationships.

Rohmer has revealed that the proverb was a late addition to *Femme* and so, for him, it serves a descriptive rather than a prescriptive function.[3] The original proverb from Musset's text serves a slightly different function as it only appears at the end of the play (although it does also serve as the title) so that its purely retrospective application demands the spectator's reinterpretation and revision of the meanings accorded to the work as a whole. Rohmer, on the other hand, involves viewers from the start and invites them to analyse *while* they watch so that watching becomes an active process.

Le beau mariage also has a misleading title since Sabine's efforts to obtain such a marriage are thwarted. Its ironic status within the film is thus in its reference to her efforts to achieve a dream, not to its realisation. The proverb in this film is 'Quel esprit ne bat la campagne? Qui ne fait chateaux en Espagne?' It is a literary reference to La Fontaine's fable 'La Laitière et le pot au lait'[4] but is as instantly recognisable as a saying in French as in English. Here again a literary text is used to provide a proverb but this time its role is more akin to a popular saying in that it presents us with a truism, which the film shows to be accurate. Thus, the unlikelihood of Sabine's marriage project coming to fruition is clear from the outset. Rohmer links this more prescriptive role for the proverb with the fact that, in contrast to the other films, he found it at the same time as the subject.[5] However, it still provides a direct authorial comment on the film that follows.

At first sight the title *Pauline à la plage* seems more straightforward, referring as it does to Pauline's time spent on holiday. However, the childish tone of the title (it could easily be used for a children's story) belies the complicated interactions between Pauline and the various people she encounters on the beach that structures the film's narrative.

Like *Mariage*, this work also has a literary source for its proverb. 'Qui trop parole, il se mesfait' comes from Chrétien de Troyes' *Perceval* which, as we have seen, was itself filmed by Rohmer in 1978.[6] In the book, the proverb forms part of the advice given by the Prudhomme to Perceval, and so it fits in well as a lesson to be learnt by the young Pauline. The sense of the proverb is still clear in modern French but its origin clearly illustrates the director's idea of an elite audience who will have no problems in following old French and will also be familiar enough with the source text to be aware of the problems in adhering too closely to this rule: we

remember that Perceval remained silent when he should have asked about the Grail.[7] Thus, what first appears as a statement of fact emerges as ambiguous and challenging, and the audience is invited to approach this proverb in a critical way as there may well be times when it should be ignored. This process represents a high level of belief in the spectator's creative role in the film on the part of the director.

The title of *Les nuits de la pleine lune* is a reference to the fantastic and as such echoes that of Rohmer's first feature, *Lion*, and its key link with astrology. There are things which can only happen, it seems, during the night of a full moon. It is of note that the title for its British release (*Full Moon in Paris*) is not a literal translation and is clearly an attempt by its distributors, Artificial Eye, to cash in on its Parisian allure, providing further evidence of the power of a title.

Nuits has the first non-literary reference in its proverb, using the following saying which the film title attributes to the Champagne region, but which Rohmer appears to have invented himself: 'Qui a deux femmes perd son âme, Qui a deux maisons perd sa raison'. Although the proverb offers what is clearly a male perspective, it applies to a woman, Louise, in the film and it functions prescriptively since its warning message is justified within the diegesis. As before, a particular expectation is created in the audience. The fact that we see Louise with two men from the very start leads us to expect an unhappy outcome: our interest centres more on how this will come about, rather than on the situation itself.

Le rayon vert provides yet another reference to the fantastic but, in this case, as we have already seen, it is mediated by the novel of the same name by Jules Verne. There is a long scientific description of the green ray in the film but we also hear how this ray supposedly allows those who see it to understand their own feelings as well as the feelings of those around them. This dual presentation of the

ray is also present in the novel, but it is evident that Rohmer is prepared to make challenging demands of his audience as they will have to read Verne's work for themselves if they are to understand fully the nature of the links between novel and film.

The proverb this time also refers us to a literary source, this time a poetic one. 'Ah! Que le temps vienne / Où les coeurs s'éprennent' comes from a poem by Rimbaud entitled 'Chanson de la plus haute tour'.[8] This title echoes one character's definition of Delphine's star sign, Capricorn: 'c'est le symbole de la petite chèvre qui gravit la montagne et qui va le plus haut possible. Mais généralement, elle y va seule'(p.27). Given Delphine's incredible patience in waiting for the right man, it is also appropriate that this poem is one of a series entitled 'Fêtes de la Patience'. The proverb itself is reflected in Delphine's friends' insistence that she meet a man, though there is no direct reference to Rimbaud in the film. What is expressed is Delphine's desire to find a 'Prince Charming', which underlies her whole search, rather than a prescription for success in love, as in *Nuits* and its call to keep to one house and one partner.

In an interview at the time of the film's release, Rohmer clearly indicated the type of audience he is aiming at, and explains how this expectation is reflected in the proverb. He commented that the earlier part of the Rimbaud poem is linked more closely to *Rayon* than the extract used as a proverb (lines which come to mind include 'Je sors. Un rayon me blesse / Je succomberai sur la mousse' and 'Je veux que l'été dramatique / Me lie à son char de fortune'[9]) and hoped that those interested would look it up for themselves.[10] Indeed, Rohmer admits to using the lines reproduced at the start of the film precisely because of their banality and therefore, as a consequence, the invitation he extends to the spectator is to find the more complex

references which lie beneath. Few directors would dare hope for this kind of dedication on the part of their audience, and the very fact that Rohmer can express such an expectation is indicative of the extent of his awareness of his viewers, as well as of the creative challenge that his work gives them.

Finally, the significance of *L'ami de mon amie* (quite apart from its ambiguous gender when spoken) is uncertain since, from Blanche's point of view it refers to Fabien while, for Léa, it partly refers to Alexandre (although he is never really Blanche's boyfriend). In addition, these meanings change at the end when for both female characters 'my girlfriend's boyfriend' *becomes* 'my boyfriend' as Blanche ends up with Fabien and Léa with Alexandre: just as we think we know the identity of the boyfriend of the title, it changes. Here the meaning of *Ami* is in a state of flux as it reflects the state of mind of the protagonists. This final film in the series is the only one to use an authentic popular saying as its proverb: 'Les amis de mes amis sont mes amis'. It is again descriptive and avoids teaching us any lessons. The apparent straightforwardness of the proverb, which is reflected in the frequently banal surface level of the film itself, is in fact quite complex: male friends become boyfriends, as anticipated in the dual meaning of 'ami' (friend and boyfriend).

Arbre is not part of the *Comédies* but it does make similar use of text on screen. The film is subtitled 'les sept hasards' and the first scene depicts the teacher explaining the use of 'si' to his pupils: to give the conditions which permit events to happen. This theme is continued through the remainder of the film where each section of the narrative is prefaced by an intertitle which indicates the catalyst for what we are about to see. Thus, we are told that the editor of *Après-demain* is only interested in publishing an article on the new generation of Socialists because the party has done so badly in local elections; and that if the village's willow tree had not

survived this long, there would be no campaign against the mediatheque being built.[11] Here the written text is used by Rohmer to provide a sense of unity in a film with a number of intertwining plots, as well as to underline the role of chance in the lives of his characters: it is thus a sign of direct authorial intervention within the narrative.

In addition to the provision of titles and proverbs, Rohmer uses text in a number of other ways, but most often to provide information about the temporal duration of his films. Precise dates are indicated in *Genou, Rayon, Hiver, Rendez-vous*: 'Les bancs de Paris' and *Eté*; while *Nuits* is dated by month and *L'Anglaise* by year. The effect of this is to draw attention to an authorial presence and remind the viewer that there is an organising force behind the temporal construction of the film. Frequently, the dates given match those of the year of filming so that those in *Eté* (Monday 17 July-Sunday 6 August) are indeed correct for 1995. Here, too, a sense of 'reality' might appear to be a primary concern. The visual format of these titles is also particularly important: the hand-written ones imply a more personal relationship with the narrator (eg. *Genou, Rayon*), while the printed ones suggest an increased sense of distance and a more impersonal narrator (*Eté* and *Nuits*). In the case of Rohmer's 1965 short film *Etoile*, the titles also seem to reflect those used in silent cinema, in that they provide information both about the plot and the characters: 'Rien dans la Presse'(p.20, in the aftermath of Jean-Marc's attack) and 'ex-coureur du 400m'(p.18, the hero). In this instance there is an overload of information which draws yet more attention to the power of the authorial figure and, in turn, to the self-consciously filmic.

The titles in *L'Anglaise* almost all appear to be quotations from Grace Elliott's book and so remind us of the authenticity of the material based on an

eyewitness account. However, as we have seen, the source of many of these quotations is not in fact Grace but Rohmer himself: the use of titles here is revealed as reflecting a struggle for authorship between source text and final film.

Textual fragments are also included *within* the filmic image (e.g. a close-up of a sign), so that information is passed on to us in a less forced way than is the case with traditional intertitles. Once again, however, the effect is to draw attention to the way in which information is provided to the spectator and so detract from the apparent seamlessness of the film as Rohmer explores the nature of meaning and representation. Examples of this include the close-up of a plaque giving the car driver's name in *Lion* (after the fatal accident involving Pierre's cousin) so that we realise that Pierre has (re-)inherited, although he himself remains unaware of his third change in fortune. Subsequently we are shown a newspaper article to underline the irony of the hero's position: 'Milliardaire sans le savoir, il disparaît'. *Etoile* provides us with a good example of the different uses of texts within the same film. There are four intertitles that, once again in a fashion which recalls their use in the silent cinema, provide us with information about character and plot. The first one informs us of Jean-Marc's skill at running, a comment which makes his reaction after the attack (he runs away at some speed) all the more realistic. The second title confirms that there was nothing about the fight in the papers, while the third informs us that Jean-Marc avoided returning to the Champs Elysées in the course of the following weeks. The final title ('Un ou deux mois s'étaient écoulés, quand, enfin'(p.21) is a marker of time (the only one in this film) which indicates the passing of a few months. Thus, all of these titles emerge as part of a method used by Rohmer to pass on plot information to his audience in a self-conscious way which draws attention to the status of film as film.

However, *Etoile* contains other diegetic texts that are used to convey further spatial and character information. The inserts of the street names serve to verify a realistic location within the confines of the Place de l'Etoile for the otherwise fanciful plot. As Jean Douchet points out, part of Barbet Schroeder's original idea for *Paris vu par...* was that each short film would be set in a specific area of the capital and would respect its atmosphere: this constitutes one of the very few occasions when outside production forces dictated the setting of one of Rohmer's films.[12] Since then, as we have seen, decisions over location have been entirely his. As for characterisation, the newspaper extracts allow us to enter into Jean-Marc's mind and to understand his fears and worries, providing evidence, as they do, of the lethal capability of the humble umbrella.

The question remains as to why, given the use of text in the film, Rohmer also chose to include a voice-over, particularly given the conflicts and contrasts between this and the information provided by the types of non-diegetic text described above. On the whole, voice-over serves to provide us with information about the Arc de Triomphe and the problems of pedestrians as they walk around the Place de l'Etoile. The accompanying images show both the Arc being used on official occasions and the pedestrians as they cross the avenues, all the time avoiding the traffic. Inserts of 'piétons passez' and 'piétons attendez' reflect the existence of an outside power which seeks to regulate their movements. In many ways, therefore, this sequence seems to form a documentary on the Place de l'Etoile ranging over the history and the social role of the square, but there is a clear shift to the purely fictional when the same voice is used to introduce the hero and explain the two possible routes he can take to his work. Here, the narrative space breaks down the barrier between documentary and fiction as differing levels of reality overlap

confusingly. However, this fluidity does not last long as the printed word increasingly assumes the narratorial, and fictional, role.

Similar uses of texts may be traced through most of Rohmer's *oeuvre* so that in many ways *Etoile* can be seen to have provided a blueprint, which will later influence other works. Thus, for example, diegetic texts appear in a number of his films as evidenced by the inserts of newspapers/magazines/letters in *Marquise*, *Arbre* and *L'Anglaise*. In the first case, this is the Marquise's advertisement that provides an explanation for her search for the father of her child, while in the second it is Blandine's article in which Julien (much to his horror) discovers little reference to himself. Finally, in *L'Anglaise*, there is an insert of Grace's letter in which she is granted permission to enter Paris. All of these are supported by the soundtrack: the advertisement is read out loud (fortuitously, since it is in old German gothic script); Julien complains to Bérénice about the content of the article (which again is not clear from the insert itself, although it includes a large photograph of Julien's rival, which suggests that the centre of interest has moved to him); while an official tells Grace that the passport is only valid until midnight: if she fails to return she will be in real danger.

Perhaps one of the most important uses of written texts occurs in *Maud* where we have seen how inserts, especially of texts by Pascal, provide a structure to the film as a whole. Pascal's text on 'le pari' provides a basis for Vidal's belief that life does have a meaning and it also permits Jean-Louis to justify his decision to marry Françoise before he even speaks to her, although both men misuse these texts in their own way.

Diegetic texts also appear in the form of street signs. In *Boulangère*, there are a number of inserts of the names of streets where the narrator is searching for Sylvie,

thus seeming to anchor his efforts in a real district of Paris. A similar device is used in *Hiver*, but here the names have a role that supersedes that of signifying place. Two street plaques are shown. The first, the rue des Belles Lunettes, presumably constitutes a reference to the architecture of the street, but also implies that Félicie's view of Maxence is 'rose-tinted'. The second street, the rue Casse-cou, is clearly a critical and playful comment on Félicie's reckless behaviour, and as such it is most unusual in Rohmer's work. Another significant example occurs in *Femme*, when there is a shot of the 'issue de secours' sign on the back window of the bus, just after we see Lucie for the first time. Rohmer may laugh at the idea of this having a 'hidden meaning', but it surely can be read as a comment on the possible role played by Lucie in the film.[13] Similarly in *Eté*, the Oasis poster in Gaspard's bedroom proclaims *Definitely, Maybe*: a title that reflects the hero's problems with decisions.

Rayon uses such texts in two distinct ways. The green notice, which Delphine remarks upon on her way to visit her friends, promises 'le contact avec soi-même et avec les autres'(p.18). This provides us with information about the protagonist's needs and loneliness, which directly afterwards allows us to read between the lines of her claim that: 'Je ne suis pas triste. Tout va bien'(p.19). The discovery of playing cards punctuates the film, and the music that accompanies these moments is heard again when the 'Prince Charming' is finally confirmed. The cards themselves have a particular significance, at least from Delphine's point of view, with the Queen of Spades being the harbinger of bad luck and the Jack of Hearts announcing the arrival of a 'new man'.

In all of these cases text, diegetic or otherwise, provides the spectator with information concerning a range of different aspects of the narrative. The information may apply to the film as a whole, or to the experiences of a particular character, but it

also inevitably provides a constant reminder that we are watching a work of fiction and that we are invited to play a role within its creative process. Such observations certainly are far removed from the traditional view of Rohmer as a serious 'realist' director whose films purport to be a straightforward reflection of the real world.

Documentary Technique

Despite our appreciation now that Rohmer is far from being an unproblematic exponent of mimetic realism, he himself reveals that he originally set out to film the world in front of his camera as he aimed to develop story lines from improvised filming in order to increase the pleasure he felt in invention.[14] However, he goes on to contrast this improvisational technique with the deliberate and planned nature of his working methods and admits that the possibility of the two working well together was remote. However, this dichotomy between the planned and the improvised does continue to play a role in Rohmer's films which, while depicting a fictional universe, also contain numerous documentary elements. This serves to remind us of their place in a real world and, by extension, of their own artificial status and the interplay between reality and illusion that is fundamental to filmic discourse. This dichotomy may be seen from the very beginnings of cinema with the split between Lumière as 'cinéaste du réel', apparently filming what takes place in front of his camera, and Méliès's elaborate staging of an imaginary journey to the moon (*Le voyage dans la lune*, 1902).[15] The *Nouvelle Vague* often mixed these two filmic forms, employing a natural setting where the actors mix with the bystanders and a fictional narrative that is played out against a 'real' background, in theory adding extra credibility to the former. The model for this approach was provided by

Jean Rouch in films such as *Moi un noir* (1958), although the best example is his 1960 work, *La Punition*, which mixes the fiction of a pupil excluded from school with her improvised conversations with the people she meets.[16] Within the New Wave itself, Godard's *A bout de souffle* provides one of the first examples of this mixture of genres with its real footage shot in the cafés and streets of Paris, while its narrative recounts the fictitious tale of Michel's attempts to evade capture.

In Rohmer's work, images of actual contemporary events and places may be seen in the filming of the 14 July ball in *Lion*, where Pierre is seeking a woman with whom to spend the night. The same technique is used in the filming of the street market, where a hand-held camera follows Pierre, and in the footage of the former market at Les Halles. The opening shots of *Boulangère* provide a guide to the area around the carrefour Villiers in Paris. The narrator's voice-over provides information on the setting while the images show the buildings and places to which he refers. The 'boum H.E.C. 1963' in *Suzanne* is filmed in a similar fashion to the 14 July festivities in *Lion*, where again the characters mix with partygoers, while *Etoile* provides (as we have seen) a historical guide to the square and the Arc de Triomphe itself. In each case, Rohmer's awareness of the self-conscious nature of the filmic process is clear from the way in which he mixes fictional and 'real' images.

Maud also contains a number of such 'real images': the first involves the scenes during mass which are presented as part of an 'authentic' religious service and give added significance to the priest's message (particularly since the character is played by an actual priest[17]) in his Christmas sermon: 'chaque homme et chaque femme de ce monde est appelé ce soir à croire qu'une joie immense peut l'envahir, car au coeur de cette nuit nous est remis le gage de notre espérance'(p.14). We

appear to be watching part of a real sermon, and the message provided by this apparently neutral voice about the possibility of an immense joy may be interpreted as a blessing on Jean-Louis's feelings for Françoise. The fact that we are listening to the words of an actual priest, apparently during a real mass, simply adds to the apparent truthfulness of their message. The three scenes set in the church are all but absent in the original short story and, here again, we have an example of the importance of location space in Rohmer's work. The first such scene, in which Jean-Louis sees Françoise for the first time, is reduced to the revelation by the narrator that he has been watching her at mass for a number of Sundays. The second, from which the above quote comes, is reduced to ten words: 'Point de Françoise non plus à la messe de minuit'(p.70), while the third, in which Jean-Louis and Françoise go to mass *together* for the first time, is entirely omitted. Clearly, the influence of the church of Notre-Dame du Port on Rohmer encouraged him to increase the importance of these scenes so that a real location becomes part of his fictional world. Thus, contrary to expectations, while Rohmer does indeed work to a pre-ordained script, he is also prepared to be influenced by the location he has chosen.

Later, the workers leaving the Michelin factory are filmed in a fashion reminiscent of the Lumière brothers' *La sortie des usines Lumière*.[18] This scene thus emerges as not just a social documentary on factory workers, but also as a reference to the roots of cinema, an idea which is further supported by Rohmer's decision to shoot in black and white, despite the film being made in the late 1960s. Thus, this scene may be seen to operate on three separate, but complementary, levels. First, there is the fiction of Jean-Louis going home from his job; second, there is the 'documentary' footage of Michelin workers leaving their factory; and, thirdly, there is a clear filmic reference to one of the first films ever made. This complex interplay

reflects Rohmer's interest in the nature of the filmic medium itself. Far from providing an unmediated version of 'reality', his mixture of fiction and real footage constitutes a questioning of the way in which the world is represented.

Another example of an apparently unadulterated depiction of reality is provided by the scene of the concert given by Léonide Kogan, which appears to be an actual concert: the motionless camera observes the playing, as if not wishing to disturb the violinist. However, we must remember that in this case, as with the more overtly fictional moments of the film, despite its apparent realism, we are in fact being presented with a representation. Despite its apparent realism, Kogan's concert is as much an artificial spectacle as the previous conversation between Jean-Louis and Vidal, and Rohmer's relatively neutral filming simply serves to invite us, albeit momentarily, to forget this.

Amour contains a depiction of the crowd emerging from the metro, which again has the appearance of a documentary, and reflects Rohmer's pride at being able to film without people taking any notice of his camera. This sentiment is clearly linked to his desire for a 'caméra *absolument* invisible'; and the possibility of events taking place before an apparently neutral and unobtrusive camera is an aim which, of course, directly reflects that of the documentary filmmaker.[19] However, it is precisely in the orchestration of fictional events that the intervention of a director like Rohmer may be seen, although even Bazin admits that the reconstruction of a situation may also happen in a documentary and even claims (although this may not be a widespread view) that such a practice is 'permissible' as long as there is no attempt to trick the viewer and that the inherent nature of the event is not at variance with its reconstruction.[20] Once again, Rohmer's use of fiction emerges as a form of questioning, rather than a straightforward depiction of the 'real' world. At the very

least the camera is seen as a prism through which the spectator is provided with images and their resultant self-conscious nature invites us to analyse the way in which they are constructed.

Perceval is not a film that we would expect to discuss in relation to documentary realism, set as it is in the twelfth century, and with a decor which is essentially artificial. Nevertheless, it has a number of realistic elements. The historical authenticity and detailed reconstruction of the clothes and armour are clearly important to Rohmer and could be seen to provide us with something akin to an authentic depiction of life at this time, as is especially the case in the street scene in Escavalon. The chorus describes the different jobs carried out in the town and the images perfectly reflect these, as we see the different workers performing their daily tasks. The fact that Rohmer had earlier made a version of *Perceval* for school's television is clearly reflected in the pedagogic nature of these images from the feature film. *Perceval ou le Conte du Graal* was made in 1964 for the series 'En profil dans le texte' and it employs the voice of Antoine Vitez (Vidal in *Maud*), Chrétien de Troyes' text and actual twelfth-century miniatures so that the image gives information which the text helps us to fully understand.[21] The effect in the 1978 version resembles this in that the images provide an immediate impression of the plot, while the words (whether from the characters or the Chorus) offer a commentary. In this way a close relationship is set up between the text and the image which, when read together, provide a filmic experience of Chrétien's written original. Here again, the spectator is required to have a creative involvement in the film since it is only when he or she juxtaposes images and literary text that the film's meanings begin to emerge.

Femme also contains documentary images, this time of the workers in the sorting office where François earns the money he needs to support his studies. Michel Mesnil points out that 'rien de ce qui fait des centres de tri un des refuges de la contestation gauchiste [...] ne sera seulement esquissé dans le film'.[22] It is in this that we see the imprint that Rohmer puts on the world, even when he is filming 'real' workers in a 'real' sorting office. What he leaves out (their apparent militancy) is as crucial to the final meaning as what he shows, and we are provided with fiction pretending to be reality.

Perhaps the most complex example of this intermingling of fiction and 'documentary' occurs in *Rayon*. On one level, as we have noted, this film may be seen as an entirely fictional account of Delphine's holiday adventures. However, the script itself is almost entirely improvised, and many of the characters whose words we hear are effectively (or actually) playing themselves. This method of building up a narrative creates problems for cutting within a scene, since each take may result in a 'different' conversation, and the recognition of this further illustrates Rohmer's intense awareness of the nature of film language. Rohmer employs two techniques to solve these problems. The first involves making a tape recording of the sound track of the original master shot and then getting the actors to repeat their original lines to produce a number of reverse shots or close ups of individual characters.[23] This technique was used for the scene in Cherbourg when Delphine defends her vegetarianism: the master shot depicts her making her point while other shots provide the spectator with the family's response. The second approach is to use insert shots to create a cutaway from the main action so that certain elements of that action may be cut out. An example of this comes in the course of Delphine's café conversation with her friend Irene. The master shot depicts the exchange itself but it

is interrupted by a series of inserts: a shot of the gathering clouds, a shot of two other customers and, finally, a shot of two motorcyclists. It should also be noted that the way in which the sound of the bikes covers the words spoken is similar to Godard's and Buñuel's manipulation of sound in many of their films, as, for example, in *Je vous salue Marie* (Godard, 1984) and *Cet obscur objet du désir* (Buñuel, 1977) where some of the exchanges are inaudible. In both cases, our attention is clearly drawn to the soundtrack and its relation with the image, and it is clear that Rohmer, too, is drawing our attention to the artificiality of the filmic process, weakening the image's unassailable position and introducing areas of ambiguity within the narrative.

One other area of narrative ambiguity is clearly the green ray. This phenomenon is first referred to in a conversation, which Delphine overhears, between a group of friends who initially discuss its romantic attributes: 'quand on voit le rayon vert, on est capable de lire dans ses propres sentiments et dans les sentiments des autres'(p.61). The scientific explanation for this phenomenon, which follows, would seem to be more appropriate in a television science programme rather than a feature film. It also contains inserts, although here they have an explanatory role in showing us the type of climatic conditions under which the green ray is *unlikely* to occur: a misty horizon. The uncertainty of the status of the ray that we finally *do* see serves to complicate matters further, for it would surely be remarkable for a director renowned for his authenticity to use a special effect, especially before the computer generated images of *L'Anglaise*. Rohmer himself describes it enigmatically as 'un petit trucage [...]'[24], a statement which typically tells us very little. However, it is clear that presenting such a special effect as an actual representation of a natural phenomenon would fall outside Bazin's conditions for

*re*presenting reality discussed earlier, since in this case, the spectator is clearly being mislead. Rohmer is evidently aware that film is a medium that has a problematic relationship with the world but which can also show nature through sleight of hand. In this case, the ray *does* exist, even if the one we see was not visible in Biarritz, and so Rohmer is providing us with one possible reading of the world, rather than a wholly realistic one.

This desire to subvert and destroy the notion of the boundary between fiction and reality is again revealed in *Reinette*, through its mix of improvisation and tightly scripted scenes. The *heure bleue* of the first sketch, a moment of silence just before sunrise, is similar to the green ray, in that we are dealing with a rarely experienced natural phenomenon which invokes an emotional response in Rohmer's protagonists. Reinette describes the *heure bleue* as a period of silence just before dawn: 'Les oiseaux de jour... sont pas encore réveillés... et les oiseaux de nuit sont déjà couchés'(p.111). However, in this instance it is clear that nature is very definitely helped by technology: we are dealing with a special effect, since the microphones were not sufficiently sensitive to pick up a discernible silence and, in any case, as Rohmer admits, the phenomenon does not really occur in this part of the country: 'En Brie, où nous avons tourné, il y a encore des bruits de nuit dans les bois alors qu'il y a déjà des chants d'oiseaux dans la pleine.'[25] It is therefore highly ironic that, in the diegesis, it is an example of modern technology that prevents the two girls 'hearing' the silence on the first occasion when the sound of a tractor engine covers it. Both their attempts are filmed in a similar fashion beginning with an exterior shot of the barn, followed by back lit medium shots of the girls as they listen. One or more shots of the sky is used to end each sequence accompanied by the sound of bird song. However, the first attempt essentially shows the protagonists in one shot while its

successful counterpart is depicted in a series of shot/reverse shots of Reinette and Mirabelle. These differences, limited as they are, serve to underline and emphasise the gap between the two experiences, and the fact that such a distinction is based on the human perception of nature, albeit affected by exterior circumstances (including the arrival of the tractor and Rohmer's use of the camera). However, we must remember that both occurrences depend on Rohmer's technical intervention and this provides further proof of his admission that there is a limit associated with the desire for a truthful depiction of the world.[26] From the point of view of what could actually be heard, there is no difference between the two events, and so it is the addition of a special effect which serves to provide a new 'natural' phenomenon. Once again the trappings of documentary are used by Rohmer in order to persuade his audience to believe in something entirely artificial, as he employs a technique which reflects his belief in the complexity of the filmic image.

The sequence depicting Mirabelle's discovery of the farm could also be described as pseudo-documentary in that we are provided with a town-dweller's guide to the countryside through Mirabelle's conversation with the farmer. The camera is handheld, and appears to respond to the actress's movements, rather than anticipating pre-arranged ones - a visual approximation of the non-scripting noted earlier on the soundtrack. Scenes which, at first sight, seem to have been filmed in a similar fashion appear in *Arbre* when Bérénice discovers the animals and the plants on Julien's farm: she admits to never having seen lettuce in the ground before: 'je les vois toujours sous cellophane au prisu'(p.14). However, while the effect in *Reinette* is one of enthusiastic discovery of the countryside through a direct link between the filming technique and the feelings of the characters, in *Arbre* the more careful framing of the characters distances us from any such sentiments. Instead, we are

invited to gently mock the 'city slicker' as well as Julien's 'gentleman farmer'. Thus, minor changes in Rohmer's filmic technique will have a marked influence on his audience's reaction, as he appears to respect, but in fact subverts or plays with, the dichotomy between documentary and fiction.

In the *Kleptomane* episode in *Reinette*, the chase in the supermarket is depicted in a similarly detached fashion as Mirabelle follows the store detectives who are in turn trailing the shoplifter. We are shown the criminal carrying out her crime (putting the food into her bag), and then being questioned by the detectives, although Mirabelle's intervention will lead to her going free. Later, Mirabelle tries to justify her response to Reinette, and the difficulty she experiences is at least partly reflected in the awkward filming of the scene. As we have seen was the case with some scenes in *Rayon*, the master shot was in fact improvised while the reverse shots were filmed afterwards using the words that the actress uttered spontaneously before, a tape recording also having been made of the conversation.[27] The result is a lack of continuity in the rhythm of the acting, as the shot is more spontaneous than the reverse shot[28] and thus the awkwardness between the two flatmates is perfectly reflected in the image so that form and meaning go together.

The documentary elements in *Ami* are generally connected to the depiction of life in a new town. During the opening credits each protagonist is associated with a particular building in Cergy, as a shot of this edifice prefaces a shot of them at work. Thus, the Town Hall is associated with Blanche, the IT school with Léa, the EDF tower with Alexandre, a laboratory with Fabien and the Art School with Adrienne. Subsequently, we see more of the buildings and hear about the facilities in Cergy-Pontoise and even get a guided tour of Blanche's apartment. In addition, the scenes of Blanche and Fabien spending Sunday by the lakes give an insight into the routine

of the other people there: 'Ils viennent des banlieues moches où ils vivent la semaine, entassés les uns sur les autres, dans des HLM complètement délabrés'(p.62). Here the protagonists appear to provide a sociological commentary on the people we have seen in the previous shots. However, it is not a neutral exposition, but rather one that is elucidated from a perceived position of social superiority and so reveals more about the enunciators than it tells us of the mores of the inhabitants of these suburbs. This is in fact not a documentary at all but a fictitious point of view, which the spectator will in turn use to construct his/her personal reading of the characters.

Urban space is again constructed and explored in *Hiver*, which provides the viewer with an insight into the centre/periphery opposition in Paris as we follow Félicie on her way to work from Loïc's house in the suburbs to her job in the centre of the city: there are shots of the RER train arriving in the station, the grey murky view from its windows, the passengers crowded together and the interchange which Félicie makes (complete with a 'Direction Mairie des Lilas' sign). Her visit to Nevers reminds us of *Hiroshima mon amour* (1959) but while Resnais subverts geographical space, linking Nevers and Hiroshima through memory, Rohmer provides a kind of travelogue of the town so that it retains its own identity. As Félicie and Maxence walk around we are shown the cathedral, the archaeological museum, the reliquary of St. Bernadette, the Loire and the old walls of Nevers with inserts to provide extra visual detail, such as the body of St. Bernadette and the pots in the museum. However, Rohmer subverts this apparently real space in order to fictionalise it since each insert is from the point of view (actual or potential) of his characters and this process reaches its apogee when the street names 'comment' on them (see above).

Like *Reinette*, *Arbre* also contains a guided tour, this time of a farm and its fauna. The workers in the model-making workshop are the actual employees, while the architect who defends his development plan is a practising architect who developed an actual proposal for the area.[29] Thus it is tempting to see the scene with this architect as documentary style footage: the words are his, and the actors react spontaneously to them. However, of course, the plans have been specially created for the film, and the proposed arts centre is a fiction. This inseparability of the real and the fictional is also reflected in the way this scene is filmed. One shot (documentary) depicts most of what the architect has to say but there are a number of carefully chosen insert shots (fiction) to illustrate his points: the model of the projected centre, the drawings of it and a photograph of the type of stone that will be used in its construction. As before, this mixture reinforces the plausibility of the fiction and provides further evidence of Rohmer's awareness of the interplay between his narrative and the world in which he situates it.

An example of this interrelationship occurs in the course of *Arbre* when the journalist, Blandine, interviews a number of local people who respond in a spontaneous fashion to her improvised questions. Rohmer points to two ways of perceiving these people: either they are characters in the film who are responding to the Mayor's (fictional) projects or they are talking about culture in rural areas without any awareness of the filmic diegesis. He sees this as proof of the interface between the reality of the village and the story which he himself had invented.[30] The fact that these people knew little or nothing of the plot of the film takes nothing away from this essential ambiguity.

In all of these films the initial impression is one of effortless images which reflect the natural quality so often perceived in Rohmer's work, where the camera is

considered to be a mirror and the screen to be a window on the world. On closer examination, however, we can distinguish a level of self-consciousness that provides us with a simultaneous commentary on the images: where does documentary end and fiction begin? The answer here involves the use of documentary in order to bolster the imaginary as well as question the status of the real. This is a reflection on the very nature of any filmic representation rather than a simplistic mise-en-scène. Thus the status of all of Rohmer's images emerges as fictional because, like his colleagues, he uses images of reality (as he uses texts, paintings and street names) to create a fiction. It becomes impossible to distinguish between the two, as art remodels and revitalises reality.

The self-conscious camera

We have already noted how the camera actually influences and shapes the spectator's perception of Rohmer's films. There are a number of occasions where the camera is used in a particularly self-conscious way to reveal information which is not known by a protagonist so that, on one level, the viewer assumes responsibility for creating the fictional work. One of the clearest examples occurs in Rohmer's first feature, *Lion*, in which, once Pierre's anticipated inheritance turns out to be non-existent (his cousin is to get the money), he remains unable to contact his friends as they are either sent on assignment out of the country or are frantically searching for him. In the course of one such search, a panning shot which shows both a friend's car and Pierre's latest sordid hotel serves to link the hero with this quest, but the two do not yet coincide. Later, the appearance of Pierre and Jean-François in the same shot

reflects the impending success of the search, although each on this occasion remains entirely impervious to the presence of the other.

The fatal accident suffered by Pierre's cousin (Christian) allows Pierre to inherit after all, but he remains unaware of his good fortune, a fact emphasised in the way in which Christian's crash is depicted. There is an overhead shot of Pierre from Notre Dame cathedral, which dissolves into a drawing of Paris from above, which in turn becomes an omniscient vertical shot of a car on a minor road. The crash happens off screen and, afterwards, we see a man running, and other motorists who stop to discover that the motorist is dead. This is followed by a close up of the name of the driver on the dashboard: Christian Wesselrin. As mentioned previously, the newspaper headline 'Milliardaire sans le savoir, il disparaît' can leave us in no doubt as to what has happened: he has re-inherited but does not know it. Our understanding of the irony of Pierre's descent into vagrancy stems from this knowledge, which is kept from him and also serves to increase the dramatic tension.

In the case of *Boulangère* we initially see the narrator, as he emerges from the bakery, in a high angle shot, indicative of an omniscient camera. However, this shot turns out in fact to represent the point of view of the other woman in his life (Sylvie) whose flat overlooks the street. When the narrator discovers this, it is not without some trepidation: how much did she see of his flirting? (In fact very little.) Here the viewer knows no more than the narrator and discovers the truth at the same time as he does, when Sylvie reveals that she thought that his frequent visits to the bakery were signs of his devotion to *her*.

Genou contains a similar effect at the end, although this time the narrator never discovers the truth (the reconciliation between Claire and Gilles), a fact which is used by Rohmer to undermine the pompous self-justifications of his hero. Jérôme

sees his good deed in being the instigator of the ending of Claire and Gilles's relationship when he tells her that Gilles has in fact been with someone else. Claire promptly bursts into tears, which gives Jérôme a justification to fondle her knee. However, after Jérôme's departure from Talloires, the camera adopts Aurora's point of view and we see the young couple reunited, with the added irony in the short story that Gilles ends up caressing Claire's knee. It is in the space between the protagonist/apparent narrator and the *real* (omniscient) narrator that the true subject of the film emerges: the gap between words and actions, language and reality. The version of events provided by the 'virtual' narrator is definitively undermined when we lose his visual point of view and the camera becomes omniscient in its viewpoint, albeit also coinciding with Aurora's viewpoint.

There are two occasions in *Reinette* when one or more of the protagonists are unaware of the full facts of a situation, which have already been divulged to the viewer. The first time this happens is at the Gare Montparnasse when we see the trick which a woman (played by Marie Rivière) plays in order to extort money from unwary travellers. She claims to need money to get home since her bag has been stolen. Reinette is taken in by this story and when she sees the trick being played on someone else, she intervenes. The spectator knows in advance what is going to happen and so is invited to feel part of this creative process.

The ending of the film contains a similar situation, this time involving both Reinette and Mirabelle. The gallery owner has very reluctantly parted with 2000FF for a painting by Reinette but, after the girls have left, he tells a prospective customer that the cost of the same painting is 4000FF. Even the usually sharp Mirabelle, without whom Reinette would have had to accept an even lower price, has found her match: her victory is no more than a Pyrric one. Here the spectator is even more

involved since he/she knows more than either of the protagonists and is invited by Rohmer to reread this episode in the light of its ending.

In all of these cases the camera is used to provide a commentary on the filmic events, a commentary that, in its turn, draws our attention to the existence of an organising force who has more information available than the protagonists. In this way Rohmer continues to emerge as a manipulator of images, rather than as a mere recorder of reality, who creates hierarchies of knowledge with himself at the summit.

Jump Cuts

The self-conscious nature of Rohmer's camera may also be seen in his use of jump cuts. One of the defining features of the French New Wave is that it wanted to break the rules which governed classical continuity editing in order to register its differences with the past, and one method that was employed to signal this was the use of jump cuts, where, within the same scene, there is a noticeable temporal or spatial gap between one shot and the next. Classic editing avoids such cuts in an effort to create a seamless narrative flow, so that the spectator is unaware that different shots may well have been filmed at different times. In contrast, jump cuts draw the spectator's attention to the artificiality of the filmic medium and invite analysis of what is represented.[31] Although, as we have noted, Rohmer is perceived as belonging to the New Wave, his depiction of the world is more often described in terms of remaining within the norms of classic aesthetics[32] rather than as subscribing to any new filmic technique. However, from *Boulangère* onwards, there are examples of the image being manipulated in an innovative and unrealistic way, accompanied by self-conscious editing techniques. At one point in this film there is a

series of jump cuts followed by a zoom as the narrator walks about, attempting to decide on the best strategy for finding Sylvie. Time, at this point in the narrative, is not represented in a linear fashion. Instead, we are presented with a series of shots which represent repeated actions that took place over the few days between the hero's first 'meeting' with Sylvie in the street and his meeting with her rival, the *boulangère*. This is another example of Metz's episodic sequence, which we noted earlier in *Hiver*, where a series of brief scenes are presented in chronological order and must be assessed as a whole.[33] There is thus a correlation between image and plot, but not a 'blow by blow' account of the passing days. Rohmer uses this jump cut in an attempt to visually represent the thoughts of his narrator in a self-conscious way so that the spectator is conscious of, and indeed made part of, this filmic technique.

In *Collectionneuse*, there is a series of such cuts in the scene where Adrien and Haydée are returning after their 'night on the tiles': the countryside in the background changes a number of times in the course of their journey, although the voiceover remains continuous, so that Rohmer is subverting the classic representation of both space and time. Given that this type of playful and self-conscious representation is unusual in Rohmer's work, the spectator is immediately made aware of the existence of the camera, which can question the narrative point of view provided by Adrien. The latter may claim to despise Haydée but his actions (here going for an early morning drive with her) indicate a higher level of interest on his part. This example of the self-conscious presence of the camera is once again indicative of Rohmer's ability to direct his spectators' attention to the gaps between what the camera shows and what the narrator tells us is happening.

A similar use of jump cuts occurs in *Arbre* in the course of Julien's walks with Bérénice in the countryside. A logical reading would suggest that these scenes take place at the same time; yet this reading is perpetually frustrated by the fact that the protagonists constantly appear in different clothes. The result is to remind the spectator of the *fiction* itself, which is in keeping with the frequent appearances on screen of the text of 'les sept hasards' that structure the plot. In *Hiver*, there is a similar effect in the prologue where the characters' clothes change a number of times. In this case the 'marvellous' fits in with the fantasy atmosphere which surrounds Félicie's initial happiness. Rohmer is once again drawing our attention to the filmic medium itself by breaking classic narrative rules and, although he does not do this in a systematic fashion, it does bring the real/fiction dichotomy into ever-sharper focus.

Rohmer's continued use of the radical approach pioneered by the New Wave, and in particular its use of jump cuts, reflects his distance from classical cinema. He uses these self-conscious techniques in fiction films so that the narration draws attention to itself and requires the creative response of the spectator, a far cry from the passive role which classical narrative accords.

Empty Space

In a number of films by Rohmer we are presented with part of a shot, usually at the end of a sequence, where no character(s) are depicted and the camera remains still. Our attention is drawn to the depiction of time as it passes but "nothing happens" and we are invited to contemplate the vacated space. At its simplest, this device may be compared to punctuation, marking the boundaries between scenes, but it also leads to

moments when narrative development stops, and so inviting the spectator to analyse plot development so far, thus creating a narrative space of his/her own.

In *Maud*, in the course of the meal in Maud's flat, there is a static shot of the empty room before the door slowly opens and Marie (Maud's daughter) enters. This hiatus in the development of the plot gives us the opportunity to examine the setting, as well as creating a sense of expectancy: who is about to enter and what will her role be in the narrative development? However, it is only later on that Rohmer reveals the true significance of Marie's presence: there is in fact no bedroom, apart from Maud's, available for Jean-Louis to sleep in. Narrative control remains in the hands of the director, even as he provides his spectators with moments for their own creativity.

There is a similar shot in *Genou* when Jérôme is depicted caressing Claire's knee, having made her cry. The camera zooms in to a close-up of his hand on her knee, and there follows a series of shot/reverse shots of the protagonists' faces. The tension of the scene has reached its apogee, but continuing to show it at this level is of limited interest for the director: the audience *has* understood and simply risks boredom. What Rohmer does is to cut away for a shot of the turbulent lake in the thunderstorm: a space without people. The length of time during which Jérôme can continue with his action is entirely contingent upon the weather (once the rains stops the two characters will leave their refuge) and therefore on natural causes: all this despite his desire to be in control of events. The shot of the rain falling is synonymous with this protagonist's powerlessness, as is the case with the final shot of the film discussed above. The shot of the lake serves to distance us from Jérôme since it provides a space within the narrative from which we can critically assess his actions.

Pauline provides one of the richest sources of scenes which continue after the characters have left the screen (or begin before they appear) and single shots of an area without people during which we can analyse narrative events. For instance, we see the shutters of Marion's bedroom after Pauline has left the screen, having found out that her cousin has spent the night with Henri. This provides us with a moment to consider the effects of this plot development on Marion's relationships with Henri, and Pierre. Later, we see the landing in Henri's house for a moment before Sylvain enters the frame on his way to warn the cheating Henri that Marion has unexpectedly returned. This creates tension (will Henri be caught?) but also an opportunity to fully take account of Henri's infidelity. Carole Desbarats discerns two possible results of this type of scene: the spectator is provided with the possibility of contemplating the screen while, at the same time, finding his/her own space within the film: 'Rohmer laisse à son spectateur la liberté de se couler dans les interstices qu'il lui ménage, de penser, d'exister'.[34] The viewer's existence is acknowledged within the image itself, an admission that this image has been created to be analysed as well as viewed. Furthermore, the spectator is provided with a space within which to do this.

Reinette contains similar moments, most significantly in the shots of the sky at the end of each attempt to 'hear' the blue hour. This is a clear invocation of nature and of its existence outside the concerns of the protagonists as well as an invitation for us to reflect on their differing reactions to the presence or absence of this phenomenon: when it is absent, Reinette cries, while its presence leads to laughter. *Hiver* uses this technique more as a caesura, or at least a marker of the passing of time, in the course of the family's Christmas meal. There is a shot of the tree and the crib that serves to denote the temporal distance between the start of the scene and Félicie's subsequent conversation with her sister. In *Eté*, there is also a moment of

punctuation at the end of Gaspard and Margot's walk to see Dinard from the 'pointe du Prieuré'. The background to their conversation (the town) is out of focus but becomes suddenly sharp once they leave the frame. We, the spectators, are provided with the opportunity to comprehend the coincidence which has just become clear: *all* of Gaspard's female friends know each other and, therefore, that 'les amies de mes amies sont mes amies'.[35] As we have mentioned, *L'Anglaise* begins with a series of still shots (involving paintings produced for the film). These, combined with the voiceover, serve to introduce the two protagonists, as well as the locations for the film. In this case, the spectator is given the opportunity to analyse what he/she is being told, without the possibility of information over-ride. However, since we know little of the characters at this stage, these stills are less a time for analysis by the audience, as was the case in the previous films.

If Bazin sees depth of field as a democratic effect used to provide the spectator with freedom of choice, and requiring an essential creative reading on their part,[36] we are here being provided with a simple but effective method of allowing an audience to think for itself. It is interesting to situate Rohmer's methods in relation to more extreme experimental directors such as Marguerite Duras, for instance, whose highly challenging and idiosyncratic works require that the viewer 'must assume creative responsibility, must become the director of the film'.[37] Rohmer's camerawork certainly enables us to become aware of a degree of manipulation, creativity and ambiguity, which has hitherto not been widely recognised, and is entirely in keeping with the basic conflict that he creates between appearance and reality.

The Blank Screen

The blank screen is a moment in a film when we are provided with no discernible image so that only one colour, usually black, is visible on screen. One of the most extreme examples of this is Derek Jarman's *Blue* (1994) where the screen remains blue throughout the film and the audience is invited to listen to every detail of the soundtrack. In most films the use of this technique leads to the narrative pausing, an unusual device in classical films, and we can see in this distancing technique a self-conscious comment upon the nature of film, in that it draws attention to the medium itself, and increases the involvement of the spectator by inviting analysis of the plot. In *Maud* there is a fade to a blank screen as we move to the epilogue, five years later. Françoise's words : 'Si on ne parlait jamais de tout cela. Tu veux bien, n'en parler jamais?'(p.39) are on the soundtrack as the screen goes blank and so force us to reflect even more closely on what they say about the couple's level of communication, where Françoise and Jean-Louis are prepared to lie about relationships *before* their marriage. Here the image provides a visual representation of the intervening five years: there has been no progress in the exchange of information between the two parties. These eight seconds of darkness say much about the type of (safe) relationship Jean-Louis is satisfied with and why he 'runs away' from Maud (she is 'dangerous'). These seconds also provide a space for these words to leave the narrative world and apply directly to us. The lack of image, perhaps more than any other device, invites *us* to imagine the gaps: the effect is again akin to that found in many of Duras's films, an extreme example being *L'homme atlantique* (1981). We are encouraged to re-evaluate an initially simplistic view of

Rohmer as a director as it forces us to take an active role in creating meaning for the film we are watching.

There are a number of fades to a blank screen in *Amour*. Those between Parts One and Two, and before the arrival of the au pair, are essentially markers of the passage of time. However, they also serve to reflect the different stages in Frédéric's relationships. The fade between the two parts marks the point when the level of his attachment to Chloé becomes absolutely clear: he is evidently upset when she stands him up, after he has lied to his wife in order to meet her, and this is compounded when she goes off to Italy with another man. The second fade (soon afterwards) introduces the English au pair, who walks around the flat naked but has no effect whatsoever on Frédéric, another indicator of the feelings he harbours for the now absent Chloé. The fact that these fades follow on so closely emphasises their role as providers of reflective space for the spectator: Frédéric's marriage seems so threatened that the happy ending *in extremis* does not ring true: it is only a matter of time before it will also come to an end.

There is an even more crucial fade almost at the end of this film, just before Frédéric's final visit to Chloé, and after he has suggested a meeting when they would discuss the future of their relationship. At this stage it seems almost certain that they will make love, and this probability is confirmed in the scene immediately after the fade. Frédéric arrives outside Chloé's room with an enormous plant. Its sheer size serves to undermine any sense of serious purpose he might have and her *chance* shower as he arrives (she has been expecting him) appears to leave the final result in no doubt. The effect of this is to totally undermine the sincerity of his hurried retreat back to his wife, whose relationship is further weakened, albeit ironically, by her emotion: was *she* also intending to be with someone else? These seconds of interlude

can be seen to provide the audience with the necessary time to contemplate the developments within the plot, and produce their own range of interpretations so as to actively engage in the film.

Marquise stands out in Rohmer's work for its use of fades to black. These are essentially used to denote temporal changes, for example, the fade between the first scene (the reading aloud of the newspaper advertisement) and the second, which portrays the lead up to the attack on the fortress defended by the Marquise's father. Sometimes these ellipses can indicate a very short period of time passing (different moments from the night of the attack) whereas others may encompass much longer periods, even a number of months, for example, between the end of the wedding and the 'newlyweds' kissing. The effect is to draw attention to a directorial choice: this is an economical device for depicting the passing of time, implying that some events are essential while others, less important, are 'faded out'. As well as providing a space for audience contemplation, such moments remind us of an authorial voice behind all of these images making value judgements upon them.

However, one fade stands out from the others and has a second and deeper level of meaning. It occurs after the Count has rescued the Marquise and returned to watch her sleeping. There is a dolly shot into a close-up of his face, followed by the fade. Initially, this fade appears no different from the others and so we assume that nothing of importance has occurred in the time lapse indicated by the blank screen. It is only as the film progresses that we are made to suspect that what was not shown is in fact of central importance: that the scene we were denied is the very one in which the Marquise became pregnant, in other words the catalyst for the entire plot. The effect of this is to retain a level of suspense: if nothing of import occurred in the course of the other ellipses, then why should it here? Could the Count possibly be

innocent? In this case the image does not lie, but the truth is to be found in what is not seen. The simultaneous reference to Fuseli's painting tends to undermine the Count's innocence, and so the overall effect of the scene is to force the spectator to reflect on what is/may be happening. We are forced to participate in an active fashion in the film so that, on one level, its very development depends on our continuing analysis of the narratorial events presented for scrutiny. This is clearly some way from Rohmer's reputation as a simple presenter of events.

A similar opportunity to misread what is visible, this time involving a film's protagonist, occurs in *Pauline* when Pierre sees Louisette making love. However, Henri's bedroom window acts as a frame which prevents him from seeing her companion, so that Pierre has no clear evidence to disprove Henri's claim that she was with Sylvain. In both cases the invisible is revealed as being more important than what is actually seen. This forms part of the illusion/reality dichotomy that lies at the heart of Rohmer's self-conscious awareness of the nature of film. The spectator has only an illusion to go on and yet must approach this in a critical manner, even if at times (just as it is for Pierre) it is tempting to take our partial view as being 'reality'.

Femme provides another example of a fade that introduces a layer of meanings into the narrative. This fade occurs as François sits at a café in the *Gare de l'Est*, having spotted Christian at another table, and then promptly falls asleep. The very self-conscious filmic device of an iris-in to François, accompanied by the disappearance of diegetic sound, marks the beginning of this moment, which results in a four second black screen followed by an iris-out to reveal François again. This may of course be read as simply signifying the passage of time while the protagonist was asleep and so increasing our identification with him by leaving unseen what he

himself misses. However, the association of the iris-in/out with the past, and especially silent film, adds to the impression that the remainder of the film may not be set in the same 'real' time as the initial scenes. Thus, this device could be a transition marker between waking and sleeping and so the remainder of *Femme* might be the representation of François's dream. Even if we do not accept this interpretation, the subsequent plot development is imbued with an air of fantasy that is supported by its twists of chance, and by the appearance of the mysterious Lucie who should be at school, who likes to play at being Sherlock Holmes, and whose boyfriend eventually turns out to be none other than François's friend. The fade thus introduces ambiguity into the heart of the film, and plays an important role in the main narrative in much the same way that the fade on the sleeping Marquise did.

In the case of *Nuits*, there are a number of fades, but each of them functions clearly as a marker of the passage of time, and nothing indicates that anything of importance has occurred in the interim. Again, fades are used to denote both wide temporal lapses, such as that between November and December, and also much shorter ones, as between the different times when the two protagonists arrive home at the end. The longer intervals are signified through the use of titles for each new month. The principal function of the shorter time lapses is to help focus attention on two key moments. The first of these is Louise proposing her plan of a separate pied-à-terre to Rémi: a decision which, in many ways, leads to their break up since it provides them both with the opportunity to meet other potential partners. The second precedes Rémi's return when he has finally decided to leave Louise. Both fades add to a sense of expectation and invite us to consider possible consequences, again involving us in the creative process.

Rayon, by contrast, contains only one fade, but its importance is, if anything, even greater within the film's diegesis. It occurs near the end of the film, as the couple wait for the sun to set. Delphine tells Jacques: 'On va attendre un tout petit peu. Je te demande de la patience'(p.71). The ensuing three second fade compels us to experience the same delay, and brings our involvement in the plot to its apotheosis in order to prepare us for the 'magic' of the final glimpse of the green ray itself. Here the fade is as much a creator of suspense as an indicator of the passing of time, and contributes to the emotional charge of the ending by underlining the uncertainty about viewing the ray: it will not appear until the time is right.

Arbre also contains only one fade; here it serves to divide up Blandine's journey to the magazine office. A shot of the *Assemblée Nationale* clock indicating 10.58 is followed by a dark screen before we see her arriving at the *Après-demain* offices, where she will meet up with Julien. The preceding title, part of a series as we noted earlier, has explained the importance of the fact that Blandine has inadvertently unplugged her answering machine and will miss the message telling her not to go to the magazine. Therefore, the fade neatly divides cause and effect. Again this visual device has both a temporal and diegetic role by marking the passage of time and pointing forward to Blandine's article, which operates as a catalyst for subsequent plot developments as the other protagonists react to its publication.

The third of the *Contes des quatre saisons* (*Eté*) contains a single fade which, as in *Femme*, is introduced by the highly self-conscious device of an iris-out. This immediately follows the opening credits and so serves as a marker of imagination, giving a fairy-tale air to the entire film. In addition it is, as noted above, a mechanism associated with the past (silent film) and so contributes to a questioning of the temporal setting of the narrative: the setting appears to be contemporary yet this

cinematic effect is not. It is also noteworthy that Rohmer has revealed that he based the plot on events which happened to him in his twenties, and so the inspiration for the narrative is in fact nearly sixty years old.[38] All of this serves to denote the key role of time in this film, as well as to signal Gaspard's final realisation that the moment has not yet come to form a meaningful relationship. Margot claims that winter is the best time to visit Ouessant (a visit which serves as a metaphor for developing a relationship), but it will not be possible for Gaspard to accompany her for her boyfriend will have returned by then. A graphologist claims that Gaspard will only be successful when he reaches thirty and, given Rohmer's claim that this film is partly autobiographical, and taking account of the fact that he himself was forty-nine before having a cinematic success (*Maud*), then the concept of there being little a person can do until the time is right assumes an increasingly central importance within the film. This lack of choice and element of predestination is of course at the heart of Jansenism, and inevitably recalls the themes of *Maud*. Rohmer's characters deny that their choices can make any difference in their lives but here, as we have seen in many other instances, the spectator is invited to treat these claims with caution and to distance him/herself somewhat from the protagonists. *L'Anglaise* also uses fades in order to provide the spectator with moments during which he/she may consider what is happening on screen. After Grace successfully hides Champcenetz from the soldiers, there is a two second fade; and before the crucial meeting, in the course of which the Duc de Biron and Grace try to persuade the Duc d'Orléans not to vote for the King's execution, there is also a brief fade to black. Similarly, before the start of this crucial vote, there is another fade allowing us to consider what the Duc may do. Once again, the viewer is provided with a time to increase his/her participation in the creative process.

The very use of fades in self-consciously filmic terms is unusual in contemporary cinema and, by recalling a past cinematic era, draws attention to the medium itself. Such devices focus our attention on the history and language of film and work in two ways: they can invite a questioning on the part of the spectator on a diegetic level while simultaneously reminding us that this is a representation of the world rather than an unadulterated view of it. Rohmer is very much sharing with us his questioning of this art form and inviting us to pursue these debates. The inevitable result of this process is our continual re-evaluation of Rohmer as a straightforward director.

Painting

Rohmer, as we have already noted, has written quite extensively about the relationship between painting and cinema. In addition, he has also reflected on the references to paintings in his own films and he begins by outlining five axioms which he tries to follow in the course of his work.[39] First, since film is an autonomous art form, it must be judged according to its own criteria rather than those applicable to literature, painting or music. Secondly, and despite this, it *is* possible to analyse the pictorial quality of a film and, indeed, any organisation of forms within the delimited screen space will have its roots in the two-dimensionality of painting. Thirdly, Rohmer refers to the sheer variety of the plastic arts that encompass not just painting but also sculpture, architecture, dance and cinema. Thus, the use of the plastic arts in a film can be pictorial, architectural or filmic, corresponding to Rohmer's view of the three spaces of cinema. Rohmer limits his analysis here to the pictorial and to the organisation of forms in relation to painting. The fourth axiom

affirms that pictorial influences in a film are not necessarily a positive thing, as they may undermine its cinematic quality by drawing the spectator's attention to a still image. The final axiom focuses on Rohmer's claim that he has never set out to imitate paintings in a film, although he admits that this happened in *Marquise* where the shot of the sleeping Marquise is a clear citation of Fuseli's *Nightmare*. He also describes the more subtle use he made of Fragonard's *Le Verrou* in the same film as inspiration for the dramatic gestures of the characters.

We have already examined the role of painting in *Genou* and *Marquise* where there *are* direct citations or references to the work of specific painters in the images themselves, and which thus serve to multiply the layers of meaning of the narrative. Sometimes, or so Rohmer claims, the paintings glimpsed in a film are of little significance in themselves but rather provide a pictorial background that impinges little on narrative events (p.112). Rohmer cites, for example, a painting by the German expressionist Emil Nolde, which the narrator looks at out of boredom in *Suzanne*, and the paintings in *Amour*, which were executed by the actor Bernard Verley, as examples of background images (pp.113, 116). The choice of such works nevertheless functions on several levels: it was a painting by Emil Nolde, owned by producer Barbet Schroeder's mother, which was used to raise finance for *Boulangère* (p.114).[40] Thus, the subsequent presence of the painting by Nolde in *Suzanne* can be read as a self-conscious reference to the financing of the film so that the decor is more than a straightforward representation of 'reality'.

Maud contains a number of pictures that Rohmer reveals to be photographs taken from an atlas of the moon. The craters we see are reminiscent of those near Clermont-Ferrand, which the protagonists climb, although in the film they remain almost invisible due to the weather. The director claims that these photographs were

quite simply intended to compensate for this absence of the 'real thing' (p.114). The result is that the actual mountains are hidden while the *moon's* surface is shown, so that Nature is at once withheld and revealed and we are left to interpret ourselves the status and significance of the images we observe. These images are also a reminder of events in the real world which are never referred to in the course of the diegesis: while filming took place over Christmas 1968, Apollo 8 brought astronauts around the moon for the first time.[41] This is a rare, if subtle, example of outside events impinging on Rohmer's filmic world. There are also reproductions of two drawings by Leonardo de Vinci, which Rohmer explains as follows: 'j'ai toujours pensé que le visage de la comédienne [Françoise Fabian] avait quelque chose de très léonardesque et c'est un hommage peut-être que je rends à Vinci de façon tout à fait indirecte' (pp.114-115). In addition to referring to the ambiguity present in the smile of the *Mona Lisa*, a subjective quality is revealed here as the spectator is left to understand, or even agree with, this comparison: we recognise here another example of the importance of the creative role of the viewer.

In the case of *Reinette*, the paintings contained within the diegesis are by the actress Joëlle Miquel (Reinette). What is interesting in this instance is that Rohmer claims they have no link with the atmosphere of the film itself: 'il y a même une opposition. Ils sont dans un style post-surréaliste, bande dessinée, etc'(p.118). In this case, we are justified in wondering what his reasons for including the paintings may be. This is not what we would expect from this director and so this art work clearly results in simultaneously drawing attention to the filmic medium (the paintings are shown one by one for the camera) as well as indicating an instance of collaboration in Rohmer's creative process as he is prepared to have another 'artist' involved in his work. Furthermore, they do directly give rise to a joke at his own expense when the

gallery owner describes them as representing the fantasies of an older man: 'des fantasmes d'homme d'âge mûr. Et même très mûr!'(p.177). Here there is a sense of a refreshing playfulness that is at odds with Rohmer's straight and somewhat humourless reputation which we noted in the first section.

In *Mariage*, the poster that Sabine hangs on her bedroom wall represents a Man Ray painting, and depicts three fruit underneath three white shapes. However, Sabine claims to have chosen it because of the colour of its border (pink) rather than for what it might represent, and Rohmer has said that pink is one of the three key colours in the film as well as being 'la couleur du personnage'(p.120). This choice of a painting based on its colour, rather than on its form, reflects this director's use of other art forms to fit into the visual pattern of his film. Three other paintings serve as markers of symbols in this work. Sabine tells Edmond that she provided Clarisse with the idea of painting the sun onto lampshades and the sun also appears in a reproduction of a painting by Magritte, in Sabine's room (p.120). Rohmer reveals that in both cases these paintings recall the setting sun as seen in the area around Le Mans, another example of the importance of location in his work. Nature is also reflected in the presence of the moon (which can be seen in binary opposition to the sun) in a reproduction of a Millet painting (in Sabine's room) which fits in with the dream-like nature of the quest for a 'good marriage'. The moon reappears, of course, as a motif in *Nuits* while the sun plays a key role in *Rayon*, so that their appearance here may well serve as an announcement of things to come.

Rohmer sees Matisse as the principal artistic influence in *Pauline*, and not only do we see a reproduction of that painter's *La Blouse roumaine* in Henri's house, but Pauline takes up the pose of the model in the painting, during the restaurant scene with Pierre. Rohmer claims that her posture was fortuitous, since he had not given

Amanda Langlet any instructions to follow, but then adds that he would not have noticed the similarity if he had not already been thinking of Matisse. The painting's main colours of red, white, and blue are the principal ones of the film itself and Rohmer also credits Matisse with providing him with the courage to include a mix of horizontal, vertical and oblique lines in the shots, with a boldness which could well have led to a sense of cacophony (pp.120-122). Thus, while we may not be presented with a vision of the world 'as it is', there is a clear link between this *impression* of reality and the post-impressionist painter who inspired it. It becomes clear that a painting can go beyond reflecting a character to influence the way the film as a whole is shot. Yet again this suggests a fundamentally formalist and self-conscious approach to filmmaking on Rohmer's part.

In a similar fashion to the work of Matisse, paintings by Mondrian are accorded an important role in *Nuits*, and this is made clear by the presence of reproductions of two of his works hanging in Rémi's apartment. Rohmer claims that he was critical of Mondrian when there was 'une sorte de dictature du mondrianisme, de l'abstraction géométrique' but since this no longer pertains, he is happy to be more positive (p.122). Thus, Rohmer's reputation as a traditionalist may well be connected with his desire to avoid an artistic hegemony rather than to any wholesale rejection of things that are new. In fact the paintings were chosen by Pascale Ogier (Louise) and this, as we saw earlier, provides additional evidence of Rohmer's willingness to collaborate. The predominant colours of the paintings (grey, blue and a dark red) are reproduced in other elements of the decor, notably the flowers and the wallpaper. Even the background in the Auber station café contains grey, blue and an orangey red. This creates a harmony of colours through the film that contributes to an overall sense of unity while also reflecting the lives of the characters: mundane (cold

grey and blue) with moments of crisis or decision (vibrant red). These paintings work to provide a visual commentary on the characters' lives and an awareness of this role adds further to the spectator's creative input into the film.

Rendez-vous is a work in which paintings play an especially important role both in terms of creating a particular atmosphere and in inspiring particular conversations. Indeed, Rohmer claims that there is a 'peintre-patron' for each of the three episodes in the film.[42] In 'Le rendez-vous de 7 heures' the painter in question is Miró: a reproduction of one of his works can be seen in Esther's room and the camera remains on it even after its owner has left the frame, inviting the spectator to examine it. The impact of this painting as a leitmotif comes from its bright colours and playful shapes, which not only suggest the colours worn by the protagonist, but also the vivid tones of the Niki de Saint Phalle fountain that we see in the course of the fateful rendezvous when Esther discovers her boyfriend has a lover. The shapes of the fountain also echo those found in the Miró painting and provide a visual metaphor for Rohmer's own ability to display filmic playfulness. Even as we watch these images, we are made aware of the differing levels of links between them and their distance from unproblematic realism.

'Les bancs de Paris' has the solemn air of the *art pompier* of the late nineteenth century as its 'patron', as is most pointedly seen in the Medicis fountain sculpture in the Luxembourg Gardens that was designed by Ottin in 1863.[43] The characters discuss in some detail the significance of its depiction of the jealous Polyphemus about to kill Acis and Galata: in many ways this depiction could represent the anger of Benoît, the boyfriend who is being deceived. The problems of the characters are thus depicted in the background, as well as the foreground, providing a mise-en-abîme effect: we see a scene and simultaneously receive a

commentary upon it. Later on, the Cubists of the Bateau-Lavoir are also referred to, as the protagonists walk through Montmartre, and we are shown the Geode of the Parc de la Villette which is perhaps a twentieth-century example of *art pompier* and certainly provides further visual evidence for Rohmer's interest in more recent public art.

In the episode 'Mère et enfant 1907' painting itself is foregrounded, since the protagonist is a painter, and the plot includes a visit to the Picasso museum. The Cubists ultimately emerge as providing an essential link between all three episodes of the film as Miró ('Le Rendez-vous de 7 heures') and Picasso worked in the Bateau-Lavoir that is visited by the central couple in 'Les bancs'. This tight intertextuality extends to other works by Rohmer, as Mondrian, whose work, as we have seen, plays a significant role in *Nuits*, was also a member of the Cubist movement. In addition, the paintings we see in the artist's studio depict either crowds or wide expanses of space which, as Rohmer explains, fit in with his themes 'puisqu'il est quand même beaucoup question d'espace et de foule dans *Les Rendez-vous*'.[44] Painting is here revealed as an additional signifier within the central themes of the film, as well as naturally contributing to the overall visual meaning.

The influence of Cubist painting, and especially Picasso (in the light of the visit to the museum devoted to his work), is also reflected in the filmic image itself. When the second girl comments that the Scandavian girl could still look attractive if she were painted with one eye facing ahead and the other facing sideways, she herself consecutively takes up precisely these two positions in relation to the camera. The difference between film and painting is epitomised in this scene in that the two views of the eye can be shown simultaneously by Picasso (as in *Grand nu au fauteuil rouge* which is also seen in *Rendez-vous*) while Rohmer chooses to reveal them one

after the other. In one case, we are presented with an immediate and incomplete depiction, and in the other with a succession of images that combine to produce a whole. It is a reminder of the way in which the cinema itself depends on still images to give the illusion of movement. Rohmer is clearly aware of the visual links between painting and film and his use of the former serves once again to draw attention to the artificiality of the filmic image.

However, the paintings also operate here as a plot device that is used to account for the chance meeting of the characters. The Scandinavian girl, who has come to Paris to study art, has been sent to meet the painter by a mutual friend, while the second girl is in the museum to check some colour transparencies for her husband's book. This is at least the 'official version', but in a film where truth is constantly being manipulated, we may well wonder at the readiness of the newly married woman to go to this stranger's studio: is she also recounting a narrative of her own? The effect is to increase the participation of the spectator since each of us will have a slightly different version of the plot represented. Thus, these paintings simultaneously draw our attention to the artificiality of the filmic medium itself and also to the contrived elements within the plot.

The use of paintings in L'Anglaise, as we have already seen, also draws attention to the filmic process as well as providing a solution to the problem of depicting the past. These paintings are inspired by works by De Machy, Hubert, Robert, Boilly, Janinet and Prieur that were produced around the time of the diegesis.[45] Jean-Baptiste Morot produced the thirty-six paintings which appear as the exterior locations for Rohmer's film and the actors were then filmed and electronically transferred into these backgrounds.[46] In this case, our initial expectations of a straightforward depiction of the past are undermined, as Rohmer

comes to terms with the difficulty of depicting the world which his characters inhabit in a convincing way. The result is a *re*presentation of Paris in the 1790s (akin to the *re*telling of Grace's story) so that the audience is aware of the artifice involved but comes to accept it within the parameters of the film. The interiors also involve the use of painted backgrounds and further contribute to this sense of artificiality which contrasts (as it did in the case of *Perceval*) with the careful use of costume designs from the time.[47] It is through this tension between the mimetic and the artificial that Rohmer achieves a vibrant depiction of the past while simultaneously drawing our attention to the fictional essence of his film.

Songs

Songs are used in a number of Rohmer's films in ways that draw attention to the spectacle of the fiction as well as commenting on it through their words. In this they differ from the more usual use of non-diegetic music in film in order to heighten tension or emotion, a practice which is avoided by Rohmer. Such music differs from songs in that the latter are made up of a joint articulation of words and melody, although both can contribute to the reaction of a spectator. However, as Barthes points out, even within songs there can be an emphasis on communication through the structures of the language being used (the pheno-song) or on the diction of that language (the geno-song).[48] In the case of Rohmer, the emphasis is on the pheno-song in order to transfer a meaning rather than an emotion, although the geno-song is not totally excluded. *Perceval*, of course, contains the most sustained use of such songs since the Chorus's commentary on the plot is entirely sung. In addition to this, the characters sometimes sing in order to recount their actions, as when Blanchefleur

sings of her night with Perceval. What is even stranger is that we see her singing as she carries out the acts described in the song in a similar fashion to a musical. This forms part of the self-consciously artificial elements of this work (especially the set) which were examined in more detail above in Section 3, while also providing a sort of doubling or mise-en-abîme that painting also creates. These parallel versions of the narrative initiate a dialogue between the two, which prevents the spectator from forgetting that he/she is witnessing a representation of events, in the same way that Chrétien de Troyes claims to be representing a tale which he read in a book.[49] Both form and content are influenced by the source text and this is reflected in the use of song.

Songs also play a significant role in *Femme*, though in a different and subtler way. At the start, François whistles a tune that recurs a number of times in the course of the film. We hear it, for example, when he returns to his room at 9am, and later in the café when he is with Lucie. Lucie herself uses the same theme to sing of his predicament: 'Le pauvre François est bien embêté, sa petite chérie l'a laissé tomber pour un aviateur, quel malheur!'(p.55). At the end, when François's colleague passes by, having kissed Lucie, he too is whistling the same tune. François has probably lost both women and so the words of the song (still the same tune) which accompany the images of him posting his postcard to Lucie (and then the closing credits) are especially poignant: 'Paris m'a séduit / Paris m'a trahi / Paris m'a pris mes espoirs et mes illusions'(p.65). This simple tune has been present throughout the film and has passed from François to Lucie to her boyfriend and finally to the closing song. It provides an element of unity to a series of chance encounters, by creating memory patterns in the spectators, and the words of the song itself provide a self-conscious

commentary on the protagonist's predicament and more generally on the problems of living in a major city.

Nuits uses two songs to provide an element of commentary on what happens, and Alain Bergala points to the words of the Eli and Jacno song at the first party and its phrase 'les dés sont pipés' which accompanies the image of Bastien and Marianne, who will later be involved with Louise and Rémi.[50] This can be seen as a subtle hint of the changes to come. Rohmer denies this was done consciously and claims it is a coincidence, but the subtitle of the book in which this interview appears is: 'Tout est fortuit sauf le hasard'. This is yet another example of Rohmer's complexity and his highly developed level of playfulness.

The second song at the second party contains references to the moon, and subsequently intrudes on Louise's conversation with Octave and then accompanies the images of Louise and Bastien on a motorbike, in a restaurant, and dancing. It finishes with the line 'c'est la pleine lune' and a shot of this phenomenon, which relates not merely to the title but also to the subsequent explanation from the painter in the café that no one sleeps when there is a full moon. The song (like the first one) provides a hint of what is to come the following morning: Rémi has had a similar experience to Louise this night (he has 'slept' with someone else), except *he* wishes to stay with his new partner.

If this last song in *Nuits* is unusual in Rohmer's work in that it is (for the most part) non-diegetic, its counterpart in *Arbre* is even more surprising for it involves a clear suspension of disbelief. The song is begun by the teacher in his classroom, but he is clearly miming the text, and there is no sign of the musicians playing. The music stops at the end of the scene only to continue almost immediately at a party in Julien's garden. A choir accompanies the Mayor, but also singing with

them is Bérénice, who has clearly been filmed in Paris (the Arc de Triomphe is visible in the background and there are two insert shots of the capital's streets). Country and city are visually linked by this song, which claims to have found the solution to the conflicts between them: 'nous vivrons tous à la campagne'(p.66) with holidays being spent in the city. Rohmer's awareness of the naivety of this resolution is clearly reflected in the content and filming of these sequences. The school children add an air of innocence to the message and the music itself has a simple, almost childlike, harmony. The initial non-diegetic sound, combined with Bérénice's presence in another city not preventing her from joining in, creates a fairy-tale atmosphere that has already been reflected in the conditional statements which punctuate the film. The song thus emerges as an integral part of the self-conscious atmosphere of the work as a whole, rather than as a slightly embarrassing finale.

Eté contains the most sustained use of songs in a Rohmer film that frequently reflect directly on developments in the plot. The opening credits are accompanied by Gaspard(?) whistling the tune of the song he is working on, and he is shown on a number of occasions in the act of composing. After Gaspard and Margot kiss for the first time, he whistles the same tune, and that night he works on it with a tape recorder. Ironically, this song was originally dedicated to Léna, but now it is firmly associated with her 'rival'. The song continues its association with Gaspard's women when Solène sings it, accompanied by him on the guitar, and we become more aware of the speed of their developing relationship as they kiss passionately at the end. Solène goes on to sing a fuller version of the same song in the boat, accompanied by the accordionist, and again (in a truncated version) after Gaspard has finally agreed to go with *her* to Ouessant. In this way the song has moved from Léna to Margot and

on to Solène, reflecting Gaspard's own trajectory and becoming a leitmotif for his emotional wanderings.

A second song, 'Santiano', is used in a similar fashion. Léna sings it for the first time when she is talking to Gaspard about *their* planned trip to Ouessant. However, its first line ('Je pars pour de longs mois, laissant Margot', (p.43)) reminds us of another potential companion for a journey to this island, and the song itself is heard again at the end of the film. By now the meaning of this line becomes a literal one as Gaspard goes off on the ferry and waves goodbye to Margot. Both songs form an integral part of the complex web of relations between the characters as we recall that all three girls know each other, in addition to being linked through their relationships with Gaspard. The music thus provides an authorial commentary on Gaspard's lack of commitment to any of these potential partners, and its ironic overtones are perfectly reflected in his final decision to abandon all three in order to buy an eight track tape recorder to help him with his song writing.

Two other songs also play a part in this film. Gaspard and Margot sing part of 'Valparaiso', which contains the line 'Goodbye! Farewell' that is a clear reference to the short term nature of their relationship. In addition, the fisherman sings a sea shanty which, as well as reflecting Margot's interest in ethnography, also provides another example of documentary appearing within the fictional world of a Rohmer film: this is a real sailor sharing part of his own heritage.

Automne also contains a striking example of a song used in a self-conscious fashion and which accompanies the characters as they dance at the end. The scene is a wedding reception, and while the song is diegetic in nature, Rohmer draws special attention to its words by subtitling the original *patois* in French. On one level, the effect is to provide a commentary on the lives of the protagonists: they progress

through the years and the singer hopes that all will turn out well for them. However, the references to the passing seasons, combined with the filming of this *Conte* at the end of the series, add a note of nostalgia at the swift passing of time. Indeed, the refrain:

> Si la vie est un voyage
> Vous y souhaite plein beau temps
> Vert et bleu et fleurs sauvages
> Bonne route, mes enfants

can be read as an exceptionally personal statement from the filmmaker himself to his audience and an admission that there will be a time when they will have to continue without him.

The Revolutionary songs in *L'Anglaise* appear less self-conscious and serve, at least on one level, to provide a more realistic background soundtrack to the artificial images that we have already analysed. They can serve to underline both the danger that Grace is in (even her own cook sings 'les Artistos, on les aura') or, for example, the strength of feeling of the Duc's supporters (who are singing in the street when they see him and voice their support as he returns from England). The use of songs to recreate the atmosphere of the past is reminiscent of Truffaut's *Le dernier métro* (1980), a film where Lucas Steiner's need to hide in the cellar of his theatre can be likened to Champcenetz's hiding in Grace's bedroom. In Rohmer's case, depicting a much more distant past, these songs play an even more important role as markers of time. However, their words can also comment in a self-conscious way on the diegesis: the contrast between the ambiguity of the Duc's position (the King's brother who supports the Revolution) and the unambiguous stance of the song heard as he drives by ('Ça ira') is a clear indicator of the impossibility of his position. The

song leaves us in little doubt of what will happen and invites us to think as we watch: this is surely the essence of a self-consciously filmic approach.

Rohmer's willingness to play with elements of image and sound in order to produce an ambiguity in his depiction of the world contributes still further to his flexibility and inventiveness as a director. Attention is drawn to different elements of the filmic representation so that their artificiality is made clear. Thus, it is a testament to his consummate skill that we accept (and frequently ignore) the most audacious of these manipulations of reality which paradoxically create an impression of unmediated images. The individual filmic elements are frequently foregrounded as artificial and yet the result is greater than the sum of its parts and has a sense of coherent unity. This acceptance is made easier through the spectator's potential level of participation so that the self-consciously filmic creates a space for the audience within the image. It is precisely the importance of this role for the spectator that has become clear in the course of our analysis, providing a constant reminder of the modern elements within the work of this director.

NOTES

[1] See *Le petit Robert* (1989), p.341.

[2] Alfred de Musset, *Comédies et proverbes*, Paris: Editions Malesherbes, 1947, p.194.

[3] See interview with Rohmer, *Cahiers du cinéma* no.346 (April 1983), 19.

[4] La Fontaine, 'La Laitière et le pot au lait' in *Fables* Paris: Didier, 1964, p.107.

[5] See interview with Rohmer, *Cahiers du cinéma* no.346 (April 1983), 19.

[6] Chrétien de Troyes, p.64.

[7] ibid., pp.92-94.

[8] Rimbaud, *Poésies*, Paris: Livre de Poche, 1972, p.147.

[9] ibid., p.147

[10] Interview, *Cinématographe* no.122 (September 1986), 33.

[11] The building of the mediatheque would require the tree to be cut down. Ironically, it did fall down during a storm on 4 April 1994. See '*L'arbre, le Maire et la médiathèque* a été tourné dans le Sud-Vendée', *Ouest-France*, 19 July 2000 at http://parlange.free.fr/pages/village_saint_juire.html. Accessed 17 December 2003.

[12] See Jean Douchet, 'Un Esprit 'Nouvelle Vague': les Films du Losange' in *Pour un cinéma comparé. Influences et répétitions*, edited by Jacques Aumont, Paris: Cinémathèque française, 1996, p.72.

[13] Rohmer describes these cases as 'les [...] idées que je n'ai pas eues'. See interview, *Les Inrockuptibles* no.166 (23 September 1998), http://www2.lesinrocks.com/DeatilArticle.cfm?iditem=80906&idheading1=4. Accessed 12 August 2002.

[14] Eric Rohmer, *Six contes moraux*, pp.8-9.

[15] See Jean-Pierre Jeancolas, *Histoire du cinéma français*, Paris: Nathan, 1995, pp.11-13. The quote is taken from page 12.

[16] This film is discussed in the chapter on adaptation.

[17] The priest is Guy Léger, a close friend of André Bazin, who introduced him to the cinema while they were both stationed in Bordeaux during the 'drôle de guerre'. Léger wrote an article as part of a collective homage to Bazin, *Cahiers du cinéma* no.91 (January 1959), 2-5. See also Dudley Andrew, *André Bazin*, Paris: Editions de l'Etoile, 1983, pp.53-55.

[18] This was the first film shown to a paying audience on 28 December 1895 in Paris. See Jean-Pierre Jeancolas, p.11.

[19] *Cahiers du Cinéma* no.172 (November 1965), 34.

[20] André Bazin, *Qu'est-ce que le cinéma?*, p.38.

[21] See interview with Rohmer, *Cinéma 79* no.242 (February 1979), 11.

[22] Michel Mesnil, '*La femme de l'aviateur* ou la France en creux de 1980', *Etudes cinématographiques* nos.149-152 (September 1986), 56.

[23] See interview with Rohmer, *Positif* no.309 (November 1986), 17.

[24] See interview with Rohmer, *Cahiers du cinéma* no.392 (February 1987), 11.

[25] ibid., 11.

[26] ibid., 11.

[27] See interview with Rohmer, *Positif* no.309 (November 1986), 17.

[28] ibid., p.17.

[29] Interview with Rohmer, *Cahiers du cinéma* nos.467/68 (May 1993), 67.

[30] ibid., 68.

[31] See David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson, pp.222-224.

[32] See for instance Marc Cerisuelo, p.34.

[33] See Christian Metz, *Film Language, a Semiotics of the Cinema*, p.130.

[34] See Carole Desbarats, p.103.

[35] This is of course akin to the 'proverb' for *Ami*.

[36] André Bazin, *Qu'est-ce que le cinéma?*, p.75.

[37] See Wendy Everett, 'Slipping in and out of Focus: Words and Images in the Filmic Discourse of Marguerite Duras', *Nottingham French Studies*, vol.34 no.2 (Autumn 1995), 66.

[38] In an interview Rohmer claims that 'Ce que je montre ce sont des choses qui arrivent en période de vacances et je peux dire avec un certain recul qu'elles me sont arrivées à l'âge du personnage.' See *Cahiers du cinéma* no.503 (June 1996), 49.

[39] Eric Rohmer, 'Les Citations picturales dans les *Contes Moraux* et les *Comédies et Proverbes*' in Carole Desbarats, pp.109-123. He discusses the axioms on pages 109-110. Subsequent references to Rohmer's comments are given in the text.

[40] See Jean Douchet, writing in the programme produced to coincide with the 30th anniversary of the founding of *les Films du Losange*.

[41] For an account of this mission, and its importance at the time, see Andrew Chaikin, *A Man on the Moon*, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1998, pp.56-134.

[42] Interview, *Cahiers du cinéma* no.490 (April 1995), 33. The details given below come from this interview.

[43] 'Art pompier' or 'académisme' was named after the helmets worn by characters in some of the compositions and was generally official in nature. See, for example, *Quid 2000* (Paris: Robert Laffont, 1999), p.429.

[44] Interview, *Cahiers du cinéma* no.490 (April 1995), 31.

[45] Interview with Rohmer, *Libération*, 7 September 2001, http://www.liberation.com/cinema/200109/20010907rohmer2.html. Accessed 7 September 2001.

[46] See Jean-Baptiste Marot, p.46.

[47] See Patrick Caradec, 'Rohmer marie numérique et décors peints'.

[48] See Roland Barthes, 'The Grain of the Voice' in *Image, Music, Text*, p.182.

[49] See Chrétien de Troyes, p.34.

[50] Interview with Rohmer in *Eric Rohmer* (2nd edition) (Studio 43 - MJC de Dunkerque/Ciné 104 - Ville de Pantin, 1992), p.154.

CONCLUSION

Conte d'automne

Automne occupies a unique position in Rohmer's work in that it employs an unusually large number of his previous films as intertexts. Indeed, this is one of the ways in which this tale of autumn can be identified as Rohmer's most self-conscious piece of filmmaking, and it therefore may serve as a fitting conclusion to this study by bringing together the findings of this thesis.

The light brown colour of the background of the opening credits is not merely reminiscent of that of autumn leaves, it is also almost identical to the colour used in the titles at the start of *Mariage*. In that film, Béatrice Romand played the part of Sabine, a young woman who decides to find a suitable husband. Her character in the later work (Magali) is a widow who wishes to find a partner, but on this occasion it is her friend Isabelle who does the searching for her. Both films include a wedding reception, which is reluctantly attended by Sabine/Magali and where they meet their prospective partners. However, the relationship between Magali and Gérald appears much more likely to succeed, given the definitive nature of Edmond's final rejection of Sabine.

In addition to plot similarities, the actresses immediately recall for us the characters they previously played in Rohmer's work. Béatrice Romand first appeared as Laura, in *Genou*, where the sixteen-year-old tells the thirty something Jérôme that she is interested in marrying an older man. Indeed, as we have already noted, there is

a copy of Gauguin's *Naféa foa ipoipo* (Quand te maries-tu?) in her bedroom. This fascination with marriage continues in *Mariage*, and then the actress makes a brief appearance in *Reinette* as a store detective following a shop lifter, who in her turn is being followed by Mirabelle. Of more interest, however, is her contribution to *Rayon*, where she plays a friend of Delphine, a role played by Marie Rivière, the Isabelle of *Automne*. In this largely improvised film the situation is precisely the reverse of the plot of *Automne* so that Béatrice is trying to help Delphine to find a partner, suggesting that she should holiday alone. Her approach, however, is very different from that of Isabelle and she is more than direct in her admonitions to Delphine to find a new boyfriend. Her admission that 'on passe effectivement par des stades de méchanceté, parce que, quelquefois, il faut brusquer les gens'(p.20) contrasts with the more supportive approach in the later film.

This in turn leads us to the recurring role played by Marie Rivière in Rohmer's work. She has a number of minor parts in *Perceval*, principally in the Chorus, before appearing as Anne in *Femme*, a woman who appears at times swamped by the attentions of male friends. She declines marriage with the somewhat wimpish François but is herself rejected by the aviator, Christian. Marie Rivière also reappears in *Reinette* as a swindler, who persuades unsuspecting travellers to pay her 'lost' train fare. Once again, however, her role in *Rayon* is more important in that she is the opposite of Isabelle: *she* is the one who (with however much uncertainty) is searching for a partner. She does eventually find a 'Prince Charming', ironically in the guise of Vincent Gauthier, who previously played Sabine's former boyfriend in *Mariage*. Marie Rivière also went on to appear in *L'Anglaise* where she plays the part of Mme Laurent (the Duc de Biron's mistress) who is present during the long wait for the results of the *Convention*'s vote on the fate of the King.

One final link in the pattern of Rohmer's use of his actresses exists between this final season's tale and Rohmer's previous work. The woman in the red dress, who attracts Etienne's interest at the wedding reception, is played by Aurore Rauscher, the unnamed heroine of *Rendez-vous*: 'Les bancs de Paris'. In the earlier film, *she* was the one who rejected her suitor, while here it is Etienne who leaves her dancing at the wedding reception, when he departs with Rosine. In this case it is only through our knowledge of Rohmer's previous work that we can understand the irony of this rejection.

Within the *Contes des quatre saisons*, Rohmer picks out three areas of similarity between *Automne* and *Printemps*: the exploration of thought, the presence of plots or machinations and the relationships between different generations.[1] Both films involve characters who are philosophy teachers, but it is only Jeanne who refers explicitly to her subject as she makes references to Kant and *a priori* synthetic judgements. She reminds us that the example of such judgements given by Kant is that everything that happens has a cause, and while no mention is made of Kant in *Automne*, it is precisely this point which preoccupies all three of the female characters. Magali suspects Isabelle's involvement in the appearance of Gérald since she feels there must be a cause for his presence. Isabelle clearly feels compelled to act on her friend's behalf since without a cause (her efforts), she feels there will be no effect (a partner for Magali). Similarly, Rosine wishes for two results: for Etienne to go out with Magali and, in turn, for Rosine herself to remain platonic friends with Etienne. Here an effect can itself be a cause: a relationship between Etienne and Magali could in turn help Rosine's own relationship with the same man.

Thus, on a more or less self-conscious level, both films involve machinations whereby one character attempts to influence the personal life of her friend. In the

case of Isabelle and Rosine, there is no ambiguity about the existence of such plots, while Natacha, for her part, denies any effort to bring her father and Jeanne together. However, *she* is the one who points out the possibility of such a relationship to Jeanne, telling her new friend that her father is interested in her, and repeatedly finds excuses to leave the two of them alone, most notably overnight in the house at Fontainebleau. Both Natacha and Rosine appear to inhabit a dream world and this undermines their interventions when they are faced with the intransigence of the desires of others. Natacha claims that she took her dreams for reality while Etienne chides Rosine for attempting to make people love each other. If we follow Kant's argument, it appears that the young people's interventions prevent something which might have occurred of its own accord. Indeed, this seems especially the case with the relationship in *Printemps*, where Jeanne claims that she allowed Igor to kiss her precisely in order to show the silliness of Natacha's matchmaking. Thus, the link between cause and effect can be negative, in that the outcome is the opposite of the one desired or predicted.

Isabelle's efforts appear even more proactive, since she puts a 'lonely hearts' advertisement in the local newspaper in order to find a partner for her friend. Yet, paradoxically, her plan is revealed as having a good chance of success by the end of the film. How can this be the case? Isabelle goes so far as to take on the identity of Magali in order to audition Gérald before she allows him to meet her friend. This offers the possibility of her own flirtation with Gérald and the final shot of the film, in which Isabelle stares into the distance while she dances with her husband, could be read as a reflection of her own regrets at what might have been. On this level at least, Isabelle's plot partly fails, and was doomed to do so from the start: it is

impossible for her simultaneously to satisfy her own desire and that of Magali, given that they are both attracted to the same man.

Isabelle's enigmatic gaze at the end, as she stares into the distance, recalls that seen at the start of the film during a meal with her daughter and future son-in-law, and can be recognised as another filmic element reminiscent of *Printemps*. In the earlier film, Jeanne's gaze while Natacha plays the piano, and later in the garden when Natacha goes off to telephone her boyfriend, is equally ambiguous. These gazes reflect the essential uncertainties at the heart of both films: Jeanne is happy to kiss Igor but refuses to take the dalliance further, while Isabelle is content to 'court' Gérald before desisting in favour of her friend. The real reasons and feelings of these characters remain obscure: are they happy to return to 'married' life or is their adventure the precursor of a broken relationship?

The interaction between different generations is sufficiently rare in Rohmer's work to signal its importance in these two films. Igor is a father who is interested in a woman much younger than himself. Etienne is also a father, and his girlfriends are frequently his students. The father/daughter relationship between Igor and Natacha is best reflected by that between Magali and Rosine, where the father is replaced by a mother/friend. In both cases it is the 'child' figure who attempts to change the adult's life, an attempt which ends in failure and serves to create further intertextual references between these two films within the *Contes des quatre saisons* series.

The endings of these two tales of the seasons also contain striking parallels. Jeanne rejects, albeit at the last possible moment, the advances of Igor, and the final shots of the film depict her return to the domestic space she shares with Mathieu. However, her previous conduct provides evidence of the fragility of this relationship, making its future appear anything but certain. Isabelle also rejects the advances of a

man (Gérald) and returns to the arms of her husband, but her gaze, as we have noted, is enigmatic. Of particular note is the intrinsically filmic nature of this moment: it does not appear in the published screenplay and reflects the ambiguity that we have increasingly seen to be central to Rohmer's work and which only the image can depict in this way.

Links abound with other films by Rohmer: the heroine's return to her first love, having dallied with someone else, recalls the plot outline of the *Contes Moraux*; and the sunset, which Magali claims to be waiting to see, is reminiscent of the crucial dusk scene in *Rayon*, especially since Magali is talking to Isabelle (Marie Rivière/Delphine) at the time. However, it is *Maud* which provides us with some of the most telling comparisons. The advertisement placed in the newspaper by Isabelle is reminiscent of the one which Jean-Louis suggests to Maud that he should place in order to find a wife, and Etienne's relationship with Rosine closely reflects that between Vitez and his student. Indeed, Gérald's whole life story has striking parallels with that of the hero of *Maud*. Both have spent a good number of years working abroad and now have returned to the French provinces, where they know nobody. They each become involved with two women, before finally deciding on one of them. However, Gérald is presented in a considerably more straightforward fashion, displays a degree of openness that is markedly lacking in Jean-Louis, and is himself the subject of a subterfuge on the part of Isabelle.

This thesis began with an assessment of Eric Rohmer's reputation as a film director who, from a cinematic point of view, may appear relatively straightforward and apparently avoids the cult of personality associated with many of his colleagues from Hitchcock and Truffaut to Spielberg. However, in the course of this study, we have become increasingly aware of the complexity of his position. He is an intensely

private man who has chosen to work in a very public medium and has appeared a number of times on screen; his films make almost no references to movie going and yet abound with examples of filmic (and non-filmic) intertextuality; and he has more influence on French cinema today, through his films and his production companies, than he did during the late 1950s, at the height of the New Wave. These contradictions are reflected in other areas: Rohmer's working methods provide ample evidence of his need for control and yet there are many examples of his openness to improvisation or inspiration coming from his collaborators. It is clear that he consistently strives for realism, and yet his depiction of the world involves a carefully chosen mix of documentary realism and devices borrowed from classical Hollywood, not to mention the special effects of green screen technology used in *L'Anglaise*.

We have seen that Rohmer's films may all be classified, in one way or another, as adaptations either of his own texts or, more rarely, of the writings of others. However, many other factors provide inspiration, and his versions of 'classic' texts emerge as the result of a dialogue with the original, rather than a straightforward retelling. Indeed, this awareness of providing the spectator with just one possible version of the tale told is present throughout his work, sometimes through the presence of a narrator (*Contes Moraux*) and sometimes through characters' subsequent accounts of their actions (Jeanne's description of her day to Natacha in *Printemps*), all of which add considerably to the self-conscious nature of his filmmaking. The same self-consciousness is also clearly illustrated in Rohmer's filmic technique, which constantly draws attention to the image and, by extension, to the artificial way in which it is created. His use of empty screen space, blank screens, text, paintings, and songs all add to the spectator's sense of being present at a

performance rather than a straightforward presentation of the world, and one where the viewer plays an active part in the creative process. Finally, we have seen how *Automne* creates complex intertextual links with most of Rohmer's other films and so provides examples of the many techniques we have been analysing, all within the same work.

Pascal Thomas has claimed that there was no one less suited to the cinema than Rohmer and that praising him is akin to being impressed by the efforts of a weightlifter as he attempts to ice skate.[2] This thesis has endeavoured to show just how mistaken this opinion is both in terms of production methods and content. As a director, we have found him to be extremely meticulous in the preparation of his films with ideas frequently undergoing a long gestation period followed by a year or more of pre-production work with his actors and actresses. He uses a very limited crew and so his production costs are kept low. His production team is especially loyal and many of the same technicians have worked with him film after film. We have also analysed the influences on Rohmer's work and the key role played by intertextuality. All of his films are adaptations of one kind or another, either of his own texts or those by someone else, and the way in which a wide range of novels, paintings and songs are the erudite contents of a melting pot within his films has been especially striking.

From his critical writings we have become aware of his interest in depicting the world in such a way that its inherent beauty becomes clear, and it is certainly true that the world depicted within most of his films appears to bear a close relation to the one we may observe for ourselves. Locations are respected and the journeys undertaken by the protagonists may be easily repeated by the spectator. However, we have also recognised the problems associated with this impression of a seamless

representation of the world. Our close examination of Rohmer's filmic technique has allowed us to be conscious of the cinematic complexity of his work: his green ray is (at least partly) a special effect, his blue hour is achieved by turning down the sound, *Perceval* contains images of a cartoon bird while *L'Anglaise* can only exist due to advances in computer technology. Rohmer is not simply presenting us with a seamless depiction of reality and his cinematic technique combines many factors to produce a style which might, at first glace, simply appear not to exist.

The influence of the New Wave has always been open to question and James Monaco, in his first assessment in English of the movement, makes little attempt to link it with other filmmakers.[3] Twenty-seven years later the interviewees in Aldo Tassone's reappraisal of the *Nouvelle Vague* are equally vague on this subject. They tend to see it as a change in filmic techniques[4] with a long term influence on a small number of directors. Rohmer himself is typical and cites Pierre Zucca, Jean Eustache and Jacques Davilla as examples of those who upheld the New Wave tradition, before admitting that all three died young.[5] In the case of Rohmer, we have found a number of areas in which he clearly has had an influence. First, through his work at the 'Ciné club du Quartier Latin', he introduced many of the critics who were to become the nexus of the New Wave. His concurrent publication of *La Gazette du cinéma* then allowed many of these future filmmakers to publish articles on the cinema and prepared them for the arrival of *Cahiers*. Rohmer's own critical writings are important in the development of film criticism throughout the 1950s and this is especially the case through his subsequent editorship of the magazine.

As a director, Rohmer has apparently had more limited influence and yet his films consistently enjoy good distribution, a positive critical response and a pleasing box office. A number of directors may be perceived at one time or another to have

imitated him (Christian Vincent, Jérôme Bonnell, Walt Stillman, Richard Linklater[6]) but he still emerges as a unique talent. His work provides a very important opportunity to develop the analysis of cinema in a variety of ways ranging from the textual to the cinematic.

The significance of our findings is clearly important for a number of reasons. Given that the traditional image of Eric Rohmer as a familiar, even 'safe', filmmaker has been shown to be flawed, we can see how this has led to a misguided dismissal of the inherent cinematic qualities of his work. By extension, as familiar representatives of French national cinema, there is an extent to which many of his compatriots have suffered a similar fate and been represented as more interested in story and dialogue rather than the use of the camera. Clearly, this reappraisal of Rohmer's work also calls for a re-examination of that of his colleagues and a questioning of our preconceptions with regard to European cinema as a whole. In addition to research in this area, clearly more work remains to be done on Rohmer himself: what is the role of his television documentaries within his *oeuvre*, is there a much greater link between his life as Maurice Schérer and his films than has previously been thought, and to what extent may his work be seen as providing an accurate depiction of contemporary French society?

In the French public's imagination, Rohmer has become a cultural reference.[7] In terms of world cinema, his style is immediately recognisable, as the adjective 'Rohmerian' (applied both positively and negatively) indicates.[8] Yet, just as we think that we have discerned his technique, he releases a film using the latest digital technology (*L'Anglaise*) and a 'big' budget costume drama, his latest film *Triple Agent*. Even in his 80s, Rohmer continues to subvert our expectations.

Rohmer puts demands on his spectators that they can choose to accept or ignore.[9] His films can be read solely as carefully crafted narratives and stories well told, but anyone who accepts the challenge will find unexpected layers of meaning and be invited into an intertextual network of literary, filmic, pictorial, musical and character associations. It is the self-conscious nature of Rohmer's filmic style that ultimately involves his audience in the creative process, and the critics who dismiss him as conservative have failed to grasp the cinematic depth of his work. Behind the simplistic façade, there is a complexity - hitherto ignored in writing on French cinema - that means that his films cannot be reduced to a preconditioned signified. The significance of Rohmer's *oeuvre* remains open for the viewer both now and in the future.[10]

NOTES

[1] Interview, *Cahiers du cinéma* no.527 (September 1998), 32-33.

[2] See interview in *Que reste-t-il de la Nouvelle Vague?*, edited by Aldo Tassone, Paris: Stock, 2003, p.302.

[3] James Monaco, *The New Wave: Truffaut, Godard, Chabrol, Rohmer, Rivette,* New York: Oxford University Press, 1977.

[4] See interview with Claude Miller in Aldo Tassone, p.190.

[5] See interview with Rohmer in Aldo Tassone, pp., 254-255.

[6] On Richard Linklater see Emmanuel Levy, *Cinema of Outsiders. The Rise of American Independent Film*, New York: New York University Press, 1999, p.181.

[7] The French Olympic swimmer Solenne Figues has been described as 'Comme dans un Rohmer du bord de Bretagne'. See Alain Leauthier, 'Solenne Figues se satisfait du bronze sur 200m nage libre', *Libération*, 18 August 2004, http://liberation.fr/page.php?Article=231419. Accessed 18 August 2004.

[8] The sunset at the end of Cyril Collard's *Les nuits fauves* (1993) has been critically described as 'Rohmerian'. See Harlan Kennedy, 'King Kong comes to Berlin. The 43rd Berlin Filmfestspiele' in *Film Comment* (May-June1993), http://americancinemapapers.homestead.com/files/BERLIN_1993.htm. Accessed 22 August 2004. For a positive comparison of Richard Linklater's *Before Sunset* with Rohmer's *Contes Moraux* see Philip French, 'Brief re-encounter', *The Observer*, 25 July 2004, http://observer.guardian.co.uk/screen/story/0,1268426,00html. Accessed 22 August 2004.

[9] In his own introduction to a screening of *Victor Hugo: Les Contemplations Livre V-VI* and *Victor Hugo architecte* at the *Cinémathèque Française* on 17 April 2004 (during a complete retrospective of his work), Rohmer commented on the assiduity of the spectators, who had given up their Saturday afternoon to watch two documentaries that were originally made for schoolchildren.

[10] See Roland Barthes, *Images, Music, Text*, p.141.

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La boulangère de Monceau 1962, 26 mins, b/w.

La carrière de Suzanne 1963, 52 mins, b/w.

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Les métamorphoses du paysage (*L'ère industrielle*) 1964, 22 mins.

*Les salons de Diderot 1964.

Perceval ou le Conte du Graal 1965, 23 mins.

Don Quichotte de Cervantès 1965, 23 mins.

Les histoires extraordinaires d'Edgar Poe 1965, 24 mins: contains an extract from
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Les caractères de La Bruyère 1965, 22 mins.

Entretien sur Pascal 1965, 21 mins.

Carl Th. Dreyer (Série: *Cinéastes de notre temps*) 1965, 61 mins.

Victor Hugo: Les Contemplations Livre V-VI 1966, 21 mins.

Le celluloïd et le marbre (Série: *Cinéastes de notre temps*) 1966, 90 mins.

Entretien avec Mallarmé ou *Stéphane Mallarmé* 1966, 27 mins.

Nancy au XVIIIe siècle 1966, 25 mins.

Louis Lumière 1966, 65 mins.

*L'homme et la machine 1967.

*L'homme et les images 1967.

*L'homme et les frontières 1968.

*L'homme et les gouvernements 1968.

*Postface à l'Atalante, entretien avec François Truffaut 1968, 17 mins.

*La sorcière de Michelet 1969.

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Le béton dans la ville 1969 29 mins.

*Le français, langue vivante? 1970.

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* These programmes are attributed to Rohmer by the Centre National de Diffusion Pédagogique but his name does not necessarily appear on the credits. See Bontizer, p.153.

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