

Film & Culture

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2016

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Layout design by: BENCE LEVENTE BODÓ

Proofreader: ANDREA THURMER

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ISBN 978-963-284-757-3

EÖTVÖS LORÁND TUDOMÁNYEGYETEM

Supported by the Higher Education Restructuring Fund |

Allocated to ELTE by the Hungarian Government

2016

Table of Contents

Géza Kállay Introduction: Being Film	5	Marcell Gellért Shakespeare on Film: Romeo and Juliet Revisioned	75
Vera Benczik & Natália Pikli James Bond in the Classroom	19	Márta Hargitai Hitchcock's <i>Macbeth</i>	87
Zsolt Czigányik Utopia and Dystopia on the Screen	30	Dorottya Holló Culture(s) Through Films: Learning Opportunities	110
Ákos Farkas Henry James in the Cinema: When the Adapters Turn the Screw	44	János Kenyeres Multiculturalism, History and Identity in Canadian Film: Atom Egoyan's <i>Ararat</i>	124
Cecilia Gall Representation of Australian Aborigines in Australian film	62	Zsolt Komáromy The Miraculous Life of Henry Purcell: On the Cultural Historical Contexts of the Film <i>England, my England</i>	143
		Miklós Lojkó The British Documentary Film Movement from the mid-1920s to the mid-1940s: Its Social, Political, and Aesthetic Context	155
		Éva Péteri John Huston's Adaptation of James Joyce's "The Dead": A Literary Approach	186

- Eglantina Rempert & Janina Vesztergom** | Romantic Ireland and the Hollywood Film Industry: *The Colleen Bawn* (1911), *The Quiet Man* (1952), *Leap Year* (2010) 169
- Eszter Szép** | Sequential Arts: Moments From the Parallel History of Comics and Film 196
- Andrea Velich** | The English ‘Monarchy Film’ Revisited: From *The Private life of Henry VIII* (1933) to *Elizabeth* (1998) and *The Queen* (2006) 210
- Dorottya Jászay** | Glossary 227

Being Film

GÉZA KÁLLAY | **Film & Culture** ▶

“FILM SHARES WITH OTHER GREAT ARTS
THE PROPOSAL THAT EVERYTHING MATTERS—
AND YOU DO NOT KNOW WHAT ‘EVERYTHING’
MEANS.” (CAVELL AND KLEVAN 169)

‘What is film?’—this question will be taken here as a philosophical one, concerning the ‘ontology’ (the ‘what-ness,’ the ‘very being’) of film. On the everyday level, everyone growing up in our (‘Western’) culture is familiar with films: generally, we are exposed to them—through television, the internet, later in the cinema, in the ‘movie-theatre’—before we can read and write. We live in an age when one can ‘make a film’ (photograph, video-recording) with her smart-phone quite easily, and is even able to transmit it to a wide audience. Film, as an ordinary phenomenon of our everyday lives, is a series of moving images (‘pictures’) that are viewed on a smaller or larger screen, and are now mostly seen in colour. The black-and-white film that was the tradition until approximately the mid-1960s, is today used almost exclusively for artistic purposes.

Film is an artefact: a kind of combination of animated photography and, in one way or another, acting (in a broad sense: i.e., if we allow, that e.g. natural phenomena, like trees, can become ‘characters,’ too, as in nature films). Moreover, film—as opposed to the singularity of, for example, a painting by Botticelli, or the singularity of the performance of a play one evening in this or that theatre—

is a multiple art form, like novels, photographs, dramas in print: lots of copies of the same film are in circulation.

Like novels, films, in most cases, display some narrative structure (a ‘plot’), as well, but this narrative is performed in front of us, in our immediate presence, and often, as in drama, through characters doing things, talking, etc. However, if we watch films, the actors are unaware of our presence; they ‘are’ ‘in’ the screen, in a virtual manner; whereas actors on stage are not only conscious of their audience but they heavily rely on audience-responses. On the theatrical stage the ‘conjuring up’ is relatively limited to a setting depicted through scenery, stage props, etc. Film can do more in this respect: for a backdrop, it can have an absolutely ‘realistic’ interior (e.g. a restaurant); there can be a ‘real’ landscape where the fictional plot is set. For example, an imaginary story taking place in the Alps might be shot in the Swiss Alps. Moreover, through simple photography, shots of (actual) houses, cities, nature, and the shapes and colours of these (besides the characters acting), constitute a very important part of ‘film-language’ as well.

It does not need much theorizing, either, to see how film differs from other ‘pictorial representations,’ such as

paintings. ‘Photographic mimesis’ and verisimilitude (even in black-and white) is possible in painting as well, but this requires considerable effort from the painter. Photographs, still or moving, do not make such demands on the person holding the camera: the ‘natural,’ default-case feature of a photo is that it shows (or at least it is very close to) what the naked eye would also see. Thus, the camera, and what the camera fixes, the shot, can be thought of as *another* ‘eye’; the camera is much closer to ‘visual aids’ like telescopes, microscopes, glasses and mirrors than to the painter’s hand guided by the painter’s eye and imagination. This statement does not mean that shooting a photo or a film is ‘unimaginative.’

On the contrary, there are choices: the angle, the perspective, the closeness to or the distance from an object, a person ‘represented,’ not to mention the deliberate ‘distorting film-tricks’ applied with respect to the everyday perception of ordinary reality (with accompanying sounds and music). All of these decisions can easily put movies on the artistic (astounding, provoking) level. This concept precisely means that, since the camera is, in the default case, a means of mechanical reproduction, it can become

a new way of seeing: we do not, so to speak ‘watch a film’ but we see, we re-visit the world through it. Film, in a certain sense, is ‘transparent’ (cf. Bazin 9–22, Walton 246–249, and Coleman 22–45).

As we learn about “mechanisms” behind phenomena, we are also told that film, considered from the material point of view, usually is a transparent strip of cellulose triacetate, perforated on the edges, and covered with photographic (especially today with iron-oxide) emulsion which makes it sensitive to light. It is a tape of various widths and lengths but it is helpless without lighting, cameras, projectors, and thousands of other, man-made devices.

We also learn that while watching a film, we are victims of a constant optical illusion: the strip contains still images which, when speeded up by a projector and thus following one another in quick succession, create the impression that the images are ‘moving’ (hence the name: “movie,” “moving pictures”). These attributes are necessary physical prerequisites for films ‘to be;’ but when we ask what film is, we are rather interested in the function and in the impact of the ‘full product’ on and in our lives. The ‘being’ of film, at least when we wish to discuss it, is

‘how *we are* with respect to it’; i.e. film exists in our *attitudes* to it, and its *relation* to us. It is a truism that films can be made for lots of purposes: there are obvious differences between, for example, a ‘family film’ about somebody’s wedding, newsreels (effectively used for propaganda purposes especially between the two World Wars), and the so-called ‘feature film’ (a ‘long film,’ where running time is usually between 60 and 210 minutes) such as *Star Wars*, produced by one of the powerful Hollywood film studios.

Films fall into numerous types and genres, usually according to their subject matter (love, history, etc.), specific medium (cartoon or not), and style, some of them originally borrowed from other aesthetic media (novel and drama). These types and genres include: documentary, newsreel, silent movie, action movie, adventure film, disaster film, spy film, superhero film, thriller, suspense movie, crime story (‘whodunit,’ ‘gangster film’), film noir, horror film, splatter, gore film, science-fiction, fantasy, comedy, slapstick, dark comedy, remarriage comedy, melodrama, family drama, history drama, romance, western, musical, animated film, cartoon, experimental film, etc. (cf. Bordwell and Thompson 318–383). Genres are seldom ‘pure’

and their own conventions and style keep changing with the times, for example: a comedy from the 1930s is very different from one made in the 1980s.

In addition, there is an interesting divide between films that ‘only’ have a script, and those films whose origin go back to some already more or less well-known printed fictional stories, such as novels or dramas. It is also part of today’s multiple-mediality that films have a counter-effect on the printed medium: a popular film is often remade into comic strips, children’s books, whole novels or dramas. In what follows, the ‘ontology’ of film will be addressed with the assumption that we are first and foremost talking about feature films to be primarily shown in cinemas (‘movie theatres,’ as opposed to television), made for artistic purposes, these purposes including ‘entertainment’ as well.

If film—like poetry, a play, a painting, or a novel—is considered as a form of art, it is hard to tell what film is. In art, compared to the everyday world, there is some surplus of meaning, an excess of force, a potential for resilience, an excess of energy and significance which simply takes us in, and appeals to more than just our cognitive, ‘knowing’

capacities. The process is annoyingly simple: we are taken in by a medium (words, pictures, figures, shapes, forms, colours, and so on), yet there are so many ‘channels’ at work on us, some elements are so unexpected, they are so much selected, condensed and intensified, and they activate so many factors from our past experiences (from our ‘horizon of expectations’) that even when we try to give a systematic account of the ‘effect,’ we are likely to feel that some ‘stimuli’ have been left out. We feel that we ourselves have become a ‘medium’ as well, but we do not know exactly what we are transmitting to ourselves and to the world.

Thus, the process is painfully complex: we may find that what we experience is far greater and more powerful than we can ever fully grasp. We, especially when we are trained for deciding what counts as ‘art’ and how ‘art-criticism’ should be done, will try to ‘say something.’ Those who have a talent for creative art might respond with another artwork: perhaps this response is the most adequate reaction to artistic creativity. Yet we often feel that what we say or do as a response is a far cry from what we *really, truly* feel; it is often like trying to give an account of a dream. Cognitively, we also know that not

only our reactions but the very question of what counts as ‘art’ is historically conditioned; the story, the life that we live is just as much part of the mostly contingent context in which we encounter (potential) art, as are the specific place and time of the encounter, together with our particular and psychological disposition, the time of the day, and the company we are in. We also know that various answers can be taught and learned regarding the questions of ‘what is art,’ ‘how do we know that this material is great art,’ and ‘what is the paradigm of this or that branch of art.’

However, one of the characteristic elements of our (spontaneous) response to art may precisely be the joy that, when we are struck, ‘we do not have to care’ about historical circumstances, we do not have to make an inventory of our dispositions or our learning and ‘duties.’ We are temporarily ‘free’ of time and place—we react to a presence we find ourselves in and which is laying claim to our total selves. Art may well be a kind of dual assault on us; simultaneously pleasant (because we may ‘leave ourselves,’ our limitations) and unpleasant (because we are dominated by our own passions). We tend to be ‘thunderstruck’; strategies and devices of ‘self-defence’ can easily drop out from our minds

(we ‘lay down our sword and shield’): we cannot *but* react.

This reaction is very similar to falling in love with someone, as opposed to knowing what the word *love* means: we hastily set dictionaries and books on love aside; we wish to be in the presence of the Other all the time, we wish the Other totally to ourselves, we feel that ‘now we, indeed, live,’ every moment has become meaningful, and we are craving for an intimate, unique relationship with the Other. We instinctively provide our full presence: we come to the fore as we feel something has been revealed to us; we have gained a new—although often hazy, blurred, inarticulate—understanding. We can hardly help this; the love we feel is a ‘given,’ a gift we can neither really resist (unless we start lying to ourselves), nor artificially induce, nor persuade ourselves into through negotiations. It just happens—by itself, ‘inchoatively’ (‘medially’), as it were. It is there and we do not care about explanations; we can feebly give some ‘descriptions’ and ‘reasons’ but the real answer is the Other as a whole, the self we have invested our self into.

The vital force of falling in love and the elemental effect of (valid, admirable, enjoyable) art are especially similar in both requiring personal presence (‘to be *right* there’) and

a good encounter, as well as a yearning for knowledge as intimacy, yet there are obvious differences. We are ready to admit that ‘love is blind’ and a personal case of private taste, whereas when we are drawn to an artwork, we wish everyone else to be attracted to it, too: we would like to raise our judgement that e.g. a film is great onto a more general, ‘universal’ level. If someone resists art or a particular film we call ‘art,’ there is, of course, not much to do (as there is not much to do when our love towards someone is rejected) but it is a fundamental observation about aesthetic experience, first made by Immanuel Kant, that judgements of taste go beyond the personal and we wish a whole community were of the same opinion as we (cf. Kant 97–106). Because judgements about artistic pieces transcend pure personal feelings and enter the world of institutions, this transcendence also means that one is confronted with all sorts of theories, paradigms and vocabularies that have been worked out (since Plato and Aristotle) to ‘legitimately’ mould personal responses and passions into certain shapes, whereas the actual practices and ways of ‘loving the other’—although also socialised and institutionalised to some extent, of course—remain

uninterested in individual taste.

Theories about film are becoming just as numerous as in literary or cultural studies. These theories involve not only aesthetic concerns but also “psychological, sociological, educational, consumer, criminological, and political” issues, with special reference to “authorship, genre, form, style, and representational politics” against the backdrop of “worlds of race, gender, class, region, age, religion, language, politics, and nation” (Miller 2). Theories are useful: when they are drawn by insightful interpreters and good readers, they provide a matrix and a vocabulary with which one is able give voice to the usually inarticulate responses, the primary impressions, many of them only amounting to ‘intuitions’ one has (or even to grunts that one makes: a feeling one has in her stomach, a chill on the spine) when she is initiated into a work of art. To follow our *tuition* for a given intuition can be of great value, indeed.

However—and this might be thought of as a theory itself—it is my strong conviction that theory should never serve as a means to avoid the often violent, astounding, literally awe-some effect directed at our uniqueness, which a novel, a play, a poem, a film may have on us. Theory should

not immunize the personal, the intimate in us; it should keep us open and make us alert. All theories carry the risk that when we apply them, we find, after a while, that all the actual pieces ‘under analysis’ start to be about, and begin to ‘say,’ the same thing. Learning and applying a theory is very much like mastering and using a language. Yet it is not only (the language of) theory which should not remain unknown to us but we should not become unknown to the theoretical register, and, hence, to ourselves (our differences from and with, our spontaneous deviations from, a theory) either. The overuse of a theory is one of the ways in which we can get estranged from, and thus become afraid of, the language (and the self) of our own. The way Andrew Klevan, specialist in film aesthetics and criticism at the English Department of the University of Oxford, describes his struggle to ‘express film’ is highly instructive:

My eventual writing on the film will be woefully insufficient, partly necessarily so, partly because of my own problems with expression, but I’m never in doubt about the nature of the pursuit. This lack of doubt is not because of arrogance, but because good films won’t let me doubt

it. They take a hold of me. When I leave the screen, and go and do something else, the film follows me. Sometimes it rudely interrupts my enjoyment of other films, or it accompanies me into the shower: “Hey there, don’t forget me. I’m sure you’re simplifying me to make it easy for your writing. Are you really doing me justice?” (Klevan and Cavell 177)

What complicates film theory and the ‘philosophy of film’ is that film as art is only about a hundred years old. The first movies of significance started to appear in the 1920s, when film-theory and serious writing about film began as well. A totally new medium with immense potential, the movie gradually rewrote the map of traditional aesthetics. Questions about the status of film itself, especially whether it is an independent form of art and in what sense (one of the central questions of film-theory until the early 1960s), helped to re-examine the age-old question of ‘what is art,’ a typically philosophical question. Somewhat paradoxically, film, first promising light and popular ‘entertainment,’ found itself more in the company of philosophy than several other ‘respectable’ art-forms, such as the novel,

the opera, drama, etc., with much longer respective traditions (cf. Bordwell and Carroll 122–134). Drama on stage, attended by practically all layers of society, had such a phase in Early Modern England between the 1570s and the early 1640s (the closing of the theatres), when it was somewhere between ‘high art’ like poetry, and ‘popular entertainment’ like the famous bear-baiting-shows in arena theatres.¹ One of the chief fascinations with film, soon after its debut, was, indeed, that it had a similarly ‘democratic’ appeal: while art galleries, ‘serious’ novels, theatres, and operas tend to have a more ‘elite’ consumer public, lots of movies, not even requiring the knowledge of the alphabet, still appeal to large masses of people coming from all social strata. Nowadays, much has been done to dismantle the ‘binary opposition’ between ‘high culture/art’ and ‘popular culture/art,’ resulting in the ‘sugar-coating’ of entertainment. Therefore, film’s relatively easy accessibility (through seeing and hearing), and the hope of watching

¹ In some public theatres, it was one form of public entertainment that hungry dogs were set loose attacking a usually blinded bear. The bear was tied to a pole with a strong chain. The dogs bit into the bear, which→

‘normal,’ ‘realistic action’ happening right in front of them, may open more people up for aesthetic pleasure than other art forms.

The theoretical endeavour to ‘define’ what film is has been motivated, it seems, by two central questions:

(1) What differentiates film from other artistic forms, what is the specificity of it that other works of art do not contain? (This was already very briefly addressed, when film was compared to drama, the novel and to painting above.)

(2) How does this difference relate to the understanding of being human, how does the moving image contribute to the aesthetic and epistemic (knowledge-related) assessment of the human being?

The answers which such a brief introduction as this

→ tried to chase them away with its paws. In Shakespeare’s *Macbeth* there is a reference to this when Macbeth says: “They have tied me to a stake, I cannot fly / But bear-like I must fight the course” (5.7.1-2).

one can offer fall very short of an exhaustive survey of even the interpretations and the possible implications of the questions themselves. However, the above questions are useful because they seem to cut across the relatively well-discernible trends in film theory and criticism of the past hundred odd years; it seems that all theories, in their own way and according to their methods of approaching film, ask these questions in one form or another. The six main approaches appear to me to be the following (of course, other divisions and labels are very much possible):

(1) **the psychoanalytic - psychological - cognitive approach**, which, mainly influenced by Sigmund Freud and later by Jacques Lacan, wishes to understand film in relation to human thought, claiming that the cinema reproduces and helps us relive and re-examine our chief cognitive processes from perception through reasoning to inference, as well as make our unconscious or repressed desires, fears etc. visible;

(2) **the semiotic-semiological approach**, which, under the spell of structuralism (Ferdinand de Saussure’s ‘linguistic turn,’ Umberto Eco’s semiotics) has treated film-‘texture’ as a very complex system of signs, where

each sign has value and function with respect to the whole system, and pays close attention to, for example, the oppositions between one single shot and several consecutive shots, thereby gaining insights, for instance, into our sense of time, thus creating systematic taxonomies (lists of types, classes) of specific film-signs;

(3) apparatus theory (social criticism of ideologies) claiming, chiefly on the basis of Karl Marx, Michel Foucault and Louis Althusser, that, like everything else in society, film is ideological and political through and through and both the overt or covert ‘ideologemes’ behind film-making, as well as the effects (moving) images make or have made on various layers of society should be meticulously examined; apparatus theories are close to other society-based—rather than individual-based—approaches in cultural and literary studies such as cultural materialism, New Historicism, or postcolonial theory;

(4) feminist and queer theories, which, like feminist and queer studies in cultural and literary criticism or in philosophy (epistemology, ethics, etc.), can be characterised more through subject matter than method; the chief theoreticians (Laura Mulvey, Ruby Rich, Clara Clover,

Alexander Doty, etc.) study the construction of gender roles, the building up of masculine and feminine, gay and lesbian identities and their social implications in film, and they use psychoanalysis, apparatus theory, etc., or a fruitful amalgam of all these as ‘tools;’

(5) the phenomenological approach, most informed by the ‘father’ of phenomenology, Edmund Husserl and his followers (e.g. Maurice Merleau-Ponty), with its most influential exponent, André Bazin, investigates both the experiential and the experimental features of film, claiming that the camera ‘brackets’ (puts on the periphery) our usual, ordinary vision of the world, it reshapes our familiar relationship with things and persons external to us through temporary estrangement, and thus shows us in our ‘life-world,’ i.e. in the world we inhabit as ambiguous and contingent beings;

(6) the post-analytical philosophical approach has been worked out, taking Ludwig Wittgenstein’s *Philosophical Investigations* as a starting point, by Stanley Cavell; it focuses on our sceptical attitude to the world as a direct consequence of our separateness from the Other and how film is able to expose this, as well as how it may help us

acknowledge and overcome, through meticulously watching small gestures shown to us, this separateness; both characters on the screen and we, the witnesses and the ‘critics’ of film, are presented as struggling for voice, for expression, which should happen in taking full responsibility for the uses of our language.

According to subject matter, we may further distinguish auteur theory (concentrating on the film-director’s personal vision behind the film), narrative film theory (close to narrative theories of prose-fiction but applied to film), Malcolm Turvey’s revelationism (claiming that through close-ups, slow motion, time-lapse photography and editing, film can reveal features of reality that are ‘invisible’ to the human eye, i.e. it can only see these aspects of the world with the help of the camera),² and several sub-trends of all the above mentioned approaches (cf. Miller; Livingston and Plantinga 294–545).

It varies from person to person which theory she finds

² Turvey claims that four theorists and film-makers started the revelationist tradition: Jean Epstein (1897–1953), Dziga Vertov (1896–1954), Béla Balázs (1884–1949), and Siegfried Kracauer (1889–1966) (Turvey 21–48).

the most attractive and applicable to her own purposes—I think Cavell’s is the most fruitful and revealing. (And, of course, it is always possible to advance entirely new ways of interpreting film.) Cavell has investigated several aspects of the cinema: he has interpreted the relationship between Shakespearean comedy and Hollywood re-marriage comedy (*Pursuit of Happiness*), the figure of the “unknown woman” in American melodrama, especially this character played by Greta Garbo (*Contesting Tears*), and how philosophy becomes visible and animated on the screen and what kind of philosophies film represents (*The World Viewed* 3–37).

Among the latter themes, one of the most intriguing is that the ‘ontology’ of film can be best understood if we start with our very situation in the movie theatre, watching a film: I am sitting in a chair with several people around me, staring at the screen (maybe munching on pop-corn and drinking coke). Film, then, is my existential stance in the world; it is my experiencing (seeing, perceiving) through the eye of the camera recorded on the celluloid strip; film is how I am, as a knowing (‘epistemological’) subject with certain ethical norms *in* the story I am watching, and how

the film is positioning and exposing me in my ordinary, everyday life. For Cavell, film investigates the world, the possibilities of people and things (of ‘phenomena’) by putting in front of us, in myriads of ways, what our pictures of the phenomena and their possibilities and limits are. Film does so by making us hear what we are inclined to say, when, and how, by creating a situation when we, in darkness, are alone with the world, having to concentrate on it (unless we leave the show) from the outside. The screen is the frame of the world, it is a shape, a mould of it and since what I see is not aware of my presence, I am sitting there ‘unseen’ by this world; the screen makes me ‘invisible.’ I become aware that I am watching past events which took place without me: I am an invisible outsider who is now given the chance—each time I watch the movie, always mechanically, stubbornly appearing to me in exactly the same way—to bear witness to these events. I am in a position of estrangement and I am invited in simultaneously: film takes the world away from me in order to hand it back, in a certain shape and mould, so that I may regain it.

Films are notoriously difficult to talk about: you see something but when you also wish to say something about

a picture, already a new one appears before you. Therefore, films are not easy to remember in detail and you cannot ‘quote’ film on the printed page: all you can do is to put still images (photos, after all) into your discussion. Or you start narrating the action, the plot, the story, which will, of course, always fall short of what the film is *really* about in its visionary, in many senses, *magic* ways. The best way, I think, to start to talk about film is to take a short, relatively independent episode and describe it in as many details as you can, trying to pay attention to ‘everything,’ even to those features which are not directly visible but only implied. This is a far more laborious exercise than one thinks but this is the first step in trying to regain the world we keep losing all the time in ordinary perception as well. Film *is* who we *are* in film, through film, inside and outside of the world at the same time.

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James Bond in the Classroom

VERA BENCZIK & NATÁLIA PIKLI | **Film & Culture** ▶

1. POPULAR CULTURE: AN INTRODUCTION

Popular culture has always been an integral part of everyday life whether one chooses to be aware of this fact or not; this is especially the case with today's omnipresent media, as we grow up surrounded by popular cultural products of our world. We might venture to say that being exposed to print and audio-visual content from birth onwards plays a formative part in shaping our tastes, language, preferences and personalities, or simply put, it plays an important part in who we become. Despite all this we tend to view popular culture as transient, with its texts largely catering to the entertainment needs of the masses. The opinion that these disposable products serve our amusement only often results in regarding popular culture as superficial and inferior to 'real' and 'valuable' art forms and artefacts. This is partially the reason why academia has failed to recognise and appreciate the potential use and benefit of studying phenomena of popular culture for so long. However, the advent of postmodernism, and later media and cultural theories blooming since the late 1960s and 1970s, decentralized the academic approach

to cultural output. Attention turned from the canon to the margins, and previously neglected and scorned groups of texts and subject areas were deemed fit as objects of study. This paved the way towards a more open attitude in the curricula, and resulted in the incorporation of various popular culture texts and their related theoretical background into the classroom environment.

Literary theories, such as New Historicism, starting in the 1980s, also raised awareness concerning contextual readings of literary texts of any age. Although Stephen Greenblatt and his colleagues' landmark studies relied on research concerning the early modern era, their approach has proved fertile from a number of aspects. Their results confirmed the fact that the so-called postmodern age shares many features with the early modern era, among which one of the most significant is the close and constant interaction between popular and elite cultures, however, this two-way traffic diminished in later centuries. It suffices to look at any episode of *The Simpsons*, for example, to discover a wide array of intertextual references to contemporary and historical narratives. In addition to the undeniable presence of this two-way traffic in our day, the

popularity and ubiquity of popular films and visual stimuli also call for an academic interdisciplinary approach which combines popular culture with literary and film studies.

The variety of media available for the expression of popular culture is manifold: music, film and print—just to name the most obvious—may all carry content labelled as popular culture. Recent years have seen another significant change: with the internet revolution of the past two decades and the rapid transformation of communication technology the line between producer and consumer of cultural products has thinned considerably. Audiences are no longer passive observers, but very often become active agents of cultural production themselves: websites, comment threads, blogs, social media like Facebook, Twitter, and Tumbler, or content sharing sites such as YouTube or Instagram not only allow for immediate access to cultural products, but also function as channels for instant publication. Creative recycling of visual content results in memes or gif images, which reach millions or even billions of cultural consumers across geographical and cultural boundaries.

1.1. DEFINITIONS

When critics map the difficulties of defining the term *popular culture* they often begin with the remark that the problems start at narrowing down the meaning of both ‘popular’ and ‘culture’ (Storey 1; Burke 7–19). These philosophical-anthropological problems aside, the definition of popular culture relies on several models—the most misleading though readiest being the two-tier model of elite and popular culture, the latter negatively defined as “unofficial culture, the culture of the non-elite” (Burke xiii). This is a qualitative approach which insists both on the supremacy of ‘high culture’ and the relative worthlessness of popular culture. John Storey in his book *Cultural Theory and Popular Culture: An Introduction* presents another alternative starting point, the quantitative aspect, and proposes that popular culture may be viewed as “culture which is widely favoured or well liked by many people” (5). While this approach negates the apparent elitism of the qualitative definition, it upholds the divide between elite and popular, and negates the varied interconnection between the two.

Popular culture needs to be further defined regarding its producers and consumers—whether and to what extent it is ‘of the people’ or ‘for the people.’ For instance, Sherlock Holmes and James Bond films are produced by a profit-oriented and easily definable elite body of producers, studios, filmmakers, etc. with the intention of being consumed by unnamed masses. They belong to mass media, which is defined as “media designed to reach large audiences perceived to have shared interests” (Sturken and Cartwright 152). EON Productions, the copyright holder of the Bond franchise, and the first producers Albert R. Broccoli and Harry Saltzman, later Barbara Broccoli and Michael G. Wilson, have been responsible for the so far 24 ‘official’ Bond films (1962–2015). They have always attempted to guess at what the potential market would buy, while simultaneously being in a hegemonic position, defining and controlling the Bond image ‘for the people.’ On the other hand, as mentioned above, audience responses and creations, like internet memes and fan fiction (sometimes even fan videos), may be produced by anyone. These are often anonymous and go viral instantly either in an unchanged or a modified format, their conception and

transmission closely resembling the workings of folk culture in previous centuries.

The problem of popular culture being produced ‘of’ or ‘for the people’ is further complicated by the fact that the interconnected immediacy of our internet-society often results in the boundaries between producers–artists, filmmakers, writers etc.–and consumers–readers, viewers, fans etc.—weakening and breaking down, sometimes even reversing the relationship between the actors in the popular culture game. Therefore ‘of the people’ phenomena are not only uncontrolled and untraceable reworkings of the ‘original’ but in turn also tend to influence the other, ‘official’ party, for instance, fanfiction having an impact on later episodes in the BBC production of *Sherlock*. “The Empty Hearse,” the first episode of the long-awaited third season of the BBC series, aired on 1 January, 2014, is an intricate array of referential layers: in addition to the usual play on the canonical tradition of the Sherlock Holmes-universe, Mark Gatiss and Steven Moffat also leave room in the plot to reflect upon the fan-frenzy and fan theories that had surrounded the series in the hiatus after the end of season two, especially concerning the theories about

the escape of Sherlock Holmes after his ‘death.’ The duo go as far as to mock and tease audiences by presenting a number of possible solutions, without the satisfaction of a straightforward resolution.

Popular culture, furthermore, seems to be anchored in the present, and could be regarded as a category which is constant in terms of existence—arguable present since the dawn of culture—yet ever-changing in terms of its content: for instance, William Shakespeare’s major plays, performed in public playhouses like the Globe, were considered popular entertainment in the age they were conceived; however, the same oeuvre by now has acquired the status of high literature thanks to centuries of cultic attitude towards his dramas. This fragile connection between popular culture and the ‘Now’ also means that students of contemporary phenomena try to reflect on something that is immediate and in constant flux. On the other hand, this immediacy may prove a great asset since students are usually familiar with the texts under discussion. Building on the (con)textual knowledge of the students, narratives of popular culture may contribute to their understanding of various socio-cultural and

historical phenomena, and may also offer a way to put other, less accessible texts into a better frame of reference.

1.2 POPULAR CULTURE IN THE CLASSROOM

Courses focusing on studying the cultural icons of Sherlock Holmes and James Bond provide challenging opportunities for students and academic research alike, since the method used in literary studies can be applied to ‘reading’ visual images in depth. As Sturken and Cartwright affirm, “[w]e decode images by interpreting clues to intended, unintended, and even merely suggested readings” (Sturken and Cartwright 26), thus the Sherlockian method of following clues and then constructing an interpretative narrative actually corresponds to the close reading of texts. Other aspects of investigation include interpreting images “according to their socio-historical contexts,” since we “are trained to read for cultural codes such as aspects of the image that signify gendered, racial, or class-specific meanings” (26). Therefore, the analyses of Bond films or Sherlock adaptations in different eras offer a number of challenging insights regarding cultural memory and

context, whereas the relationship between original literary texts by A.C. Doyle and Ian Fleming and filmic or textual adaptations also enrich our understanding of media-crossing and appropriation.

Phenomena of popular culture are often characterised by easy visual recognisability, working as triggers to achieve the same effect in a large number of people. Such visual images are called icons. According to Sturken and Cartwright, an icon is “an image that refers to something outside its individual components, something (or someone) that has great symbolic meaning to many people,” and is “often perceived to represent universal concepts, emotions, and meanings,” like the mother and child image (36). However, images of James Bond and Sherlock Holmes transmit less universal and more specific messages, therefore they are best addressed as ‘cultural icons,’ constructed by and for a given (consumer) culture. Sean Connery as James Bond, dressed in an elegant suit with white cuffs and leaning leisurely on his luxurious Aston Martin car at the edge of a beautiful but dangerous precipice in a publicity shot for *Dr No*, the very first Bond film (1962), is the defining image of the character of the not-so secret agent of

British Intelligence: a cool, hip, sexy, and dangerous English gentleman, able to defy the whole world if necessary. This iconic image is one of many that “evoke pleasure and desire” in the spectator, becoming “icons of glamour” (38).

What is glamorous, though, is culturally bound: the same image, for example, may mean very little or something completely different to a traditional peasant community, isolated from Western civilization’s consumerism, knowing nothing about the worth of an Aston Martin. Time may also change the relevance of popular culture icons quite rapidly: what is fashionable one day may seem outdated some decades later, and the overtly, even parodistically masculine figure of James Bond has been the target of feminist cultural critics ever since. Daniel Craig’s visual appearance as James Bond in *Casino Royale* reflects changed audience expectations and the development of the character through more than four decades. He still looks suave and relaxed in his tailored suit, however, there is a coarseness in his face. His short cropped hair and strongly muscular and athletic appearance, which contributes to the image of a harsher and more humanised Bond, is closer to Fleming’s original conception of the character

in the debut novel *Casino Royale* in 1953, as rather a cold-blooded assassin than the sophisticated gentleman secret agent of the first films. In addition to the nostalgia with which the film engages the Bond-canon, it also tries to cater to the sensibilities of a 21st-century audience, and addresses questions of gender identity, gender stereotypes and the traumatized psyche of Her Majesty's Assassin, a discourse which reaches its climax in *Skyfall* (2012).

Despite changes, the figure of James Bond has remained recognisably the same, and transcending the silver screen, it has become a popular culture phenomenon which is able to fully function even if stripped of its narrative context: the silhouette of the secret agent alone—invariably clad in a suit or a tuxedo, clutching a gun—is able to evoke the atmosphere of the Bond-universe, and is often used in commercials, especially when advertising luxury items like perfume or Rolex watches. 007 signifies all that is luxury, and conjures up promises of a life full of male fantasies and adventures. Therefore, the popularity of the Bond phenomenon, the icon, the films and the books may also be read psychologically, with the figure of James Bond interpreted as an object of desire and wish-fulfilment for

both male and female audiences, albeit for different reasons. Such gendered and psychological readings of Bond and Sherlock also offer a vast field of research.

Popular culture and the postmodern attitude to existing texts and images share the tendency to appropriate, i.e. borrow, re-use, re-write, and play-off well-known images in an ironic and self-reflexive manner. According to Sturken and Cartwright, the necessary condition for such parody and pastiche is that “images acquire the status of icons, which are commonly understood” (41). Such appropriation implies a number of metatextual—a text’s self-reflexive comments on itself and its context—and intertextual—texts referring to, quoting or commenting on other texts—references, the full meaning of which are never understood by all but address different layers of the audience, thus facilitating a multi-faceted analysis. The official opening ceremony for the 2012 Olympic Games in London could not proceed without evoking the cultural icon of the English agent on Her Majesty’s Secret Service—effectively recalling Fleming’s tenth Bond novel (1963) and the sixth film (EON Productions, starring George Lazenby, 1969) with the same title: *On Her Majesty’s Secret Service*.

In the video Daniel Craig, dressed as 007—the fictional international hero arrives, at Buckingham Palace and after being escorted to the Queen—who makes her first official appearance as an actress—he acts as her personal bodyguard, taking her to the Olympic Stadium by a helicopter and a parachute, while the shot from the helicopter leads us through the landmark sights of London (the London Eye, Big Ben, etc.), with MI5 personnel, ‘the people’ in the streets and even Churchill’s animated statue saluting them as they fly past.

The video combines elite and popular phenomena, referring to English traditions in a playful medley of real and fictitious visual triggers—we see Bond arriving in a London cab, meeting the Royal Corgies, and so forth. The accompanying music ranges from elite (Händel’s *Water Music*) to the traditional Bond theme in the end. The Queen plays her (fictitious) self in a wonderfully postmodern entwinement of reality and fiction: life and fantasy mingle, even Daniel Craig’s identity is questioned by being both himself and Bond when facing the (un)real Queen.

Whether ‘for the people’ or ‘of the people,’ whether disposable entertainment or multi-layered cultural

self-reflection, popular culture calls for a nuanced interpretation, combining the methods of different disciplines from literature, visual, film and memory studies to psycho-analytical and gendered readings. In the following some specific examples will provide more information on how the study of popular cultural icons may be integrated and used in an academic and classroom environment.

2. CASE STUDIES

2.1 BOND, JAMES BOND

Films to watch: *Dr. No* (1962), *Casino Royale* (2006)

Theory: Laura Mulvey “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema” (6–18), Umberto Eco “Narrative Structures in Fleming” (144–72)

BACKGROUND

The figure of James Bond was created by British author Ian Fleming (1908–1964) in 1952, loosely based on his own experiences in the British Naval Service. The figure of the indestructible secret service agent with a weakness for

women and alcohol was the protagonist of twelve novels and two short-story collections, from 1953 until the author's death in 1964. However, the importance of Bond as cultural icon far transcends the printed page. Early radio and television adaptations were followed in 1962 by *Dr. No*, with the benchmark performance of Sean Connery which elevated the figure of the MI6 agent to cult status. James Chapman concludes that the reason for the film's immense success was that it "combined a particularly British generic tradition (the spy thriller) with the sort of production values, colour and spectacle more usually associated with Hollywood movies" (54). 24 'canonical' Bond films (and two 'non-canonical' movies) have been released to date, with six actors portraying 007: Sean Connery, George Lazenby, Roger Moore, Timothy Dalton, Pierce Brosnan, and Daniel Craig, in chronological order. Despite periodic setbacks the franchise has remained alive, and is today more successful than ever, making it one of the longest-lived movie franchises in film history.

BEFORE YOU WATCH:

How does the figure of James Bond embody the masculine ideal of male fantasies?

Collect images of James Bond from popular media. Try to outline the usual visual triggers which identify the character, and also explain their specific meaning in the given context.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION AFTER WATCHING THE FILMS:

How do the two Bonds differ from each other? Employ Umberto Eco's framework to analyse the similarities and differences in plot structure.

How does *Casino Royale* and Daniel Craig adapt the figure to the demands of the 21st century? How does the film comment on the coming-of-age of James Bond?

Is this adaptation successful? What aspects of 'Bondness' are retained, what aspects are subverted and transformed?

Does the film provide any ironic, metatextual comments on the hypermasculinity of James Bond?

Employ Mulvey's concept of the gaze: how is the male gaze present in both films? Do the movies feature a 'female gaze'?

Compare the female characters of the two films. How do they differ? How do they each conform to their own contemporary societal expectations? How do they approach the archetype of the *femme fatale* differently? Use Mulvey's concept of the *gaze*.

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Utopia & Dystopia on the Screen

ZSOLT CZIGÁNYIK | Film & Culture ▶

Dreams of an ideal society called utopia and its negative counterpart dystopia have been fascinating topics for the literary imagination and have also found their way to the screen.¹ This chapter will give a framework for understanding this genre and will analyse several dystopian movies (focusing on adaptations of literary works such as *Nineteen Eighty-Four* and *A Clockwork Orange*, but not excluding original movies, such as *Equilibrium*). Special emphasis will be laid on the recent interest in dystopian themes.

First of all, some definitions need to be clarified. Although *utopia* is a Greek word, it was coined by an Englishman in 1516, exactly 500 years ago. It appeared in the title of the book by Thomas More that was to initiate this successful genre. ‘Topia’ refers to the Greek word ‘τοπος,’ meaning ‘place,’ whereas the first part of the word may either be the equivalent to the Greek word ‘ου,’ meaning ‘no’ or ‘ευ,’ meaning ‘good,’ hence the term may either refer to a ‘*good place*’ or ‘*no-place*.’ This ambiguity is present

1 This chapter is based on research carried out under the auspices of the Humanities Initiative Fellowship of Central European University, Budapest. (Available online [here](#))

in the history of the concept, and it also contributes to the success of the genre: it is never obvious what exactly is meant by a utopia.² The concept is much older than the term—in fact, it is present in human thought since time immemorial in its simplest form as a longing for something better.³ Utopia, in its fullest form, is understood as an imaginary ideal world, or, as Lyman Tower Sargent argues, a positive utopia is “a non-existent society described in considerable detail [...] that the author intended a contemporaneous reader to view as considerably better than the society in which that reader lived” (9). Let us now ignore the problems arising from issues related to the intention of the author, and consider how greatly social circumstances may change in time: readers today look at Thomas More’s social fantasy quite differently than contemporary readers did. This may even result in adding further complications to the original ambiguity of the term: a book that originally intended to be a utopia may now be read

2 As Abensour argues, the oscillation between the possible interpretations prevents a dogmatic reading (407).

3 For more details see Vieira 2010.

as a negative one, a *dystopia*. So we have to distinguish between *negative* and *positive* utopia; social structures better or worse than the basis of comparison: the readers' own social context. There are also a number of works that are intended to be dystopias, or negative utopias: social structures that are considerably worse than the one in which the writer (and presumably, the reader) lives.

THE EVOLUTION OF THE DYSTOPIAN GENRE

As the focus of the present chapter is neither literary utopianism, nor utopia as a social construct, but utopia in film, we shall not dedicate too much space to the history of either utopian or dystopian literature. Suffice it to say that the genre is already present in antiquity, Plato's *The Republic* (4th c. BC) describes an alternative society, hence it is considered to be primarily a utopian construct—or a dystopia, as it can also be interpreted in a negative fashion. In English literature an important early example of a dystopia is Book Four of *Gulliver's Travels* (1726) by Jonathan Swift, the book that describes the world of the Houyhnhnms, the ultimately rational horses that live in

a harmonious society which completely lacks emotions. It is an ongoing debate since the publication of the book whether this world is considered to be a positive utopia, where the negative impacts of emotions are absent, or a horrible dystopia which robs its inhabitants of their emotions and individual personality—their most important human traits. The issue of a humanity lacking emotions that may lead to disastrous consequences (hatred and fear causing wars etc.) is a central topic in dystopian literature and movies in general, and became the main theme of the movie titled *Equilibrium* (2002, dir. Kurt Wimmer) which will be discussed in detail later.

When discussing utopia on the screen, we will have to concentrate on the negative side of the utopian tradition—dystopian movies. Critics and scholars agree that “[c]ontrary to the meagre body of what can be called ‘utopian films,’ filmic dystopias have become [...] prominent in the cinematic production” of the past decades (Blaim and Blaim 8). Or, as Simon Spiegel argues, in “film [...] the positive utopia—the *eutopia*—is basically non-existent. There is wide agreement among scholars that a classic positive utopia lacks some of the basic elements required

for a narrative film.”⁴ Quite ironically, even the British TV series titled *Utopia* (2013–14, written by Dennis Kelly) focuses on a dystopian plot. Dystopian movies are becoming extremely popular, so much so that nowadays it is almost obvious that when a movie takes place in the future, it needs to have a dystopian setting which depicts an undesirable social and political structure. Yet this dystopian setting often only forms a vague background to the plot of, for instance, an action movie, like in the case of the first part of *The Hunger Games* (2012, dir. Gary Ross).⁵ The *Star Wars* series (first movie 1977, dir. George Lucas)

4 Spiegel then goes on to argue that the utopian impulse in its positive form is more naturally present in documentary films. An outstanding example is the second movie of the *Zeitgeist* trilogy (2007–11), titled *Zeitgeist: Addendum* (all three directed by Peter Joseph, available online [here](#)).

5 The social structure becomes more prevalent in later parts and especially in the original novel trilogy by Suzanne Collins. Dystopian settings are so popular that they appear in unexpected instances as well, such as in a recent adaptation of Antoine de Saint-Exupéry’s *The Little Prince* (2015, dir. Mark Osborne) where the aging aviator tells the story of his meeting with the little prince to a young girl in a dystopian suburb of a consumer society. It may be claimed that presenting the utopian reality of ‘seeing rightly with one’s heart’ makes the dystopian aspects of our civilization explicit.

resembles the dystopian genre in as much as it depicts an alternative dictatorial society and the revolt against it. However, this Medieval knight’s-tale fought with hyper-modern weapons has such a formulaic social setting that it cannot be considered a dystopian movie. Science fiction and utopian genres overlap, yet I agree with Lyman Tower Sargent who claims that historically, utopia, the imaginary society, is the “well-spring” of science fiction (II). For our present purposes, it is enough to point out that not all future-oriented movies are utopias or dystopias (and not all utopias take place in the future). We shall only consider those science fiction movies where an alternative social structure that radically differs from the contemporary situation is of primary importance, otherwise the movie is only aesthetically dystopian. In the following, I shall concentrate on movies (mostly literary adaptations) that not only show a dystopian social or political structure as the background of the plot, but in which the social structure is of defining importance—what I consider the prerequisite for a dystopian film.

As we can see in the literary example of Swift’s *Houyhnhnms*, utopian works may have dystopian inter-

pretations (and rarely, as in the case of Anthony Burgess's *A Clockwork Orange*, a dystopian work may have utopian interpreters). Although H. G. Wells's *The Time Machine* (1895) already describes a dystopian future of mankind, the most important early dystopian work of literature with a major impact on other writers (primarily George Orwell) is the Russian writer Yevgeny Zamyatin's *We* (1921). The imaginary world of *We* is a mathematically organized dystopian police-state called the "One State." This organization aims at the total control of citizens who live in transparent glass-houses and have codes like D-503 or I-303 instead of names. *We* already includes the most important basic topics which have kept occurring in dystopian literature and cinema ever since. These include mind control, the repression of emotions and imagination, sublimation of individuality in a larger social unit, and the existence of a non-conformist revolt group, including the alienated protagonist whose sufferings highlight the impossibility of human existence within the framework of the total state. Thus, the focus of this genre (whether on page or on the screen) becomes the limits of humanity in the context of an extremely oppressive

social construct that often claims to be beneficial.

The above elements are particularly important for the definition of the dystopian filmic genre as "the term *dystopia* seems to have become nowadays an 'umbrella' term for any work depicting a gloomy vision of horrible society" (Maziarczyk 47), dystopia having become an aesthetic category. Rick Altman argues that genres are groups of films which share certain semantic and syntactic elements. "By semantic Altman means the 'building blocks' of a genre; typical characters, props, and locations, but also stylistic features" (Spiegel 2). So we can conclude that the most important semantic elements of the dystopian genres have already appeared in Zamyatin's book, and they are oppression, mind control with the repression of emotions, a society threatening individuality, and the individual (usually in a small group or at least in a love relationship) rebelling against this threat. After this brief introduction to the dystopian genre, the following case studies of some important dystopian movies will try to provide useful aspects for fruitfully interpreting this genre. Due to the large number of dystopian films, a full overview is not intended.

A CLOCKWORK ORANGE—A SOCIAL DYSTOPIA

Anthony Burgess (1917–1993) is one of the most popular English writers of the second half of the 20th century. His oeuvre contains more than fifty books, yet most people remember him for one of his earliest writings, *A Clockwork Orange* (1962).⁶ The fame of the book is at least partially due to the American film adaptation released in 1971 by Warner Bros, directed by Stanley Kubrick (1928–1999, other major films: *Dr. Strangelove*, *2001: A Space Odyssey*), starring Malcolm McDowell in the role of Alex.⁷ The movie (following the novel) depicts a dystopian society in the near future where aggressive youth terrorize the inert majority

⁶ For more on the novel consult this [website](#).

⁷ The title in Hungarian is usually referred to as *Mechanikus narancs*, whereas the title of the book is *Gépnarancs*. In English the two titles are identical (although the indefinite article is often omitted in case of the movie). The film was not released in Hungarian cinemas, as the state censorship did not allow for the publication of Burgess's works either, until *One Hand Clapping* appeared in 1979. *A Clockwork Orange* was published in Hungarian in 1990, translated by László Gy. Horváth, the title is also his invention. For more on censorship in Hungary see my '[Literature and Censorship in the Kádár Era in Hungary](#)'

who spend most of their time watching TV in their apartment blocks. Alex, the protagonist, is the leader of a gang committing all kinds of crimes including rape, robbery, and even murder. He is imprisoned and offered the possibility of undergoing the experimental Ludovico treatment that makes him incapable of committing acts of violence. The treatment is successful and robs Alex of his ability for moral choice, and consequently curtails his humanity. He felt free before the treatment, but in fact he was a prisoner of his violent instincts; after the treatment he becomes an automaton incapable not only of acts of violence but also of self-defence, and remains helpless until the cure is reversed. The film ends with Alex regaining his ability of aggression and enjoying it again. In fact, this ending reflects the US version of the book which contained twenty chapters. The original British version includes Chapter 21, where Alex becomes surfeited with his lifestyle, and having met an old pal who had married and taken to a peaceful life, Alex recognises that he wants to put an end to his life as a gangster. This optimistic conclusion is absent from the film version, whose ending remains rather disturbing: aggression seems to be necessary for happiness.

A recurring point of criticism concerning both the book and the movie adaptation is that Alex, despite being a violent thug, is presented as a likeable person, thus they both may be considered to propagate violence. The reason why Alex is so attractive is partly that he is the first person narrator (in both versions), and the narrator cannot remain repulsive for long; the audience inevitably becomes attached to him. Yet this attachment is reinforced by our repulsion towards the other characters; there are practically no positive characters appearing in the plot. Moreover, Alex's parents and most of the other characters are passive people, lacking a potential for either positive or negative actions, whereas Alex's creativity appears as a very positive feature in the context of inertia. The film adds to this positive image with the extraordinary way Alex dresses and the makeup he wears (including false eyelashes on one eye only) which created a fashion trend in the 1970s. Costume designer Milena Canonero also differentiated the thugs and their victims by dressing Alex and his friends in black and white, whereas all the victims' clothing is colourful.

An important feature of the book is the artificial language the young characters use: standard English mixed with Russian words, cockney expressions, and early modern English phrasing. This language has an effect that mildens the violence: the aggressive scenes feel much less disturbing when described in a language that the reader does not fully understand; language offers the reader some protection, a linguistic insulation against violence. The director's task was to find the visual equivalent of this technique. A good example of this effect is the scene where Alex's gang meets another group of thugs and a fight evolves. Here Alex wins our sympathy by appearing as the protector of a girl who was about to be raped by the rival gang (whom Alex would otherwise gladly rape). The fight takes place in a "derelict casino," a theatre-like building. While watching the two gangs fight in a playful and ballet-like fashion, the accompanying score is a playful piece from Gioachino Rossini's opera, *The Thieving Magpie*, and even though the fight becomes brutal by the end of the scene, the viewer hardly recognises it—the violence

seems more like a game.⁸

A Clockwork Orange is not a typical dystopian movie in the sense that it does not feature all the semantic panels that were listed in the introduction. There is a rebel hero against an oppressive regime, yet the oppression comes more from the passivity of the consumer society rather than a particularly dictatorial political power. The love component is completely missing (sexuality is almost exclusively depicted in the form of rape, except in the last scene), yet the ultimate lack of freedom and the general atmosphere is clearly dystopian; *A Clockwork Orange* is not a political but a social dystopia.

NINETEEN EIGHTY-FOUR:

A MELANCHOLY MOVIE FROM 1984

The central phenomenon of the 20th century dystopian trend is George Orwell's (1903–1950) *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1949). This book is not only very popular (ranking very

⁸ Similarly in another scene (starting at 32. min.), where the fight oscillates between brutal and comic. For Rossini's theme see [here](#).

high in various popularity contests), but its main features are known to everyone with a link to European or American culture.⁹ And phenomenon is the correct word, as Orwell's impact extends well beyond literature. His phrases such as “Big Brother” or “newspeak” are often used when interpreting politics, history or contemporary life. The British movie with the identical title premiered in the symbolic year and was directed by Michael Radford (1946–, other major films: *The Postman*, *The Merchant of Venice*), starring John Hurt and Suzanna Hamilton. The film is also remembered as the last appearance of Richard Burton, who did not live to see the premiere of the film.

The very first scene of the movie is a powerful expression of the essence of the fictive dictatorial world the film depicts. We see a secular communal liturgy called “Two Minutes Hate” where people gather in a cinema-like room to be shown movies in the style of Nazi and communist

⁹ Bényei calls this feature “cultural dissemination” (169). For an analysis of Orwell's book see also Claeys (118–126), or in Hungarian [Czigányik](#) “A totális szabadsághiány anatómiája” (86–147)

propaganda films.¹⁰ Scenes of peaceful work are followed by violent pictures depicting war, and the movie within the movie culminates with the appearance of the chief traitor—Emmanuel Goldstein, who claims that it is not the enemy but the party, that is responsible for all the suffering. The audience does not hear Goldstein's words as they jump up and shout in hateful frenzy. They are only calmed down when the picture of Big Brother appears on the screen. The scene is a perfect summary of the chief aspects of the film: how individual liberty dissolves through the power of an oppressive society, how propaganda works and how the central emotions of the fictional world, fear and hatred, control the minds of the inhabitants.

Orwell's book, in my reading, focuses on human freedom that the protagonist Winston Smith paradoxically experiences through its absence. "Freedom is the freedom to say that two plus two makes four. If that is granted, all else follows" (Orwell 790). When a totalitarian dictatorship, which aims at controlling all aspects of human life, requires the individual to claim that this sum is different,

¹⁰ Leni Riefenstahl's Nazi propaganda films are particularly relevant.

the purpose is to make the individual express their subordination and loyalty to political power. *Nineteen Eighty-Four* thematises basic ingredients of human liberty through their absence. We perceive the world of this fictive dictatorship through the mind of the protagonist, who suffers in the world controlled by the Party as he cannot live a human life since his thoughts, words and actions must follow explicit and implicit political directives. The two most salient symbols of the lack of freedom is the omnipresent picture of Big Brother, and the telescreen that not only continuously broadcasts propaganda, but also serves as a surveillance device, transmitting the actions and words of the inhabitants of Oceania to the members of the Thought Police. Winston and all the other party members completely lack privacy, but (paradoxically) live in complete loneliness, being unable to communicate freely. As we can see, *Nineteen Eighty-Four* presents the workings of a totalitarian dictatorship in an exaggerated way, pushing to the extremes phenomena present in real political systems. It is not surprising, hence, that many readers do not look at either the book or the movie as a fictional work, but as a realistic portrayal of totalitarian political phenomena,

and consider Winston and Julia as two failed heroes of liberty. In this respect *Nineteen Eighty-Four* is essentially a political statement.

In Orwell's book the detailed portrayal of the dictatorship is always complemented with its impact on the consciousness of the characters. In this respect, paralysing fear and the lack of memory play crucial roles. The movie emphasises the psychological aspect: Winston on the screen is not a romantic freedom-fighter, but one who suffers in a totalitarian dictatorship. His paranoid mind is a necessary condition of the Party's power; this power is unlimited because it is internalised in the subordinated mind of the dependant, yet the reason this mind is so helplessly subservient is that the external power destroys all opportunities of freedom. The Hungarian audience that so passionately identified their own experiences with the fictional space of the book, interpreting it as a somewhat exaggerated realism, was less enthusiastic in the reception of this more moderate, melancholy psychologising

approach.¹¹ A more active resistance was expected from Winston by the audience that knew the destructive effects of the necessary compromises with a political power for one's survival.

The performance of Richard Burton in the role of O'Brien, the party official misleading and finally torturing Winston, is particularly vigorous, yet it is also dubious from a narrowly political interpretation. Burton plays a most cynical intellectual who never makes his cynicism explicit and his unlimited power allows him to appear compassionate—he is fully inhuman while looking humanistic.¹² All in all, he is too melancholic and does not seem vicious enough for a chief villain. *Nineteen Eighty-Four* is a precise analysis of the relationship of the individual and dictatorial political power, yet the movie version

¹¹ Needless to say, neither was the book published, nor was the film screened in Hungary during the Kádár regime. The translation of the book was legally published first in 1989, whereas the movie was broadcasted in television in 1993. See also [Czigányik "Reader's Responsibility."](#)

¹² Cf. particularly scenes when Winston visits O'Brien, and the torture scenes that are long (proportionately much longer than in the book) but not particularly bloody.

concentrates on the psyche of the individual; the oppressive nature of dictatorial political power appears through its paralysing impact on the human psyche.

CONCLUSION: *EQUILIBRIUM*

An analysis of all the major dystopian movies would go far beyond the confines of this chapter. As a conclusion I find it apt to introduce *Equilibrium*, the 2002 film directed by Kurt Wimmer (1964–, other major films: *Total Recall*, *Law Abiding Citizen*), starring Christian Bale. From a cinematographic point of view, this film is far from outstanding, and also clearly lacks a lot in originality, but for the same reason it is a most useful object for understanding the genre. As Maziarczyk argues, *Equilibrium* is an “example of cultural recycling in contemporary cinema: it combines the most typical elements of classic anti-utopias and dystopias and enhances them with quasi-religious motifs only to use them as an appropriate oppressive background

for a typical action-movie plot of ‘one against all’” (45).¹³

The movie takes place in the fictional state of Libria, where emotions are recognized as the source of human calamities, hence banned and considered “sense offence,” in the fashion of the Orwellian thought crime. Thought police also has its equivalent, and the protagonist John Preston, who will later revolt against this inhuman system, is a member of this group. Learning that emotions, besides their dangerous consequences, also offer a richer existence than ever experienced by Preston, he quits taking the emotion-numbing drug, and through a number of spectacular action scenes, manages to confront the Big Brother-like leader and overthrow the system. *Equilibrium*’s fictive social structure cannot avoid a number of obvious paradoxes; while supposedly suppressing any form of emotion, the leader often has fits of anger; despite the seeming lack of emotions, people form family bonds; and a well-founded

¹³ As often in the dystopian genre, *Nineteen Eighty-Four* is “the dominant dystopian intertext for *Equilibrium*. As it soon turns out, a number of other key elements of the film have been ‘borrowed’ from *Nineteen Eighty-Four* as well as *Brave New World* and *Fahrenheit 451*,” (Maziarczyk 46) and one could add *Matrix*.

system is quickly overthrown by the hero defeating the chief villain. The structure of the dystopian society is not clear either, as Maziarczyk argues, it is “a dystopian bricolage [...] much less comprehensive and consistent than Huxley’s or Orwell’s” (53).

Nevertheless, it is also a general feature of the cinema as opposed to literature: visual effects have a natural primacy, whereas the possibility of depicting complex social systems in a comprehensive way is seriously limited. Visual images, however, allow for the presentation of powerful symbols and the bleak atmosphere of dystopian societies. Another strength of dystopian cinema is the depiction of the relationship of the individual to the social system, whether in a psychologically accurate manner as in *Nineteen Eighty-Four* or in a more formulaic way as in *Equilibrium*. This latter example also shows the temptation of getting submerged in spectacular scenes. The examples discussed above represent the basic semantic elements of dystopian cinema: the presentation of an oppressive social system must be a central issue, combined with mind control and the repression of emotions and imagination; and this social system, which threatens

individuality, appears in the conflict of the individual and the larger social unit.

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Henry James in the Cinema: When the Adapters Turn the Screw

ÁKOS FARKAS | Film & Culture ▶

This chapter explores the potentials and problems related to the cinematic adaptation of literature, literary adaptation for short, through examining a number of film versions based on Henry James's novella "The Turn of the Screw" (1898).¹ Adaptation studies being a fairly recent addition to academic curricula and Henry James having a reputation for "seriousness" that may not make him an obvious choice for moviegoers, a few explanatory remarks may be required.

QUESTIONS OF A DOUBTER

Stanley Cavell said, almost forty years ago, that "the people [...] who like movies best are among the best readers" (8). The prominent American philosopher connected these two aspects of culture at a time when film studies had a long way to go before achieving the prestige

¹ Critical references to James's novella are inconsistent in format, with the title appearing now in italics, now in quotation marks. This chapter uses quotation marks around the title of the source text to distinguish it from the titles of the various film adaptations, which are italicised: "The Turn of the Screw" (novella); *The Turn of the Screw* (film).

that reading canonical literature had always enjoyed in the groves of academe.

Nowadays, "doing film" at college or university has come to be regarded as something no less valuable than studying Homer, Shakespeare, or Virginia Woolf. But while nobody questions the legitimacy of film studies as a discipline in its own right any longer, literary *adaptation*, that hybrid form, is still seen by many as a somewhat dubious field of scholarly inquiry. True, the assertion that "nobody loves an adaptation" may well have been a deliberate exaggeration when the provocative statement was made by J. G. Boyum, one of the discipline's earlier promoters, some three decades ago (15). Nevertheless, adaptation studies has remained a contested area to this day in spite of the ever growing popularity of movies based on books. No wonder, then, that it may raise unpleasant questions among novices to the field. Why bother with literary adaptation instead of reading great books for value or watching original films for fun? And even if the subject is worth studying, why would one want to focus on the screen versions of an early modernist novella rather than an Elizabethan drama or a contemporary novel? Why Henry James and

not William Shakespeare or Margaret Atwood?

WHY ADAPTATION?

Originality has been regarded as a major standard of aesthetic merit in the arts at least since romanticism's cult of the individual talent. However, as demonstrated by North American exponents of archetypal theory or Russian classics of formalist criticism, there aren't that many stories to go around. One cannot be very original about narrative content when the basic stories have been told and retold a number of times. As an example, most love stories end the way Puck foresees the blissful outcome of the complications he has plotted in Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. As the arch prankster goes about setting things right with yet another dose of some love potion to be applied, he quotes this country proverb: "Jack shall have Jill. / Nought shall go ill" (3.2.461–2). All is well if it ends well, Robin Goodfellow might also say—unless one is dealing with a pair of "star cross'd lovers" who, prevented by their fates from *having* each other, "take their life" as Romeo and Juliet do in utter despair. In the first instance we have

comedy, while in the second tragedy, but with both we are dealing with fairly similar, if not in fact identical, stories.

There is, of course, more to it than that. Hearing or watching the same story twice or a hundred times over is just as likely to bore as it is to reassure. It does make a difference who tells the same story, where, and how. If it is a crew of "rude mechanicals" enacting "the most cruel death of Pyramus and Thisby," then the audience will invariably laugh where they should cry. Also, if it is "Arthur Brooke's versification of Matteo Bandello's adaptation of Luigida Porto's version of Masuccio Salernitano's story" concerning the fateful deaths of those lovers, as Linda Hutcheon describes the literary metamorphoses of the world's saddest love story before it became *Romeo and Juliet* (177), we will probably yawn before we would either cry or laugh. It takes imagination, preferably the creative imagination of a genius, to retell the all-too-familiar narrative in a way that will surprise convincingly. But genius or no genius, few creative artists can really help retelling, or recycling, existing material. They cannot help borrowing and they will not cease from adapting. It is precisely the example of that arch-borrower and tireless adapter William Shakespeare

whose practice of “loving rip-off” inspired Hutcheon to end her major work on literary adaptation with the conclusion that “[i]n the workings of the human imagination, adaptation is the norm, not the exception” (177).

WHY MODERNISM—OR EARLY MODERNISM?

But why watch and discuss film versions based on the work of a notoriously difficult, if not in fact elitist, writer whose work dates back to the early days of an equally demanding period known as modernism? Why not something more exotically distant or, for that matter, more relevantly close? And why not someone more *popular*? In short, why modernism and why Henry James?

As for the selection of the period, it is not by chance that the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries are movie directors and producers’ favourites when it comes to literary adaptation. And it is not only because modernist texts have been around long enough to be outside copyright protection but not quite so long as to have lost contemporary relevance. No, works of Victorian and (early) modernist writers have more than that to offer the filmmaker. The

close mutual relationship between modernist literature and film came to be a widely recognized feature of the cultural landscape at the turn and in the first half of the twentieth century (cf. Marcus 242). So much so, that due to its popular appeal, “its mechanical force and play,” and its “tension between picturing and moving,” cinema in fact came to “metaphorise” modernity, as Tom Gunning, a major researcher of the cinema, put it (qtd. in Marcus 242).

James’s narrower period, the late Victorian era, is also among the salient cultural moments with which our “postmodern culture shows remarkable affinities in its cultural recycling” as pointed out by intermediality theorist Barbara Straumann (252). The connecting link, she explains, is the Victorian age’s “own investment in adaptation” (252). To see the point, one only has to think of the Brontë sisters’ fondness for popular magazines, R. L. Stephenson’s exploitation of the gutter press, Dickens’s keenness on melodrama—or Henry James’s fascination with the theatre and his lifelong attraction to ghost stories.

BUT WHO IS HENRY JAMES AND WHAT IS “THE TURN OF THE SCREW”?

A major innovator of the realist novel whose consistent use of point of view and unreliable narrators and whose meticulous representation of mental processes through the employment of interior monologue prepared the ground for much experimental writing in the modernist and post-modern periods, Henry James has always been a writers' writer. Awe-inspiring as it may sound, such a reputation does not tend to make a novelist's fiction eminently suitable for adaptation to film. The art of fiction is one thing, the ability to cater for the widest possible audience, cinema's main goal since its inception, is another.

But then Henry James, while he may not have been “all things to all men,” was convinced that a real artist could, and in fact should, serve two masters: high art *and* broad popularity. That was how he decided to try his hand at writing for the theatre. The fact that he failed with his most ambitious play—he was actually booed when stepping on the stage after the curtain fell on his *Guy Domville* (1895) the night it premiered in London—only hardened his

determination to please his public as well as his critics. It is interesting to note that what is referred to as the experimental period in his writing roughly coincides with his decision to create what he himself described as “essentially a pot-boiler and a *jeu d'esprit*” (qtd. in Orr 20), i.e. a light-hearted and witty piece of profitable entertainment that came to be known as “The Turn of the Screw.” Given its gruesome subject matter—the repeated appearance, real or imagined, of a pair of ghosts to a young governess and the possible corruption of her young charges by the evil spirits she sees—the story cannot really be described as particularly light-hearted. But due to the insatiable thirst for the inexplicable and the other-worldly among James's (and perhaps our own) contemporaries, his gothic tale of psychic horrors could rightly be expected to be a success. And “The Turn of the Screw” did in fact become much more popular than anything else Henry James ever wrote. No wonder that James's novella found its way to film adapters whose dual objective was, and has ever remained, to provide quality entertainment to a large but discerning audience in order to make their venture both commercially feasible and culturally respectable.

The potential value of “The Turn of the Screw” for the cinema has been duly recognized and fully exploited by generations of filmmakers who have adapted it to the screen. Jamesian scholar J. Sarah Koch counted no less than sixteen television and feature films based on the novella before 2002 (Koch 351–4). To this number three more items have been added since Koch’s list was compiled, which raises the total to nineteen. Of the nearly 180 films inspired by James’s entire fictional output, roughly fifteen percent has thus been indebted to “The Turn of the Screw.” Given that this gothic novella fills a mere two percent of James’s collected fiction published in the definitive Library of America edition, page for frame “The Turn of the Screw” has been over seven times as popular with filmmakers as the average Henry James story.

Looking behind the statistics to assess quality as well as quantity, we find that the screen credits of the gothic tale’s adaptations boast some really glamorous names in the leading parts of *The Turn of the Screw*. These include Ingrid Bergman (1959), Deborah Kerr (*The Innocents*, 1961), Marlon Brando (*The Nightcomers*, 1971), Colin Firth (1999), Nicole Kidman (*The Others*, 2001), and Michelle Dockery

(2009). Mention should also be made of such great names as Gore Vidal and Truman Capote (scriptwriters, 1955 and 1961), Jack Clayton (director, 1961), or Benjamin Britten (opera composer, 1959, 1984, and 1990) among the makers of the novella’s film and TV versions. When it comes to the screen adaptation of classic modern literature, “The Turn of the Screw” has always been a favourite of favourites.

WHY SO POPULAR?

Beyond the popularity of the period highlighted above, the attractions of “The Turn of the Screw” for filmmakers are threefold. The first is the combination of the genre’s lasting appeal and the value of “proven property” (Boyum 4). Gothic tales of horror have always found a large and enthusiastic audience, while Henry James is, in all English-speaking countries and in many parts of continental Europe (one has to think of the Spanish, French, German and even Czech contribution to the adaptation work described above), a literary brand-name guaranteeing ‘quality’ entertainment. The term edutainment sums up the situation perfectly: middle-class cinephiles—the

industry's second largest target audience after teenage movie fans—can enjoy the thrills of a psychic story with the clear conscience of those appreciating high culture.

The second selling point of “The Turn of the Screw” has to do with its ideal length. While the plot and subject matter of a short story are not always felt to be enough to fill a full-length movie, a novel of several hundred pages will require too much surgical intervention on the part of the adapters. While extension and abbreviation are welcome means of updating intermedial appropriation, working with a narrative of optimum dimensions such as the novella can make life a whole lot easier for the filmmaker.

The last, but perhaps most important, advantage of James's gothic story for literary adapters is that it belongs to the major genre of narrative fiction. There is an aspect essentially important for literary adaptation that film shares with fiction but not with its first cousin the theatrical play. This advantage of fiction over drama may be surprising—after all theatre and film are alike in being fundamentally multimodal media combining the visual and auditory effects of dialogue, acting performance, and scenery. The aspect that the moving picture has in common

with fiction but not with the theatre is the importance of *point of view* in both film and novel or novella. Here is what connects fiction in general and Henry James's stories in particular to the world of film as summed up in a recent handbook on intermediality:

[In certain respects] film resembles narrative fiction more than drama. [...] Like narrative fiction, film can convey a character's point of view not just through direct speech (namely commentary by voice-over) but also by means of a range of other devices, including camera angle, focal length, music, *mise-en-scène*, mind scenes and dream sequences. (Straumann 253)

An important difference between plays on the one hand and films as well as narrative fiction on the other is that while the attention—the “gaze”—of the theatre-goer is free to roam from actor to actor or even from actor to scenery during a theatrical performance, the attention of the cinema-goer as well as the novel-reader is controlled. The power to direct audience attention is something exploited by writers of stories and makers of films to much

the same extent. It is of little importance that the writer controls our attention by manipulating narrative point of view, whereas the film maker does so by deploying the technical means at his or her disposal. What really matters is that in either case our attention is under greater control than it is with live performances. This is especially so with a narrative like “The Turn of the Screw” where the point of view is strictly limited to the perspective of a possibly unreliable narrator—the perceptions of the governess telling her own disturbing (or disturbed) story. With certain reservation the same can be said for the best film adaptations of James’s gothic novella.

WHICH PARTICULAR FILMS AND FOR WHAT PURPOSE?

We will look at five of the nineteen adaptations, focusing primarily on three, to examine how adapters go about transferring to the screen such a key element of James’s “The Turn of the Screw” as its limited point of view. The films to be considered include: *The Innocents* (1961), *The Nightcomers* (1971), *The Turn of the Screw* (1999),

In a Dark Place (2006), and *The Turn of the Screw* (2009).

This selection will enable us to clarify the extent to which each adaptation translates James’s consistent refusal to either validate or discredit the first-person narrator’s account of the incidents befalling her. Working with these films we will look at the relative usefulness of fidelity versus creative appropriation as criteria of evaluating the screen versions of “The Turn of the Screw.” In doing so we will visit the fringes of adaptation such as prequels and sequels. Eventually we will be in a position to draw some tentative conclusions about the general nature and legitimate uses of literary adaptation.

AMBIGUITY AND POINT OF VIEW IN THE SOURCE NOVELLA

The chilling effect of James’s gothic tale lies in the fact that it leaves a whole lot of vexing questions concerning the story and its interpretation unanswered. These are best summed up by Jamesian scholar John Tibbets:

What, exactly, *has* happened? What transpired in the past between Quint and Jessel? Were the children involved? If so, were they the ‘innocents’ they first seemed to the governess, or willing go-betweens? Worse, were they sexually abused by Quint and Jessel, and are they now somehow re-enacting those activities? Is the governess protecting them from real evil, or is she subjecting them to her own obsessive agendas? Is she sexually repressed, and transferring her fantasies onto Miles? And finally, the central question which arises from all this—are the ghosts real or just figments of her imagination? (103)

Successive generations of critics have offered their various answers. At a time when psychic phenomena comprised a legitimate subject of scientific research, James’s contemporaries were ready to accept the proposition that other-worldly influences could do all sorts of appalling things to the living. Later, as the new century grew more and more sceptical and secularised, psychological explanations replaced belief in the existence of the supernatural or its ability to interfere with our worldly lives. Observations

made by artists and intellectuals of the modernist period like Ezra Pound or Virginia Woolf prepared the ground for the ascendance of Freudian interpretations explaining the mysteries surrounding Bly with the governess’s repression-induced “hysteria.” First explicated by the famous American critic Edmund Wilson in 1939 and then endorsed and elaborated on by James’s ‘official’ biographer Leon Edel in the 1950s and 60s, the “non-apparitionist” explanation prevailed for decades to come. In this view it is the governess’s repressed sex instincts, aroused by her unrequited love for her employer, the Master, and transferred to the boy Miles, that “haunted” her and destroyed her victim. With an occasional return to the “apparitionist” theory accepting the implied author’s belief in the actuality of the supernatural (James had in fact written a series of straight ghost stories), current critical interpretations prefer to remain noncommittal. Taking their cue from deconstruction and post-Freudian theory, “critics have [recently] shied away from the ‘either/or’ approach and placed supreme value on the story’s ambiguity itself” (Bloom 17). This means that the question whether “the ghosts are real or just figments of her imagination” neither

could nor should be decided (Tibbetts 103).

After all, James himself sends out mixed messages when he distances us from the governess's story by inserting two additional narrators, a respectable sounding pair of secondary characters who introduce the governess's first person narrative, as well as placing a forty-year span between reader and story in the frame narrative. We thus have an unnamed guest at a Christmas party recounting how the other frame-narrator, Douglas, entertains his friends with reading out his (and, formerly, Miles and Flora's) long-dead governess's age-old manuscript. Once we enter the main narrative, we are completely left at the governess's mercy, deprived of any unbiased, external information either to confirm or question her story because our perspective fully coincides with the first-person narrator's—the governess's—restricted point of view. Thus the “essential ambiguity” of James's gothic tale is upheld by the reader being denied privileged access to the ultimate truth possessed by an omniscient narrator. Let us see whether the film adaptations to be considered are capable of replicating the source text's reduced point of view and the resulting ambiguities.

AMBIGUITY AND POINT OF VIEW IN THE ADAPTATIONS

The “classic,” early, film version, Jack Clayton's *The Innocents* (1961) puts camera angle and editing to the best possible use in limiting the viewer's perspective to the governess's dubious point of view and thus throwing doubt on her story of the ghosts. Although the medium of film is normally disposed towards the objective viewpoint and thus an omniscient stance (cf. Boyum 87), camerawork in *The Innocents* succeeds in mimicking the eye-movements of a single character—Miss Giddens, as the originally anonymous governess is named in the film. This is achieved by the camera usually presenting the apparitions from her foreground position in deep-focus two-shot, clearly showing the governess and the ghost in one single frame. An alternative technique of creating the effect of subjective point of view is provided by the editing where eye-line matching is employed, in which case we follow Giddens's gaze across the screen to locate the apparition in the next frame. When after this the camera shifts to its “natural,” omniscient, position, the ghost usually disappears, which

suggests that it is Giddens, and Giddens only, who has seen the phantom (cf. Tibbetts 112).

But there are at least two exceptions. One is when Quint's ghost appears, or seems to appear, for the second time. Stepping between a thick curtain and a French window to hide herself from Flora and Miles in a game, the governess is terrified to see the dark face of a menacing male figure appearing in the window. This would neatly fit in with the effect of the subjective shots described above, except that it is not Giddens but we, the viewers, who first spot the face. So there is something we know, or seem to know, before Giddens takes notice of it. In other words, the camera here shifts into omniscient mode to validate, rather than discredit, Giddens's growing conviction that Bly is haunted.

The other instance where cinematography gives substance to at least one of the ghosts comes near the end of the film, where Miss Giddens and Miles are seen from above. The high-angle shot could be mistaken for objective camera work producing omniscient point of view. This, however, is unlikely to be the case as the camera is positioned at the precise location where Miss Giddens

previously saw Quint, and so the viewer is now forced to occupy the spirit's vantage point (cf. Tibbetts 112). The ghostly effect of this is that not only does at least one of the evil spirits exist, but that he might exist in our heads, looking out of our (camera-) eyes. Ghosts are real—except that they are inside Miss Giddens and perhaps the movie-goer, too.

The ambiguity resulting from the alteration of subjective and objective camera work is not quite unique to Clayton's film, but nowhere else in the adaptations surveyed here is it used to the same dizzying effect as it is in *The Innocents*. True, in Ben Bolt's *The Turn of the Screw* (1999) for just one passing moment we may have the eerie feeling of sharing the ghostly Quint's point of view atop the tower where his apparition was first spotted by the governess. Here it is also from above that the camera overlooks the benighted garden from Quint's signature position as the camera follows the desperate governess rushing to Miles to lead the wayward boy back to the safety of the house. But this is an exceptional moment, which is not reinforced either by similarly telling camera angles or revelatory episodes that could in any important

way contradict the film's anti-apparitionist agenda emphasising the governess's sexual repression behind her obsessive behaviour.

The Innocents, on the other hand, provides further, literally tangible evidence of the ghostly presence. For example, Miss Jessel's ghost is at first shown crying at a desk through the employment of the subjective camera position limiting our perspective to the new governess's point of view. But then, after the apparition vanishes, a dubious Giddens walks up to the desk followed by the now objective camera, and here we see her smear between her fingers a teardrop obviously left behind by the ghost. The presence of this physical trait of a psychic phenomenon runs in the face of contrary factual evidence reinforcing the anti-apparitionist interpretation. An example of the latter is the fact that Giddens's ability to provide an incredulous Mrs Grose with a precise description of Quint's appearance is quite rationally explained by her previous discovery of the former valet's miniature portrait in a box she chances upon in a hidden room. With material evidence now suggesting the actual, now the imagined existence of the ghosts, *The Innocents* leaves the viewer just as helpless and dizzy

as Miss Giddens is when she is photographed in a swirl of her gyrating nightgown pictorially illustrating what her name suggests: total physical and mental giddiness.

WHAT COMES AFTER...

Although the figure of the governess is made out to be just as helpless as she is in *The Innocents* in most of the other film versions, viewers are nowhere else thrown into the same dizzying confusion of interpretations as they are forced to share with Miss Giddens in Jack Clayton's movie. The single possible exception could be the novella's most recent adaptation, Tim Fywell's *The Turn of the Screw*. This 2009 version endeavours to follow up the governess's life story by placing her in a mental institution where she is locked up for forensic examination after her causing the violent death of young Miles. At the psychiatric ward she is submitted to a series of diagnostic interviews conducted by a young specialist, Dr Fisher. It is to be mentioned that the good doctor's scientific curiosity is fuelled by his evident attraction to the governess, whose feminine charms are left untouched by her seeming derangement.

What happens during the sessions is truly remarkable. The governess's account, shown through intermittent flashbacks, of the spooky events unfolding at Bly can either be read as symptoms of her repression-induced mania (a central motif of Ben Bolt's ITV drama made precisely ten years before Fywell's BBC-adaptation) or as a shocking report of how the Evil One can manifest itself through the least likely agents—such as innocent children. The ambiguity of her narrative is, however, for a long while dispelled by the presence of the young scientist, whose sober comments and rational incredulity seem to give the lie to the disturbed woman's ghost story and thus reinforce a straightforward medical interpretation—the non-aparitionist one. But then Dr Fisher himself undergoes an experience quite similar to those recounted by his patient. First he sees the ghostly figure of Quint suddenly appear out of nowhere in a photograph of Bly House thumbtacked to a display board in his office. Although the mysterious patch in the photo disappears as Dr Fisher looks again, the experience clearly disposes him to listen to his patient's narrative with more sympathy than he has shown so far. This is followed then by the film's concluding sequence

where the governess is led away from the hospital ward to what must be a prison cell or the death chamber awaiting her as a child killer. The nondescript policeman opening the back door of the patrol wagon for the female prisoner all of a sudden morphs into the exact likeness of a leering Quint, a face familiar to the good doctor from another photograph examined by him earlier. The viewer is now left wondering whether a warning made by the governess to the doctor a little earlier may not have come true. Shortly before the arrival of the police wagon, she had this to say to Dr Fisher apprehensive about her fate: “Thank you for your concern, but it's you I'm sorry for. You scientists. If you don't believe in evil, evil that will endure throughout the ages... If you don't believe in Quint, he will keep coming back for you” (Fywell, 2009).

Is this newest film version of James's novella all about “a cocky young man of science ha[ving] his certainties upturned” as the doctor is described by a TV-reviewer (Sutcliffe)? Is it then a topical parable about an arrogant male doctor being taught an object lesson in parapsychology by an oppressed woman (!) who shows him that there are more things in heaven and earth than dreamt of in

his narrowly materialist philosophy? Or is it rather the sad story of an impressionable young doctor influenced by the delusional ravings of a sexy patient for whom, as much as for the innocent doctor, evils of her own making keep coming back? In any case, this sequel to the governess's literary narrative makes a credible attempt at telling us what happens after... after the death of Miles, where all previous versions leave the story off, but also after the ascendance of theoretical interpretations unknown to, or irrelevant for, both Henry James and Jack Clayton, such as the apparently feminist twist given to its source by one possible interpretation of Fywell's adaptation. What is preserved though, is the literary source's and its classic film version's deeply disturbing ambiguity. No, Fywell and his crew did not 'vandalise' James's story, as the reviewer quoted above would have us believe (Sutcliff). To the contrary: they remained faithful to the—deeply ambiguous—spirit of the original by adding new interpretations to its old letter.

FIDELITY THROUGH APPROPRIATION OR ADAPTATION AS A LIFE-SAVER

With its closing shots, Fywell's sequel to "The Turn of the Screw" leaves the viewer wavering between two stories—a feminist allegory of how an apparently groundless ghost story might be truer than the scientific convictions of a patriarchal institution, *and* a realistic account of how emotional contagion can create something like mass hysteria once the imagination of a suggestive female is allowed to run riot. But then is it legitimate for a film adaptation, purportedly based on a well-known original cashing in on its cultural prestige, in order to force its own, updated, interpretations on a classic story whose author could hardly have dreamt of the issues raised by the adapter of a later age? Is it permissible that Fywell should play a feminist agenda off against a pop-psychological reading in his James-film as seen above? Are we to accept how a host of other, earlier, directors promote their various interpretations, from the Freudian to the politically correct, as it is respectively done in the prequel called *The Nightcomers* and the more recent adaptation titled *In a Dark Place*?

James surely knew little, and probably thought less, of how witnessing Freud's "primal scene" can leave a deep imprint on children as illustrated by the former, or how being sexually abused can even more deeply traumatise teenage girls as hammered home by the latter of these two films. In that light, such practices of filmic updating may seem very fishy to those who go to the cinema in order to encounter the *real* Henry James.

But who *is* the real Henry James and, more importantly, what *is* the 'correct' interpretation of his novella? As described above, each critical school has offered its own interpretation of "The Turn of the Screw" from the credulously "apparitionist" through the squarely "non-apparitionist" to the consistently noncommittal, each excluding the other two. In all this confusion, one would be tempted to suggest that the adapter should return to the good old notion of authorial intention as the ultimately valid interpretation. And indeed, Henry James, one of the most critically self-reflexive novelists of all time, left behind more than enough comments on his ghostly novella for the filmmaker to go by. But there, precisely, is the rub: he left us with *more* than enough commentary.

We have seen how, in a private letter, he referred to "The Turn of the Screw" as a simple money-making venture—"a pot-boiler." This he later made public in a preface to the story where he referred to "The Turn of the Screw" as "a fairy tale, pure and simple" (qtd. in Orr 21). Such trivialising self-evaluation seems to be contradicted by another remark in the same preface, where he describes his gothic tale as an "excursion into chaos" and then as a "piece of ingenuity" meant "to catch those not easily caught" (21). Left with these mutually exclusive testimonials, the adapter trying to learn from the author himself what *really* to make of his story is no better off than the poor governess intent on making sense of her unsettling experiences. The Jamesian scholar is right: "James was happy to sow genre-confusion" (Orr 20).

If neither scholarly critics, nor the author himself can, or will, offer a definitive interpretation, then what is the adapter to do? He or she is perhaps best off accepting the Foucauldian maxim that "[t]here is absolutely nothing primary to interpret, for after all everything is already interpretation" (qtd. in Straumann 251). The adapter then can go on to create his or her own *filmic* interpretation of

the source text. This does not mean that moviemakers should be disloyal to the spirit of the source text or show disrespect to its maker. Quite the contrary. Creative adaptation, also known as appropriation, will render the original the greatest service by making it *adapt* to the changing expectations of a changing audience. The very word adaptation is, after all, borrowed from biology, the science of life, where to adapt means, as we are reminded by Straumann, “to make fit,’ ‘to adjust,’ to ‘alter,’ ‘to make suitable for a new purpose or to a different context or environment” (251). If biological adaptation ensures the physical survival of a species in its natural environment, it is the work of appropriative adaptation that can guarantee the “cultural survival” of a source text. Fidelity to the spirit can be best achieved through ignoring the letter. That may well be the final turn of the screw in literary adaptation.

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Representation of Australian Aborigines in Australian film

CECILIA GALL | Film & Culture ▶

How is it possible to learn about Aboriginal culture from Australian film? How can we make sense of different representations of a minority about which we know very little? How can we evaluate and assess the politics of representation inherent in the perspectives presented in these films?

This chapter provides some answers to these questions. A short account of the representation of Australian Aborigines (and their cultural practices) in Australian film is followed by some specific examples of representation and some ideas about how to make sense of these films.

A good starting point for such a discussion is Marcia Langton's important essay, *Well I heard it on the Radio and Saw it on the Television.* Langton gives a critical analysis of the representation of the Aboriginal subject, which she refers to as "the colonising imperative in Australian art and film" (7). "Freedom in the world of film and the arts," she claims, "can only thrive if there is a strong critique, and in relation to Aboriginal matters, if the critique is anti-colonialist" (8).

What does Langton mean by "anti-colonial" critique? Australia's history is most often still recounted from the perspective of the explorers—that of colonisation.

Although there has been a marked change in historiography since the 1960s as a result of the work accomplished by historians, such as Henry Reynolds, who aimed to incorporate the history preceding the white invasion into the mainstream narrative, this viewpoint has yet to make a lasting impact on public thinking. "White Australia has a black history" was the slogan developed in 1988, the year Australia celebrated 200 years of white settlement. Whilst acknowledged as the oldest continuous culture in the world, Aboriginal Australians put the stress on "survival" rather than anything else with respect to colonial history. The arrival of the First Fleet in 1788 started a new phase in Aboriginal history—one marked with violence, forced assimilation, loss of land and culture.

The dominant early representations of Aborigines by Europeans (in all forms of art) tended to depict the natives in terms of the primitive, violent or 'noble' savage or even as a grotesque figure dressed in European clothing. Such characterisations were derived from ideas about 'Aboriginality' gained from earlier travel writing, which were informed and coloured by the dominant beliefs of the particular era. As Langton says: "Australians do not

know and relate to Aboriginal people. They relate to stories told by former colonists” (33).

Representations of Aborigines in film are similarly distorted. Langton draws our attention to the fact that there are a staggering number of representations of Aboriginal people in Australian film (Langton quotes Michael Leigh as counting over 6000 representations) (24). A shocking early feature that characterised films was the very “non-presence” or absence of natives, a lack which corroborates Australia’s founding story of “terra nullius” or “empty land.”¹ This concept also includes those minor characters in movies who are “invisible,” or characters who are of no consequence, or are there to serve the white people or simply as part of the (exotic) landscape. Some examples of such representations would be early films of Charles Chauvel, such as *Heritage*, (1935) and *Uncivilised*, (1936) or *Bitter Springs* (1950) by Ralph Smart.

Chauvel’s 1955 classic, *Jedda*, represents a new approach. It is an important film from many points of view. This was

¹ “The Natives do not appear to be numerous, neither do they seem to live in large bodies but dispers’d in small parties along by the water side.” (Cook)

the first film in Australia to be shot in colour (Gevacolor),² the first film which actually cast Aboriginal people in the lead roles, the first to be shot almost entirely on location³ in the Northern Territory and the first Australian film to compete for the *Palme d’Or* in Cannes. Yet on close analysis, *Jedda* is deeply problematic and confused in its messages. Narrated by a half-caste stockman, played by a “blackface”⁴ (painted-up) actor, the tragic story of *Jedda* describes both the impossibility of assimilation as well as the doomed future of Aboriginal Australians. The title character, Jedda, whose mother died, was adopted as a baby by a white woman who had recently lost a child.

² Gevacolor (later Agfa-Gevaert) is a colour motion picture process, like Cinecolor or Technicolor for example. It was especially popular in the 1950s and believed to be especially suitable for on location shooting (Hayward 86).

³ Stuart Cunningham coined the term “locationism” (qtd. in Miller 149) to describe Chauvel’s “intense commitment” to location shooting. It is an interesting fact of trivia that as the last reel of film was destroyed in a plane crash, Chauvel was allowed to spray the caves in the Blue Mountains near Sydney and re-shot the scenes there (Miller 152). “Locationism” was abandoned due to lack of funding.

⁴ See Benjamin Miller’s excellent article for a cultural analysis of ‘black-face,’ in relation to *Jedda*.

Despite the white mother's efforts to assimilate Jedda, the film shows the young girl experiencing some inexplicable pull towards a primordial, 'primitive' world that manifests itself in different ways. The tribal Aborigine, Marbuk, abducts Jedda, who is the 'wrong skin'⁵ for him, and he is subsequently shown to be driven mad by the rejection of his own tribe as a punishment for his wrong choice. He is simultaneously castigated by his own people and pursued by an assimilated stockman, who claims to be Jedda's rightful suitor.

The first few minutes of the film set the tone for the whole of the movie. Dramatic music plays while the title appears in large font over a landscape painting in the style of Albert Namatjira.⁶ This is soon replaced by a map

5 The expression 'wrong skin for someone' refers to a complex set of rules in Aboriginal society which determined marriage patterns within a larger group.

6 Katrin Althans points out that Carl Kayser's camerawork recalls the watercolour paintings of Albert Namatjira (Althans 15). Indeed very often landscape shots are framed like a painting, foregrounding a tree and encompassing a hill or mountain in the background. Albert Namatjira (1902–1959) was a famous Australian artist of Western Arrente origin, best known for his vivid watercolours.

of Australia which carries the following text:

To cast this picture the producer went to the primitive aboriginee⁷ race of Australia and now introduces NARLA KUNOTH as Jedda, a girl of the Arunta tribe and ROBERT TUDEWALLI, a man of the TIWI tribe as Marbuk. In this film many people of the Northern Territory of Australia are re-living their roles. The story of Jedda is founded on fact. (Chauvel, 1955)

The function of the short introduction is to establish the film's authenticity: "went to the primitive aboriginee race," "girl of the Arunta tribe," "man of the Tiwi tribe," "the story is founded on fact."⁸ This "quasi-documentarism" is identified by Stuart Cunningham as being very

7 Original spelling by Chauvel.

8 In his notes to *Jedda* on [Australian Screen](#) Paul Byrnes lists the three stories that Chauvel's daughter, Susanne Carlsson mentioned as the basis of the plot. These are the story of Nemarluk, an Aboriginal resistance fighter, the case of a white woman who had to get permission over radio to bury her dead baby, and the story of an Aboriginal girl, raised by a white family who ran away from them and rejoined her people during a vacation trip spent in the Northern Territory.

important for Chauvel and the audiences as well. In fact, the perception of the film as an “unusual documentary-type drama” was responsible for its invitation to the Cannes Film Festival (Cunningham). Chauvel’s search for the main characters is well documented.⁹ Hoping to “find someone who could embody both primitive mystery and modern film star beauty” (Fox), Rosalie Kunoth was finally selected for appearing to be “closer to the traditional Aboriginal” as opposed to others who were “too inter-mixed and too far removed from the primitive that we were looking for” (Fox). Kunoth’s name was changed to a better sounding Narla, just as the male lead changed from Bobby Wilson to Robert Tudawalli. By “[giving] him his tribal name” (Elsa Chauvel qtd. in Miller 154) the Chauvels placed Wilson back into the ancestry they believed he truly belonged—an ancestry he was (according to the Chauvels) in the process of losing.

Isadore Goodman’s dramatic music¹⁰ continues to play

⁹ See for example articles by Cunningham, Fox or Miller.

¹⁰ Stuart Cunningham claims that “Isadore Goodman prepared a musical score whose ethnographic credentials were impeccably based on A.P. Elkin’s recordings of Aboriginal music.”

whilst the rest of the credits are shown. The film proper starts with aerial shots of the Northern Territory and Joe’s voiceover, in which he introduces himself and the land. His accent is sophisticated, almost British, signifying the education and success he claims to have gained from his white foster parents. “This is part of the oldest land in the world,” “this is my land, and Jedda’s, the girl I love” (Chauvel, 1955). The landscape is described in exaggerated terms borrowed from anthropology and ethnography: “mountains of mystery, red tombs in Australia’s dead heart which hold the secrets of the Aborigines’ dreamtime, the burial place of the old totem men. The native race so old that their laws and religions stretch to a past beyond our thinking” (Chauvel, 1955). Apart from showing off scientific knowledge, the “native race” is also identified with mystery, placed outside of reason, presented as unfathomable. The film continues by depicting Sarah McMann’s tragedy, the way she tells the Flying Doctor Service of her baby’s death over the radio. Inside and outside shots alternate, the camera takes turns to show the grieving mother and then her husband busy driving cattle in the remote distance. We see a dead Aboriginal woman (a “lubra” as

she is called in the film—a usage which is not appropriate today) and a lonely newborn baby (referred to as a “pican-inny”—the same outdated usage as above) crying out for care. The function of these introductory scenes is to establish the scenario which makes it possible for a white couple to even conceive of the idea of raising a black baby. This is a concept that the station owner, Doug McMann, never grows fond of (in fact Jedda never calls her adopted parents Mum and Dad—they are always “Boss” and “Bardi”). Subsequent scenes show Jedda (her name meaning “little white goose”) growing up, as if by chance (according to Joe’s voiceover, “as Topsy, just grow’d”—Topsy referring to a character in *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*). In her book, *The Scorsese Connection*, Lesley Stern compares the opening sequences of *Jedda* and *Duel in the Sun* (1946, directed by King Vidor), where the same metaphor of the wild flower is used with respect to the “half-breed” girl, Pearl Chaves, who like Jedda, dies a tragic death at the foot of a rock as a result of a failed love (125). The beautiful wildflower, which “just grew,” strengthens the idea of being “nature bound”—when removed, these flowers can rarely survive, losing their “context” and purpose, and ultimately

their lives. The intertextual connection to Topsy, the slave, serves to define Jedda as the ‘other,’ not one of us (white people).¹¹

Considerable attention is devoted in the movie to Jedda’s development from a baby to a young girl. Under the watchful eye of Joe, who is always there to help look after and protect her, Jedda is shown to be drawn to more practical than to theoretical ideas (e.g. she prefers drawing animal prints rather than spelling). She is shown to be a person of instincts and emotions rather than reason. This is especially apparent in her piano playing, which at one point becomes ecstatic, almost hysterical with pent up sexual energy triggered by an Aboriginal artwork on the wall and accompanying Aboriginal music which she imagines in her mind.¹²

¹¹ The reference to Topsy is made by Joe (Miller 150). Doug McMann makes a reference to the Biblical figure of Jezebel: “Well, that Jezebel, not satisfied with claiming my wife, she claims my head stockman too” (Miller 151). Jezebel is regarded as arguably the most evil woman in the Bible, a schemer, who met her untimely death by being thrown out of the window.

¹² For a great analysis of this scene see article by Meaghan Morris, “Beyond Assimilation: Aboriginality, Media History and Public memory.”

Up to the point of becoming a woman of sixteen, who is courted by Joe and picked instantly by the newcomer Marbuk, Jedda is often shown inside the house just like Sarah McMann. Doug McMann and the men in the film spend most of their time outdoors. The nice harmony and equilibrium in the narrative, upset briefly by the death of the baby but rectified by Jedda's arrival, is threatened by Marbuk, who not only lays claim to Jedda (who he is told is the "wrong skin" for him) but, as a true criminal, sets fire to the McManns' horse enclosure as well. Later we learn that he is indeed a fugitive—a murderer, a woman snatcher—pursued for previous crimes. Marbuk is a very dark skinned Aborigine, wearing only scant clothing—a red loincloth—to cover his privates. His body is muscly and attractive. Jedda and Marbuk are eroticised in the film in the way the white characters (and Joe) are not: Marbuk dances an erotic dance and is rumoured to be able to cast magic spells which can seduce anyone, while Jedda is photographed from an angle to enhance the ampleness of her body and especially her breasts. At the height of her attraction to Marbuk we see Jedda succumb to the lure of the full moon and lie on the pure

ground on her back as if expecting a lover to seduce her.

Throughout the film music is used to heighten dramatic effect. I have already mentioned Jedda's piano playing driven to a crescendo. Marbuk has some 'action scenes'—a fight with a crocodile and a member of the chase party—where again dramatic, non-Aboriginal music is played. Marbuk wins in both cases, his position as an "alpha male" cannot be undermined. This is why the narrative resorts to showing him go mad, opening the way to his disposal by suicide. It is only when Jedda and Marbuk are alone that we can hear Aboriginal singing.

Joe narrates the film from beginning to end. He translates conversations between Jedda and Marbuk and explains what happens in the scene when Marbuk is rejected and sentenced by his tribe. These are scenes in which Joe does not participate, yet he acts as an 'omniscient narrator,' he knows more than anybody else in the film. His voiceover drives the narrative, he is the storyteller, who has the authorisation to pronounce judgement at the tragic end of the narrative: "Was it our right to expect that Jedda, one of a race so mystic and removed, should be of us in one short lifetime?" (Chauvel, 1955). Us and them again: us,

who are part of civilisation (emphasised especially by the use of dressing up in the film, as Jedda is shown many times dressed up in pretty clothing), as opposed to them, ‘The Other,’ the raw force, the ‘uncivilised’ (represented by Aborigines living *outside* the house, who are unkempt and dirty, and who rush to wash their hair as soon as they see the Boss coming). Marbuk is not mourned by anyone in the film—narrative closure and equilibrium are achieved again by his death. His death is inevitable, yet the assimilation of girls like Jedda, although perhaps not impossible (let’s remember, for the most part she resisted being with Marbuk), the film seems to argue, will be a very hard and slow process.

There is a relatively large body of critical writing on the subject of *Jedda*. These range from a celebration of the inclusion of the ‘black’ topic (“Négritude,” as Barbara Creed calls it) into high art—Creed understands “black” to stand for the repressed, which in the Freudian sense is allowed to erupt to the surface and claim its place—to a complete condemnation, to Langton’s view that “[t]oday *Jedda* is sickening and, at the same time, laughable for its racism” (47). ‘Aboriginality,’ as it is constructed by the

film, however innovative it is as a topic or *topos*, is decidedly depicted from a colonial point of view. When we see Aboriginal practices like collective learning about the environment, which Jedda would like to participate in, she is extracted from the circle as Sarah McMann disapproves of associating with “dirty picaninnies.” Or, when we see Aborigines departing for an annual “walkabout,” we only see them depart—the camera angle, from the vantage point of the house, “the white world,” “civilisation,” shows them to leave but we don’t see them “arrive.” Sarah McMann’s warnings of “Don’t leave the babies too near the water” and “If you’ll have your first picaninny on this walkabout you really should stay home” (Chauvel, 1955) might be well intentioned (as protection policies of the time may have been) yet are completely superfluous—we are talking about a people who successfully survived at least forty thousand years without the help of the future Sarah McManns. This scene is also remarkable from the point of view of agency. The Aboriginal women (“girls” as Sarah calls them) sit or stand around passively; we see their backs as the camera faces Sarah McMann, who, from the point of view of the house, is active, handing out a

water can and advice about correct behaviour. Issues like white involvement in producing half caste babies (Joe is claimed to be the offspring of an Afghani teamster and an Aboriginal woman)¹³ and the stolen generations (Jedda's mum dies at childbirth, thus Jedda is not stolen but 'rescued') are therefore conveniently glossed over, whilst the questions of white ownership of the land and the value of civilisation are naturalised through the character of Joe. In this way, the selection of very dark skinned actors for Jedda and Marbuk will immediately make sense (remember, authenticity), whereas Joe's "blackface" can be symbolically "washed off" as he claims the land in the beginning (in a white voice) and as he waits for and fulfills the career option of "head stockman" offered to him by Doug McMann. As there are no "career options" for Jedda and Marbuk, their elimination from Chauvel's plot thus became inevitable.

It is interesting and highly instructive to compare Chauvel's film with *Night Cries*, a 1990 short film by Tracey

¹³ Meaghan Morris speculates about the possibility of Joe's European ancestry, in fact she argues for Doug McMann's paternity.

Moffatt, which re-works many of the themes presented 35 years earlier. Refusing to kill Jedda off, Moffatt presents a scenario when a disillusioned, middle-aged Aboriginal woman cares for her dying (white) mother. Doing away with speech as a signifying system altogether, Moffatt uses noise, text, song, painting, flashback and images as communication. This is a new language which Moffatt finds appropriate to express the relationship between the characters. In *Night Cries* there is no narrative as such, no attempt at "quasi-documentalism," instead we have memories, nightmares, dreams and frustrations.

The characters themselves are not stable, but rather fluid, as we see several versions of them: the dying mother is shown as a young attractive woman on a still photograph; later as lovingly playing with her child on the beach; then turning her back on her daughter just when she needs her; finally, there is an indoor scene when the mother is nursing her daughter again. These scenes serve to present the mother as a complex character. A succession of fast cuts and montage is employed to represent the black woman's conflicted self reflections, in effect we see the visual equivalent of stream of consciousness writing. Whilst we

saw Chauvel's (over)use of narration to minimise ambiguity, Moffatt does the opposite and leaves everything open to interpretation.

Night Cries 'quotes' *Jedda* extensively—the full moon, the watercolour painting, even Doug McMann's light injury is repeated as Moffatt translates it into a "prosthetic hand."¹⁴ Sarah McMann's obsession with cleanliness, manifested through the use of dresses, washing, soaping, and hair brushing, seems to have been wasted on Moffatt's uncombed Jedda who presides over the wreckage of the household. The camera first repeats the angle used in *Jedda*, looking outside from the house, incorporating the view of the landscape. The composition of the eating scene is like a painting, except the aesthetic employed is that of decay. Decay is manifest everywhere in the house, in the body of the old lady, and in the old dunny¹⁵ where the old lady spends a lot of screen time. By including scenes such as eating whilst reading, feeding the mother, taking the mother to the toilet, waiting for

¹⁴ The old lady has an elaborate metal contraption attached to her right hand.

¹⁵ An outdoor toilet.

the mother to leave the toilet, extricating the mother from the mosquito net, Moffatt reduces life to a series of useless, tedious and nuisance routines which are contrasted to the fantasies of the mind, the latter never to be realised. The desire for leaving indicated by the Aboriginal woman's reaction to the sound of the train, her reading a travel brochure, and waiting for some kind of change, is disrupted by the night cries of the mother. Far from being 'primitive' or 'instinct driven,' the daughter reads and writes, and dreams of faraway places. Frustrated and lonely, she uses a water hose to cool herself. It is an interesting reversal that she is seen as 'savage' and 'ferocious' when doing the washing and decidedly sadistic when we see her crack a whip, destructing the old woman's quiet time. In this scene, the mother is in the foreground and is shown to be symbolically hurt by the whip and the laughter, which echoes the mad laughter of Marbuk before the suicide scene in *Jedda*.

The memory of the beach scene emerges from the depth of the daughter's psyche; a memory which is happy and disturbing at the same time. First being swung around by the mother, the little girl enters into a slinging match with two boys. The scene quickly turns into a nightmare

as the girl begins to choke from what appears to be seaweed that wraps around her neck. Her terror, anguish and fear, accompanied by rapid drum sequences, screeching birds, and jarring noise, mirrors the hysteria experienced by Jedda at the piano scene and becomes the climax of the short movie. On closer look, the seaweed choking the young girl turns out to be film stock, giving a visual form to Moffatt's criticism of the (mis)representation of the Aboriginal subject.¹⁶

Moffatt's take on the relationship between the two women goes well beyond the questions of assimilation and colonisation. Meaghan Morris very convincingly argues that Moffatt's filmic references to Namatjira and Jimmy Little, examples of two successfully assimilated artists, further complicate the already quite complex theoretical questions of Aboriginal representation, and rather than restricting possibilities, they can be viewed as "enabling."¹⁷ Moffatt's own artistic output is an example of rallying

against compulsory categorisations of what are perceived as the "correct" ways of being an Aboriginal, an artist, or what might constitute true or authentic Aboriginality. "Yes, I am Aboriginal, but I have the right to be avant-garde like any white artist" says Moffatt (qtd. in Morris)—and who couldn't agree with that?

Morris argues that the kind of 'enabling' tradition developed by Moffatt is "not one of 'forcing us to confront the past' in a polarising, polemical way, but more subtly making it less attractive, less *interesting* to go on telling the same selective stories as our predecessors than it is to remake our national histories in a spirit of inclusiveness, justice and truth" (Morris). Morris agrees with Langton that Aboriginal authorship *par excellence* does not guarantee "correct" representation. Giving Aboriginal people voice, visibility, agency, presence and individuality are the important issues, and to demonstrate through the medium of the moving picture that there are positions other than the dominant colonial ones from the vantage point of which stories about Aborigines can be told.

¹⁶ For a more detailed analysis see Katrin Althans' chapter on *Night Cries* entitled "Trans-muting cinema: Tracey Moffatt's films."

¹⁷ Morris develops Laleen Jayamenne's idea in her paper.

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Shakespeare on Film: *Romeo & Juliet* Revisioned

MARCELL GELLÉRT | Film & Culture ▶

Seven years after Shakespeare's death, Ben Jonson, fellow playwright, poet laureate, and the only one among the Bard's peers who came close to rivalling him, in his Eulogy written to grace the 1623 First Folio prophesied immortality to the author of the 36 plays enclosed in the volume: "He was not of an age, but for all time." For four hundred years Shakespeare has been the contemporary of all successive ages through his ever-renewing cult on page and stage, yet today it is not his native medium that grants him this status. Since his first screen adaptation—a photographic record of H.B. Tree's stage production of *King John*—more than a thousand films (recordings of theatre performances, feature films, TV versions, screened musical adaptations) have been made—motion pictures for which Shakespeare has, more or less, writing credit. The ever-increasing number of films based on his works (in December 2015 19 films were in active production!) seem to justify Robert Hapgood's provocative supposition in his study of Shakespeare's plays on screen:

There is something expansive about Shakespeare's dramatic genius. His plays reach out to audiences in a profoundly popular way that makes film and television

seem congenial media for their performance today. One suspects that if he were writing now, he would be writing scripts for these forms, just as in his own day he wrote his plays for the venue—the public theatre—that afforded the broadest possible audience for his work. (273)

Men of letters with an eye always on the bookish qualities of his plays, enchanted by the poetic intensity and linguistic brilliance of his play-scripts, may object to the above statement in defence of Shakespeare, the author of literary works. But if we admit that the most reliable measure of a play's worth is its popularity—as undoubtedly it was in Shakespeare's time—it is reasonable to suppose that Shakespeare, the public entertainer, the showman and the shareholder of the Globe, a limited company of entrepreneurs, today may turn his back to the stage in the hope of addressing the incomparably larger audience of the movie theatre, let alone the silver screen. As the foregoing figures show, Shakespeare is by far the most frequently filmed author of all time. All the 37 plays of his canon have been screened with *Hamlet* and *Romeo and Juliet* taking the lead

both in terms of the number of screen adaptations and their ratings. The latter alone has more than forty direct adaptations—feature films, full-length TV-adaptations and filmed versions of stage performances—in addition to an incalculable number of loose adaptations with varying degree of relation to Shakespeare’s play-scripts. Tony Howard in his study on Shakespeare’s cinematic metamorphoses doubts the possibility of making even a rough estimate:

In the case of *Romeo and Juliet*, synonyms for young love, film-makers can rely on universal recognition: we inherit so many of our images of romance, generational discord and social hatred from the play that it is impossible to list all its cinematic reincarnations. (295)

As opposed to *Hamlet*, its greatest rival on screen, the professional and popular estimates of the play’s worth strikingly disagree. Scholars have never ranked *Romeo and Juliet* among Shakespeare’s ‘great’ tragedies: *Hamlet*, *Othello*, *King Lear* and *Macbeth*. It is devoid of fully-fledged characters, the depth of psychological insight, of evil, vice, madness, striking brutality, the unspeakable horrors of

guilt-ridden souls, the pangs of conscience, metaphysical dimensions, even tragic offence, to mention only their most frequently voiced objections. Yet its popularity with audiences has been unshakable since 1597, the year of its first stage performance in The Globe Theatre. Already in its author’s lifetime it was the favourite of the audience, which is testified by the successive printed editions of its text.

What makes *Romeo and Juliet* special is the balanced composition of certain features at their best. It is the most action-based, tightly-plotted, passionate, lovable, youthful, innocent, reader- and viewer-friendly, poetic, simultaneously cheerful and lamentable, timeless, and, thus, easily adaptable piece of Shakespeare, the tragedian.

Despite its enormous popularity, out of a dozen direct adaptations for the big screen from 1908 to 2013, today only four are rated as truly notable achievements: George Cukor’s (1936), Renato Castellani’s (1954), Franco Zeffirelli’s (1968) and Baz Luhrmann’s (1996). Though each of the four productions were amply honoured with the most prestigious awards and met with considerable critical acclaim, only two of them, Zeffirelli’s *Romeo and Juliet* and Luhrmann’s *Romeo + Juliet*, gained the favour of the

audience while earning the highest grosses of all times in the history of Shakespeare on screen. Despite the striking differences in concept, dramaturgy, cinematic strategies, setting, dating and design, the secret of success in both cases is the same. Both directors produced a relatively faithful, streamlined translation of play-script into screenplay, exploiting the possibilities of visual representation inherent in Shakespeare's text, keeping only as much of the dialogue as needed for the action and the most lyrical parts that grant the intensity of the lovers' passion and the intimacy of their romance. Both of them, overtly or covertly, updated the play though by using different strategies to meet the taste and demands of their target audience. The following section, focusing on the main compositional elements of the play, discusses the two directors' strategies of adaptation translating Shakespeare's play-script into screenplay; transforming the text of an emphatically poetic verbal composition meant for the audience of a 16th century public playhouse into big screen films for spectators of the movie theatre.

Zeffirelli's guiding principle is authenticity. He deploys all the then available means of cinematic dramaturgy to

achieve his goal: to be as faithful to the play as possible in the visual representation of its world. His treatment of genre, theme, plot, narrative, characters, time, spectacle and music, all serve the same purpose, as much as his filmic strategies in regard to cuts, additions, rearrangements of scenes, perspective, camera angle, gaze, editing, pace of action and shots. The secret of his success is his firm grasp on the play's main subject, the archetypal twin-theme of war and love. In Zeffirelli's reading *Romeo and Juliet* is based upon Shakespeare's central philosophical concern—the reigning duality of the world, the constant conflict of its antagonistic constituents in all spheres: in the cosmos, in nature and in man alike. Magnifying through his lens Shakespeare's 'double sight,' Zeffirelli shows everything in contrast to reveal the dualities of the play's world.

Shakespeare's preoccupation with dualities is apparent even in his choice of the play's genre, in the balanced combination of comedy and tragedy. Comic elements, as indispensable ingredients of stage entertainment in the public playhouses of London, can be found in all his tragedies but here their share of 'modal agency' openly challenges its opponent. The first half of the play—by

the number of lines longer than the second—would easily pass for a romance-sweetened city comedy of humours and manners turned by an accidental sword-thrust into a tragedy of passion. In terms of action, the duel of Tybalt and Mercutio (3.1) is the compositional crux that abruptly ends the comic stage and starts the succession of events leading to the tragic conclusion. Zeffirelli grabs every opportunity to fatten the comic body of the play and thus sharpen the contrast between the two stages of the narrative. After the ominous chorus in Laurence Olivier's authoritative voice-over that sets the tone of gloom and mourning, the opening quarrel of the two feuding families is extended into an elongated scene of commotion: a mock-heroic civil war farcical in its carnivalesque madness and portentous in its raging violence. In the ball-scene (1.5) Zeffirelli even evokes the world of festive comedy. He gives full vent to his operatic fantasies to provide delight by sensual satisfaction. The decorative scenery, the lavish costumes, the measured sequence of spectacular dances, the accorded interplay of sight, sound and movement is the artistic consummation of the world of art, the quintessence of the Italian Renaissance, called to a vivid life on

screen. It is a great opportunity to regain the lost balance and restore the peace, the ultimate goal of comedy. He invites all the Graces and Muses to promise happiness to the lovers-to-be in the house of the turncoat Capulet posing as the generous supplier, the friend of peace and the enemy of war. Happiness, however, even here and now is mere illusion just like the art that called it to life. With the melancholy tune of the interpolated song on mutability and the decay of youth—the voice of the mournful sonneteer—he casts a threatening shadow both on the feast and the would-be lovers who, in the meantime, play a hide-and-seek game to find an opportunity to meet. Zeffirelli, with this musical addition—the song has since become the iconic tune of his film and a hymn of love—strikes contrary chords using the same instrument to play two modes off against each other.

Shakespeare's text is devoid of authorial instructions in respect to location, setting and costumes leaving everything to the creative imagination of the audience. Only occasional indirect hints in the dialogue suggest location for

the actors on the 'empty space'¹ of his stage. Zeffirelli, in exchange for the unbounded freedom granted by the play-script, leaves nothing to the imagination of his audience and provides each of his scenes with an elaborate setting fitted to his vision of the play's world. *Mise-en-scène* in his adaptation encompasses not only recognisability—the representative arrangement of the setting for the sake of verisimilitude, but through a carefully designed pattern of analogies, he employs places as narrative leitmotifs, providing a visual means of connotation and interpretation. The most obvious such location is the church in the marketplace of the city. Seen from outside it is a decorative setting for scenes of public life, peaceful traffic and raging violence, merriments and stern rituals of mourning. Shown from inside: the intimate interior of peace

¹ Peter Brook elaborates the idea in his ground-breaking work on the phenomenology of the theatre (5). His views on Shakespeare's stage may serve as guidelines for film directors as well: "The power of a Shakespeare play on stage stems from the fact that it happens nowhere. A Shakespeare play has no setting. Every attempt, whether supported by aesthetic or political reasons, to try to build a frame round a Shakespeare play is an imposition which runs the risk of reducing the play: it can only sing, live and breathe in an empty space." (Jackson 22)

and piety, the sacred space of instruction, confession and shrift, seclusion and retreat. In its dignified decay it embodies in lime and stone the crumbling authority of the Catholic church, helpless in keeping and restoring peace in the world of 'ancient grudge' and ever-renewing mutinies. In the visual narrative of the film it plays the same controversial role as the church's representative in the cast, Friar Laurence, who—for all his good intent and pious practices—becomes the instrument of fate, the agent of the death of his protégés.

Zeffirelli shows both his reverence for Shakespeare and an artist's devotion to the world of the play in his faithful adherence to its plot. Though he retains only 35% of the dialogue, all his cuts serve the same purpose: to tell the story of the "star-crossed" lovers in pictures. In exchange for the painful cuts of the most poetic, thus least adaptable parts of the play-script, he provides ample compensation. Instead of translating the poetic imagery of love into pictures, he focuses on the lovers themselves. His successive gazes on the actors, his devout admiration of youth and beauty, faces and bodies, expressions and gestures, form a purely visual subplot whose repeatedly

arrested time stands in sharp contrast with the rapid pace of action. Though the glorified objects of his visual admiration are the lovers themselves, he finds beauty worthy of visual revelation everywhere: in the Arcadian landscape, in the Eden-like garden of Capulet's palace, in the medieval buildings of the city—sights of the fine artist's grand tour of the world of Renaissance Italy, providing proper artistic milieu for action and reflection alike. While seeking authenticity so as to give credit to his period movie in many ways, in this respect "Zeffirelli has no qualms about imposing his own tastes on to Shakespeare's text" (Cartmell 212). Beauty for him is the aesthetic manifestation of youth, innocence, purity, harmony and love. In easing the weight of loss through the magic power of beauty he outdoes even Shakespeare. The aesthete subdues the moralist, war surrenders to love, facts to fiction, tragedy to poetry—the visual illusion of redemption. The crafty actor of the metamorphosis is *time*, the principal subject of the sonneteer's philosophical reflection, and the double agent of dramatic action in his tragedies and romances. We have a keen sense of its presence and its ceaseless operation all through the film, itself being the

sole cause of all cheer and gloom, joy and pain, happiness and misfortune in a world where vice and evil are kept at bay. The plot, the rapid succession of events, the characters—young and old, the rituals of public and private life, the birth and growth of love, acts and states of bliss and curse are all keenly timed with an ever-changing measure depending on the contrary demands of detachment and involvement, action and reflection. Time out of joint, by propelling or delaying action, is set right by moments of temporary neglect, when it is forgotten in the ecstasy of love and beauty's admiration. Shots of timeless gaze offer healing consolation for the spectators even at the heart-wrenching dénouement in the crypt. Yet, at the conclusion Zeffirelli mercilessly cuts out the lines of consolation. Instead of the gilded monuments of the lovers offered by the grief-stricken fathers to each other and posterity, he bids farewell to his beloved Verona with the prophetic sentence of the prince: "All are punished," and he rounds the frame of his picture with the voice-over of Olivier, the iconic figure of Shakespeare representation on both stage and screen, "whose voice will draw on more" about the timeliness of the tale for the target audience of

the movie; the flower-pacifist advocates of peace and love estranged from their parents by the Vietnam War.

Zeffirelli's *Romeo and Juliet* is the work of a lover, like Shakespeare may have been when writing the play, as is boldly suggested by Tom Stoppard in the screenplay of John Madden's *Shakespeare in Love*, a brilliant free adaptation of the play. Zeffirelli loves Shakespeare, loves the play, loves his actors, loves Italy, loves art, loves everything that gets into the focus of his camera, which shines through all his shots and heats up all his scenes. It is precisely this all-embracing passion that makes his movie lovable and as such, an authentic, 'authorized' adaptation of Shakespeare's tragedy of love.

The thirty years that elapsed between Zeffirelli's *Romeo and Juliet* and Luhrmann's *Romeo + Juliet* explains much of the difference between the two adaptations. The "+" replacing "and" in the title in itself is a significant marker of the director's unorthodox attitude. Luhrmann's 1996 updated, modern-dress adaptation, tuned to the times of its making and fashioned to the taste of its target audience, the MTV-generation of the 1990s, is the most spectacular proof of Shakespeare's boundless adaptability for the big

screen. For those who have doubts about the legitimacy of his adaptation, Luhrmann sums up his arguments in an interview given to the *Signet*:

What I wanted to do was to look at the way in which Shakespeare might make a movie of one of his plays if he was a director. How would he make it? ... Shakespeare after all was a player. We know about the Elizabethan stage and that he was playing for 3000 drunken punters, from the street sweeper to the Queen of Eng—and his competition was bear-baiting and prostitution. So he was a relentless entertainer and a user of incredible devices and theatrical tricks to ultimately create something of meaning and convey a story. (Luhrmann)

Luhrmann's concept of adaptation is in full accord with his creed as much as Hapgood's fore-mentioned fundamental assumption concerning Shakespeare's topicality. Luhrmann's strategy to domesticate Shakespeare in the popular culture of the 1990s is twofold—a balanced interaction of cuts and complements, reductions and additions.

While he keeps the storyline and the cast, he drastically cuts Shakespeare's text. He retains less than a third of it, removing most of the lines that would delay the action, evoke the illusion of the original setting, and reveal in poetic detail the inner world of the characters. After all, a 'movie' of action and visual design would not bear the burden of too many words, the overwhelming weight of Shakespeare's lines. More of them would easily turn the film into a mock-heroic travesty, a misshapen satire of the play. Language-wise, it is a film that renounces all claims to provide an authentic rendering of the play for an audience familiar with Shakespeare's text since it was made for a generation whose book is the screen. Yet Luhrmann's treatment of Shakespeare's language poses questions. Why insist on Shakespeare's text at all if it is so out of date, out of place, out of tune? Did Luhrmann keep to the play-script because it is a must in direct screen adaptations, merely out of reverence, in the name of authenticity? Or is it a means of sharpening the contrast between the two worlds evoked: the play's 'then' and the film's 'now'? In most of the action sequences, with the exception of those love scenes set in isolated interiors, Shakespeare's dialogue sounds

oddly discordant with the contemporary mise-en-scène, with respect to characters and milieu alike. But what if that is exactly the point? In Luhrmann's lurid vision of a semi-surrealistic, quasi-dystopian world, a postmodern allusive pastiche of features borrowed from diverse genres of popular film, from westerns through action films to fantasies, *discord* is the key of composition; dissonance lends inverted authority to The Bard's words restoring thus the desired accord of voice and vision.

Luhrmann's metacinematic frame, matching convention and invention, serves the same purpose. The self-reflective opening in displaying the fruitful duplicity of voice and vision is a masterstroke. The doubling of the Chorus on the screen within the screen with the voice-over placed on top of rapid shots covering the location, the city of "Fair Verona," and the ongoing mob war simultaneously stands for authentication and modernization. In imitation of Shakespeare's framing device—an effective mediator between stage and audience—he makes it clear even before the action starts that for him the "public playhouse" is the movie theatre. The silver screen within the big one—the medium of public involvement and private

detachment—is on throughout the film.

Unlike Zeffirelli, with the predominantly comic mood of the first two acts muted—the only exception being the Caplets’ custom feast extravaganza—Luhmann presents a shocking vision of the play’s world, much darker than any of his predecessors’. His “Fair Verona” is the sinful city, the “Waste Land” of lovelessness, where lovers are doomed to die not by blind fate, “fickle Fortune,” or the conspiracy of the stars, but by “rude will”—the ever-raging hatred of its inhabitants.

The reigning emblems of the city, the twin towers of Capulet and Montague, the colossus of the Saviour with its hands helplessly spread over the violence-stricken streets, the run-down beach with the ghostly ruins of its main gate—an anachronistic backdrop reminiscent of an Elizabethan playhouse—the barren nowhere land of the caravan campsite planted in the middle of a desert generate with joint visual force the sense of gloom, of a world already fallen without knowing about it. In provocative contrast with Zeffirelli’s concept of historical and artistic verisimilitude, Luhmann turns the placelessness of Shakespeare’s ‘empty’ stage-space to his advantage. By

the crafty combination of the actual locales of shooting (Mexico City, Veracruz, Los Angeles, Miami), he creates the vision of a dystopian nowhereland, a fictitious cinematic space that grants him the freedom of visual representation. In the public sphere of this space everything is oversized. Exaggeration of size is the *spatial* analogy of disjointed *time*, the acceleration of action fallen out of control. Timing and location are attuned by the pulsing tempo of succession in action and vision alike. Luhmann cut the 24 scenes—or rather what is left of them in the screenplay—into 80 shots to keep his audience on the edge of their seats by rapid action and visual variety.

Despite the striking ingenuity and lurid charm of this composite postmodern vision, all this is only the setting, the milieu, the updated temporal and spatial context. The duality of Luhmann’s world, the opposition of the city’s public life and the private sphere of the lovers, is most apparent in the characters, their state of isolation and their symbolic identifiers. As skyscrapers, cars, outfits, knives and guns, drugs and fire are visual and actional signifiers of the city and the two warring mob-clans, the sea, the bath tub, the fish tank—containers of water –, a notebook,

lit candles, miniature sculptures of angels and the Virgin Mary in Juliet's bedroom—a private chapel forecasting the monumental church-scene of the denouement—and the ring of their bond create the visual mosaic of the lovers' world. What really matters for Luhrmann, just as for Zeffirelli, is the theme, the plot and the characters. The lovers themselves and the story of their love resist all attempts at modernization, being time-and place-proof, protected by The Bard's powerful shield—his words.

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Hitchcock's *Macbeth*

MÁRTA HARGITAI | FILM & CULTURE ▶

The title of this piece may seem somewhat nonsensical, considering that Hitchcock never adapted either *Macbeth* or any other Shakespearean play for the silver screen, yet the literature surveying Shakespearean references in his films is voluminous. Hundreds of film reviews, literary essays, newspaper articles and blog entries research the field, mostly in an attempt to establish Hitchcock as a serious auteur. In want of space and time, this paper will provide only a brief list of relevant analyses representative of their genre. The author of the present writing, however, does not wish to join these critics, as she has never doubted the authority of Hitchcock as a serious artist. Instead she aims at exploring Shakespeare's influence in Hitchcock's oeuvre and also makes the bold suggestion that after contemplating Hitchcock's ideas concerning Shakespeare and the theatre in general, students in a film seminar might be interested enough to imagine and reconstruct 'his' *Macbeth*.

First, let me outline very briefly John Charles Bennett's (1899–1995) ideas in this matter. Bennet, who was actor, playwright, and screenwriter working with Alfred Hitchcock on six of his films, *The 39 Steps* (1935), *Secret*

Agent (1936), *Sabotage* (1936), *Young and Innocent* (1937), *Foreign Correspondent* (1940) and *The Man Who Knew Too Much* (1956), was convinced that it was his theatre experience that was the basis for his collaboration with Hitchcock, adding that “ultimately my love of Shakespeare helped shape the ‘thriller’ genre” (Bennet).

The seminal Hitchcock critic, Robin Wood, wrote in 1965—probably only using Shakespeare to “prove the seriousness of Hitchcock's work” (74)¹—that “*Psycho* is one of the key works of our age. Its themes are of course not new—obvious forerunners include *Macbeth* and Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*—but the intensity and horror of their treatment and the fact that they are here grounded in sex belong to the age that has witnessed on the one hand the discoveries of Freudian psychology and on the other the Nazi concentration camps” (83). When discussing the character of Marion, Wood uses another reference to *Macbeth*: “[s]he has by her actions penetrated the shell of order, and

¹ This editorial comment introduces the reprint of Robin Wood's original essay in the chapter “The Building of a Reputation” in *Alfred Hitchcock's Psycho: A Casebook* (74–84).

like Macbeth plunged herself into the chaos world, which finds here its most terrifying definition” (78).

Philosopher Stanley Cavell in 1981 wrote an article about *North by Northwest* (directed by Hitchcock in 1959), suggesting that in the title of the film there might be an “allusion to Hamlet’s line that he is but mad north northwest” (764–5); and that the film is “notable, even within the oeuvre of a director pervaded by images and thoughts of the theater and of theatricality, for its obsession with the idea of acting; and considering that both the play and the film contain plays-within-the-play in both of which someone is killed, both being constructed to catch the conscience of the one for whose benefit they are put on” (765).

This being stated, he goes on to list other similarities, for example that the “film opens with an ageless male identifying himself first of all as a son” (765).²

² What he writes about the initials of the protagonist, ROT (Roger O. Thornhill played by Cary Grant), is most interesting: he recalls “the exchange on the train between Thornhill and Eve about the monogram on his matchbook. ‘Rot,’ he says, ‘it’s my trademark.’ She asks what the ‘O’ stands for. ‘Nothing,’ he replies (764). Cavell adds that the “‘nothing,’ or naught, in the ROT monogram equally appropriately stands for origin, so

Confirmation of these views can easily be found in several Hitchcock interviews.

We know from Caroline Moorehead that Hitchcock wanted to produce a modernised version of *Hamlet* as the first film to be made for his new independent film production company in 1945, and, as she states, it would have been in Hitchcock’s words, a “psychological melodrama” and that Cary Grant³ was keen to take on the role (“Hamlet”).

The Hitchcock Zone, which is “a collection of web sites and blogs relating to the life and career of director Alfred Hitchcock” (“Welcome”), also quotes Grant talking about the modern Hamlet project, reported by the Associated Press in August 1945: “Hamlet will be shown as a modern man with problems. I won’t attempt to portray the role in

its simultaneous meaning is that the actor is the origin of the character and also the origin of what becomes of himself or herself on film.” Cavell then concludes that “Thornhill’s identifying ‘rot’ as his trademark by now irresistibly suggests to me Hamlet’s sense of something rotten” (766).

³ “[T]he transcription will be closely watched, so as to be as faithful as possible to Shakespeare’s text, yet modern enough to appeal to the widest possible audience. The plot, situations, psychology and characters will be retained, but the action and sets will be modern,” said *Hitchcock* (qtd. in “Hamlet”).

the traditional Shakespearean manner. I approach the assignment with considerable trepidation, but my faith in Mr. Hitchcock is my reassurance in the matter, which I am eager to undertake. Shakespeare is the best theater in the world and if we are successful in devising an acceptable film formula through *Hamlet*, other things may follow” (“Hamlet”). Sadly, however, nothing followed; we may say the rest is silence.⁴ Or we may not, since in 1959 Hitchcock made the film *North by Northwest*, with Cary Grant in the main role and, as we have seen above, it is a movie which Cavell claims to be a reworking of Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*.

4 This aborted film project with the fantastic idea to cast the ever dashing and debonair Cary Grant, 42 at the time, to play Hamlet has inspired many students of Hitchcock and Shakespeare to try to reconstruct Hitchcock’s possible solutions as to filming the tragedy.

Students specialising in film studies here at ELTE may find a similar project appealing and challenging as well.

See e.g. [here](#) about a group of students who “were given one week to plan, film, edit, and present a film to the class. The only instructions given were that they needed to select a scene from Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* to produce, and that they needed to do it as a ‘homage’ to Hitchcock, incorporating shots, angles, motifs, sound, lighting, shadow and dialogue accordingly” (“Hitchcock Hamlet Homage”).

And this is my point here: although we can find no faithful adaptations of Shakespeare’s plays in Hitchcock’s oeuvre, Shakespearean ideas, traits, motifs, characteristics, symbols, techniques and methods in Hitchcock’s works are legion. The very words of the auteur support this thesis: in Truffaut’s book, Hitchcock mentions the playwright and one of his plays, *Hamlet*, a couple of times.

In Chapter 3, discussing his film *Murder!* (1930), Hitchcock admits he was particularly interested in the filming because they did many things that had not been done before. As it was a talking picture, they had to reveal the main character’s inner thoughts, and since Hitchcock would have hated to “introduce a useless character in a story,” he “used a stream-of-consciousness monologue,” which back then “was regarded as an extraordinary novelty, although it had been done for ages in the theater, beginning with Shakespeare. But here we adapted the idea to the techniques of sound” (Truffaut 74).

There is another interesting aspect of this picture, namely the several references to *Hamlet*.

Hitchcock himself helps whoever is not sharp or well-versed enough to make the discovery herself: “[t]here were

also several references to *Hamlet* because we had a play within a play. The presumptive murderer was asked to read the manuscript of a play, and since the script described the killing, this was a way of tricking him” (75); “[t]hey watched the man while he was reading out loud to see whether he would show some sign of guilt, just like the king in *Hamlet*. The whole film was about the theater” (77).

Later, in Chapter 13, defending the marketability of *Psycho*, Hitchcock concludes that “you have to design your film just as Shakespeare did his plays—for an audience” (Truffaut 283).

There was a radio debate entitled “Shakespeare: Broadcasting and the Cinema” on BBC Radio in 1937, where Hitchcock and Val Gielgud “argued the merits of radio and film adaptations of Shakespeare’s plays respectively” (“Shakespeare”). A written version of this debate was published a couple of days later in *The Listener*, a BBC broadcast magazine, under the title “Much Ado about Nothing?”⁵ It is here that Hitchcock makes an obvious—but to the Shakespeare aficionado a rather startling—remark:

⁵ You can read the full transcript [here](#).

“the cinema can do without Shakespeare.” Then he explains how “[n]ovelty is the essence of a successful film, and the cinema took Shakespeare as something new to present to its millions of filmgoers. It was a bold step, for to the majority of the public anything connected with Shakespeare is as dull as ditchwater.”⁶ In other words, “Shakespeare spells considerable gloom to the average mind of today.” So what did the cinema do to Shakespeare, he asks. It “condescended to make Shakespeare palatable,” as well as livened, popularized and humanized him, he suggests (“Much Ado About Nothing”).

Although fully aware of all these advantages and potentials why did this film-maker never venture into ‘properly’ adapting Shakespeare for the big screen? Hitchcock’s works

⁶ Next he adds that “the world of Shakespeare lovers [...] is a very little one compared with the world of the cinema enthusiasts.” He, then, articulates what we—80 years later—also have to grapple with: “[t]o the man in the street Shakespeare is something very dull and too pregnant with classroom memories to smack of entertainment. To the modern girl *Romeo and Juliet* may certainly be the top in love stories, but she would not be able to follow the dialogue of the sixteenth century” (“My Most Exciting Picture”).

include a great many adaptations, as points out Truffaut, but most of them are popular or light entertainment novels (69), which he so freely refashions that they “become a Hitchcock creation” (70). Hitchcock, at this point of the interview, answers that he hates the way Hollywood directors distort literary masterpieces, and that he “will have no part of that” for the reason that such masterpieces are somebody else’s achievement (70).

Stage Fright (1950), for instance, is “simply another one of those little British crime movies in the Agatha Christie tradition” adding little or nothing to his prestige,⁷ as Truffaut writes, yet it has an intriguing aspect in that it is a film about the theatre (189). What specifically appealed to Hitchcock “was the idea that the girl who dreams of becoming an actress will be led by circumstances to play a real-life role by posing as someone else in order to smoke out a criminal” (Truffaut 189). Likewise, the Macbeth couple are actors in both senses of the word: they play several

⁷ Hitchcock calls himself an idiot for believing reviewers of the book that it might make a good Hitchcock picture (Truffaut 189).

roles and they act out various dreadful deeds as well.⁸ And one wonders whether Lady Macbeth does faint in 2.3 or she only feigns fainting.⁹

So *Stage Fright* is a film about the theatre, but the metafiction here is not entirely translated into the language of the cinema. In an earlier film, *Murder!* (1930), however, the director—although using a similar method—was more successful in translating *metatheatre* into *metacinema*. Rothman draws attention to a very specific metacinematic device in this picture such as in the scene where Sir John and Fane stand “frozen in silence, script in hand” and then “there is a cut to a page of script.” The script is supposed to be that of the play written by Sir John about the murder Fane has committed. On closer scrutiny, however, it turns

⁸ The Lady’s advice to her husband is rather telling in this respect:
 “Your face, my thane, is as a book where men
 May read strange matters. To beguile the time,
 Look like the time, bear welcome in your eye,
 Your hand, your tongue; look like th’ innocent flower,
 But be the serpent under’t. (1.5.61–4)

⁹ Braunmuller notes that this question has long been debated by critics (156). A. C. Bradley also discusses the issue in the second edition *Shakespearean Tragedy: Lectures on Hamlet, Othello, King Lear, Macbeth* (484–6).

out to be that of a film, although not the film *Murder!*, which would be a perfect example of metacinema, but “an ironic stand-in”—a scene in which a magician is pulling a rabbit out of a hat (Rothmann 91): yet another characteristic Hitchcockian joke. This, however, is not the only metacinematic device in the film. The movements of the camera are also very successful in translating metatheatricity into the language of film, with Hitchcock switching between objective and subjective points of view, active and passive modes, especially towards the end of the film (c.f. Rothman 105).

In *Murder!* Hitchcock used metatheatrical devices more extensively as well. In the final scene of the film we are “at the circus, the murderer is shown as a transvestite as he confesses he killed the victim because she was about to tell his fiancé all about him, about his special mores”¹⁰ (Truffaut 75). Thus, there we have yet another metatheatrical element: the circus (i.e. the theatre), where the roleplay seems more real than reality; the transvestite

costume being more authentic than the men’s wear *normally* worn by the character (a norm enforced by society). Handel Fane, whose last name curiously rhymes with *feign* (Rothman 89), confesses his crime in a letter in which he finishes the play started by Sir John, while he is making up his face backstage, already wearing his sparkly leotard, i.e. part of his transvestite stage costume. If truth is the best disguise, a rule learnt the hard way by Edgar as Poor Tom in *King Lear*, maybe the opposite is also true: you can come to terms with the truth concerning who you are when you are acting, playing a role, wearing a disguise, etc.

With respect to clothes and sexual ambiguity, we might reflect upon the clothing motif and various aspects of gender issues that also surface in *Macbeth*. Regarding the latter, the Lady is generally felt to be more manly at the beginning of the play than her husband, while regarding the former, clothing metaphors of the play, we should notice that characters of the play describe Macbeth as a

¹⁰ In Clemence Dane’s novel, *Enter, Sir John*, from which the script was adapted, writes Rothman, Fane’s secret is that he is a homosexual (86).

dwarf wearing giant robes.¹¹ This can be noted at the beginning of the play when Ross greeted him as Thane of Cawdor, he himself objected asking,

Why do you dress me
In borrowed robes? (1.3.106)

The emphasis on garments here, as in many other Shakespearean plays adds yet another layer to the metatheatricality of the plays: characters often disguise themselves or play different roles by wearing different clothes (see crossdressing e.g. in *As You Like It*, *Twelfth Night*, etc., or King Lear taking off his lendings, or Prospero's discarding his magic robe transforming back into an ordinary human being, and so on). However, changing one's outfit can have practical reasons as well, for example, to get rid of blood-stained clothes after a murder, or, from a dramaturgical

¹¹ Such as Angus saying in 5.2.20–2:
Now does he feel his title
Hang loose about him, like a giant's robe
Upon a dwarfish thief.

point of view, to indicate the passage of time.

Metatheatricality is definitely an important device in many Shakespearean plays, including *A Midsummer Night's Dream* or *Hamlet*, both of which have a 'play-within-the-play,' and as Rothwell writes: "[a]s *the idea of the screen as screen* takes its place alongside the idea of the play as play, so 'meta-cinema' inevitably emerges alongside metatheatre. In making the means of representation a subject of representation, film-makers have only mimicked their stage forbears" (75). Like theatre, he continues, "film may also self-referentially draw attention to itself through ironic devices, or, alternatively, it may even have sequences that are essentially movies-within-movies" (75). To illustrate each mode, he refers to Olivier's *Henry V* (1944) as an example of the first, and Polanski's *Macbeth* (1971) as an example of the second type.

Although perhaps we can find few proper 'movie-within-movie' sequences in Hitchcock, examples of the first mode, i.e. ironic devices, are not only legion but extremely varied as well.¹² For one, let's have a look at Hitchcock's

¹² But surely, this must be the subject of another paper and / or seminar.

own appearances in his movies. Many are familiar with Hitchcock's cameos, so famous indeed that we know exactly when he appears in his movies,¹³ which I argue can be conceived as just another aspect of medium reflexivity. In other words, I suggest that the film director presenting himself as a character in his own film is just another way, another "ironic device" (Rothwell 75), to draw attention to the film as film.

In comparison you may take Prospero in *The Tempest*, who, especially in biographical readings of the play, is often interpreted as Shakespeare's image of himself or his surrogate. I am convinced, however, that it is not so much the person of the author/auteur that matters here, but metatheatricality, self-reflexivity, and self-irony—all of which are prominent features of most of the works of the two masters. What is underlying this, perhaps, is the pursuit that Shakespeare and Hitchcock have in common, i.e. an all-round interest in their medium and a serious regard for their profession, while taking themselves lightly and

¹³ Truffaut provides a list of Hitchcock's ritualistic appearances in his movies as a footnote on page 158.

mockingly. Truffaut is also intrigued by Hitchcock's own appearances in his films, of which he is told by Hitchcock that it was in *The Lodger* (1927) that he made his first personal appearance on the screen where he was shown sitting in a newsroom.

As for the reason why he appeared in the film, he explains that "[i]t was strictly utilitarian; we had to fill the screen. Later on it became a superstition and eventually a gag. But by now it's a rather troublesome gag, and I'm very careful to show up in the first five minutes so as to let the people look at the rest of the movie with no further distraction" (Truffaut 49). Cameos, therefore, have a double purpose: they are ironic devices that draw attention to film as film and they also function as instances of humour; humour being an essential and integral part of his art.

As for missed opportunities, such as the *Macbeth* that Hitchcock never made, much has been lost in the ways of dark humour as well. Both Shakespeare and Hitchcock were great masters of a diabolical sense of humour, which, Wood argues, is a distinguishing feature is *Psycho*; a "streak of macabre humor" (84). Just compare the Porter's speech in *Macbeth* (2.3) with what Hitchcock says to Truffaut

about the importance of humour in even serious genres. Commenting about the play of *Juno and the Paycock* (written by Sean O'Casey in 1924) he confesses that he “liked the story, the mood, the characters, and the blend of humor and tragedy very much” (Truffaut 69). Speaking of *The Trouble with Harry* (1955) he says it is “an approach to a strictly British genre, the humor of the macabre” (77). Truffaut notes that in the second, American version of *The Man Who Knew Too Much* (1956), “the humor is much subtler than in the British version. Another advantage is that instead of interrupting the mood of the sequence, the humor actually heightens the drama” (94). I think this is exactly what is happening in 2.3 in *Macbeth*, where the macabre humour of the scene actually heightens the drama—it accentuates the murder which has just taken place.

After dismissing the traditional interpretation of the scene, i.e. the device of comic relief, working by the principle of contrast, Tromly in his 1975 essay “Macbeth and his Porter” argues convincingly that instead of contrast, the scene works rather by its similarities to the main events, where the Porter “shakily stands as a metaphor or figure for Macbeth,” concluding that “[t]he ultimate function of

the scene is to humanize the murderer by forcing us to recognize him in the ‘ordinary’ Porter and perhaps in ourselves as well” (151).

The expression *macabre humour*—used by both Hitchcock and Wood above—can justifiably be used to describe the tone of the Porter scene as well. The gatekeeper speaks about three imaginary sinners whom he imagines to be entering through Hell’s gate, each of whom represents a different social class: the farmer, who hanged himself on the expectation of plenty; the equivocator, who committed treason; and the English tailor, who stole out of a French hose.¹⁴

We know that the Macbeth couple are already in hell—for their state of mind has been such a place ever since the idea of murdering Duncan occurred to them, while in

¹⁴ For more details on the relevance of the three sinners, see Brooke’s gloss in his edition of Shakespeare’s *Macbeth* (130–1), Braunmuller’s notes in his edition of *Macbeth* (149), and Tromly’s and Hartcourt’s articles. Hartcourt in specific argues that the Porter’s choice of the three sinners is not random. Instead, they represent or repeat the sins Macbeth commits in the play: he steals the royal robes and the crown; pursues his private gain rather than serve the public interest; and commits the ultimate treason: regicide (c.f. Hartcourt 394).

the Porter's speech, as was suggested above, another aspect of the macabre is implied, namely that all men are equal at the moment of death, whether masters or servants, rich or poor.¹⁵

There is another intriguing aspect of Hitchcock's own view of his works which is closely related to this: the presence of humour for him is a distinguishing feature, a merit indeed, and any film of his that lacks humour is condemned by him as bad. He literally disavows *Rebecca*, saying it is “not a Hitchcock picture; it's a novelette, really. The story is old-fashioned; there was a whole school of feminine literature at the period, and though I'm not against it, the fact is that the story is lacking in humor” (Truffaut 127).

And this is Hitchcock's recurring remark whenever he disparages one of his own films: he makes a similar comment on *I Confess* as well (c.f. Truffaut 200–202), where

¹⁵ More on Shakespeare's history plays influenced by Holbein's *Dance of Death* pictures and *Hamlet* as a “Memento Mori” poem, see the writings of Harry Morris (e.g. “Hamlet as a Memento Mori Poem” in *PMLA* Vol. 85, 1970). Marjorie Garber examines Memento Mori figures in Shakespearean plays in “Remember Me: ‘Memento Mori’ Figures in Shakespeare's Plays” in *Renaissance Drama*. New Series, Vol. 12 (1981).

he admits that his “own approach should have been more ironic, as in *Psycho*—a serious story told with tongue in cheek” (200). Then he reiterates that “a tongue-in-cheek approach is indispensable” (202) adding that the most difficult thing in the world is to “get just the right dosage” of humour when dealing with a serious subject (202).¹⁶

A right dosage of what to keep and what to cut is likewise indispensable in substituting “the language of the camera for the written word;” indeed, if one wants to keep everything that is written down in the script, “one would have to make a six-to ten-hour film,” says Hitchcock in Truffaut's book (72). On which Truffaut agrees, saying that “[i]t takes considerable experience and know-how to handle the flux of time properly” (72).

If one takes *Macbeth* as an example, and consider the duration of the action, one has the impression that it cannot have taken place over more than just a few weeks. If you read Freud's essay entitled “Some Character-Types Met

¹⁶ On the other hand, regarding *Psycho*, he claims that “[t]he British press raised violent objections to *Psycho*; there was hardly a critic who had any sense of humor about the picture” (Truffaut 124).

with in Psycho-Analytical Work” (1916), you will probably be convinced that Shakespeare did something very similar to screenwriters when he refashioned the original story as he found it in Holinshed, where, as Freud writes,

ten years pass between the murder of Duncan, through which Macbeth becomes king, and his further misdeeds; and in these ten years he is shown as a stern but just ruler [...] It is not expressly stated in Holinshed that it was his childlessness which urged him to these courses, but enough time and room is given for that plausible motive. Not so in Shakespeare. Events crowd upon us in the tragedy with breathless haste so that, to judge by the statements made by the characters in it, the course of its action covers about one week. (135)

My point here is that Shakespeare himself has “considerable experience and know-how to handle the flux of time properly” (c.f. Truffaut above), and as *Macbeth* is his shortest play, it seems to me to be more suitable to be translated into the language of film than *Hamlet*, which

is far too long.¹⁷

Shakespeare was also a master of suspense in the Hitchcockian sense of the term. In Truffaut’s conversations with Hitchcock, the latter points out the difference between surprise and suspense using the example of a bomb underneath a table. If the public has had no prior information about the bomb being there, they would only be surprised when it exploded. A suspense situation is entirely different: now the public does know about the bomb, and the innocuous conversation over the table immediately becomes fascinating (73). Hitchcock concludes that “[i]n the first case we have given the public fifteen seconds of *surprise* at the moment of the explosion. In the second we have provided them with fifteen minutes of *suspense*. The conclusion is that whenever possible the public must be informed.” In short, in Truffaut’s words, suspense “is the stretching out of an anticipation,” and Hitchcock agrees that “it is indispensable that the public be made perfectly aware of all of the facts involved.

¹⁷ Frye wittily writes that *Hamlet* is perhaps too long, “partly because everyone, with the exception of the two women, talks too much” (530).

Otherwise, there is no suspense” (72).

In his film *Rope* (1948), to be discussed later, Mrs Wilson, the housekeeper, has such a scene—running for more than 90 seconds—that is so suspenseful that it keeps you on the edge of your seat—will she open the chest to put the books in, or not.

SPOILER ALERT The suspense element is provided by the spectators’ knowledge that the *body* is in there. We have all this in Shakespeare’s play, *Macbeth*: the spectators know the perpetrators; they hear all the predictions of the Weird Sisters, and during the Porter scene, they know that the castle has indeed just turned into Hell, etc.

In a short piece originally appearing in *Guideposts Magazine* in 1959 Hitchcock wrote about the gift of a blind future recalling “the story of the king who befriended a wizard and was granted two wishes.” The king’s first wish “was to see the future completely. But when the king saw the pain, the misery, the death, along with the beautiful things ahead, he immediately asked for his second wish: that the future be hidden again” (“Guidepost Classics”).

Hitchcock confesses that there was a time when he had been grasping at the real future, wanting it in his own hand. Later, however, he realized that in “life, if we knew

the outcome of everything, most of the zest would go out of living. What fun would it be to go to a baseball game if you knew which team was going to win?” And he concludes that “[t]he unknown has its appeal precisely because it is mysterious [...] So when God keeps the future hidden, He is saying that things would be very dull without suspense” (Gottlieb 140–1). Macbeth, in contrast, had no second chance; he was not granted the grace of oblivion, neither was he satisfied to have the future come one day at a time. As his soliloquy in 1.7. shows, he wants to pass or leap over his present, and jump into the future right away.¹⁸ At the same time, he is clearly aware of the risk he is taking as lines 1.7.25–28 equate his ambition to be king with that of “an eager rider, who overdoes his vault” (Braunmuller 133).¹⁹

18 If it were done when ‘tis done, then ‘twere well
It were done quickly: if the assassination
Could trammel up the consequence, and catch
With his surcease success; that but this blow
Might be the be-all and the end-all here,
But here, upon this bank and shoal of time,
We’d jump the life to come. (1–7)

19 On Time in *Macbeth* and *The Tempest* see Hargitai Márta: “Prospero’s Island as ‘Bank and Shoal of Time:’ Time, timing and time gaps in

His last great soliloquy shows that he has finally understood that life is dull knowing all about tomorrow,²⁰ and the idea of tomorrows following one another in an endless row signifying nothing, is truly terrible. Hitchcock knew that all along, “if life would be dull knowing about tomorrow, it would also be terrible... Yes, the best thing about the future is that it comes one day at a time. And I thank Heaven daily that tomorrow does not belong to any man. It belongs to God” (Gottlieb 141).

Besides the above mentioned atmospheric, conceptual and stylistic affinities between the two masters, one might find numerous further minor correspondences between their works. Let me briefly suggest a couple of ideas here.

How about playing a little mental game, assuming a possible (albeit absurd) affinity between the occasional old lady character of Hitchcock's films (*The Lady Vanishes*, *Birds*, *Psycho*)²¹ and the three weird sisters in *Macbeth*. Or,

Shakespeare's *Macbeth* and *The Tempest*.”

20 To see the brilliant Ian McKellen analysing the *Tomorrow, tomorrow, and tomorrow* soliloquy visit: [this website](#).

21 In *Psycho*, the old lady is none other than Norman disguised.

we might play another game with younger female characters as well. As another proof of his diabolical sense of humour, Hitchcock apparently confessed in a television interview that “[b]londes make the best victims. They're like virgin snow that shows up the bloody footprints” (qtd. in “Alfred Hitchcock Biography”).²² Considering this advice, it is rather exciting to imagine *Lady Macbeth*, both perpetrator and victim in the drama, played by a Swedish, a northern German, or Scandinavian-type²³ ice cold blonde, and if one of the three weird sisters, perhaps the youngest, is another blonde, it is all the better.²⁴

In both oeuvres there are many instances where the question may arise: is the horror meaningful? Is it not only for its own sake? To answer this question let me cite another remarkable insight of Hitchcock here. In a footnote to their conversation, Truffaut recalls what Hitchcock

22 Interview with Hitchcock on CBS TV (20 February 1977).

23 C.f. Truffaut (224), where Hitchcock speaks about why these northern ladies including the English are more exciting than the Latin, the Italian, and the French.

24 Polanski did just that in his film version of the play (1971), where both *Lady Macbeth* and the youngest witch are blond.

stated during a Hollywood press conference in 1947: “I aim to provide the public with beneficial shocks. Civilization has become so protective that we’re no longer able to get our goose bumps instinctively. The only way to remove the numbness and revive our moral equilibrium is to use artificial means to bring about the shock. The best way to achieve that, it seems to me, is through a movie” (201). Or through a play, you might add, such as for example, *Macbeth*.

To be more methodological, however, let me take one specific Hitchcock film as a case study to demonstrate some further possible affinities between the methods and motifs used by the two masters. In the film *Rope*, some rather exciting correspondences can be discovered with Shakespeare’s *Macbeth*. First, the murder in the film takes place rather early too, in the third minute of the film. Then Philip, the submissive party in the relationship asks Brandon, the dominant partner, to switch off the lights, whereas Brandon repeatedly insists on having light in the room: he opens the curtains, lights candles, etc. The same contrast of darkness and light pervades the *Macbeth* universe as well, representing forces of creation

vs. destruction;²⁵ and what Brandon says at the beginning of the film, a few minutes after the murder further illuminates this paradox: “the power to kill can be just as satisfying as the power to create” (Hitchcock, 1948).

Hitchcock “undertook *Rope* as a stunt,” as an experiment, and he describes the process of creation in the interview as follows: “[t]he stage drama was played out in the actual time of the story; the action is continuous from the moment the curtain goes up until it comes down again. I asked myself whether it was technically possible to film it in the same way. The only way to achieve that, I found, would be to handle the shooting in the same continuous action, with no break in the telling of a story that begins at seven-thirty and ends at nine-fifteen. And I got this crazy idea to do it in a single shot” (Truffaut 179).

This method might work very well with *The Tempest*, a play unusual in Shakespeare’s oeuvre, for maintaining the three unities (time, place and action). *The Tempest*, as I write elsewhere, “has an extremely concentrated temporal and spatial structure where the whole stage is the

²⁵ See Knight: “*The Milk of Concord: an Essay on Life-themes in Macbeth.*”

island and where the island is the whole world; where the unity of time and space is kept, as 'the time covered by the action of the play coincides very closely with the time we spend watching it'" (Frye qtd. in Hargitai 217).

What Hitchcock expressed next during the interview, however, might be more applicable to *Macbeth*: "[w]hen I look back, I realize that it was quite nonsensical because I was breaking with my own theories on the importance of cutting and montage for the visual narration of a story. On the other hand, *this film was, in a sense, precut*. The mobility of the camera and the movement of the players closely followed my usual cutting practice. In other words, I maintained the rule of varying the size of the image in relation to its emotional importance within a given episode" (Truffaut 180; emphasis mine).

In my view, all Shakespearean plays are *precut* in this fashion, with the scene or the sequence being the basic unit—not the acts. There is usually a single focus in a scene, which would mean—in case of adaptation for the screen—varied camera setups would not be required within each scene. Moreover, the sequences of scenes in early modern plays are usually arranged technically in a way that lends

itself easily to film adaptations. Furthermore, this structure allows for maintaining the illusion of continuous action, which was also Hitchcock's main interest in making *Rope*.

This movie, however, is exciting from several other points of view. The action starts with two young men strangling a third one in the opening shots of the film. The hint that they might be a couple, can be inferred from Truffaut's summary of the plot where he writes about two young homosexuals (179).²⁶ They assume, or at least one of them takes it for granted that they will have no remorse; indeed they are planning to make a show of their deed by inviting guests, including the dead boy's father. Likewise, there is a banquet scene in *Macbeth* as well, where Macbeth almost gives himself away by talking to his vision of Banquo's ghost.

In the film, the two perpetrators give so many clues (including the blood on Philip's hands²⁷) that it is easy for

²⁶ As well as form the original play by Patrick Hamilton (1929).

²⁷ Philip breaks the glass in his hands; the blood on his hands being a reminder of both his guilt and his guilty conscience, not unlike the case in *Macbeth*. Compare Macbeth's "Will all great Neptune's ocean wash this blood / Clean from my hand?" (2.2.63–4), to which the Lady replies, "My

their former college professor to piece together the sequence of events to arrive at the full story.

There is diabolic or as Robin Wood says—macabre humour in the film, such as, for instance, the arrangement of the candlesticks and the food on top of the chest as if it were a “ceremonial altar,” as Brandon describes it to the stunned Mrs Wilson, which they can heap with the foods for their “sacrificial feast” (Hitchcock, 1948). As another example of this special black humour, the camera repeatedly focuses on the rope with which they strangled David and which is now tied up around the books to be taken by the father of the victim. This kind of infernal humour based on dramatic irony is to be found in Shakespeare’s tragedy as well: see the porter scene (2.3) discussed above, or how easily and—we might assume—readily Macbeth

hands are of your colour, but I shame / To wear a heart so white.” (2.2.67–8); “A little water clears us of this deed” (2.2.70).

Later, however, she compulsively washes her hands saying, “Yet who would have thought the old man to have had so much blood in him?” (5.1.33–4); “What, will these hands ne’er be clean?” (5.1.37); “Here’s the smell of the blood still; all the perfumes of Arabia will not sweeten this little hand.” (5.1.42–43), “Wash your hands, ...” (5.1.52).

misinterprets those equivocative prophecies.

As for similarities between characters in the play and in the film, it is interesting to realize that Rupert Candell, the former college housemaster of the young men, might be seen as acting much like the weird sisters, prompting such behaviour performed by the two perpetrators. In other words, both couples put into practice the ideas received from above: in the film, from Cadell, the Nietzschean *Übermensch* (Superman); in the tragedy, from the superhuman sisters.

Some background information about the play Hitchcock adapted for the screen might be helpful here in explaining the sudden emergence of the concept of the *Übermensch*. *Rope* was written in 1929 by Patrick Hamilton, an English playwright and novelist (1904–1962), who is mainly remembered for writing the plays *Gaslight* and *Rope*.²⁸ According to *vertigotheatre.com*, towards the end of the play “Brandon

²⁸ Both plays were very popular on stage and later both were made into films: *Rope* by Hitchcock in 1948, and *Gaslight* first in 1940 (rereleased in the United States in 1952); and again, in 1944 by George Cukor starring Ingrid Bergman and Charles Boyer (*britannica.com*).

explains why he and Granillo [Philip in the film] murdered their classmate, citing Nietzsche as their inspiration. ‘We have done it for—for adventure. For adventure and danger. For danger. You read Nietzsche [...] And you know that he tells us to live dangerously [...] and you know that he’s no more respect for human life than you, and tells us—to-live dangerously. We thought we would do so—that’s all [...] Others have talked. We have done’” (“No Crime is Perfect”).

Many critics²⁹ mention in their analyses of Hitchcock’s *Rope* that Hamilton’s play was most probably based on a real life murder case in 1924, where two exceptionally intelligent young men kidnapped and murdered a younger boy for no apparent reason at all, just for “thrill killing,” to pull off the perfect crime, and to demonstrate their intellectual superiority (Sterritt 314). Sterritt suggests that “Hamilton took various elements of the Leopold and Loeb case” including their “vulgar Nietzschean philosophy and wove them into a chamber play set immediately after the murder” (314). Robertson adds that Cadell clearly emerges in the film as a World War II veteran, hence “the horror and

disgust at his former students’ literal application of ideas of superiority and amorality in their murder of their fellow student” (III).

Before he is forced to face the consequences of this application, however, Cadell half-jokingly admits that “murder should be an art,” and “the privilege of committing of it should be reserved for those few who are really superior individuals.” Upon hearing this, Brandon eagerly joins him, expecting a kind of confirmation and perhaps also seeking absolution for what they did, saying “[that] the victims are inferior beings whose lives are unimportant anyway” (Hitchcock, 1948). “Obviously,” replies Cadell. “Now, mind you, I don’t hold with the extremists who feel that there should be open season for murder all year round. No, personally, I would prefer to have [...] ‘Cut a Throat Week’ [...] or, uh, ‘Strangulation Day’” (Hitchcock, 1948). It is all very ironic, though, as he says it *on* Strangulation Day, when the spectators witnessed that the deed was done whereas the others only talked about it. It is just as diabolically hilarious as Macbeth’s Porter *imagining* himself to be guarding Hell’s gate, when in fact it *is* Hell’s gate that he is guarding.

²⁹ Including David Sterritt, Ammon Kabatchnik, Robert Niemi.

After Brandon explains that the privileged few—those men of such intellectual and cultural superiority that they are above the traditional moral concepts—would decide who is inferior and would be killed by them, David's father suspects that Brandon agrees with Nietzsche and his theory of the superman, and the young man quickly admits he does. It is also telling that when he includes himself, Philip and Cadell among the privileged few, the college professor does not protest. So, after incorporating these “superhuman” ideas, both Brandon and Philip, like Macbeth and his Lady, believe that they are above ordinary morality; Macbeth becomes convinced that he is invulnerable, trusting what the bloody child—the second apparition—tells him,

Be bloody, bold, and resolute; laugh to scorn
The power of man, for none of woman born
Shall harm Macbeth. (4.1.78–80)

In the figure of Mrs Wilson we seem to have another porter-like character: she ushers in the guests, engages in small talk with them, while also having a key role in

keeping up the suspense in the scene I discussed earlier in the present essay, where she stretches out our anticipations, like the Porter, about the discovery of the crime. The film ends with Cadell opening “the window to fire a shot in the night and one hears the noises gradually rising from the street” (Truffaut 184). Such an ending is suggestive in its inexplicitness, leaving the tedious aftermath untold and unshown.

This solution may make us wonder how Hitchcock would have ended *his* adaptation of *Macbeth*. Would he have shown a plastic head of Macbeth soaked in artificial blood—as Polanski chose to do in a rather clumsy and therefore ridiculous fashion? I do not think so. I assume he would have employed a more artistic method, something like Orson Welles did in his version of the play (1948), where the camera shows the same voodoo doll, which first appeared at the very beginning of the film, which the weird sisters had moulded from clay in the spitting image of Macbeth, i.e. the actor Welles—yet another ironical

self-portrait, a kind of Hitchcockian cameo if you like.³⁰ Therefore, I contend it is both an artistic solution and a logical decision to have us see this doll decapitated instead of the protagonist in the final scenes of Welles's film.

I wish Hitchcock were alive to hear us say that *Macbeth* or indeed *Hamlet* would make a good Hitchcock picture. He surely would not be an "idiot" to believe it (see footnote 7). All in all, the idea that we missed out on a whole world by not being able to watch any Shakespeare adaptations by Hitchcock, haunts us. Perhaps, though, our film students taking an interest in both masters, will learn from them and be able to integrate theory and experience to make their own contributions to the new multimedia Shakespeare.

30 Such as in *Rope*. In a 1948 Hitchcock article, "[My Most Exciting Picture](#)" we read: "It's traditional, with me at least, that I appear fleetingly in every one of my pictures. But *Rope*, with a cast of only nine people who never leave the apartment, looked like the end of the Hitchcock tradition. There was just no way that I could get into the act. Then someone came up with a solution. The result? The Hitchcock countenance will appear in a neon 'Reduco' sign on the side of a miniature building" ("[My Most Exciting Picture](#)").

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Culture(s) Through Films: Learning Opportunities

DOROTTYA HOLLÓ | Film & Culture ▶

It is often said that in order to understand the ins and outs of a culture, one must be immersed in it totally for a (rather long) while. However, one rarely has the opportunity to experience different cultures first hand. At the same time though, films are perhaps the richest secondary source of knowledge about different cultures, societies, social values and practices. To achieve this, film makers use the power of the very complex visual and sound effects, motion, as well as verbal and non-verbal information conveyed. This chapter looks at how to make the most of feature films, documentaries, advertisements and film clips¹ with the purpose of getting to know different cultures and understanding their practices and values. Films very often provide valuable cultural information quite independently of their storyline, purpose or main message. Those intending to use films for *culture learning* therefore are advised to use multiple perspectives in their interpretation. The text provides guidelines for analysing verbal and non-verbal clues as well as contextual information for

¹ The word *film* in this chapter refers to feature films, real and mock documentaries, advertisements, film clips, TV and Internet broadcasts.

making sense of the ‘moving image.’ To begin the journey behind the screen, it is first discussed how films represent culture, then a broad definition of culture is provided along with elements of culture that are important in learning about social practices and values. Finally, the chapter offers a flexible framework for analysing films.

1. FILMS REPRESENTING CULTURE

In scholarly analyses, films are most often discussed or evaluated for their message, and artistic or aesthetic merits. However, as James Monaco puts it “[f]ilm is also an important scientific tool that has opened up new areas of knowledge. It provides the first significant general means of communication since the invention of writing more than seven thousand years ago” (71). He goes on to explain that this is because film is very much like language despite its lack of a specific set of rules or prescribed system of using codes, “but it nevertheless does perform many of the same functions of communication as language does” (72). And he further elaborates:

Like written language, but to a greater degree, a film image or sound has a denotative meaning: it is what it is and we don't have to strive to recognize it. This may seem a simplistic statement, but the fact should never be underestimated: here lies the great strength of film. There is a substantial difference between a description in words (or even in still photographs) of a person or event, and a cinematic record of the same. Because film can give us such a close approximation of reality, it can communicate a precise knowledge that written or spoken language seldom can. (178)

Monaco likens films to language, and it is important to note that just like language, films do not only represent reality by mirroring it but also by using metaphors, making use of particular connotations or by relating to the absurd, the unreal, the ideal, etc. This makes understanding films for the culturally uninitiated difficult, as the viewer is required to have some prior knowledge of the background of the culture that a film represents in order to understand the connotations, the implied or the intended meaning. An ad hoc example could be a short mock

documentary, *BabaKiueria*² (directed by Don Featherstone, 1986), which shows race relations in Australia through a satirical situation of reversing the roles of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Australians. At the same time, films are very often an adequate means to become initiated into the world that they represent. However, if a film is viewed with the intent of learning about a particular culture, it must always be carefully established how realistic or metaphorical it is.

Decoding the level of realism—from the point of cultural representation—in a film is a very subjective process. It is influenced by the viewer's prior knowledge, experience, socialization, age, gender, sociocultural and educational background, socioeconomic status, and a number of other factors. The same goes for how and what one notices, how one perceives a film, and how one interprets it (Monaco 174). Yet this is a process that can and has to be learnt.

The steps taken towards understanding the varied approaches of films to reality, learning to make sense of the

² "Babakiueria." Online video clip. *You Tube*. YouTube, 26 Jan. 2014. Web. 1 Febr. 2016.

semiotic and representational processes, i.e., the complexities of signs used and the way the signifying structures gain and express their meaning, contribute not only to analysing particular films or to the intellectual growth of the individual, but are also a key in understanding the world around us. In more academic terms then, analysing films for the way they represent reality also contributes to the broad field of cultural studies (Turner 48).

2. THE CULTURES THAT FILMS REPRESENT

The word *culture* is almost impossible to define precisely. In social studies some key concepts recurring in the definitions are: learned and shared human patterns or models for living (Damen 367); collective programming of the mind (Hofstede 5); a fuzzy set of attitudes, beliefs, behavioural norms, and basic assumptions and values that are shared by a group of people (Spencer-Oatey 4). For the purposes of this study a definition by Graeme Turner is accepted as it allows a very broad interpretation of the term:

[C]ulture [...] is a dynamic process which produces the behaviours, the practices, the institutions, and the meanings which constitute our social existence. Culture comprises the processes of making sense of our way of life. (52)

Turner also adds that “[l]anguage is the major mechanism through which culture produces and reproduces social meanings” (52). Once the connection between film and language has been established, this remark makes the definition particularly pertinent for the study of societies, social values and practices as they are rendered in films.

Another view of culture needs to be cited here, which throws light on the multifaceted nature of culture:

We need to distinguish three levels of culture, even in its most general definition. There is the *lived culture of a particular time and place*,³ only fully accessible to those living in that time and place. There is the *recorded culture*, of every kind, from art to the most

³ Italics mine.

everyday facts: the culture of a period. There is also, as the factor connecting lived culture and period cultures, *the culture of the selective tradition*. (Williams 66)

How are these levels connected to films? Films obviously embody *recorded culture*, but they are closest to documenting the *lived culture* of any period directly or figuratively. The *culture of the selective tradition* plays a role in how different groups evaluate films as to whether they offer a valid representation of the culture that appears in them. It is based on the selective tradition whether cultural content becomes the canon, the mainstream or the ‘fringe,’ i.e., academically revered cultural content, culture that is widely accepted, or alternative, lesser accepted culture.

Thinking about the validity of cultural representation in a film, leads the analyst to also consider what segment of reality the film represents; what context or what situation its allusions or claims are valid for. The impressions reflected in the film may be generalizable to a large community (e.g. a country or a nation) or may just refer to a small one (e.g. a particular social group or community).

Would an advertisement for cold medication appealing to the viewer that if a mother is ill, the family stops functioning, characterize the target audience as traditionalist regarding gender roles, or would this be truer of the creators of the advertisement? And to what extent does the film record reality, the creators’ perception of reality or the reality that the creators think the audience would want to see? Understanding the cultural features captured in a film is a learning process in itself. This process can be stepped up by being aware of what elements of culture to look for in a film.

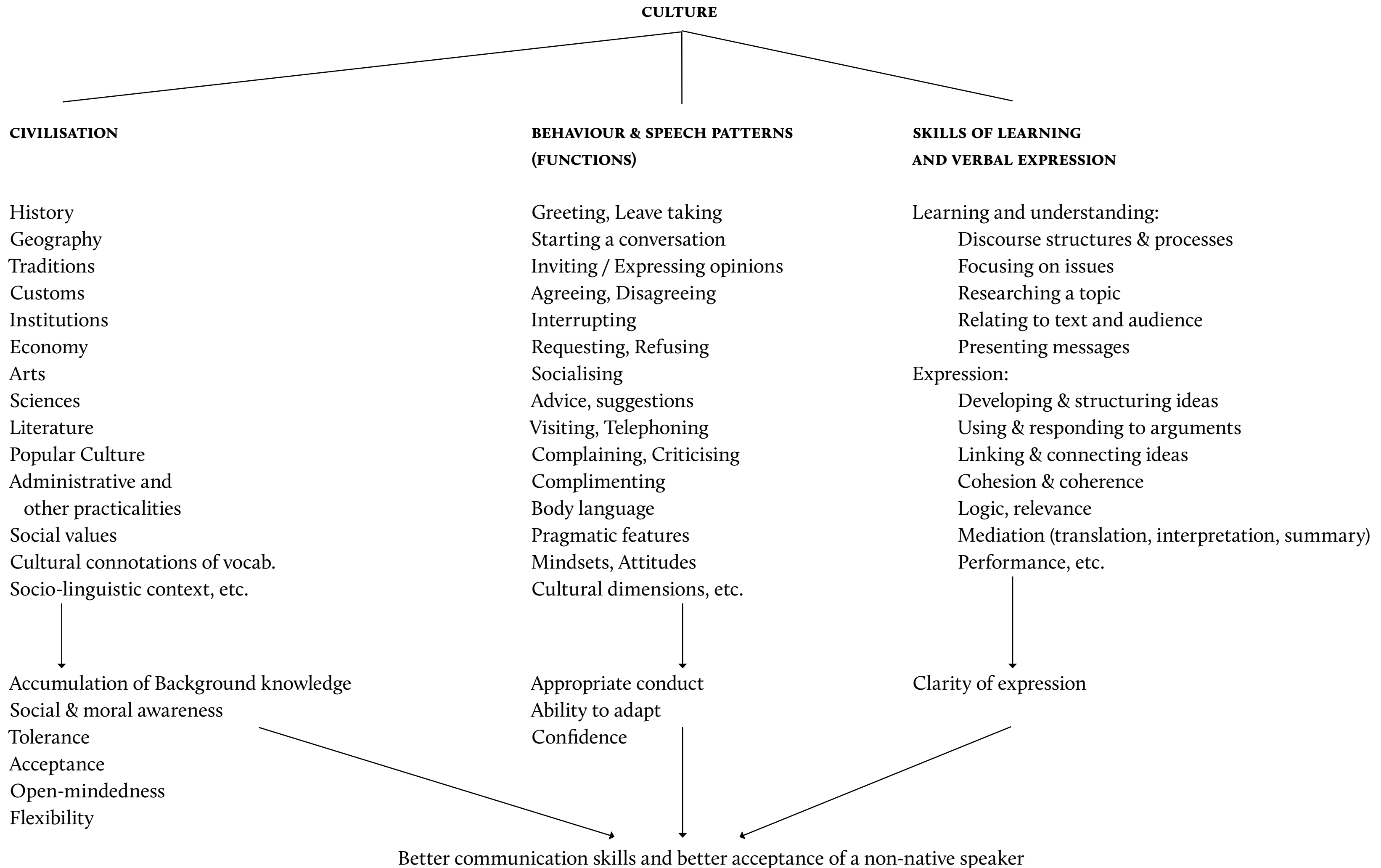
3. ELEMENTS OF CULTURE – TO BE LEARNT FROM FILMS

Several aspects of culture are represented in films—just as they appear in life. These aspects relate to age, gender, education, religion, ethnicity, social or economic background, language use, national or regional identity, etc. As this chapter focuses on *culture learning*, the text concentrates on foreign language users learning about different cultures. It must be added though that *culture learning*

is often based on comparison. When we learn about another culture—be it the target culture of the foreign language we learn/use or any other culture—we also learn about our own culture. It is through comparing and contrasting that we become conscious of phenomena in our own culture that earlier we took for granted.

To enhance the effectiveness of the learning process, it is helpful to identify elements of culture that are particularly relevant in studying culture. Figure 1 below offers an overview of elements of culture, many of which can be easily observed in films. This tripartite division lists *civilisation* as a collection of items of cultural background *knowledge*. Acquiring (some of) this knowledge about one's own culture and the target culture(s) helps foreign language users be more socially aware, understanding, accepting, accommodating and open minded in the course of communication in general but particularly in an intercultural situation. Being aware of the different *behaviour and speech patterns*—often called language functions—and being able to perform them, as well as understanding the differences in mindsets, cultural dimensions, social and personal values and attitudes equip people with the the

necessary *skills and attitudes* to behave appropriately in various situations (Holló, “Cultural Dimensions” 134–145). This results in more confidence. Finally, awareness of *skills of learning and verbal expression*, i.e., the structure of texts and processes of creating discourse in one's own and the target culture, helps one to decode texts more precisely and to express oneself clearly in a foreign language. While the study of discourse seems to be more obvious in written texts, films represent structures and routines of oral exchanges just as saliently. The three groups of cultural elements contribute to the development of the foreign language user's communication skills and a better acceptance of their performance in intercultural situations.



All these elements become really meaningful in concrete cases of communication be they in a live situation or one represented in a film. Since the constraints of this chapter do not allow for analysing examples of how these elements appear in films, the reader is referred to an excellent online collection, the Intercultural Film Database compiled under the direction of Francis Jarman at the University of Hildesheim.⁴ A large number of films were analysed mainly around the concept of cultural dimensions. (The “find movie” tab offers two very useful features: the alphabetical archive of the collection and the possibility to search for particular features.) While this site targets just one of the elements in the above list, the films in the collection offer ample opportunity to examine all the other items as well.

Task 1: Identify elements of culture in a film of your choice.

Task 2: Select a few elements of culture and describe how these appear in the film you chose. What do these

⁴ Jarman, Francis. *Intercultural Film Database*. 2005–2013. Web. 28 December 2015.

elements reveal about the culture represented in the film?

4. A FLEXIBLE FRAMEWORK FOR ANALYSING FILMS

Identifying and analysing elements of culture as they appear in films is one of the major steps in learning about cultures through films. At the same time—and particularly if not only individual scenes but longer stretches or whole films are to be analysed—it is also important to look at the representation of culture from the point of view of the main features of film. This section offers concepts to be used for this endeavour.

Rainer Schüren establishes that “[f]ilm, just like any other fiction is (re-)structured, (re-)organised, highly concentrated reality” (197), and explains that the (foreign) viewer needs to describe, interpret and even to “rewrite” the film to understand it and it is easy to misunderstand or miss meanings and connotations (196–197). He also adds that “most of the film’s cultural background and detail becomes a mere exotic backdrop without any particular significance” (201). But this exotic backdrop can become a

meaningful one if it is used consciously to uncover cultural connotations. Graeme Turner gives a particular example:

Images, as well as words, carry connotations. A filmed image of a man will have a denotative dimension—it will refer to the mental concept of ‘man.’ But images are culturally charged; the camera angle employed, his position within the frame, the use of lighting to highlight certain aspects, any effect achieved by colour, tinting, or processing, would all have the potential for social meaning. When we deal with images it is especially apparent that we are not only dealing with the object or the concept they represent, but we are also dealing with *the way in which they are represented*. There is a ‘language’ for visual representation, too, sets of codes and conventions used by the audience to make sense of what they see. (54)

In order to understand the cultural connotations and meanings as well as ways of representing (or manipulating) reality, the awareness of the elements of culture and their way of functioning has to be coupled with the awareness

of some aspects related to film production. Referring to some commonly applied elements of film and text studies—and relying particularly on works by James Anderson (323–349), Ann Griffin and Vanessa May (441–458), Geoff Mayer (5–6), Jane Stokes (51–92), Fran Tonkiss (405–416), and Graeme Turner (52–74), which all provide details on the methods of analysis—a selection of concepts that can be used as the key constituents of an analytical framework are presented in Figure 2. The concepts in the left column relate to two main notions: the *content* and the *technical aspects* of films. Some concepts have further sub-categories. These are indented and are printed in italics. To operationalise these concepts for analysis, it is practicable to ask questions to see if the concepts can be used for the particular film under investigation. Some possible questions are listed in the right column of the figure for illustration. The sample questions are intended as initial ideas that further questions can be based on. However, practically in all categories it can be asked whether the cultural aspects in the film are represented realistically or have been manipulated. If so, how and for what purpose? The list contains many ‘Yes-No’ questions. For the

purpose of analysis and interpretation, they should always be followed up by 'How' and 'Why' questions.

The proposed framework is flexible in that its elements can be chosen as the film or the analyst's perspective requires. It is important to remember though that answers to the questions that arise do not offer themselves easily. Substantial research on cultural background, as well as language and cultural connotations, is necessary for accurate interpretation.

CONTENT	
The story, plot, topic, narrative or main ideas	Does the story or narrative contain any direct information about the culture featured in the film? What elements of culture appear in the film? Does the film reflect a realistic, idealized, stereotypical, outdated or current image of the culture in question? ⁵
Hidden agendas	Are there any indirect hints to elements of culture, social issues, or social values? Is the cultural representation fair or manipulated?
Actions and events	How do the actions and events reflect behaviour patterns and social values?
Characters	Do the characters seem to be a typical, stereotypical or irregular representation of their social type? In what ways are the characters (stereo)typical or individual? How is the characters' social identity represented? What language variety/ies do the characters use?
<i>Discourse</i>	<i>What cultural patterns or themes are expressed? Are messages communicated directly or indirectly? How much is said and how much is just hinted at or remains unsaid?</i>
<i>Dialogue</i>	<i>How do the dialogues reflect behaviour patterns? What hierarchy do the dialogues show between the characters? How are power relations expressed? Are the dialogues to the point or evasive?</i>
<i>Narration</i>	<i>Is the narration neutral or does it represent someone's perspective? Is it chronological? Does the narration supplement or evaluate the dialogues?</i>
Non-verbal messages	What behaviour patterns are transmitted through non-verbal channels? Are different patterns shown depending on the socio-cultural background of the characters?
<i>Body language, facial expressions, eye contact, proxemics,</i>	<i>How emotional or neutral do the characters seem to be? How are emotions expressed? Are facial expression used the same way as in your culture? How direct is the eye contact between people? What seems to be the accepted distance between people in different social situations? Do people touch one another while communicating? What greeting and leave taking customs or other behaviour patterns can be seen?</i>
<i>Environment, context</i>	<i>What objects or landmarks identify the environment? What does the environment (natural or built) say about the particular society or community in the film? How cared for/clean/organised/etc. is the environment in the film? How are the activities represented in the environment?</i>
Author, filmmaker, producer	How might the author's, filmmaker's or producer's background and intentions have influenced the cultural aspects of the film?
Audience	Does the film imply what audience it was made for? How?
TECHNICAL ASPECTS	
Image composition	Do the images and the image composition support what is said? Does the image composition reflect harmony or disharmony?
<i>Spatial relations</i>	<i>How do the spatial relations reflect thematic focus?</i>
<i>Lighting and colour</i>	<i>What atmosphere do the lighting and colour schemes reflect? Are they relevant for the environment in the film?</i>
Camera movement	How is the speed of camera movement relevant? Does the camera focus on scenes/objects relevant to a cultural topic?
Editing, cutting	Is the editing of the film chronological or does it follow a thematic organisation? Is the speed of events suggested by the editing characteristic of the culture or context the film represents?
Sound, music	Do the sound and music support the topic of the film? Do the sound and music accentuate particular issues?
Special effects	Are there any special effects that reinforce the intended representation of any issues in the film?

5 This question was inspired by Stempleski and Tomalin (96).

To conclude and to show how some of these concepts may work, Figure 3 shows a very brief example—just a taster—based on a one-minute advertisement for ‘Dockers’ pants.⁶

CONTENT	
The story, plot, topic, narrative or main ideas	- Fictional but represents middle class Americans of various ethnicities realistically; (not fashion models but slightly pot-bellied men); -The sports context suggests a sense of belonging and achievement; - A ‘coach’ gives a pep talk to fathers as if to sportsmen in a locker room; - Values and activities related to fatherhood;
Hidden agendas	- Unsaid reference to gender roles: fathers’ involvement in their children’s life; - Achievement orientation;
Actions and events	- A leader speaks, the others listen and follow him;
Characters	- Language use: (Northern) American middle class English; - Characters dressed typically for their roles (chequered, coloured shirt, graduation ring, large watch);
<i>Discourse</i>	- <i>Very well-structured speech;</i> - <i>Direct communication;</i> - <i>Appealing to the listeners;</i>
<i>Dialogue → Monologue</i>	- <i>Pace: typical for a public speech;</i>
Non-verbal messages	- Non-verbal clues radiate confidence and achievement orientation;
<i>Body language, facial expressions, eye contact, proxemics</i>	- <i>Direct eye contact but going round looking at everyone;</i> - <i>The speaker seems quite aloof and raises emotions at the end of the speech;</i> - <i>The listeners sit (too) close, crowded in the small room, this calls for action;</i>
<i>Environment, context</i>	- <i>A locker room—as if the dads were sportsmen needing advice and energizing;</i>
Author, filmmaker, producer	- The advertiser opted for non-obtrusive persuasion, selling a feeling (brand) more openly than an actual product;
Audience	- To reach aspiring middle class men;
TECHNICAL ASPECTS	
Image composition	- Consistent with the topic;
<i>Spatial relations</i>	- <i>Confined space indicates urgency of action;</i>
<i>Lighting and colour</i>	- <i>The lighting is darker than one expects; to focus on the speaker;</i> - <i>Subdued colours;</i>
Camera movement	- Smooth camera movement, except at the end to emphasise the enthusiasm;
Editing, cutting	- Some interesting close-ups;
Sound, music	- The volume rises with the momentum at the end;

6 Available at: [Ads Commercial 2014. “Dockers–Locker Room Advertisement.” Online commercial. You Tube 1 January 2016.](#)

- Task 3:** Try to explain what features above relate to ‘Americanness’ and the spirit of advertising.
- Task 4:** Watch a film (feature, documentary, etc.) of your choice, and add questions to the list in Figure 2. Conduct a brief analysis using the concepts listed there.
- Task 5:** Watch the ‘HSBC’ advertisements about cultural differences.⁷ Choose a few and interpret them referring both to elements of culture and concepts in film analysis.
- Task 6:** Do a combined analysis of the elements of culture and film-related concepts of a film that is not directly about cultural differences.

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Multiculturalism, History and Identity in Canadian Film: Atom Egoyan's *Ararat*

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The term multiculturalism has multiple meanings in the Canadian context. It is a demographic fact, a social ideal, a political philosophy and a government policy consisting of a series of specific programs implemented by the various Governments of Canada in the past few decades. In addition to arts and culture, multiculturalism in Canada has had a significant impact on every aspect of life, and in recent years it has become an integral part of the Canadian national identity, a feature which many believe distinguishes Canadians from other nations.

Even though multiculturalism as a policy has been subject to some severe criticism ever since it was introduced in 1971, its emancipatory effect on the cultural field and beyond is indisputable. The cultural works created as a result of a multicultural social reality, backed by both the theory and the policy of multiculturalism, have given new impetus to Canadian culture and fortified its place among other cultures in the world.

Multiculturalism has played a pivotal role in making minority cultures visible and recognised by mainstream Canada; nevertheless, the difficulties inherent in a multicultural society are demonstrated by exactly the works

which arose in the aftermath of the official implementation of the multiculturalism policy.¹

The following discussion investigates recollection and memory as a way of constructing history and identity against the backdrop of multiculturalism in Atom Egoyan's movie *Ararat* (2002). One of the central questions of the movie is what happens if people of different backgrounds are brought together on an occasion which prompts them to investigate their national, familial and individual past.

The Armenian genocide of 1915 and subsequent years—the underlying topic of *Ararat*—is one of the great traumatic events of the 20th century. Committed by the Ottoman Turkish state, it is regarded by some as the first modern genocide. Armenia, located in Anatolia, the eastern part of Turkey, had been conquered and ruled by the Ottoman Empire for centuries, just like lands of many other nations in the region. The Ottoman empire lost

¹ For more information on the history, policy, theory and impact of Canadian multiculturalism, see Kenyeres “[Aspects of Canadian Multiculturalism: History, Policy, Theory and Impact](#).”

control over its Christian territories—Greece, Bulgaria and Serbia—in the late nineteenth century, which led to a rise in Turkish nationalism, followed by a systematic persecution of its last remaining large Christian population, the Armenians. Thousands of people were killed in the 1890s and it is believed that eventually over a million Armenians were massacred in mass killings, deportations and forced marches. As Siraganian states, “The Armenian community in Anatolia was destroyed and one-half of the world’s Armenian population was annihilated. Survivors crowded refugee camps around the Middle East and in the rest of the world” (Siraganian 134).

Atom Egoyan’s treatment of the Armenian genocide on film began in a rather unusual way. Kirkland recounts that the idea of Egoyan’s movie *Ararat* was raised when, at an awards ceremony at the Armenian Community Centre in Toronto, Hungarian-born Canadian film producer Robert Lantos virtually upstaged Egoyan to make a speech. As Egoyan recalled, Lantos “sort of one-upped me by standing up in front of this audience and saying that the time had come to make a film about the Armenian genocide. And the whole audience, in this emotional outburst,

stood on their feet. Even he was probably surprised.” As Lantos recalled the same event, “I felt that this is another story like *Sunshine* that simply had to be told. It’s not just a movie. It’s not just a story. It is something that really truly matters and it had to be told by Atom. There really isn’t anyone else who could tell that story..” (Kirkland).

Indeed, Egoyan, one of Canada’s most highly regarded contemporary film directors, seemed well suited for the task.² Both his professional skills and his interest in the

² *Ararat* is not the first movie in which Egoyan draws on the theme of the Armenian genocide. *Family Viewing* (1987) already offered an allegorical representation and *Calendar* (1993) also discussed the topic, in an implicit way. Among the literary depictions of the theme, mention must be made of Franz Werfel’s *Die vierzig Tage des Musa Dagh* [*The Forty Days of Musa Dagh*] (1933), which became a bestseller and directed attention to the Armenian genocide on an international scale. The topic is also dealt with in Kurt Vonnegut’s *Bluebeard* (1988), Edgar Hilsenrath’s *Das Märchen vom letzten Gedanken* [*The Story of the Last Thought*] (1989) and Louis de Bernières’s *Birds Without Wings* (2004). The first film on the Armenian genocide was released in Hollywood in 1919 under the title *Ravished Armenia*, which was followed by a number of documentary and art films. Egoyan’s *Ararat* (2002), in turn, was followed by another filmic adaptation of the theme, *La masseria delle allodele* [*The Lark Farm*] (2007), directed by the Taviani brothers. → → It is interesting to note that Charles Aznavour, who

subject matter warranted a conscientious filmic treatment of the topic. It is often mistaken or downright simplistic to connect an artist's life with the works produced by him, but in Egoyan's case his Armenian background cannot be overlooked. His life story reads as both a typical immigrant story and a unique and extraordinary one as far as its particular details are concerned. He was born to Armenian parents in Egypt and his first name, Atom, comes from his parents' fascination with the establishment of Egypt's first nuclear power station. This does not necessarily suggest a strong Armenian awareness on the family's part or that such national awareness was openly tolerated in Egypt at the time. Egoyan was about two years old when he and his family moved to Vancouver, Canada, where he was raised and educated. As he explains in several interviews, as a child he was mainly concerned with being accepted as a Canadian and admitted the relevance of his Armenian background only later in life. He went to the University of Toronto, and after some experimental projects completed

plays the film director Edward Saroyan in *Ararat*, dedicated his song "İls Sont Tombés" (1976) to the victims of the Armenian holocaust.

his first feature film, *Next of Kin*, in 1984. His expanding filmography reveals a gradual increase in the film budget, as well as a rise in the popularity with movie audiences. His fourth feature, *The Adjuster* (1991), won him recognition in the United States and it was the first one in a long line to be distributed by Alliance Communications (as from 1998, Alliance Atlantis Communications), a company co-founded by Robert Lantos. His movie *The Sweet Hereafter* (1997) won several awards and brought him international fame; his more recent films, released after 2000, include *Ararat* (2002), *Where the Truth Lies* (2005), *Adoration* (2008), *Chloe* (2010), *Devil's Knot* (2013), *The Captive* (2014) and *Remember* (2015).

Egoyan's art-house cinema embraces a wide spectrum of interests and topics, and its relevance is also far-reaching. The complexity of his cinema offers a vast showcase of themes: traumatic loss, mourning, mania, manipulation, fantasy and sexuality (Wilson ix). Additional themes readily offer themselves to be added to this list, such as the search for identity and truth, national and family history, reconstruction of the past, sexuality, technology and alienation.

Regarding its perspective and logic, Egoyan's cinema can be seen as a perfect example of what postmodernism is all about. His films are open-ended, fragmented and multi-layered, offering a complexity which in turn invites innumerable interpretations and interpretive strategies. The density of Egoyan's cinema is achieved, quite paradoxically, by seemingly simple and relatively short dialogues, whereas the time shifts, cuts, and the fragmentary plots allow for multiple meanings.

In *Ararat*, recollections do not merely elicit the cause of a trauma and broken lives, like in *Exotica*, or reveal the parallel lives emerging from a disaster affecting a whole town, like in *The Sweet Hereafter*, but while retaining the said elements, the flashbacks in *Ararat* address the question to what extent and whether the past can be known and represented at all. As Kállay observes, "since the camera is, in the default case, a means of mechanical reproduction, it can become a *new way of seeing*: we do not, so to speak 'watch a film' but we see, we re-visit the world *through it*: film, in a certain sense, is 'transparent'" (7), and thus it may help us see things hitherto unknown to us, including facts, feelings and even philosophical observations.

Ararat contains numerous subplots, each separate from but intertwined with each other in a subtle network of interconnections. The main plot can be summarised as follows: Edward Saroyan, a renowned Armenian film director, is making a movie about the Armenian genocide concentrating on the uprising against the Turks in the city of Van. His film is partly based on his mother's testimony and the autobiography of an American physician, Dr. Clarence Ussher. The screenplay is also assisted by a Toronto-based Armenian-Canadian art historian, Ani, an expert on Arshile Gorky, an important 20th century Armenian painter, who was a child in Van during the genocide. Ani's son, Raffi, who got a job as an assistant and driver in the film, is returning to Canada from Turkey, struggling with the memory of the loss of his father, who was killed as an Armenian terrorist fifteen years ago. Raffi, who is carrying cans of exposed film into Canada, allegedly background footage for Saroyan's film, is interrogated at the border by a customs officer, David, whose son, Philip, has a homosexual relationship with the actor who plays the role of a high-ranking Turkish military commander in Saroyan's movie. Raffi's stepsister is also struggling with

her own past, the mysterious death of her father who fell, or perhaps was pushed, off a cliff after his separation from Ani, the art historian.

As the above outline suggests, Egoyan's film invokes not only the genocide but the personal stories of Gorky and the characters in the 'film within the film' who have a direct relationship with the bloody events, while the characters living in present day multicultural Canada are only indirectly linked to it. The theme of genocide appears on all three large narrative levels of the movie. It emerges on the non-diegetic level as the title and the written statement at the end of the movie clearly show this. This latter reads: "the historical events in the film have been substantiated by holocaust scholars, national archives, and eyewitness accounts, including that of Clarence Ussher" (Egoyan, 2002). The genocide is also manifested on the diegetic level of the film, where the characters in present day Toronto are connected to it—for different reasons—in their everyday life. The genocide is obviously the main issue on the metadiegetic level of Saroyan's film, (the 'film within the film'), but also in the video footage made by Raffi on his trip to Turkey. The recollections used in the narrative

levels of *Ararat* are intertwined, just like the plots themselves, at times reinforcing, at times negating one another.

It is a peculiar feature of the movie that the recollections presented offer a passage between the narrative levels. When first seeing a scene about the Van uprising, the viewer does not suspect it is from a different movie, Saroyan's film. In a similar way, when Ani walks across the live set during the shooting of a dramatic scene in Saroyan's film, ruining the shot, the actor playing Clarence Ussher flies into a terrible rage and starts shouting at her from the perspective of Clarence Ussher. He is in a strange trance, a transitional state between the two narrative worlds of the film, with vivid memories of the 'film within the film,' virtually speaking out of another world, surprising the viewer, but at the same time symbolizing the way in which the past makes a strong impact on the present.

However, *Ararat* speaks not only of personal recollections of a national trauma, but also of the conflict between the collective memory of two nations, that of the Armenians and the Turks, mostly surrounded by a great amount of ignorance by the rest of the world. One of the most intriguing scenes of the movie is when Raffi

asks Ali, who is half-Turkish, about his sentiments concerning the film in which he plays the role of the cruel Turkish officer, Jevdet Bey:

Raffi: Were you serious about what you told him?

Ali: What?

Raffi: That you don't think it happened?

Ali: What, the genocide?

Raffi: Yeah.

Ali: Are you gonna shoot me or something? Look, I never heard about any of this stuff when I was growing up... you know. I did some research for the part. From what I read there were deportations and... lots of people died. Armenians *and* Turks. It was World War I.

Raffi: But Turkey wasn't at war with the Armenians. I mean, just like Germany wasn't at war with the Jews. They were citizens. They were expecting to be protected. That scene you just shot was based on an eyewitness account. Your character, Jevdet Bey, the only reason they put him in Van was to carry out the complete extermination of the Armenian population in Van. There were telegrams, there were communiqués.

Ali: Look I'm not saying that *something* didn't happen.

Raffi: Something...

Ali: Look, I was born here. So were you. Right?

Raffi: Yeah.

Ali: This is a new country. So let's just drop the fucking history and get on with it. No one's gonna wreck your home. No one's gonna destroy you family. Hmm? So let's go inside and uncork this thing... and celebrate. Hmm?

Raffi: Do you know what Adolf Hitler told his military commanders to convince them that his plan would work? "Who remembers the extermination of the Armenians?"

Ali: And nobody did. Nobody does. (Egoyan, 2002)

Collective, familial memories, or their absence, determine the way the individual interprets historical events and the prejudices inherent in the interpretation create a different national and personal identity; the conflicting personal views based on collective memory being often irreconcilable. In the beginning both Raffi and Ali are ignorant of the historical events which Saroyan's film portrays,

and their interest is aroused only by participating in the shooting of the ‘film within the film.’ It is the representation of the historical events in Saroyan’s movie, coupled with the director’s indifference to his thoughts and Raffi’s unrelenting accusations, which eventually transform Ali into the harsh character of the Turkish officer he personifies. For Raffi, internalizing the memory of the physical and spiritual wounds suffered by the Armenians is key to completing his personal quest: understanding his family story, his father’s motivation for trying to assassinate a Turkish diplomat, during which he was killed by the police. This drives him on his solitary travel in Turkey to record remnants of the past.

Saroyan’s ‘film within the film’ reflects the collective memory of the Armenian people, based on the personal account of the director’s mother as well as the eye-witness testimony of Clarence Ussher. However, as it turns out, this memory, this recreation of the past, is not only different from the Turkish view, represented by Ali, but it proves to be in conflict with historical facts as well. When Saroyan explains that his film will show everything as it actually happened, Ani, looking at the stage set of Van,

which shows the view of Ararat, instantly remarks that it is not possible to see the mountain from Van. Saroyan replies that the view of Ararat is “true in spirit,” but it is clear that historical truth is different from the representation of collective memory based on “poetic licence.”

The statement “it’s true in spirit” evokes Northrop Frye’s distinction of *Heilsgeschichte* and *Weltgeschichte*. As Frye asserts:

Weltgeschichte uses the criteria of ordinary history, and attempts to answer the question, What should I have seen if I had been there? *Heilsgeschichte*, as we have it for instance in the Gospels, may say to us rather, ‘This may not be what you would have seen if you had been there, but what you would have seen would have missed the whole point of what was really going on.’ (Frye 48)

In his distinction of the above concepts of sacred and ordinary (world) history, Frye accurately maintains that the purpose of any investigation into ‘ordinary history’ is the attempt to establish ‘what actually happened,’

and although Frye is aware of the subjective nature of *Weltgeschichte*, there is no doubt that his primary interest lies in *Heilsgeschichte* and how it is related to myth. Philosophical thinking concerning the nature of history, however, is predominantly preoccupied with questions of ‘ordinary history,’ and theoreticians, such as Edward Hallett Carr, Hayden White or Paul Ricoeur, have clearly demonstrated that history is far from being an objective account of the past. These theories evidence that ‘ordinary history,’ too, is based on subjective factors. In *Memory, History, Forgetting*, Ricoeur distinguishes between three basic constituents of historiographical activity: “The epistemological course embraces the three phases of the historiographical operation; from the stage of witnessing and of the archives, it goes through the usages of ‘because’ in the figures of explanation and understanding; it ends on the scriptural level of the historian’s representation of the past” (Ricoeur xvi). Each of the above three activities is involved with interpretative operations and thus is closely linked with probability rather than certainty. In this way, historical knowledge cannot be fully objective; moreover, some facts are forgotten, overlooked, and

remain irretrievable. Ricoeur nevertheless believes that historical accounts are not fully unreliable and subjective; some sense of objectivity is present in all testimonies.

It is not surprising, therefore, that if *Ararat* intends to establish an authentic representation of the Armenian genocide, it cannot resort to a simplistic historical approach.³ As Wilson notes, “Egoyan’s position in *Ararat* is complex, if not contradictory. The film seeks to assert the absolute truth of the Armenian genocide, the fact that these events happened. [...] *Ararat* has a role to play in deepening awareness, however belatedly, of a national and racial trauma. Truth is critical to the film.” Yet, as she adds, in “*Ararat* Egoyan makes us increasingly aware of the falsity and manipulation of historical reconstructions” (Wilson 116–117). Thus, in *Ararat*, Egoyan is less interested in the original genocide testimony itself and, as Burwell and Tschofen claim, “more in how the genocide is mediated by the various reactions to and interpretations of this testimony by

³ For a detailed analysis of the representation of history in *Ararat* in the context of the writings of Edward Hallett Carr and Hayden White, see Parker 1040–1054.

later generations” (Burwell and Tschofen 126). Moreover, the film is not only preoccupied with a particular historical event, but how it is internalized by later generations. True, *Ararat* represents the genocide through the filtering of mediation, but the film also shows that just like there is no single way of remembering and recalling the past, as each individual inevitably incorporates his or her own personal experiences in the act of recollection, there is no clear, definite and tangible past, either.

In addition to the above questions, what makes any discussion of the Armenian holocaust exceptionally difficult is the controversy concerning its basic historical foundation, more specifically its outright denial by the Turkish authorities and the reluctance of a number of countries to this date, largely for political reasons, to acknowledge the fact that it happened. Analysing essays on Egoyan’s treatment of the genocide, Burwell and Tschofen conclude that Egoyan is “grappling with two core issues: the severity of the trauma produced by the events of the genocide themselves followed by their erasure from ‘official history,’ and the absence of a ‘place’—a home or homeland—from which one could manage this trauma and anchor one’s culture,

language and identity” (Burwell and Tschofen 125–126). Due to its denial and controversy, but also because of the remoteness of the past, the Armenian holocaust cannot be talked about directly; there is a veil of doubt surrounding it.⁴ As Raffi says in his video shot in Turkey: “When I see these places, I realize how much we’ve lost. Not just the land and the lives, but the loss of any way to remember it. There is nothing here to prove that anything ever happened” (Egoyan, 2002). Memory loses ground, and is subject to erasure and forgetting. This explains why this particular event is often treated metaphorically, history being transferred to the world of the imagination, the world of art. This is where history and art converge, but in Egoyan’s film there is a strange inversion; we witness an attempt to reconstruct something tangible out of the allusiveness of symbols and metaphors. In *Ararat*, art does not merely make use of the imagination, but it also attempts to break away from it in order to recreate a tangible past.

⁴ Doubt sometimes turns into objection. As a result of protests by “Turkish groups, complaining that the film was anti-Turkish propaganda,” Egoyan decided to screen *Ararat* in an out-of-competition-slot at the Cannes Film Festival in 2002. See Romney 173.

It is clear that in *Ararat* memory and recollections are used to represent a sense of national, collective, familial and personal history. As Parker claims, “*Ararat* is first and foremost a meditation on history—how it is made and how it affects individuals” (Parker 1040). Nevertheless, while Egoyan’s above preoccupation weighs heavily on his cinematic world, by virtue of being an art work, the movie eventually supersedes, or at least supplements, the theoretical problems concerning history and historiography. Albeit less conspicuously than the self-reflexive representation of history, *Ararat* is eventually a contemplation on the nature of art. It demonstrates a reality that supersedes history while still retaining its roots in it. This is a forward-looking vision realised in the present of the movie, where, despite the odds, things are repaired. This is the vision which is looming modestly behind the suggestion of a terrible past, a past which cannot be accurately described and represented.

As mentioned above, *Ararat* is a contemplation on the nature of art and the movie also offers an explicit meta-interpretive strategy to its own understanding. This suggested interpretive method, expounded by Raffi, based

on interconnections between artworks but extending to personal and national narratives as well, brings into play a typological reading of the movie and establishes links between the national and personal histories, the communal and individual threads of the story-line. Close to the ending of the film, we first see Ani giving a talk on the Armenian artist Arshile Gorky in a lecture hall, standing before a screen depicting a monument from the old-home-land, and then the next scene—beginning while Ani’s commentary is still heard—shows Raffi playing his own video recording to Celia of a stone carving on an Armenian church wall representing the Mother and Child, explaining to Celia the import of this artwork:

Ani: Arshile Gorky was born in a small village on the shores of Lake Van. From the shores of this village, the island of Aghtamar was in plain view. Gorky, as a child, would go to this island with his mother, who would show him the detailed carvings on the walls of the church.

Celia: Why are you showing this to me? [The viewer can see the video recording of the Mother and Child carving on the Armenian church wall.]

Raffi: This is the origin, from the memory of this place, right to the photograph, to the sketch, to the painting. You told me to go there. I had to put something in my heart. If that was gonna happen, it was gonna happen here. That I was prepared to throw my whole life away. And last night, as we were sitting in that... dark room, as I heard him open the can, I felt it.

Celia: You felt what?

Raffi: His ghost. The ghost of my father.⁵
 (Egoyan, 2002)

The stone carving and the Biblical story of Jesus and Mary underlying it serve as the *type* or prefiguration of the photograph of Arshile Gorky and his mother, which in turn forms the basis of the sketch of Gorky's painting and eventually the painting itself (see Appendix, Fig. 1–7). This chain of *types* and *antitypes* is further extended to the family relationships depicted in the diegetic level of the movie: those between Raffi and his mother, Raffi and his father (who was killed while trying to assassinate a Turkish

diplomat), as well as Celia and her father (who died under uncertain circumstances) and Edward Saroyan, director of the 'film within the film,' and his own mother, who was a genocide survivor. The stone carving—through the Mother and Child motif—thus extends to the parent-children relations of the movie and, as the only tangible evidence of a tangible past, serves as a sense of remedy from the various traumas expressed in the movie.

The Christian motif of Mother and Child, underlying the above chain of associations, is suggested in a sophisticated, half-concealed way in Egoyan's movie. On the other hand, Christianity, as the religion of the Armenian (and Greek) people (as well as of the American missionary and physician Dr. Clarence Ussher), is expressly referred to in the 'film within the film,' from the Turkish commander Jevdet Bey's viewpoint:

An appeal for Christian help. Did your missionary feel so persecuted? We've invested you Greeks and Armenians with power and freedom. You should be thankful! This your mother? [holding up the photograph of Gorky and his mother] Well, she's given you this

⁵ Italics mine.

photograph so that you may remember her. Look at it now. This is the face of a woman who raised you to feel superior to us. She's taught you that Turks are vengeful and ignorant. That we're bloodthirsty. Now I'm going to teach you something. What is about to happen to your people is your own fault. For as much as you talk about your prophet Jesus Christ in the depths of your souls, you believe in nothing... but commerce and money. My streets overrun with your markets and moneylenders. Your greed has led us to corruption and ruin. Now you yourselves will be ruined. (Egoyan, 2002)

Jevdet Bey's above statement in the 'film within the film' reveals the Turkish viewpoint not so much as an objective truth but as it is presumed and understood in Armenian collective memory. Jevdet Bey's accusations against Armenians as a Christian people who "believe in nothing... but commerce and money" and whose greed has led to "corruption and ruin" sound familiar; they are essentially identical with the widely known accusations the Nazis made against the Jews. It is exactly this point which

is made by Raffi in his reference to Hitler's plans: "Who remembers the extermination of the Armenians?" (Egoyan, 2002), implying that the Armenian genocide was the *type* or prefiguration of the Second World War Holocaust, and as such the two events are essentially the same, with the important difference, however, that the Armenian genocide has been erased from history.⁶

Despite the theoretical questions raised, in the final analysis, *Ararat* represents history metaphorically, by transferring it to the world of the imagination. It raises the question whether art offers remedy to a trauma based on an intangible and incomprehensible historical event. Hands play a crucial, typological role in the movie, as demonstrated by the close-ups (see Appendix, Fig. 8 and 9), and when Arshile Gorky erases his mother's hands from his painting, which recalls her as vividly as if she were alive, the film suggests that despite its evocative power, art in fact lies. Hands are for touching, for keeping contact,

⁶ In the same way, *Ararat* can be interpreted as a prefiguration of *Remember*, Egoyan's 2015 movie about the search of a dementia-stricken World War II Holocaust survivor.

and Gorky's dead mother is irrevocably out of touch, irreversibly dead, hence the erasure of her hands from the painting is the only true way of representing her loss. Paradoxically, Gorky erases his mother's hands with his own bare hands, establishing contact with her, for the last time (see Appendix, Fig. 10). The erasure on the personal level also reflects another, much larger erasure—the deletion of past events from history. When Ani touches the hands of Gorky's mother, Shushan, on the projected image of the photograph after her lecture (see Appendix, Fig. 11), this represents a gesture to reconnect with her and with the historical past, even though this attempt is purely metaphorical. Nevertheless it is both an intellectual and emotional reaching out to the past and a move towards establishing contact with those who were lost.⁷

The final scene of the movie, however, offers some relief. It appears as if it was a scene from Saroyan's 'film within the film,' but it is not. Nor is it on the diegetic level of Egoyan's *Ararat*. It represents an altogether different

narrative level, which can be called the level of art: we see Gorky's mother, mending a coat, sewing a button on it. This button is missing from Gorky's coat in Saroyan's movie in Van, and reappears in Gorky's studio in New York, hanging on a thread from the wall. The coat was never mended. But what if it is? This final scene, therefore, shows the world of art where everything is possible. In this way, the film demonstrates through its very existence, by commemorating the past, that it is the act of remembering that has a chance to offer relief from a historical trauma. Egoyan does not claim to know the past, he does not wish to pass judgement, but shows the wounds in collective and personal memory and makes a step towards healing them.

⁷ The act of touching to establish contact with the past appears as a motif in Egoyan's other movies as well, such as *The Adjuster*.

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Fig. 1: Stone carving of the Mother on the walls of the Armenian Church of the Holy Cross on the Island of Akdamar (Aghtamar) on Raffi's video recording in Atom Egoyan's movie *Ararat*



Fig. 2: Stone carving of the Child on the walls of the Armenian Church of the Holy Cross on the Island of Akdamar (Aghtamar) on Raffi's video recording in Atom Egoyan's movie *Ararat*



Fig. 3: Raffi showing Celia the Mother and Child stone carving on his video recording in Atom Egoyan's movie *Ararat*



Fig. 4: Photograph of Arshile Gorky and his mother, together with Gorky's sketches for *The Artist and His Mother*, in Gorky's studio in Atom Egoyan's movie *Ararat*



Fig. 5: Photograph of Arshile Gorky and his mother, in Van, Turkish Armenia, 1912. Source: [here](#)



Fig. 6: Arshile Gorky, sketch for *The Artist and His Mother*. Source: [here](#)



Fig. 7: Arshile Gorky, *The Artist and His Mother*, c. 1926–36. Oil on canvas, 60 × 50 in. (152.4 × 127 cm). Whitney Museum of American Art, New York. Source: [here](#)



Fig. 8: Hands of Arshile Gorky's mother, Shushan, in Gorky's painting in the 'film within the film' in Atom Egoyan's *Ararat*



Fig. 10: Arshile Gorky erasing his mother's hands from his painting in the 'film within the film' in Atom Egoyan's *Ararat*



Fig. 9: Hands of Arshile Gorky's mother, Shushan, in the 'film within the film' in Atom Egoyan's *Ararat*



Fig. 11: Ani touching the hand of Arshile Gorky's mother on the projected image of the photograph in Atom Egoyan's movie *Ararat*
Eturio volorem lisimiligni consendam essita pero maximil esto totatur?

The Miraculous Life
of Henry Purcell: On
the Cultural Historical
Contexts of the Film
England, my England

The idea of a biopic about the life of the 17th century English composer Henry Purcell sounds somewhat extravagant, given that this historical figure happens to be one about whose life we know virtually nothing. Purcell's oeuvre is the most widely known of the English musical production of his period, he is acknowledged to be one of the great composers of the history of Western music, and research has uncovered a fairly detailed picture of his professional life, but Purcell the man remains unknown: there are simply not enough extant records and data for us to have even an approximate idea of his private life, his thinking, his opinions, his emotional experiences, details of his daily life, or his personality. If we wonder why filmmakers should nonetheless set themselves the impossible task of a biopic about Purcell, we may find a clue in the timing of the production. The film was released in 1995 (dir. Tony Palmer), the 300th anniversary of Purcell's death, and was part of a year-long series of Purcell-related events and publications, commemorating one of the iconic figures of English culture. Indeed, the film's main title—*England, my England*—itself testifies that this work is not so much about “The Story of Henry

Purcell” (as the subtitle claims), but about England—or, put differently, it is about Purcell not as a musician or a man, but as someone who has become a representative figure of English culture. But by calling attention to the impossibility of a historically faithful biopic about Purcell, the film also self-reflexively comments on and interrogates the process of creating national symbols.

This discussion of *England, my England* serves to show that the mapping of the cultural historical contexts of a film can aid its interpretation, and can highlight its own place in, and contribution to, cultural history. This is not to say that we could not interpret the film in many other ways. Indeed, the web of allusions and the complexity of reflections that this film creates is labyrinthine. We may regard every instance when Purcell's music is heard at a particular scene, or every instance of the use of literary texts (of which there are also many, including the title that is taken from the title of a story by D. H. Lawrence) as the film's reflections on the works and on the cultural history that it engages with. In order to understand these, we have to ask questions such as: what does the use of a piece of music or poetry at a particular moment say about

the way the filmmakers understand that music or poetry, and, at the same time, how does the use of a piece of music or poetry at a particular moment call on us to see the given scene? What opinions do the depictions of historical figures and events suggest? What is the significance of attempts at historical precision, or of deliberate deviations from historical knowledge? As I will not offer a detailed analysis, I will not go into these more minute issues, and will deal only with some broader contexts; I want to demonstrate how one can build a possible line of interpretation on questions that pertain to the cultural historical contexts in which the film is steeped. The film is steeped in such contexts not only because of its historical and cultural themes, but also because, as mentioned, it also addresses the way national symbols are created in the course of cultural history. While I remain uncertain about the exact nature of the film's relation to the production of national symbols, I am convinced that this is a key to its interpretation. And it is the consideration of the cultural historical contexts that helps to understand what the film says about its own act of producing national myths.

There are two larger terrains of contexts that we can

focus on here: one, the historical period the film depicts, and the other, a broadly understood contemporaneity. Indeed, the filmmakers tried to overcome the difficulty that Purcell's unknown life presents for a biopic by entering these two contexts. On the one hand, the historical period in which Purcell lived is more of a protagonist here than Henry Purcell himself (who only comes of age at about the midpoint of this two and a half-hour long film). On the other hand, the storyline is not restricted to the 17th century; it contains a modern plotline as well. The latter is set in the England of the 1960s and centres on an actor in London, who attempts to write a play about Purcell. Parallel to the historical plot, we follow this actor collecting material for his planned play, and listen to him in various situations as he meditates about Purcell and his age. There are numerous ways in which the historical and the contemporary plotlines are intertwined. (To mention just a few: both the modern hero and Charles II of the historical plotline are played by the same actor, Simon Callow; or, towards the end of the film, the actor playing Purcell [Michael Ball] appears in jeans in the modern hero's living room; or, when Queen Mary dies in the

historical plotline, we hear Purcell's famous funeral music in a version that was arranged for a synthesiser by Wendy Carlos and used as the theme music in Stanley Kubrick's film adaptation of Anthony Burgess's novel *Clockwork Orange* [on a possible interpretation of this gesture, see Jenkins], etc.) Such intersections of plotlines and historical eras are sometimes forced, sometimes entertaining, sometimes not wholly comprehensible to me in their significance, but it is clear that they serve to present modern England in the light of Purcell's England.

Understanding why modern England is approached from the perspective of the late-17th century requires some acquaintance with this historical period. This period in English history is called the Restoration, beginning with the return to the throne of the Stuart family in 1660. After the civil war in the mid-17th century that saw the execution of King Charles I, came the period of the Commonwealth under Oliver Cromwell's rule, England's experiment with abandoning Monarchy for a Republic. When this system collapsed, the son of the executed king was recalled from his exile and was crowned as Charles II. The twenty-five years of his reign, followed by the brief reign of

his Catholic brother James II, and then, when James was put down in the Glorious Revolution of 1688, the reign of William of Orange and Queen Mary, is of course a complex historical period that cannot be described with any precision in a brief sketch. Yet the last four decades of the 17th century—almost exactly coinciding with the lifespan of Henry Purcell—do have a particular character in the popular imagination. According to this image, the age of the Restoration was one of cultural revival: while the Puritans, who were in power in Cromwell's time, were often antagonistic towards cultural activity, for instance ordering the closing of all theatres, Charles II was an enthusiastic supporter of the arts and the sciences. He spent part of his exile at the French court, and upon his return he sought to adopt the luxury, pomp and sophistication he witnessed in the court of Louis XIV (the Sun King). But this was for him not just a question of the representation of his power—he himself was genuinely interested in science and was a lover of music, literature and the theatre. And he was also a lover of actresses—Charles led a libertine lifestyle, which set the tune for what later came to be seen as the culture of lasciviousness, sensuality and immorality

characterising his court. In the popular image of the age, this sensual indulgence only strengthened the idea that this was a time characterised by a love of life, including amongst its material and intellectual luxuries also the free flight of the spirit, and the flourishing of entertainment, arts, and culture.¹ For these reasons, the Restoration is often seen as a golden age, one in which power and culture mutually supported the vigour of one another. The film, in fact, begins by making this connection between power and culture when in the opening shots we hear the narrator say: "... in and around the year of our Lord 1660, two things miraculous came about which ... gave us great hope for the future of this island, this England. The first, the Restoration of Charles Stuart to his throne of England ... And the second, the birth of Henry Purcell, organist, composer ... Their lives were drawn together as if by Divine hand. And together they changed our history

¹ No doubt, it was also an age of tragedies, in which plague and conflagration followed each other in quick succession, causing unprecedented devastation, and it was also an age of intense political and religious infighting; the Restoration is thus also seen as an age of contradictions, of tragedies and joyous indulgence at once.

forever" (Palmer, 1995). Charles II's England is thus suggested to have been one in which talent could flourish, and the free flight of genius, in turn, served the flourishing of Charles II's England, a kingdom of intellectual and cultural vitality. Whether we agree with this assessment or not, the age does seem to have looked upon itself in such a way: Purcell the composer, Dryden the poet, Wren the architect, Newton the scientist (and the list could be continued) were known by their contemporaries to be among the leading spirits of Europe, and this assurance displays a kind of cultural self-confidence that is wholly lacking in the 20th century (on this, see Pinnock 5).

The film also depicts Henry Purcell as a man wholly aware of his talents and confident about the value of his work (on this, see Elley). What we know about Purcell's professional life suggests that this is historically justifiable. Charles II's conscious revitalization of English cultural life extended to music as well, and Purcell grew up and lived in a vibrant musical scene where commissions from the church, the court and from theatres were equally plenty (even if payment was often less so). His career was one of undisturbed success: monarchs came and went, but

amid all the political turmoil, he remained throughout his life in the employment of the court, occupying the most prestigious musical posts, and becoming the most prominent composer of music for the theatre as well. His genius was allowed to flourish without any hindrance, and this may be seen as another sign of the cultural self-confidence of the age. It is, I suggest, for this reason that the filmmakers offer the Restoration and Purcell as examples for the present.

Nonetheless, Purcell and his music were for some time after his death relatively forgotten, and it was a long process in which he gained the status of a national icon (on this, see Herissone). This process cannot be detailed here, but one of its elements is important for mapping the cultural historical contexts of the film, and this is Purcell's 'Englishness.' The popularity of his music could have declined partly because of changes in taste: two decades after his death, it was already Händel who dominated the English musical scene, and in comparison to, for instance, Händel's operas written in the Italian manner, Purcell's secular music sounded out-dated. This contributed to the idea that Purcell was the last representative of

a genuinely English musical tradition. As one early-20th century historian of music states, Purcell "was the last of that original school of English music whose origin [...] can only be sought for in the solitude and seclusion of the cells of ancient and long forgotten monasteries." His "genius and independence of thought might have proved the foundation of a school of English music," but unfortunately "he had no such successors, and foreign musicians soon asserted [their] supremacy in the country," and so "[w]ith the death of Purcell began the long decline that resulted in the practical decay of English music" (Ford, 10, 61, 97). But we find opinions pointing in a similar direction in the thinking of no lesser authority than Benjamin Britten, the great English composer of the 20th century, who has spoken of Purcell's influence on his work, amongst others, because, says Britten, "Purcell has shown me how wonderfully dramatic the sung English language can be" (qtd. in Herissone 347). Purcell's vocal music has indeed been seen as unique for its setting of English texts, again making him a specifically English artist—Purcell, in fact, is still often seen as the last and greatest flourish of a genuinely English musical tradition.

The film's contexts (the historical period, Purcell's career, and the history of the reception of his music) may thus suggest that 'Purcell' here is the last instance of an Englishness that is not distorted by foreign influence, a figure representing an age very unlike the petty, materialistic bourgeois England, which the film's modern plotline does not cease to attack. Such an approach would certainly suit the tercentenary celebrations of the 'musical Shakespeare' (as Purcell came to be called) as an icon of a culturally healthy England.

However, this conclusion needs to be further contextualized: is this view plausible in the light of what we know about the makers of this film? For the major artists who participated in the production of this work are themselves important figures of the cultural history of England, and for this reason, their oeuvre is itself a context to consider in our interpretation of the film.

The script was written by John Osborne (who died before its completion, and left the final touches to the contemporary dramatist Charles Wood). Osborne was primarily a playwright, and his work is today regarded as one of the turning points of the history of 20th century

English drama. His play *Look Back in Anger* of 1956 did not only establish a harsh social criticism on the English stage, but also gave voice to the discontents of an entire generation, and his whole oeuvre can indeed be seen as an incessant attack on the snobbery, philistinism, materialism and pettiness nurtured in modern British society. The director of the film was Tony Palmer, the majority of whose vast filmography has to do with music of diverse kinds, equally including feature films, documentaries and concert films on for example the rock music of the 1960s, works on Leonard Cohen, Frank Zappa, or Maria Callas, as well as films on numerous classical composers (his Wagner, Rachmaninoff or Britten films are perhaps the most well-known). Palmer's films are not only about iconic composers and performers, but more especially about the cultural phenomena they represent; thus, his works on English subjects are important documents and interpretations of English cultural history. The musical director of the Purcell film is Sir John Eliot Gardiner, who is one of the outstanding figures of the revival of early music, and a world-renowned musicologist and conductor who was one of the pioneers of historically authentic performances.

In other words, when watching this film, we are not only watching the work of any one scriptwriter, director and conductor, but the historical and cultural self-reflexions of artists who themselves are chapters in the books of English cultural history. Their oeuvre, thus, is itself an important context for interpreting the film's gestures in invoking Purcell and his age.

Let me exemplify this by considering the significance of Osborne's work for the film. In its modern plotline, the London actor's attacks on contemporary society are the vintage tirades that have made Osborne's plays so characteristic: his unabashed mixture of witticism, learning, cruel insults, filthy personal attacks, and political agitation are all there. The tirades of the actor in the film often give voice to anti-democratic, euro-sceptic, xenophobic and nationalist sentiments, and we may be tempted to recall how Osborne's own politics turned conservative after his initial lower-class awareness. It may be thought fitting for Osborne to present Purcell as the last representative of a genuine English cultural tradition, a tradition of the freedom of the spirit and the intellect which has been strangled by the tides of modern mediocrity and foreign

influence, for such concerns are ever-present in his work, and we have seen that cultural history may have given him reasons to treat the Purcell-theme in a like manner.

But if we take a closer look at *Look Back in Anger*, we will find that the hero Jimmy Porter is not simply the expression of Osborne's thoughts or social discontent: he is not simply the writer's mouthpiece. The play very often treats the hero ironically: Osborne also shows us how Jimmy is haughty, malicious and downright cruel, that he is too blind to understand the England he condemns and that his political commitments are really fuelled by self-pity (Innes 87). And with this in mind, we may qualify our first impressions and ask: should the film-script's political tirades be perhaps read in the same ironic context? If so, we may suppose that the film treats the idea of Purcell as the last representative of a lost and genuine Englishness ironically.

This perspective may make us attentive to other details that place the film's nationalism in an ironic context. Take the following scene as an example. The child Purcell shows a composition of his to Henry Cooke, the music master at Chapel Royal, where Purcell was educated. Cooke,

in his appreciation, soon bursts into xenophobic tirades about the genuine Englishness of the song: “And I shall say it which it is, which is why, in face of brought over, I say brought over Frenchmen, which you do, Master Locke, smelling as thou dost of popish superstition, thou brat of Rome, not one bit of it anywise other than what it is, which it is English ... English” (Palmer, 1995). The circumstantial, comic nature of this little monologue certainly makes something of a fool of Cooke, the viewer almost certainly smiles at his xenophobia. The scene, furthermore, is full of historical imprecision. The song we hear before and after the tirade is not a childhood composition of Purcell’s: in fact, it comes from the unfinished semi-opera he composed in the last year of his life, the *Indian Queen*. This deliberate mistake, I think, has to do with the words of the song. This is a song about love, but its words may in this context activate further possibilities of interpretation. It begins and ends with the lines “I attempt from love’s sickness to fly in vain, / For I am myself my own fever and pain” (Palmer, 1995)—perhaps, in order to sharpen the ironic representation of Cooke’s words, we are supposed to hear the love song related to his nationalism: perhaps it is

England, so proud of its ‘original’ and ‘genuine’ Englishness that is its own fever and pain. We may especially entertain this ironic reading if we also consider that Henry Cooke, an outstanding musician and Purcell’s first teacher, was known to have relished the Italian style, and was in fact regarded as the most accomplished English practitioner of singing in the Italian manner. The “Master Locke” he mentions in his tirade is Matthew Locke, a major English composer of the generation preceding Purcell’s, who in fact was regarded—at least in his anthems and instrumental music—“as a standard bearer of an ‘English’ style in the face of ever increasing foreign influence” (Wainwright 25). Cooke is not only misrepresented, but he is also made to misrepresent Locke. And Purcell may also be misrepresented, for although he did rely on English traditions in his music, his style was “a synthesis of English, French and Italian elements” (Wainwright 27). Such historical details are certainly not unknown to a musicologist and expert of the age, such as Gardiner is, so we must assume that these historical imprecisions are indeed deliberate. The historical confusion of this scene, I think, serves to highlight the ironic treatment of the subject of the “genuinely

English Purcell,” and perhaps even ridicules those viewers who want to hear of just such a Purcell, suggesting that such a desire is our own fever and pain.

Once the mapping of contexts reveals the ironic attitude towards the idea of Purcell as an icon of an ancient, lost Englishness, we may recognize other details of the film as more relevant for the kind of national symbol Purcell is turned into here. At one point, the hero of the modern plotline says: “What Charles wanted and what Purcell wrote about so gloriously was a country of tolerance, irony, kindness” (Palmer, 1995). Tolerance and kindness—one may think that nothing is further from the style of John Osborne; but it may just be that it is these things that make Purcell and his age an example today, rather than any genuine Englishness.

And this returns us to the issue of a biopic about an unknown life. Critics have been annoyed about this choice, arguing that the film as a biopic is a failure (see e.g. Jenkins). But I think that the lack of our knowledge about Purcell’s life is crucial for the kind of cultural icon he is made into here: if the chosen genre is a biopic and the chosen biography is a lacuna, the film’s relation to the

creation of national symbols can hardly lack irony. The modern plotline serves primarily to emphasise the impossibility of the endeavour, and this itself may be seen as a reflection on the production of national symbols. Indeed, Osborne’s work has for its leitmotif not only the lamenting of lost values embodied by a mystified Englishness, but also the yearning for something unreachable—an unfulfilled desire that knows that it does not find its object because the object it yearns for does not exist. (Billington, for instance, sees Jimmy Porter’s tragedy in Osborne’s seeking and never finding a passion that would match his own). In a like manner, knowledge about the life of Purcell the man does not exist. Perhaps Osborne wrote a script about Purcell to suggest that the desire for the ‘genuine’ England, ‘my England,’ is also a yearning after a non-existent object. If so, we may see Purcell in this film as representing an England which eludes attempts at the production of national myth. In this case, the film employs all those features that have contributed to making a national icon of Purcell in order to highlight the historical content of such symbol-production—in order, that is, to suggest that behind our national symbols we find not

history, but objectless desires, lacunae, void. Inasmuch as Purcell is presented by this film as the symbol of the idea of Englishness, this Englishness denotes an intellectual and creative independence which also comprises irony, kindness and tolerance. Perhaps this is the contribution the filmmakers have made to the fiction called England, and to the miraculous life of Henry Purcell, the latter of which is all the more miraculous for showing us that while it has come to represent England, it has taken up dwelling in the world of imagination.

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The British Documentary Film Movement from the mid-1920s to the mid- 1940s: Its Social, Political, and Aesthetic Context

The history of the British film industry and the art of British film making is inextricably linked with the early production of socially sensitive documentary films. This connection has largely been forgotten in our time. The following article is intended to revive and underline this link.

During the 1920s, partly as a consequence of the introduction of universal suffrage and the growing government intervention in the lives of everyday people, politicians, in particular those on the right (Swann 2) felt the need to pay much greater attention to public opinion and public morale. During the Great War, especially from 1917 when David Lloyd George's ideas of emergency governance had started to take shape, in addition to total economic and financial leverage, the government took control of new and wide ranging areas of social policy as well as propaganda (Buitenhuis). British Pathé Newsreel, relaunched after the war with a ten-year delay in 1928, focusing on the lives of celebrities, the royal family and grandiose foreign diplomatic events or wars, was, apart from the glamour, of little real interest to the average cinema goer. The BBC, in its infancy at that time, was also using famously stilted language and very few on-location interviews. There was

growing circumstantial evidence, substantiated from 1937, when Mass-Observation began its work, to show that the general British public felt alienated from the traditional hierarchies of British power and politics. Therefore, it is significant that exponents of the new documentary film movement, John Grierson, Basil Wright, Edgar Antsey, Arthur Elton, Albetro Cavalvanti and others, can be credited with introducing a new vocabulary of democracy into mass communication in Britain.

In the aftermath of the war, many civil servants remained impressed by the way wartime propaganda caught the imagination of the British public. The nation had been drawn together in more ways than ever before. Yet, the key impetus came via the United States where similar circumstances had led to similar developments. In *Public Opinion* (1921), the noted American public intellectual Walter Lippmann, poignantly quoted Plato's *Republic* leaving no doubt as to the contemporary western social implications:

Behold! human beings living in a sort of underground den, / which has a mouth open towards the light and reaching all across / the den; they have been here

from their childhood, and have their / legs and necks chained so that they cannot move, and can only / see before them. (qtd. in Lippmann vii)

The book became influential in Britain beyond expectations. It was partly in the lure of this book that John Grierson, the future anchor and energising spirit of the British documentary film movement, together with other ambitious, Scottish-born hopefuls, like John Reith and the advertising magnate William Crawford, went to the United States in 1924 on a Rockefeller scholarship (Swann 3). Significantly, Grierson's activities in the US showed more parallels with Crawford than Reith, soon to be the iconic head of the BBC in London. Grierson had read English and Moral Philosophy at Glasgow University and went on to study the Psychology of Propaganda at the universities of Chicago, Columbia and Wisconsin-Madison, acquiring a propaganda and public relations expertise that he would later import to the UK. The American advertising agencies were among the earliest to utilise modern art in their craft. Many of the modernist pictorial art movements were incorporated into commercial advertising in

the United States. Grierson was impressed by the tabloid press and the cinema in the US, both aimed unapologetically at a general audience, instead of the intellectual and social elites traditionally targeted in the United Kingdom.

Grierson was essentially a nineteenth century communitarian liberal and believed in the social, communal responsibility of the individual. He was “an elitist with populist inclinations throughout his life,” who, when political life in Britain and elsewhere began to polarise in the 1930s, departed on a journey to the left, stopping short, however, of becoming a communist (Swann 5–6). Grierson's early convictions, including the Scots Presbyterian background, combined with his formative experience in the United States, resulted in a peculiar, virtually missionary, vision for reengaging ordinary men and women with the democratic process for which so many had fought but which seemed so remote from the perspective of the post-war years. Agreeing with Walter Lippmann, he blamed the erosion of democracy at least partly on the fact that the social complexities of contemporary society made it nearly impossible for the public to participate in processes vital to the survival of democratic society. Grierson announced

this vision in an American film trade magazine as follows:

The modern multitudes ... [crave] for participation in a world where dreams come true, where life is more free, more powerful, more pungent, more obviously dramatic [...] In the meanwhile, the old folk worlds, the worlds of established heroes [...] and so dead and so distant that the multitude have lost touch with them and the imagination of the average people are [sic] without a sticking point. (Swann 7)

Grierson arrived back in the UK in 1927, imbued with the conviction that a certain new type of film could and should be mobilized to deal with the perennial problems of economic hardship shared by most throughout the twenties and into the Great Depression and to build national morale and consensus. He joined the Empire Marketing Board, a government department founded as an offspring of the Department of Overseas Trade in 1926 by Colonial Secretary Leo Amery, on a close analogy to the Federation of British Industries (FBI), to promote trade relations within the British Empire. Grierson acquired powerful supporters

in high places for his ambitions to create a modern link between the political message and the population. Among the facilitators was Sir Stephen Tallents, a senior British civil servant, who gave Grierson his first opportunity as the EMB's film officer (Swann 12–13). He directed his first film, the fifty-minute long *Drifters* (1929).

The American roots of British mass audience cinema have recently been studied with care, but little has been said about the Soviet Russian parallels. The glorification of the worker and the heroic-victorious dignity of the work process itself is evident in Grierson's *Drifters*. The vibrant, dramatic music underlies the theme that these fishermen (herring drifters with floating nets attached to their boats) are at the forefront of creation, the vanguard of the battle for a better future. At the beginning of the film we see the calm undulating fields of a small village, men going to work early in the morning. The pace is quickening, energy is mounting as the sturdy axles, shafts and pistons propel the boat to the open sea, and reaches its crescendo when the rich catch of fish is hauled in. The final caption tells us “[s]o to the ends of the earth goes the harvest of the sea.” *Drifters* was first shown in a private film club

in London in late 1929 on a double-bill with Eisenstein's *The Battleship Potemkin* (which was not granted general licence in the UK until 1954), and received high praise from both its sponsors and the press (Grierson, 1929).

The parallels with contemporary Soviet film are not superficial. In Grierson's essay "First Principles of Documentary" (1932), he argued that film should observe life and that ordinary people—who are the original actors in their original environments are better suited to convey an interpretation of the modern world's message than fiction. These views aligned with Soviet film maker Dziga Vertov's dismissal of the "bourgeois excess" of dramatic fiction and with Sergei Eisenstein's well known filming techniques. Grierson's definition of the documentary film as the "creative treatment of actuality" has long been accepted, though it does not fit certain in-between type documentaries with staged characters and re-enacted situations. Some of Eisenstein's films were exactly that.

Some films of the documentary movement experimented with formal techniques, such as the Empire Marketing Board's *Industrial Britain* (Grierson, 1931) and *Song of Ceylon* (Basil Wright, 1934). Strong inspiration came

to this type of documentary film from Alberto Cavalcanti, a Brazilian-born film maker who was played a pivotal role in the British documentary film movement between 1933 and the mid-1940s. Previously Cavalcanti had worked with avant-garde French film makers such as Jean Renoir and Marcel L'Herbier during the 1920s, and was familiar with modernist forms of film making (*Land of Promise*, 10). Cavalcanti's influence as producer, working with directors such as Basil Wright and Humphrey Jennings, is especially palpable in the experimental use of sound. *Spare Time* (Jennings, 1939), *Listen to Britain* (Jennings, 1942), *Coal Face* (Cavalcanti, 1935), and especially the towering achievement of the movement *Night Mail*, (Wright and Watt, 1936). The latter unapologetically borrowed from Soviet cinema to portray the postal train as a social integrator, its working class heroes connecting people both physically and socially across the width and length of the country.

Another strand of these films directly addressed the pressing need for social reform in Britain. These included *Workers and Jobs* (Elton, 1935), *Enough to Eat?* (Anstey, 1936), *Children at School* (Wright, 1937), and *Housing Problems* (Anstey and Elton, 1935). The last

of these landed with devastating effectiveness among those who had the opportunity to see it and is worth examining in this essay at length (*Land of Promise*, II).

Housing Problems is both a propaganda piece and a documentation project; one of a handful of films produced by the movement that made it to the national canon of great British films. One reason for this was the direct approach. Ordinary people talking to the camera was then an immensely innovative technique. The voices and stories demonstrated the dreadful conditions of the pre-WW II slums in Britain the full horror of which must have been unknown to most who had not personally seen these places. The tenants talk ‘matter-of-factly’ about the deaths of their children, their daily battles with rodents and other vermin as the camera shows the pitiful dwellings and occasionally a close-up of some of the creepy insects blighting the lives of the people on screen. The film should be watched and studied together with Robert Roberts’s ground breaking sociological study *The Classic Slum* (1971) in which life in the slums of Salford in the first quarter of the twentieth century is analysed with unsparing sociological rigour. The book and the film complement each other in more

than one way, all the more surprising that this parallel is not made more widely.

The narrator (northern, non-RP pronunciation) in *Housing Problems* tells us: “When these houses were erected, anyone could build a factory right outside your front door... Many houses have not got water laid on. People have to manage as well as they can with a tap in the yard. And sometimes at the end of the street” (Anstey and Elton, 1935). The first testimony from an actual slum dweller comes from a Mr. Norwood. The fact that the witnesses are named lends their account added authenticity. It is as if we were watching and listening to exhibits as evidence in a court case. Norwood tells us, emotionally charged, yet not looking straight into the camera but possibly at prompts some distance away:

These two rooms I’m in now I have to pay ten shillings a week for, and I haven’t the room to swing a cat round. I’ve also got five other neighbours alongside of me with the same predicament as myself. I am not only overrun by bugs, I’ve got mice and rats. With the washing, my missus has to send out every little bit of

washing there is. Every drop of water we have to go out in the yard for to fetch it in... Coming into these rooms I've had no luck since I've been in them. First I lost one youngster in one. Then I lost another youngster in one seven weeks after. (Anstey and Elton, 1935)

Another desperate tenant, Mrs. Hill, lit for the cameras by a footlight which lends an eerie atmosphere to the interview, has this to say:

This house is getting on my nerves. We're shored up in every room. There's the staircase, that you can't walk up it unless you feel seasick. One leg you want longer than the other. And it's upstairs is coming downstairs, where it's sinking. We went to see the new houses and they are lovely. But here it gets on your nerves where everything's filthy. Dirty filthy walls and the vermin in the walls is wicked. [Crawling bugs are shown here for a few seconds.] So I will tell you we're fed up... What with the hole in the wall, I can't tell you how we have to manage. We just clear up in the daytime to keep the dirt out of our mouths, and that's all. You go up the

stairs and you don't know whether you are coming down again or not... In fact everything in the house is on the crook. There's not a straight thing in it. What with the shoring up for the passage and the stairs and the coal cupboard, in fact we've got no convenience whatever. You're frightened to let the children upstairs in case they fall down. (Anstey and Elton, 1935)

The following testimony is, perhaps the most disconcerting. Mrs. Graves who had clearly been inextricably trapped in poverty and the tenement that is bound up with her economic situation is talking to the viewer, looking, unlike the others, directly into the camera:

I've been here for twenty-four years. And this last one, it has been a misery to me... I went to bed early. I had a baby very bad. In the morning, instead of getting up for the children to... for school, they'd been awake all night, I let the children lie. And as the baby went to sleep for the first time. So I had a little black dog, kept running about. So I must have dozed off with the baby. Thinking it was the dog on me head,

I looked up. Instead of that, it was a big rat. I screamed and ran out and left the baby. (Anstey and Elton, 1935)

Mr. Berner's family, wife and three children appear in the next cut. They are struggling to live, cook, eat, and sleep with a degree of cleanliness and decency in one room. No way to keep food overnight, but they have a washing facility in the back yard. Like most interviewees, Mr. Berner also expresses the hope that the council will provide "every working class man" with "hygienic conditions to live in." (Anstey and Elton, 1935)

The native sociolect used by the interviewees adds another layer of significance to this documentary. In a certain sense, this record of the language of urban poverty is comparable to the regional dialect collections of the folklorists of the same period. Except that, while hidden from the official public gaze, the people who speak in this film live in our midst not in far-flung islands or remote steppes.

Robert Roberts recalls the same atmosphere from the Salford of his childhood with enhanced literary sensitivity:

No one scorned the clean modest half curtain, but a newspaper across the panes showed all too clearly that still another household had been forced to hoist the grey flag of poverty. Doors were painted brown and roughly grained: any tenants daring to use a colour gaily different would have been damned as playing 'baby house,' a serious indictment in a world where the activities of childhood and maturity were strictly separated. (Roberts 33)

Recalling the industrial action by seamen, firemen and dockers in June 1911, Roberts's tone darkens:

A pitiless sun went down each day. Seamen, dockers, carters, miners stood in sullen little knots at a hundred slum street corners and talked and waited. A local priest spoke to the press of conditions:

These men are not hooligans. I live among them and know their poverty... Home conditions are terrible. I often have to visit dying people in a room where a family of seven or eight lives. I have seen many instances

of approaching starvation. One day I watched a man take off his coat and vest outside a pawn shop and, after a visit inside, give the money to a waiting child. (Roberts 96)

It is these textual vignettes, educational and emotionally stirring, but ultimately remaining academic, that comes alive in the socially motivated films of the documentary movement. In the aesthetic-experimental strand of the documentaries, perfectly exemplified in *Night Mail* (Wright and Watt, 1936), speed, movement, shade, dynamism, the life-giving essentials of the moving picture, played a defining role. In Grierson's words: "We could create rhythms and tempos, crescendos and diminuendos of energy to help our exposition... We could, by the juxtaposition of shots, explode ideas in the heads of our audience" (Grierson 22). Fewer visual experiments peculiar to the motion picture genre were deployed in the straight social documentary. Therefore, many of the images that pass through the film frames of the social documentaries remain with us as stills—iconic representations of the given theme. A photographic analysis approach, is, therefore,

justified, in their case.

Roland Barthes the French post-structuralist critic linked the visual image with the sociological method. Writing about photographs (which he appreciated above film), Barthes declares: "it is a matter of studying human groups, of defining motives and attitudes, and of trying to link the behaviour of these groups to the social totality of which they are part" (Barthes 15). Also in the context of photography, Susan Sontag (writing well before the age of the pliable digital image) reiterates and adds to the above consideration of the authenticating, procreational function of the visual image:

Photographed images do not seem to be statements about the world so much as pieces of it. [...] Photographs furnish evidence. Something we hear about, but doubt, seems proven when we're shown a photograph of it [...] the camera record incriminates [...] the camera record justifies [...] The picture may distort; but there is always a presumption that something exists, or did exist, which is like what's in the picture. (Sontag 4–5)

By Grierson's time, local government had the authority to pull down unhealthy slums and build new, open plan housing estates with modern amenities. This was far from being an exclusively left-wing agenda. It was the future Conservative Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain (of appeasement fame) who, (still as a Liberal Unionist) Birmingham City Councillor, headed the City Planning Committee in his native city, and, as early as 1911 pioneered healthy suburban housing development projects, which included the provision of running water and hygienic toilet facilities, especially for newly built dwellings. Significantly, the city government was allowed to take over property if the private sector failed to live up to the new standards. Other major cities, like Liverpool, adopted similar programmes, and the Unhealthy Areas Committee of the British Parliament (1919–21), of which Chamberlain was chairman (after having been elected to Parliament in 1918), was arguably also modelled on his own committee politics for urban reform in Birmingham (Pepper and Richmond). As health minister, Chamberlain introduced the Housing Act in 1923. These were Conservative (or Unionist as the Conservatives were then called) measures and drives.

At the other end of the spectrum, Sidney and Beatrice Webb and Charles Booth were campaigning, researching and writing about living conditions from a radical leftist perspective. Booth's massive (the third edition totalling seventeen volumes) survey entitled *Life and Labour of the People of London* (1902–3) examined the lives and occupations of the working class people of London often on a street-by-street basis.

By around 1927, many east-central European and Mediterranean countries adopted or were compelled to adopt populist-corporatist methods of government and National Socialism triumphed in Germany at the beginning of 1933. The solutions to endemic poverty of the interwar years offered by the right were often indistinguishable from those of the left. Except that, having abandoned the New Economic Policy first introduced by Lenin, from around 1928, Stalin's regime in the Soviet Union set out on a massive state housing development to satisfy the increased urban demand. Most of the new homes, however, showed persistent signs of faulty craftsmanship, which led to vocal complaints sustained even by some of the most dedicated devotees of the Soviet system (Sidney

and Beatrice Webb 931–940). These failures of mass urban construction, led to the idea, peculiar to the U.S.S.R., of dwelling-communes or dwelling beehives (Teige). The Federal Housing Administration in the United States, created in 1934 as part of Roosevelt’s New Deal, did not fit into the populist models as it did not aim at state or local government construction of homes for tenants: through the insurance of mortgage loans, it made possible and/or significantly increased home ownership in the United States.

Elton and Anstey’s witnesses firmly believe in a brighter future, symbolised by healthy social tenant housing in Britain. The reality, however turned out to be different. The Quarry Road Estate in Leeds, introduced in *Housing Problems* as an exemplary project, the hope of Mr. Norwood, Mrs. Hill, Mrs. Graves and Mr. Berner, “with a welfare centre, a shopping centre and all kinds of amenities” (Anstey and Elton, 1935) was never fully completed, little more was built there than some basic housing. There were no socialist or corporatist solutions on offer to the social and economic ills in Britain. Neither was there a British New Deal. The British solution came with the ‘natural’ suburbanisation of urban dwelling. By the end of the 1930s, the

prospect appeared to be that “the much-desired rehousing of the inhabitants of the vast, dreary Victorian quarters of our towns will take place in new suburbs beyond the recent suburbs” (Sharp 40–41). The ‘flight to suburbia’ had something to do with an acquired dislike for town dwelling as such. The neither town, nor country suburbia of Britain was thus born.

The British Documentary Film movement produced their work across a twenty-year period through the conduit of a number of quasi-government institutions, of which the Empire Marketing Board Film Unit was one. When the Empire Marketing Board was wound up in 1933, Sir Stephen Tallents and Grierson moved to the General Post Office (GPO) Film Unit whose turn it was to host the directors, cameramen and producers of the documentary film movement. It may be argued that the GPO film unit served as the UK’s first film school. The message of the films produced by the unit had an unmistakably, if not radically, socialist edge. The new film unit continued to look for new ways to communicate with the public under the aegis of the General Post Office.

The propaganda requirements of the Second World

War acted for the film unit almost as a dénouement in the sense that it finally had the opportunity to deliver on all the ambitions and expectations that Grierson and others had had imagined for it. Although Grierson was only in charge until 1937 (from 1938 he started working for the Canadian government) and the unit was renamed the Crown Film Unit from 1940, documentary film making and social propaganda came of age in Britain during this period. Although at the end of the war the Crown Film Unit became part of the new Central Office of Information, the ethos of its film makers remained unbroken. The new films included a rare foray by some of the movement's producers and directors into life in rural Britain under the aegis of Greenpark Productions. Between 1944 and 1947 unique portraits of life in the agricultural regions of Britain (e.g. *The Grassy Shires*, Ralph Keene, 1944; *Cornish Valley*, Keene, 1944; *Fenlands*, Ken Annakin, 1945; *Downlands*, Charles de Latour and Humphrey Swingler, 1947) were produced. Britain's comprehensive social rebirth after the war under Attlee's Labour Government is hard to dissociate from the vibrant social and economic optimism exuded by the images of the films made by the members of the documentary

film movement (*Addressing the Nation* 7–9).

Ironically, much as John Grierson and his colleagues were preparing to be the prophets of a new, popular cinematic genre, in reality these documentary productions were seen only by a few. While they had set out to achieve the maximum public enlightenment and a new art form at the same time, exploratory visual experiments and social documentaries were not the staple of the British cinema-going public whose numbers were steadily expanding in the 1930s. Yet, when Emeric Pressburger and Alexander Korda arrived on the British scene from the early to mid-1930s with the new agenda of popular entertainment, they found the core of a technically mature and socially sensitive film making community with whom they could set out to conquer the attention of the wider public.

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Romantic Ireland and the Hollywood Film Industry: *The Colleen Bawn (1911), The Quiet Man (1952), Leap Year (2010)*

A DRAMATIC OPENING: *THE COLLEEN BAWN* (BOUCICAULT, 1860 AND KALEM, 1911)

Pictures of Ireland and Irish life have long captured the imagination of the Hollywood film industry. Luke Gibbons pointed out that the American film industry soon realised the economic potential of the millions of Irish migrants who had arrived to the United States of America following the famine years of the mid-19th century (“Projecting the nation” 206). Millions of Irish migrants had arrived to the larger harbours of the Eastern coastline of the United States in what were often referred to as ‘coffin ships,’ in the hope of earning their living by working in the ever expanding building industry, or by becoming farmers in the more remote parts of the American West and Mid-West. Hardworking as these people were, it was not long before the Irish population of America had acquired considerable wealth and quite an influence in American society.

Hollywood filmmakers believed that it was economically viable to cater for the aesthetic needs and patriotic sentiments of these millions of Irish migrants. Hollywood filmmakers considered the extraordinary successes of one

Irish playwright in particular as the example to follow. Dion Boucicault, born into a family of French Huguenot origin, made his name during the nineteenth century by writing a series of financially successful plays on Ireland and Irish people. Boucicault’s *The Colleen Bawn, or the Brides of Garryowen* (1860) and *The Shaughraun* (1874), two of the most successful plays of the century, appealed to the nostalgic sentiments of Irishmen, home and abroad, through a display of lovable characters, picturesque settings and harmonious melodies. Richard Fawkes writes that these two, deliberately sensationalist, plays turned out to be great financial successes in New York, Philadelphia, San Francisco, and Boston, towns with the largest Irish population in America (115, 118, 195). These plays made Boucicault so successful that he even bought a steam yacht, named *The Shaughraun*, to house his company for the period when they were touring the major cities of the Eastern coast of the United States (Fawkes 195).

Boucicault had a real talent for creating lovable characters. *The Colleen Bawn*’s Myles-na-Coppaleen and *The Shaughraun*’s Conn are characters who immediately won the sympathies of audiences on both sides of the Atlantic

Ocean. Fawkes describes Myles-na-Coppaleen's character as witty, cunning, sentimental and utterly charming, created especially for entertaining audiences (117). Myles was a marginal character in Gerald Griffin's story, *The Collegians*, which served as a basis for Boucicault's play. He becomes the heart and soul of Boucicault's play, one who proves to be a trustworthy companion and a loyal friend. Conn, the Shaughraun, is a similar type of character. Boucicault, who played both Myles and Conn in the respective productions of the plays, described him as "the soul of every fair, the life of every funeral, the first fiddler at all weddings" (Parkin 268). Conn is both lovable and heroic; he goes as far as offering his own life for his friend, only to reveal later on in the play that he had tricked the whole company into believing that he had died for his friend, Robert Ffolliott.

Boucicault's characters moved in picturesque settings. *The Colleen Bawn* took the audience on an imaginary journey through the most beautiful parts of Co. Kerry, West of Ireland. There are scenes on the Lake of Killarney, the Gap of Dunloe, Muckross Head and Castle Chute. These scenes helped conjure up images of Éire (Irish for 'Ireland') in the

Irish community in America, the mother land which so many of them had left behind without the hope of ever returning there. For designing the stage, Boucicault preferred to use famous paintings of the Irish countryside or, when they became available, famous picture postcards of these beautiful parts of Ireland. This was done partly to appeal to the nostalgic sentiments of Irish migrants, many of whom immigrated to the United States from the West of Ireland, and partly to portray Ireland as a beautiful country so that audiences would feel proud of their Irish heritage. Authenticity was a key issue here as the playwright wanted his audiences to feel that they were back home in Ireland, the country of their long-lost relatives. Boucicault enhanced the nostalgic sentiments of his audiences by setting some of the scenes in 'authentic,' or rather 'authenticated,' Irish cottages or huts, where turf fire was burning, where whiskey was being served and where a pot of broth was always brewing for the welcome stranger.

Portraying Ireland in such a positive light paid off for Boucicault and for the actors and actresses who worked with him during the American tours. So much so that he could live a high society lifestyle, earning thousands of dollars each night, enjoying the comforts of mansions decorated

with custom-made tiles, oriental carpets and silver amenities (Fawkes 119). Given the popularity of Boucicault's play and its financial rewards, it is little wonder that *The Colleen Bawn* (1911) became one of the first cinematic portrayals of Ireland. A Kalem Company production, filmed on location in Killarney, Ireland, it was to be an 'authentic' and 'authenticated' portrayal of Ireland. Luke Gibbons writes the following about the filmmakers' authenticating approach:

The opening titles assure us that "[e]very scene, including interiors, in this Irish production was made in Ireland, and in the exact location described in the original play." As the story progresses—or digresses—the intertitles continually introduce non-sequiturs [...] assuring us that we are looking at "a real bog near Killarney's lake," and the exact reproduction of the original Danny Mann's cottage, not to mention in the climactic scene depicting the attempted murder of the eponymous Colleen Bawn, "the exact location including the real Colleen Bawn rock and cave." ("Narratives of the Nation" 72)

Gibbons is quick to point out that "there were no originals for Danny Mann's cottage or the rock and cave, as both characters and incidents are fictitious" ("Narratives of the Nation" 72). Characters and incidents were also fictitious in *The Lad from Old Ireland* (1910), another Kalem production filmed in Co. Kerry, in the West of Ireland. The movie tells the story of a young man who emigrates to the United States in order to escape poverty in Ireland; who becomes a famous politician over there; and who returns to Ireland to marry his old, country sweetheart, Aileen. As with *The Colleen Bawn*, only the setting was authentically Irish in *The Lad from Old Ireland*, for the principal actor, Sidney Olcott, was born in Canada and the principal actress, Gene Gauntier, in the United States. More 'authentic' in this regard was Robert J. Flaherty's film, *Man of Aran* (1934), shot on the Aran Islands, near Galway off the Western Coast of Ireland. Flaherty hired local people to play the roles of the nuclear family who are trying to survive on the Atlantic Islands in very harsh circumstances. The roles of the mother, the father and the child were played by Maggie Dirrane, Colman King and Michael Dillane, amateurs who had neither acting

credentials nor desire to be in movies. Known for his documentaries such as *Nanook of the North* (1922) and *Moana of the South Seas* (1926), Flaherty chose these people because his intention was to shoot a documentary of the life of the islanders. Flaherty's method of 'authentication' was so successful that audiences on both sides of the Atlantic Ocean were thrilled to see the courage and strength of those brave Irish islanders who were ready to fight the big Atlantic waves and, if necessary, kill sharks in order to survive on the Aran Islands. The film was advertised as a 'documentary.' Contemporary audiences were not aware that the American filming crew had to teach the local Irish how to slay the basking sharks swimming around the Aran Islands for the 'old custom' of killing sharks had not been practiced on the island for over one hundred years (*How the Myth Was Made*).

A CLASSICAL PINNACLE: JOHN FORD'S *THE QUIET MAN* (1952)

Celebrating romantic Ireland proved to be a financially successful decision for a number of Hollywood directors after the Second World War. John Ford's *The Quiet Man* (1952) was one of those post-war movies that celebrated romantic Ireland. Due to a three-film contract signed with Republic Pictures in 1950, Ford made three movies in very quick succession: *Rio Grande* (1950), *This is Korea!* (1951) and *The Quiet Man* (1952). James P. Byrne argues that, similar to the other two Republic movies, the story of *The Quiet Man* was "based on America's new-found standing as champion of democracy in the outer reaches of civilization" (30). At the time, the United States was involved in military action on the Korean peninsula, where it was trying to stop the spread of communist ideology in Asia (which already spread across Joseph Stalin's Union of Soviet Socialist Republics and Mao Tse-tung's People's Republic of China). Byrne argues that these historical circumstances had significant implications for Ford's movie in that the Irish landscape of *The Quiet Man* became "the

western landscape in which the American civilising mission could be played out as benevolent and naturally beneficial” (31). This would have corresponded to the political message of Ford’s two previous films, *Rio Grande* and *This is Korea!*, in which the beneficial effects of the civilizing mission were projected onto the silver screen. Ford, it seems, drew a connection between his earlier works and this new one by casting John Wayne, Kirby Yorke of *Rio Grande*, to play the character of Sean Thornton and Maureen O’Hara, Kathleen Yorke of *Rio Grande*, to play the character of Mary Kate Danaher in *The Quiet Man*.

In *Searching for John Ford* Joseph McBride presents a more comprehensive evaluation of the historical circumstances in which the film was made. While accepting the fact that contemporary anti-communist propaganda was, in fact, very important for director John Ford (who would have had some sympathy at some point in his career for the Irish-American Republican Senator Joseph Raymond McCarthy’s anti-communist ideology), McBride asserts that *The Quiet Man* was for the filmmaker a movie about returning to one’s roots (510). Due to this, the film was unlike Ford’s previous, Western movies, for instance *My*

Darling Clementine (1946), *Fort Apache* (1948) and *She Wore a Yellow Ribbon* (1949). *The Quiet Man*, writes McBride, is about a man who “search[es] for a fairy-tale homeland of transcendent ‘peace and quiet’” (510). The film is about a man, Sean Thornton, who returns from the United States to settle in the house of his parents, the house he left behind when he emigrated to America in the hope of making a living. Following his return, he falls in love with the beauty of the Irish landscape as he is falling in love with the village beauty, Mary Kate Danaher. Sean first casts an eye on Mary Kate as she is walking through a beautiful, green, lush Irish field, tending a flock of woolly sheep. Then they settle, much against the will of Mary Kate’s brother, Red Will, who only agrees to the marriage of his sister and Sean Thornton after being tricked into believing that the marriage would be financially beneficial for him by the local *shaughraun*, Michael Oge Flynn. Gibbons writes that the film is a “classic representation of romantic Ireland” filled with “claims of family, inheritance and communal rituals” which are “counterposed to American individualism” (“Projecting the nation” 210). Indeed, Ireland is represented by Ford as a very traditional

country, where the bonds of family and local customs are stronger than one's individual desires. This is done, however, with all the Hollywood accessories of a romantic love story, which significantly contributed to the film's success back then, and ever since ("Projecting the nation" 210-1).

The script for the film was adapted from Maurice Walsh's short story, "The Quiet Man," first published in the *Saturday Evening Post* in 1933, then in a collection entitled *Green Rushes* in 1935. Byrne writes that Ford bought the rights to make a film of Walsh's story as early as 1936 (30). Ford and the scriptwriter, Frank S. Nugent, administered significant changes to the original story so that the script could follow Walsh's original story, published in 1933, and would lose the very political edge of Walsh's 1935 version. The 1935 version is set in Ireland after the Irish War of Independence (1919-21), a war in which the Catholic majority of Ireland was fighting for Ireland's independence from the British Crown. This storyline is significantly reduced in the film; there are only a small number of references to the war, uttered by minor characters. What is kept from the 1933 version is the story of Sean, "the lad from old Ireland," who had emigrated to the

United States to make a living and who now returns to Ireland to rediscover the beauty of his country. Sean is a troubled man on his return; he goes back to Ireland to forget about his troubling experiences in Pittsburgh, where he worked as a professional boxer. The Ireland to which he returns is lush, full of life and full of a certain *joie de vivre*, not a country where people feel deeply distressed with the legacy of potato famines and poverty. This very positive representation of Ireland was much appreciated by Irish audiences on both sides of the Atlantic Ocean, as well as by the Irish Government, which backed the making of the film to help boost the appreciation of Ireland, at home and abroad (Flynn 160-3).

Ford's desire was not necessarily to project an 'authentic' image of Ireland but to project an image that would be appreciated by large audiences in Ireland, Britain and America. He and the producer, Merian C. Cooper, chose Ashford Castle as the main location for filming the movie. Eamonn Slater points out that Ashford Castle is, in fact, an Anglo-Irish demesne in Co. Mayo, known for its beautiful landscape gardening (147). Landscape gardening was a pastime of the aristocracy in Ireland, the religion

of whom was historically and predominantly Protestant, not Catholic. This is significant because of the many hints and suggestions about characters and objects ‘authentically Irish Catholic’ at the beginning of the film. There are shots of large fields, horse carts, characters in ‘typical’ Irish costumes and ‘typical’ Celtic crosses at the roadside, all of which suggests to the viewer that s/he sees images of the Irish countryside. This “countryside,” however, is “pleasure parkland,” “designed by landscape gardeners according to certain principles” (Slater 147). It is, therefore, a work of mathematical precision, the calculating methods of which had been developed by English landscape gardeners hundreds of years ago, and not a result of natural growth and decay. More importantly, Slater argues, “this type of gardening was not an attempt to highlight the exotic features of the Irish landscape, but to make those ‘natural’ Irish features look like an English landscape, a little England in Ireland” (147). Therefore, what the audience saw was an ‘authenticated’ rather than an ‘authentic’ Irish setting, a setting which was artificially made to create a romantic image of Ireland.

The Celtic cross, randomly positioned by the side of

an Irish road, is another ‘cultural oddity.’ As Slater points out, the design of the roadside cross in one of the opening images of the film does not follow the original ornamentation of a ‘typical’ Celtic cross (144). Medieval Celtic crosses, most of them dating from the 9th and the 10th centuries, were usually ornamented with biblical images; the crosses were most often decorated with sculptural representations of moments from Jesus’s life (Stalley 15–6, 33–37). The Celtic cross in the opening sequence of the film has no such decoration; its design is that of a series of circles which are made to resemble the well-known Celtic designs of interlocking circles, possible symbols of eternity. Slater asks rightly whether the cross was “an authentic ruin” or “a folly, constructed to look like a ruin” which was placed by the roadside to emphasise the fact that Ireland had had a long and respectable history, much longer than that of the United States from where Sean Thornton has just returned (144). Placing medieval crosses by roadsides, which appear alongside other ancient objects and customs of the past, allowed the director to weave a special thread into the texture of the film. Throughout the film, Ford is confronting his audience with the conflict

between *traditional* values and *modern* values, represented respectively by Mary Kate and the 'Irish values' of the local community of Innisfree on the one hand; on the other, Sean Thornton and the 'American values' that he brings home from Pittsburgh.

Celtic crosses appear in the courting scene which starts with Sean and Mary Kate going for a cart-drive through the Irish countryside, accompanied by Michaeleen Oge Flynn playing the role of the 'guardian of innocence.' The couple manages to sneak away from Michaeleen on a stolen bike and, now unattended, run through fields and rivers merrily, losing one or two clothing items during the course of their journey. At the climax of the courting scene the couple find themselves on the site of a ruined Gothic church; the ancient nature of the ruin made very explicit by the crumbling, arched Gothic window and by the many tilted, weather-worn Celtic crosses that decorate the site of the medieval church. Again, it is clear that the crosses are artificial constructions; their decoration suggests no connection to the religious ornamentation of the original Celtic crosses. Instead, the crosses stand in the graveyard as mementoes of Ireland's pagan past, as symbols

of Ireland's pre-Christian history. In a way, these crosses are modernised versions of ancient objects esteemed by the old traditions of an ancient country. This confrontation between *modern* and *traditional* is further emphasised in the short dialogue between Sean and Mary Kate, who arrive on the medieval site to take a short rest from the long walk through the hedge-divided fields. While Sean, in his usual business-like manner, would like to kiss his bride-to-be, she first shies away from the rushed action, listing a series of local customs that stand in the way of proceeding with the action that he desires. The old, local customs of "walking out" and "thrashing parties," however, are quickly dismissed by the young couple, who bury the old traditions in the graveyard of the church for a brief, romantic moment.

Speaking in Irish was considered to be traditional and was a mark of 'authentic Irishness.' Spiddal in Co. Galway, where Ford went to rediscover his Irish roots, was a Gaelic-speaking area. McBride writes that Ford was more than willing to talk a little Gaelic with the locals, who called him Feeney (after his father's family name). In fact, he used to call himself jokingly as "Sean Aloysius O'Fienne"

(McBride 510). Dion Boucicault used to use Gaelic words in the titles of his Irish plays, as marks of authenticity; *The Colleen Bawn* means 'The Blond Girl,' *The Shaughraun* means 'The Trickster' and *Arrah-na-Pogue* means 'Arrah of the Kiss,' referring to Arrah Meelish, the title character of Boucicault's play. The amateur actors of Flaherty's *Man of Aran* spoke a little Irish to add a local colour to the movie. Having local people speaking the local language helped to market the film as a 'documentary,' boosting ticket sales in box offices. A little Irish is also spoken in *The Quiet Man* but not necessarily to boost contemporary ticket sales, although no harm if doing so. In *The Quiet Man* the Irish language is used in the conversation between Mary Kate and the local parish priest, Fr. Peter Lonergan. Mary Kate confesses in Irish that she and her husband do not share the marital bed because he sleeps in a sleeping bag, on his own. Her confession is spoken in the Irish language with which many of the first audiences would not have been familiar. The Irish used in this scene helps emphasise the secretive nature of the affair and the secretive nature of her confession. As a rule, a confession is made in secret, in the confessional booth of a Catholic church; the information

communicated between confessor and the priest is only to be heard by the two of them, no one else. So is the case with Mary Kate's confession, the words of which are kept hidden from the majority of film viewers. Confessing in Irish signifies the very intimate nature of Mary Kate's confession. She finds it easier to talk about such an intimate matter in her mother tongue, the one which is closest to her heart. Fr. Lonergan is listening to Mary Kate's words of confession as he is trying to catch a fish from the local river, the very same river which was seen in the courting scene earlier in the film. This and other instances of the film suggest that Fr. Lonergan and Mary Kate feel at home in nature, they feel free to speak and free to act when they are in nature. Their intimate conversation in the beautiful, lush Irish countryside only helped heighten contemporary audiences' romantic sense of Ireland.

A ROMANTIC ENDING: ANAND TUCKER'S *LEAP YEAR* (2010)

Anand Tucker's recent movie, *Leap Year* (2010), has a similar plotline to that of *The Quiet Man*. *Leap Year* is about a second-generation Irish-American woman, who travels from Boston to Dublin to find love on the Emerald Island. Filmed just after the Celtic Tiger period of the 1990s and 2000s, the film follows the story of an emancipated young woman of Irish parentage, Anna Brady, who works as a successful stager in Boston. Anna and her cardiologist boyfriend, Dr Jeremy Sloane, are bidding for one of the up-market Davenport Cooperative apartments and Anna is hopeful that Jeremy will ask her hand in marriage. To her greatest disappointment, Jeremy gives Anna a pair of diamond earrings instead of an engagement ring and flies off to Dublin to attend a cardiologist conference there. So Anna decides to follow an old Irish tradition, of which she hears from her father. He tells her that her grandmother proposed to her grandfather on a special day when a woman was allowed to propose to a man. So without hesitation, Anna travels from Boston to

Ireland to propose to her boyfriend on the one extra day in a leap year, 29 February.

Similar to *The Quiet Man*, the various types of landscape through which Anna struggles her way from Boston, Massachusetts, to Dublin, Ireland, are more 'authenticated' than 'authentic.' First of all, the scenes that are set in Boston were not, in fact, shot in the United States but in Ireland, around Dublin Castle. The sense of authenticity with regard to the representation of the urban space of Boston, however, is effectively conveyed to the audience by the generic B-roll of the American metropolis, the density and hustle and bustle of which stand in sharp contrast to the rural tranquillity of the Irish landscape noticeable in the scenes that follow. Although for the greater part of the film the audience is invited to follow Anna's journey with her guide, Declan from Dingle, Co. Kerry to Dublin, the actual settings of the scenes are far off the main route that would connect the two places geographically. Accordingly, the audience can catch a glimpse of a lovely Irish village near Dun Aengus, the most famous prehistoric fort on the Aran Islands situated at the edge of a high cliff; of the Wicklow Mountains, one of the most-visited tourist sites

of Ireland located in Co. Wicklow near Dublin; and of the Rock of Dunamase, a rock formation in Co. Laois in the Midlands of Ireland. Instead of providing an authentic setting that would correspond to the actual route of Anna and Declan's journey, the inclusion of these well-known Irish tourist attractions projects a romantic image of Ireland that could be recognised and appreciated by a wider, international audience.

Besides the famous tourist attractions, the idea that Ireland was a place where nature was uncorrupted is further reinforced by a high number of shots of lavish, green fields as well as by the scene of the slow-moving herd of grazing cows that block the road to Dublin, thereby hindering Anna and Declan's arrival to the capital city. Similarly, the free-range chicken, which eventually ends up in a delicious *coq au vin*, serves as a romantic, rural counterpart to the chicken Anna knows from the freezer section of Boston's metropolitan supermarkets. Despite the fact that Anna's journey reaches its end in the urban space of Dublin, the image of Ireland as essentially rural and romantic is maintained even at this point. Instead of offering the picture of a busy city, the hustle and bustle of which would

be comparable to that of Boston, the main scenes set in Dublin represent the Irish capital as an essentially rural space. The aerial view of the river Liffey, a river that flows through the centre of the city; the long scene set in St Stephen's Green, the city centre public park: these affirm the rustic and peaceful character of Dublin, much in line with Tucker's representation of Ireland as a peaceful place.

Intertextual references also contribute to the creation of the image of Ireland as an uncorrupted space: the white swans swimming on the lake in St Stephen's Green might evoke in the knowing audience the peaceful images of Ireland depicted in the poems of W. B. Yeats, including "The Lake Isle of Innisfree" (1888) and "The Wild Swans at Coole" (1917). Associations to Innisfree are not accidental; Innisfree is the fictional location of Ford's *The Quiet Man*, used by the American director to reflect on the new political state of Ireland at the time ('inis free' [sic!] meaning 'free island' in English). Besides such subtle references, Tucker's *Leap Year* provides the audience with more explicit references to narratives of another kind, namely, myths. There is the myth surrounding the possibility of women proposing to their boyfriends on 29 February in a leap

year, which functions as a frame of the whole movie. Also, there are the several controversial remarks, some of them based on myths, some on superstitions, uttered by the locals of Dingle. In recounting the myth of Diarmuid and Gráinne, Declan contributes further to the evocation of Ireland as an essentially romantic space with age-old history and cultural traditions. The myth, which served as a basis for George Moore and W. B. Yeats's play *Diarmuid and Grania* (1901), is recounted in a setting that is of central importance with regard to projecting a romantic image of Ireland. Declan narrates the medieval legend about the love triangle between the great warrior Fionn, the beautiful princess Gráinne, and her paramour Diarmuid while he and Anna are exploring Ballycarbery Castle. Although a castle with this name does exist in Ireland, in Co. Kerry, the primary shooting location for the castle scene, the major part of which was computer-generated, was the ruins of Dunamase Castle, one of the most important Anglo-Norman strongholds on the Rock of Dunamase, in Co. Laois in the Irish Midlands. Besides the transformation of a now ruinous fortress into a breathtakingly beautiful, over-romantic and idealised setting, the use of modern

computer-generated imagery made the insertion of 'typical' Celtic crosses in the scene also possible. Far from being authentic, these Celtic crosses, randomly emerging from the ground, symbolise the old traditions of an ancient land, as did those crosses in Ford's *The Quiet Man*.

The opposition between 'authenticated' and 'authentic' also presents itself in relation to the actors. While the character of "Anna from Boston," as she is frequently referred to in the film, is played by the American actress, Amy Adams, the cheeky guy from the Irish countryside, Declan O'Callaghan, is played by the English actor, Matthew Goode. On the insistence of the director, Goode spent long hours with the Irish voice coach, Gerry Grenell, in order to learn the West of Ireland dialect so that Declan's character would sound 'authentically Dingle.' Goode remembers, however, that no one on set could understand a word he was saying, so instead of the originally proposed western accent, a fake Irish accent was eventually created by both the actor and the voice coach to signify Declan's Irish background (Movieweb). Goode's attempts at being authentically Irish are also perceivable in his character's relatively frequent use of the words "bob" and "eejit" (Irish

slang for ‘money’ and ‘idiot,’ respectively). Ironically, the authenticity of Declan’s Irishness is somewhat undermined by the Irish-born actors playing in the supporting roles of local Irishmen, people with whom the couple meet during the course of their journey to Dublin. Dingle is a Gaelic-speaking area in Ireland; the only Gaelic words of the film are uttered by one of the local men. “Go n-éirí an bóthar leat” (Gaelic for ‘May the road rise to meet you’) says one of the elders of the village as he wishes a safe journey for the young couple before they set off together to Dublin in Declan’s “classic” Renault 4. The words of the wish, in fact, constitute the first line of an old Irish prayer, not often uttered in public but most frequently displayed on tourist memorabilia. Quoting the words of the prayer at this particular point of the film, with no further reference to anything religious, seems to suggest that the words are not ‘authentic’ to the actual setting or to the moment in which they are recalled.

Tucker’s film abounds in ‘authenticating’ moments, far too many to mention. While Olcott, Flaherty and Ford made films primarily for audiences who were familiar with Ireland, their ‘home country,’ through a network

of family connections, Tucker and script writers Debora Kaplan and Harry Elfont were faced with the challenge of making a film which was to have a ‘universal’ appeal for a wider and more international audience. The majority of this international audience would have only heard of the country of Ireland through pop-up advertisements or tourist brochures financed by the intensive campaign of *Bord Fáilte Éireann*, the Irish Tourist Board, established in 1955, and of *Fáilte Ireland*, established in 2003. Films and filmmakers of the early twentieth century, for the most part, desired to speak to the patriotic and nostalgic sentiments of the Irish migrant community of America; films and filmmakers of the early twenty-first century thought about reaping the financial benefits of a more globalised interest in Ireland and Irish culture. Curiously enough, though, Ireland retains its image as a land of romantic love and of true values in Tucker’s new work, against which the corrupted values of the modern, materialistic world are clearly defined. Tucker, a director of a mixed Indian-German-Thai background, who classifies himself as a British filmmaker involved in the Hollywood film industry, still depicts Ireland as a country where turf fire is always

burning, where whiskey is being served and where a pot of broth is brewing for the welcome stranger. Curiously, this is happening against the historical background of the Celtic Tiger period of the turn of the twenty-first century, a period in which Ireland, once rural and traditional, was becoming increasingly more modern and industrial. Despite this, Tucker uses once more the well-known and well-marketed image of Ireland as a land of peace and tranquillity in his most recent film, *Leap Year*.

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John Huston's Adaptation of James Joyce's "The Dead": A Literary Approach

ÉVA PÉTERI | Film & Culture ▶

Watching an adaptation while being well-familiar with its literary source inevitably entails a curiosity whether the film is faithful to the original piece or not, even though fidelity itself will not necessarily make a good film. Fidelity can, of course, be understood in different ways: it can mean fidelity to words, to descriptions and other details, but it can also refer to the truthful rendition of the mood, of the spirit of the literary work. Literature and film obviously work with different tools: while the former solely relies on words, the latter produces impressive visual and auditory effects as well, providing, in all probability, a more definite and more clearly outlined impression. The filmic presentation of the last story of Joyce's *Dubliners*, "The Dead," was made by John Huston in 1987 and has attracted critical attention ever since. In Linda Constanzo Cahir's opinion, "The Dead" "is [...] suited to the screen" as it is "highly visual, exceptionally musical, and replete with richly suggestive characters" (212). Indeed, in this story—as in *Dubliners* in general—settings, colours, visual impressions, even music, have great, often symbolic significance. According to Roger Ebert, however, the story "would seem unfilmable," and regarding the fact that—as

most of the stories in the collection—"The Dead" tries to give an insight into the inner life of the main character, in this case that of Gabriel Conroy, Ebert seems to be equally right.

Concerning the film's fidelity to Joyce's text, critics usually regard Huston's film as a truthful rendition. According to Cahir, for example, "Huston's film is a feature-length example of a literal translation of a short story" (210). In his opinion the movie "recreates the details of the story with a fierce loyalty to the word" (212). Vincent Canby also regards the film as an "immensely faithful adaptation." It does not mean, however, that they are not aware of the definite and important changes Huston has made in the film, such as: the added character, Mr. Grace and his recitation; the longer discussion of music at the dinner table; the displacement of the story of Johnny, the horse; or the omission of a part of the journey to the hotel—just to mention a few.

More interesting, however, is whether the changes modify—and if they do so, then why and to what extent—the essence or the meaning of the story, that is, whether the film is a truthful adaptation in this sense as well. Concerning this aspect there is no critical consensus. Ann Pederson

praises the changes Huston has made in his film for, in view, these “add empathy and literary depth which do not detract from but enhance the whole” of the original (qtd. in Meljac 299). Cahir, on the other hand, writes that “while the film reconstructs the details of Joyce’s story, it fails to convey the mastery of symbolic design that Joyce’s work displays and it fails to convey the *life* that is there, in the words. The film seems inanimate, lifeless, a dead version of “The Dead” (213). The film, she adds, “hovers on the surface of Joyce’s work missing Joyce’s integral depth” (213) for failing to show the changes in the character of Gabriel and not leading to a full epiphany.

The story is very much centred around the idea of epiphany. Joyce means by epiphany “a sudden spiritual manifestation” (Tindall 10), an experience that is, according to Irving Singer, “spiritual without being transcendental” (658). Very often the Joycean epiphanies are related to objects and bring an understanding of the “whatness” of the so far insignificant, common impression the object made on its viewer before. In “The Dead,” epiphany is related to an understanding of human relations. It shows how and why the main character, Gabriel Conroy,

experiences epiphany at the end, following the course of a few hours’ events: attending the party of his aunts, the Misses Morkan’s, and then going to the hotel with his wife, Gretta, to spend the night there. Gretta’s revelation about her former lover, the long-dead Michael Furey, evokes empathy and a sense of deep humanity in Gabriel. In Singer’s view, it is also “a new realization about their marriage and the kind of marital attachment that has developed between them throughout the years” (658). According to Singer, all the story’s preceding events and details “are realistic preparation for the all-embracing epiphany at the end” (658). The film, however, is built upon a series of “subsidiary epiphanies,” and in this sense it is “a running interpretation, a feat of literary criticism [...] that guide[s] us through the accompanying realism and establish[es] a meaningful continuum in which there are more epiphanies than Joyce employed” (658).

The first added epiphany occurs during Mr. Grace’s recitation of the eighth-century Irish poem, “Donal Og,” translated into English by Lady Gregory as “Broken Vows.” The poem’s theme—that of lost love, longing and unfulfilled promises—is in obvious connection with the song

“The Lass of Aughrim” sung by one of the guests, the tenor Bartell D’Arcy later in the story, as well as with Gretta’s account of the death of her young lover in the final part. The movie shows how deeply the recitation affects Gretta, and we also see that Gabriel notices his wife’s strange distraction, yet he seems to be more concerned with his speech and with his other responsibilities than with Gretta’s “strange mood” (Joyce 2265). Film critic John Cribbs even suggests that the effect of Mr. Grace’s performance makes Gabriel more nervous about his toast (Cribbs). The film makes Gretta’s emotional distraction a recurring motif. A similar, though less emphatic, distraction of hers can be seen after Aunt Kate’s recollection of the memory of her beloved singer, Parkinson, and his “pure sweet mellow [...] tenor” (Joyce 2255) voice. The recollection reminds Gretta again of Michael Furey and his death. These added scenes about Gretta might serve as prefigurative references to her deep emotional reaction to the song “The Lass of Aughrim” in a later scene that has a vital significance in the story as well as in the film. But the two depictions are strikingly different. As the guests are leaving the Misses Morkan’s house after the party, Gabriel notices

a woman [...] standing near the top of the first flight, in the shadow [...] He could not see her face but he could see the terracotta and salmonpink panels of her skirt which the shadow made appear black and white. It was his wife. She was leaning on the banisters, listening to something. Gabriel was surprised at her stillness and strained his ear to listen also. But he could hear little save the noise of laughter and dispute on the front steps, a few chords struck on the piano and a few notes of a man’s voice singing. (2260)

In Joyce’s description, neither Gretta’s face nor the colours of her skirt are discernable, as she is standing in the shadow. Likewise, the song is almost inaudible because of the noise in the house. Visual and auditory impressions are blurred into mystery, and Gabriel thinks that the image is like a symbol. “[W]ere he a painter,” he contemplates, he would call it “*Distant Music*” (2260). The power of the impression thus strongly originates in the unintelligibility of the experience, in its suggestive quality, and this as well as the musical reference recalls the late nineteenth-, early twentieth-century idea about the superiority

of music among the arts. As Walter Pater famously commented: “[a]ll art constantly aspires towards the condition of music” (140), and, as Meljac claims, Joyce’s “The Dead,” though made up of words, “reveals itself to be a musical composition” (295).

Music is of central importance in “The Dead.” The musicality of the text is, of course, a primary feature. Music is also a theme of polite conversation and a means of entertainment: it accompanies dances and it is performed to an audience. The three musical performances described in the story produce different effects. Mary Jane’s technically brilliant academy piece on the piano remains emotionally ineffective; it has no deep impression on the listeners. The aged Julia’s singing of Bellini’s aria “Arrayed for the Bridal” elicits open praise—an honest one from Freddy Malins, and a rather ironical one from Mr. Browne. But music is most effective when distant. We do not know how clearly Gretta could hear the song, “The Lass of Aughrim” sung by Bartell D’Arcy, but according to the text “the singer seemed uncertain both of his words and of his voice” (2261), so even her perception must have been vague. The experience—Gretta’s auditory and Gabriel’s rather visual,

but still musical in nature, as the Whistlerian title indicates—evokes overwhelming emotion in both of them. Gretta has “colour on her cheeks and [...] her eyes [are] shining” (2261), whereas Gabriel’s “blood [goes] bounding along his veins” (2262).

Almost all these references are missing from the movie. First of all, nothing is made vague or distant. We can clearly see Gretta’s face, and dress, and all her surroundings, and likewise can clearly hear the song, the tune and the words alike. With a semi-circular stained-glass window behind her figure, with her scarf framing her face Gretta appears like the Virgin Mary. Even the bright red and blue panels of the window—that stand out from the generally brown-coloured world of both *Dubliners* and the film—support this impression, these being colours traditionally associated with Mary. As Nick Laird adds, Gretta’s “image turns to La Pietà when she opens her eyes and they are glossy with tears.” Truthful to the story the image is really like a painting: static for moments in the film. Ebert even comments that whereas Gabriel is only thinking about how he would paint Gretta were he a painter, Huston actually “paints her” (Ebert). Yet in style, it is a decisively different

picture than the one described in the story. The picture in the text is definitely impressionistic, while the filmic one is rather like a High Renaissance Madonna.

The association of Gretta with the Virgin Mary is not unparalleled in the literary criticism of the story either. According to Suzette Henke, “[s]ymbolically, the martyred Furey became a contemporary Christ figure, a mythic hero whose death makes Gretta into an eternal replica of the Virgin Mary as *Pietà*. She is forever an emblem of the *magna mater*, the mother/lover bearing a transfigured godhead in bereft maternal arms” (45). Henke also claims that it is ironic in the story that Gabriel feels lust “at the very moment when Gretta is most fully absorbed in reminiscences of Michael Furey, a lover whose passion took the form of sacrificial tragedy” (45). In a way it is ironic, but it is made possible precisely due to Gabriel’s lack of understanding the text and its connotations, and not being aware of the pain Gretta feels. Making these far too obvious, the film consequently shows Gabriel rather curious than sexually excited.

Henke’s claim about Michael being a Christ-like figure can be seen in other references as well. He dies for

‘someone else’—“I think he died for me” (2266), says Gretta in the story—and in a way he also becomes the saviour of Gabriel. Both the names of Gabriel and Michael are taken from archangels in Christian mythology. Gabriel is the angel of the Annunciation: he delivers the divine message of the Immaculate Conception to Mary. One of Mary’s attributes is the lily, the symbol of innocence and virginity, and in traditional Annunciation presentations Gabriel is holding out a white lily to Mary, its stem usually pointing towards her womb. Michael is the archangel of the Last Judgement. He is usually depicted with the scales, measuring the soul, making everyone face his deeds and worth—as Micheal Furey does, in the abstract sense, with Gabriel at the end. So whereas Gabriel is associated with birth, Michael Furey is associated with death. These symbolical references are also related to the story as a whole: the Misses Morkan’s party takes place on the Day of Epiphany (it is not directly claimed in the story but made clear by Mr. Browne at his arrival in the film), the 6th of January, when the Magi found the baby Christ in Bethlehem. The party, thus, celebrates birth and life, yet the discussions and thoughts are much more concerned

with death. At the dinner table they are talking about by-gone singers, they mention the monks who are sleeping in their coffins, Gabriel recollects the memory of his dead mother and contemplates the near death of Aunt Julia, and in his speech he also talks about friends who are no longer with them. Even his first comment at his arrival contains a latent reference to death, as he says that Gretta “takes three mortal hours to dress herself” (224I). As literary scholar William York Tindall points out, even Lily’s name bears a reference to death, as the lily is also a funeral flower (47). The latent “spectral presence” (Henke 47) of the dead Michael Furey is nicely shown in the film through Gretta’s memory already at the time of Mr. Grace’s recitation. It also shows how “a dead person has been haunting the proceedings the entire time” (Cribbs). It might also mean that the recitation scene could be an integral part of the narrative and is not evidently “hugely unnecessary, [or] at best the redundant precursor of the famous Distant Music scene,” as Cribbs believes.

When the dead Michael Furey finally ‘appears’ in the story—as Gretta starts talking about him—Joyce’s story shows how Gabriel’s reaction gradually changes from

anger and jealousy through shame into acceptance and empathy. As Singer writes, “[t]hough Gabriel has been excluded from this segment of [his wife’s] being, his love for Gretta elucidates for him the mythic plentitude that is epiphanized through what has erupted in her” (663). According to Cahir, his final “insight moves him from an arrogance of isolation and paralysis of soul to a wise understanding of his part in a common humanity and an emphatic connection with others” (212). Gabriel is indeed a paralysed character in the story, like most of the characters in Joyce’s Dublin. Singer regards Gabriel’s anecdote about Johnny, the horse, going round and round the statue of King Billy as a parallel to his own “enforced submission to civilized restraint” (661), his own paralysed life. In Joyce’s presentation, Dublin life in general means being bound by monotonous, daily routines, finding escape only in illusion or in drink. And though Gabriel is definitely superior to the other Dubliners depicted by Joyce—in intellect, in generosity, in solicitude—he realizes at the end that his life is still ‘frozen,’ lacking passion. All throughout the evening he “worries about the impression he is making on the other guests, particularly the young women”

(Denby 60), yet the lack of empathy—all his well-meaning notwithstanding—results in failing to communicate with Lily, Miss Ivors, even with Gretta. His ability to ultimately attain epiphany is very nicely shown in the story. Gretta, after her confession, exhausted by the stir of the party and the pain of the recollection of her past passion, flings herself onto the bed and falls asleep. Gabriel starts thinking of her revelation, of himself, of death in general. He finally lies “down beside his wife” (2268), tears gathering in his eyes and imagines seeing “the form of a young man standing under a dripping tree” (2268). He identifies himself with Gretta’s memory and pain. As Singer writes, “[h]e weeps for himself as an excluded male, but his tears are primarily a venting of sincere and passionate feelings about his wife’s devastating loss of vibrant impulses swallowed up in the distant past” (662–63).

In the film no such identification is shown. Gabriel remains physically as well as spiritually distanced from his wife, remaining standing at the window, with no tears in his eyes. His thoughts are mostly about Gretta and her passionate experience of love. And even though the Joycean text clearly says that “[he] did not like to say even

to himself that her face was no longer beautiful” (2667), gazing at Gretta’s sleeping figure in the film, he thinks that to himself she is still beautiful. The alteration implies that no “strange, friendly pity for her [could] enter [...] his soul” (2667), showing again the lack of empathy in the film. And instead of slowly falling asleep—as in the story—and thus being united with Gretta in sleep, he remains separated from her till the very end. Though musing about being united with the dead—his inner monologue relying much on the Joycean text—“the inclusiveness of [Gabriel’s] sorrow [implied in his words], not only for himself but for everyone, seems exaggerated, even disconnected” (Denby 60). And given his isolation till the end, it might be said that concerning Gabriel there is no full epiphany in the film.

The prefigurative epiphanies of the film, pointed out by Singer, and Gretta’s dramatic revelation in the hotel room may suggest that the film is perhaps more about Gretta and her haunting memory of Michael Furey, than about Gabriel. According to the story, the aunts are full of expectations about the arrival of Gabriel, whom they think they can rely on in issues and circumstances important or difficult, and Gretta only gradually gains significance to

be able to “rejuvenate [...] the moribund spirit of her husband” (Henke 48) in the end. In the film, however, she compels attention from the very beginning: she is “strikingly handsome” and elegant (Laird). “[W]ith her height,” as Laird writes, “she dwarves everyone in shot,” and though it is “Gabriel [who] is overprotective of her [...] she] looks as if she could pick up [Gabriel] and throw him over her shoulders” (Laird). Even the brief scene at the beginning, when Gretta is changing her shoes, while conversing with the aunts about her children left behind, is more memorable than her husband’s similar act of taking off his goloshes at the same time. Gabriel’s “scraping the snow from his goloshes” (2241) in the story symbolically suggests his aversion to snow associated in the story with Michael Furey and the West, and thus giving a counterpoint to his acceptance of both in the end. Huston does not mind the symbolic reference as his attention seems to be more focused on Gretta.

According to Denby, Huston’s “movie is lovely—a lyrical work—but it does not have anything like the same tragic strength” as Joyce’s story (60). But it might simply be a result of a different emphasis, and the film might be

considered as an adaptation of the story that—deliberately or unconsciously—places Gretta rather than Gabriel, her experience of passionate love rather than Gabriel’s epiphany, into the focus of attention.

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Sequential Arts: Moments From the Parallel History of Comics and Film

“TODAY FOR THE FIRST TIME IN MANY
DECADES, FILM IS LOOKING TO LEARN
FROM COMICS ONCE AGAIN.” (GARDNER 183)

ESZTER SZÉP | Film & Culture ▶

From the beginning of the 21st century Hollywood filmmakers have increasingly looked to comics for inspiration. The silver screen is populated by superheroes in tights and various mutants originally known from serialized comic books stereotypically read by adolescent males. Comic book heroes do not only star in their own films and mini-series, they increasingly make cameos in each other's adventures and populate entire universes in the newly found medium of film. Some critics see in the union of Hollywood stars and comics characters the end of creativity and originality. For others, like comics historian Jared Gardner, this *reunion* of the two mediums is only natural: film and comics stem from a common interest in movement and visuality manifested throughout the 19th century (181)—and now, with the new challenges of the 21st century, they have found each other once again.

In this article I show some ways in which film and comics meet at the dawn of the 21st century. First, thematic influences of comics on early 21st century film are briefly introduced, then, I reach back to the common origins of the above two sequential media to the late 19th and early 20th century, a time when comics was a lot more

widespread and popular than film. Afterwards, I explore some possible cultural manifestations and reasons for the interest of film in comics in our time: the return to seriality in filmic production, the re-emergence of *plastic bodies* from early comics in computer-generated filmic images, and similar interpretive strategies used by an unruly film audience and readers of comics.

COMICS AND FILM IN THE 21ST CENTURY

Hungarian visual theorist Sándor Hornyik calls the first film adaptation of *Sin City* (dir. Frank Miller and Robert Rodriguez, 2005) “moving comics” (114), and calls it one of the first examples of a new and successful genre. By the present year, 2016, a second film had already been made, *Sin City: A Dame to Kill For* (dir. Frank Miller and Robert Rodriguez, 2014), and the trend of comics-based movies seems to be unstoppable. Naturally, these blockbusters are of various quality. While some consider that the earlier adventures, such as *Sin City* and Sam Raimi's *Spider-man* (2002), found a balance between blockbuster aesthetics and the individual style of their directors (Rauscher 25),

the abounding sequels and prequels have become more and more predictable and less and less imaginative. As the influential comics theorist Scott Bukatman writes, the visually stunning action sequences in recent superhero movies is meant to impress, but is eventually counterproductive, as everything is predictable: these films “present more order than chaos” (122). At the same time Bukatman reminds us that the superhero movie is still a new genre, which is bound to change:

The superhero film genre in the first decade of the twenty-first century yielded a glut of nearly identical films featuring dumbed-down versions of characters that were still appearing, to better effect, in the comics, just as the early musical films out of Hollywood dumbed down Broadway song lyrics for a non-urban and non-urbane audience. So I’m far from certain that superhero movies have discovered their real voice. (118–119)

So, why do we have so many comics-based blockbusters? What is their promise? “The Full Comic Book Superhero

Movie Release Schedule” at *Newsarama.com* lists eight such movies for 2016, another eight for 2017, and a further 17 until 2020. With the sales of superhero comic books steadily on the wane, these films—and we should not forget about animation movies and TV mini-series—clearly do not aim at appealing to the attention of comics readers only. Long gone are the years when comic books were distributed in the millions: today, in the USA, 200.000 copies per issue counts as a bestseller and is a privilege of certain titles, while in the 1940s in the USA a million-seller was not without example (Gardner 183). Superhero films use comic books, but are not exclusively aimed at their readers.

I would also like to mention a parallel tendency in our present Western and Americanized culture: there is a recent interest in book-format comics, in longer narratives told with the toolkit of comics; often hardbound. These comics, marketed under the category of the “graphic novel,” usually, though not always, differ from comic books in several ways: they are made by one person rather than by teams comprised of writers, pencillers, inkers, and colorists. Their range of topics also tends to be less superheroic, more serious, often (semi-) autobiographical.

Graphic novels are marketed and distributed in a similar manner as books (Baetens and Frey 7–23.), and not like comic books, which can be bought at news agent's stands and specialty shops. Though the target audience of comics and graphic novels is different, the reading and interpretative strategies used by their audience is the same. Reading comics is a performance in which our whole body takes part (Hague 7). It involves all our senses, and many comics theorists state that due to the so-called process of "closure" reading comics is an especially active mode of reception. *Closure* is the act of imaginatively connecting distinct units on the page, for example two consecutive panels, or textual and visual units (McCloud 66). The reader has great liberty in this, and also has to do his or her share of the job of creating meaning.¹ At the same time we should not forget that comics reading is not a strictly linear activity: apart from the moment-to-moment reading that is required to perform closure, we also use our "global vision" when we scan and re-scan the page (Groensteen 19). Thus,

¹ Naturally, in some comics *closure* is smooth and is performed unnoticed, while other authors make the reader's job deliberately hard.

meaning is the result of the reader's work with various fragments found within a panel, on a page, in a book(let), and, perhaps, in an entire series published over several years.

The growing popularity of longer graphic narratives shows the relevance of the comics form today though the sales figures of graphic novels do not even approach the number of comic books sold. There is something in comics reading, in interpreting layers of information (words and images, panels, sequences, pages, books and booklets)² in a disorderly, non-linear and creative fashion, which intrigues the early 21st century consumers of culture.

THE COMMON ORIGINS OF COMICS AND FILM

Let me return to the original question: what is the promise of comics-based blockbusters? Possibly their most characteristic appeal is their visuality: in possession of almost endless budgets they not only use the latest CGI technologies but the very genre has been made possible by the existence of technologies to computer-generate images. The

² See Hatfield on the layers of juxtaposition in comics.

thrill of Batman diving from a skyscraper in Gotham³ or Spiderman fighting his way through the streets of New York allows us to look at the world from impossible angles, while the IMAX screen makes it possible for us to take part in extreme movements at extreme speeds. While the experience is reminiscent of the camera-handling of video games,⁴ these visual adventures have the same effect on us as the first movies had on their first viewers at the end of the 19th century: the movement we see is almost unbelievable, and incredibly exciting. We enjoy the show and are simultaneously aware that the images are not real—just like the audience watching Lumière’s *Arrival of a Train at the Station* in 1896. The following quote by film historian Tom Gunning describes how the first moving images were experienced—similarities with the digital spectacles of the present are not accidental.

³ Batman’s dive repeats that of many victims of the attacks against the World Trade Center on 11 September 2001, and thus visualizes traumatic memories and fantasies of the American public. For more see Hassler-Forest.

⁴ These “three-dimensional sets [are] comparable to the digital architecture of the navigable worlds presented in comic/film-based video games” (Rauscher 23).

Rather than mistaking the image for reality, the spectator is astonished by its transformation through the new illusion of projected motion. Far from credulity, it is the incredible nature of the illusion itself that renders the viewer speechless. What is displayed before the audience is less the impending speed of the train than the force of the cinematic apparatus. (“An Aesthetic of Astonishment” 740)

Early cinema, which Gunning calls the “cinema of attractions, [...] envisioned cinema as a series of visual shocks” (“An Aesthetic of Astonishment” 738)—just like today’s blockbusters.

I am spending more time with early cinema as it started at the same time as early comics. Audiences at the turn of the 20th century experienced a rapid development in image-making technologies. By this time, photographic practice was relatively widespread, and various visual and illusionistic performances were very popular. People used or owned gadgets or optical toys that made images move, such as the *thaumatrope* and the *zoetrope* (Gardner 4), they read about and visited screenings with Muybridge’s

zoopraxiscope or Edison's *kinetograph*. Comics and film originate in an age deeply interested in the visual representation of movement, but the two mediums stand for two different answers to similar questions. As Gardner writes, "the same experiments that led to the development of motion pictures also contributed directly to the development of sequential comics. In both film and comics, static images placed in sequence and separated by blank spaces combine to tell the story" (2).

Early cinema looked at comics for inspiration, and rightly so—comics were "the first true mass-media form" (5), read and enjoyed by the newspaper-reading public of the USA. From the last decade of the 19th century comics were distributed and read throughout the United States. Comic strips were usually published in the Sunday supplements of various daily papers, and were integral parts of the rivalling media empires of William Randolph Hearst (1863–1951) and Joseph Pulitzer (1847–1911). Naturally, advancements in printing technologies also contributed to the success of comics. Colour played an important role here, as indicated by the name of one of the most famous early comic heroes: "the Yellow Kid and other comic characters

became national celebrities, and their creators reaped huge profits" (Walker). At this time comics were an unruly medium lacking coherence: the strips were repetitive, often incoherent, contained several loops, lacked longer narrative threads, and were subversive. Well-known characters from comics greeted the audience on the silver screen, just like today (Gardner 19–28). As a result, early film shared several formal characteristics of comic strips, showing fragmented action without closure and conclusion—features that are more and more appreciated in our present time. This unorderly narrative format became more and more inconvenient for Hollywood, and the paths of the two mediums separated: Hollywood favored seamless, coherent and longer narratives over fragments. By the 1910s, film audiences were trained to dislike gaps and illogical connections, and people were taught to value continuity and clear structures with a beginning, a middle and an end once again.⁵

In the 21st century, however, we experience a return to seriality and fragmented narratives: open-ended stories,

⁵ See Aristotle's *Poetics* on this.

loops, and deferred solutions have risen in popularity with new serial cinema and new long-form television (Gardner 183). The system of prequels and trilogies in cinema, as well as television mini-series (Marvel's *Jessica Jones*, HBO's *True Detective*, the BBC's *Sherlock*, etc.) bring back the same aesthetic principles which were characteristic of early film and which are characteristic of how comics have been perceived by the public since the very beginning: in fragmented series. Seriality appeals to us once again; the rules for a decent coherent narrative brewed in Hollywood studios over the ages are left behind. This is why Gardner diagnoses the present as a moment when Hollywood film production is "*starting over*" (183), and is looking for another serial visual narrative for inspiration: comics. "[F]ilm is returning to a kind of origins even as it embraces new technologies and media unimagined a century ago when cinema and comics were beginning their experiments together. Today for the first time in many decades, film is looking to learn from comics once again" (Gardner 183).

VISUAL STRATEGIES

All cinematic strategies aimed at imitating or translating comics onto the screen will necessarily fail due to the special temporality of comics not characteristic of film. "Comics open up new modes of representing [time]" —writes Tom Gunning ("The Art of Succession" 44). Screened cinema flows in a linear succession, thus providing pre-dictated time for reception. However, as will be shown, we consume films less and less in screen environments. In contrast to film, in comics panels are simultaneously perceived, their co-presence on the page is essential. They are independent images and parts of a larger whole at the same time (Groensteen 18). The panel being read always stands for the present, but we see the past and the future as well. Moreover, the reader constructs the relationship among these frozen pieces of time and action. This elliptical formal characteristic of comics gives amazing power to the reader: to co-construct the plot together with the author(s), and as part of this, to linger at certain elements as long as (s)he wishes (Chute 7).

Returning to previous moments and making them

present, establishing connections by imaginatively traveling and transgressing the space of the page, are definitive characteristics of comics reading. Comics allows for enjoying what Bergson calls *duration*—non-measurable time, time as experience (qtd. in “The Art of Succession” 44). Film directors have used several strategies to translate this aspect of comics reading into the language of film. The split screen is an obvious solution, as it allows for the simultaneous flow of action at two different settings, in two different points of time, or to present a single action from various angles. This strategy, though it does not bring the temporal freedom of reading, brings about a recognition of the physical and special characteristics of any comics page: the varying size and form of panels, the significance of boundaries and of location. The action flows in a divided and hierarchized space. The split page also introduces the concept of closure, the imaginative investment of creating a coherent narrative out of elements.

In contemporary cinema various strategies are used to call attention to the act of looking, to denaturalize our relationship to what is projected to us. To give a comics-related example, in *Watchmen* (dir. Zack Snyder, 2009) the

flow of violent action scenes is always interrupted, the speed of the camera, or rather, the computer-generated simulation thereof, suddenly and abruptly slows down and speeds up time and time again. At the same time some films choose to reinterpret the aesthetics of comics and attempt to imitate some features of reading comics. Thus the visual design of *300* (dir. Zack Snyder, 2006) recreates certain panels of the original comic as faithfully as the medium allows, so much so that a special visual technique was developed to imitate the way our eyes scan the pages of the comics (Ecke 17). However, in the comics the text also takes part in creating the unique and dynamic visual world. This means the visual appearance of the letters and lines, as well as the location of the textual elements within the panel and on the page, contribute to the readerly experience of dynamism in *300*, while in the film version the monotonous narration has a flattening effect on the narrative that is already quite slow and languid.

THE BODY PROBLEM

Computer-generated imagery (CGI) defines the general visual design of comics-based movies. It takes part in creating characteristic atmospheres, it provides a fantastic space in which the superheroes act, and it also has a radical imprint on the way the very superheroes are represented. The human body is increasingly substituted by a computer generated body: it looks perfect, muscular, and weightless. Some characters are almost entirely computer generated, some lose the actual physical body of the actor only in the most spectacular action sequences. As a result, heroes and villains lose their materiality in the CGI world. According to Bukatman, the central problem of superhero films lies here, in integrating CGI with live action: “after Tobey Maguire pulls Spider-Man’s mask over his face, the figure on screen literally ceases to be Tobey Maguire” (121). Bukatman goes on to argue that the sight of the transforming body is also part of the visual appeal of superhero movies: civilians transform into superheroes, perfect superhero bodies get beaten up (but do not worry, they do not die), supervillains morph into amorphous

creatures in front of our eyes. These digital bodies are too safe—this is why, Bukatman argues, past traumas play crucial roles in these movies: “the digital bears no scars and no history, and perhaps this begins to explain why the narratives are so obsessed with trauma: the death of Spider-Man’s Uncle Ben, [...] Batman’s Shakespearean anguish over the murder of his parents. The X-Men films even brought Auschwitz into the mix” (122).

Gardner also writes about CGI bodies in comics-based films, and interprets the phenomenon slightly differently. Keeping an eye on comics history, Gardner sees a parallel in the present fascination with what he calls a “plastic body” (184) and a similar fascination with resilient bodies in the early American comics strips at the beginning of the 20th century. The unruly and repetitive early comic strip deals with the challenges a person has to face in the modern city: crowds, fast transport by automobiles, fast life, immigration, and class conflict. The heroes of these strips, for example, the Irish immigrant Happy Hooligan, are constantly assaulted. Bodily harm is done to them repetitively, but by the next strip they seem to have forgotten what has happened to them: they never learn. And this

is where Gardner sees a parallel with our present fascination with CGI bodies. He argues persuasively that the early comics “celebrated the modern body’s *resilience* in the face of the same forces, its ability to bounce back, to recover” (9–11). These early strips are about plastic bodies that rebound and regenerate, bodies that cannot be harmed permanently. The story is secondary: the true heroes are the resilient bodies facing the challenges of modernity. And, according to Gardner, in the recent superhero fascination we see that the fantasy of the plastic body is reborn. It is worth quoting Gardner at some length:

But this is not an indexical, realist body—not the body of traditional cinema—but a *cartoon* body, one whose strength and resilience derives from the iconic powers of representation. This helps at least partly explain the rise of the superhero adaptations in a post-9/11 United States [...] Repeatedly these superhero movies put on display digitally sculpted bodies that are tortured, shot, burned, and even atomized and yet are able time and again to recover, to return, to be reborn. (184)

Interpreting the current popularity of CGI bodies along with the history of comics helps us understand the phenomenon: like a hundred years ago, the fantasy of the rebounding plastic body is an answer to the challenges we face and it is a way to experiment with the responses we might give to them.

PRACTICES OF READING

In the final section of this chapter I would like to turn to a similarity between comics and film that is not based on thematic, formal, or representational similarities. There is a vital resemblance between the interpretative strategies of early 21st century viewers of comics-based films and comics readers. The return of film production to serialized narratives and non-coherent structures (sequels, prequels, trilogies, universes, mini-series) also show that Hollywood is looking for new inspiration on the margins of its own narrative tradition, which favors closed narrative units. In Gardner’s words: “What Hollywood is after... [is] an understanding of the ways in which comics readers *read*” (183). How do they read? As already mentioned,

they scan diverse and fragmentary visual input and construct a story from elements which, in the case of a comic book series, could have been published months or years apart. Why does Hollywood experiment with comics and comics reading?

Technology defines how products are received: with home video, and now DVDs and film downloads, films are increasingly consumed outside the cinema framework. After almost a century of taming the cinema audience, films are being enjoyed in unruly and uncontrollable ways once again, just like at the beginnings of the medium in the time of *thaumatropes* and *zoetropes*. The viewer has increasing control over his or her consumption of films, and can also manipulate the film's time frame by rewinding and pausing. The spectator of the 21st century navigates the web on a regular basis, where (s)he is exposed to discontinuous visual and textual content. When watching films, aided by both technology and alternative content, the viewer can be just as undisciplined and as solitary as the reader of comics. Film production also adapts to this: the 'Ultimate Cut' DVD edition of *Sin City* also invites collectors to reedit the film and engage imaginatively with

paratexts (Gardner 190). Gardner says: "the increasingly intimate reunion between comics and film has everything to do with Hollywood seeking out ways of engaging an increasingly unruly spectator without ultimately surrendering much, if anything, in the way of meaningful power. Comics are sought out in the twenty-first century by global media corporations, [...] because they are largely perceived as unthreatening, safe access to a different kind of storytelling that is increasingly in demand" (191).

This article has addresses the current tendency of engagement with comics in contemporary cinematic production, feature films, mini-series and animation. In the mapping of contemporary phenomena enabled by the latest image-making technologies a historical perspective has also been maintained: it is important to remember that comics and film started out from a very creative and unruly 19th century, a time for visual and optical experiments. (American) comics have maintained some aspects of this unruliness in both their format and publication practices, while (Hollywood) film has moved on to a more standardized storytelling format which resulted in more regulated narratives. Some of the possible reasons for

American mainstream cinema's reaching back to comics have been identified in challenges of contemporary culture. First, interpreting scattered information, creating relationships between bits and pieces—which is a basic aspect of comics reading—is recognized as a more general strategy of cultural consumption. Second, the computer-generated muscular bodies of superheroes have been read parallel to early comic bodies, and though these bodies look very different, they are common in their resilience and plastic nature—they both offer themselves for experiments in the search for answers in times of uncertainty.

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The English 'Monarchy
Film' Revisited: From
The Private Life of Henry VIII
(1933) to *Elizabeth* (1998) &
The Queen (2006)

“WHEN THE REAL IS NO LONGER WHAT
IT USED TO BE, NOSTALGIA ASSUMES
ITS FULL MEANING.” (BAUDRILLARD 171)

British filmmakers are either renowned for working within a particular genre (e.g. Merchant Ivory in history, Ken Loach in socialist-realist films), or are considered 'genre-hoppers' like Michael Winterbottom, Danny Boyle and Stephen Frears. In James Leggott's opinion, while British cinema may have a prestigious tradition of realist drama, "it has been poor at mythologising the worlds around us, a feat achieved by Hollywood, which created iconic genres (westerns and gangster movies) from the experiences of agricultural labourers and immigrants of early 20th century" (53).

However, I would argue that Britain, despite (or simply because of) her 20th century decline, obsessed with her 'glorious past,' the monarchy, and the Empire, likewise created a new iconic genre, 'the monarchy film' of the 1930s, something marketable all over the world, including the US. The founding father of 'the monarchy film' Hungarian-born Alexander Korda (born Sándor László Kellner), sought to create high budget quality 'history' films (to literally outshine low-budget quota films), which was international while based on national (English or British) history, a genre meant to succeed worldwide and survive in the long run.

In the following I intend to show that the British—or rather the English—monarchy (because of recent devolution attempts) and the monarchy film itself have not only succeeded and survived, but are still trading well despite the ever-present problems of marketing, profit-return, and so-called historical accuracy or 'authenticity,' the latter being an issue since 1933, the first screening of Korda's first quality history film, *The Private Life of Henry VIII* (Alexander Korda, 1933), until 2006, when *The Queen* (2006) (on Queen Elizabeth II) by Stephen Frears was symbolically 'crowned' by the American Oscars Prize.

There are many partly synonymous, partly overlapping terms for describing *history* or *historical films*, from *period* to *biopic*, from *monarchy* to *costume drama*, from *quality history* to *heritage*, to name just a few of the most frequently used ones. Leggott distinguishes further five (overlapping) categories in British period films: *literary adaptations*, the *biopic*, the *monarchy film*, the *war film* and the *representation of the 20th century* (77). According to Kara McKechnie's 2002 definition (217), the history film (although not a blueprint for historical accuracy) is concerned with actual historical figures, while the costume

film is set in a recognisable historical period, but with fictional characters. Within the history film category there is a small but distinctive number of films about monarchs, called the monarchy films. Although these films are often associated with the 1930s, for example, *The Private Life of Henry VIII* (A. Korda, 1933), *Victoria the Great* (Herbert Wilcox, 1937), *Tudor Rose* (Robert Stevenson, 1936) and *Fire Over England* (William K. Howard, 1937), the so-called *monarchy film* endures to the present day after some periodic revivals. One reason for this could be that historical and costume films are predominantly based on the lives of celebrities: royalty, political or religious figures and artists. Moreover, British historical cinema is somewhat 'fixated' on periods of national greatness such as the Elizabethan, Jacobean and Victorian eras, reflecting a British desire to revisit history "in the wake of new definitions of Britishness and Englishness in a devolved nation, now that England's myths have been degraded by revisionism" (McKechnie 218).

The monarchy film comprises a small but significant area of British film production, having undergone postwar and contemporary 'periodic revivals,' re-modelling kings and queens according to the need of the age as we shall see

in both *Elizabeth*, and *The Queen*. René Pigeon claims, that these films even tend to 'humanise' British monarchs (15).

I would also argue that the success of 'the monarchy film,' irrespective of the era it is set or created in, always lies in its fine duality: representing both a witty criticism of the monarchy and traditional national pride. I also wish to prove the validity of Leggott's statement (79), "that monarchy films always speak to the present" with case studies of the following three monarchy films: *The Private Life of Henry VIII*, *Elizabeth* and *The Queen*.

Since the late 1920s British cinema debates have focused both on economic issues and on the significance of the cinema's function in the presentation of national history and culture. *The Times*, as early as 1926, advocated setting up a national film studio and argued that "films without national identity were dangerous corrupters of the public imagination, as such they had the effect of drugs or lying teachers." They also insisted that priority should be given to cultural quality and that "films should be of and for the British Empire, produced within the Empire, depicting its life history and high morality for which it stands" (qtd. in Harper 9).

Susan Harper also quotes participants in the 1927 House of Commons debate of the Cinematograph Films Act advocating for “marshalling historical film into notions of the national interest.” The British Board of Film Censors (BBFC) in their 1931 list of ‘forbidden topics’ forbade “lampoons on the institution of monarchy, and libellous reflections on royal persons or families, whether British or not” (9).

From 1933 to 1939 BBFC expressed an increasing intolerance towards historical inaccuracy and sensationalism, consistently criticising bad language, ‘coarseness,’ and the impugning of royal reputations past or present. While historical accuracy was desirable, modern audiences also needed moral protection from the excesses of ‘real history.’ They found, according to Susan Harper, that the proposed *Catherine the Great* (Paul Czinner, 1934) was factually acceptable but “demanded a cut in the unpalatably large number of bedroom scenes” (12).

However, historical films have played a significant role in British film profit since the 1930s. There were two early peaks of popularity and high profit: in 1934/1935 with Korda’s films and in 1937/1938 with Wilcox’s *royal biopics*.

Their success occurred amidst combination of official pressures, institutional constraints, economic determinants, market demand, ideological conditions, as well as the rise of the so-called ‘middlebrow’ cinema in the 1920s and 1930s favoring history and monarchy films: “They were supported by the suburban middle classes as distinct from the consumption of Hollywood cinema” (Vidal 25).

Korda’s history films, which conquered both British and American audiences, combine a romantic, populist view of history with a degree of visual spectacle that is rare for British cinema. They also demonstrate the flexibility of the history film, and the monarchy film as well, as a genre both for entertainment, and responding to ‘the burning questions of the day’ at the same time. The most successful of Korda’s films were focused on specifically British topics (Chapman 44).

When *The Private Life of Henry VIII* was first screened in October 1933 Germany had withdrawn from both the Geneva Disarmament Conference and the League of Nations, yet the British National government under Ramsay MacDonald was reluctant to increase spending on armaments. When Thomas Cromwell encourages wise

diplomacy in the film, Henry VIII responds in the following: “I am an Englishman and I can’t say one thing and mean another. What I can do is build ships, ships then more ships.” Cromwell replies: “To do that will cost us money,” to which Henry VIII retorts: “To leave it undone will cost us England” (Korda, 1933).

Greg Walker suggests the film was a “strident call for rearmament in a political climate dominated by appeasement” and was even ahead of its time. James Chapman, however, doubts that contemporaries were aware of these possible meanings in the film, and thinks that the cinema-goers responded more to the historical and visual qualities of the film, as it presents the past as a site of pleasure and bawdy humour (33). The *Cinema Quarterly* regretted that ‘the private life formula’ meant the omission of the wider historical context, nevertheless it judged it successful (qtd. in Chapman 29). Korda must have been attracted to the ‘private life formula’ because of its commercial potential and because of the BBFC. Jeffrey Richards agrees that “the film avoids concentration on real social, political, economic, religious problems to avoid controversy, censorial intervention or to risk low profit. Thus

there is no mention of the break with Rome, the film begins only in 1536 with the execution of Anne Boleyn” (260).

Henry VIII and his subjects are united by a set of common values. Henry is responsive to the needs and opinions of his subjects, such as the royal barbers. The lower classes are also represented by the kitchen servants, who share the king’s desire for a male heir. The film validates the institution of the monarchy, a central element of consensus politics. One of the recurring themes in the film is the question of whether or not the king should marry again to produce another heir. The English also distrust all foreigners in the film. When Holbein is sent to paint a portrait of Anne of Cleves, Henry VIII insists that Peynell is sent “to watch Holbein.” Another example is the French executioner from Calais, “a shame to employ for the execution of Anne Boleyn, when half of the English executioners are out of work” (Korda, 1933). When the film was screened in 1933, there were nearly 3 million unemployed in England, representing 22% of the insured workforce in Britain (Constantine 3).

Andrew Higson states that ‘the staginess’ of British film has also been an intentional strategy to differentiate

British films from Hollywood. Aspects of forms, such as frontal staging, long takes and a predominantly stationary camera, are all intended to enhance a film's pictorial qualities. Many scenes are filmed as frontal tableaux, and while the camera is mobile, there is a relative absence of movement in the frame. The formal composition of the film, therefore, privileges the individual shot, rather than a sequence of shots (*montage*) (25). The best example of this is Henry VIII's (Charles Laughton's) first appearance. It is a perfectly symmetrical shot, framed by the door, with Laughton standing in the centre, resplendent in his royal robes, his legs apart and his hands on his sides as if had just stepped out of Holbein's 1536/1537 protrait.

Korda was acclaimed as "the man who made the world conscious of British (history) films" (Vidal 35). In hindsight, Chapman writes the *The Private Life of Henry VIII* can be seen as an important early step in Korda's calculated bid to establish himself as a major independent producer. He had already secured a deal to make quality films for distribution by the American United Artists before the film was released. Following the success of the film, Korda was able to secure financial backing for the building of a

brand new studio complex, Denham Studios, by 1936, as London Films had hitherto been a 'tenant' at Elstree (37).

Korda even contracted Winston Churchill to write a series of short films, which were sadly never made. *Lady Hamilton* (1941) was Korda's (and Churchill's) most significant contribution to the propaganda war. It was a Hollywood British film made in California supported by the Foreign Office behind the scenes. Chapman claims that Nelson's words spoken in the film echo directly part of Churchill's famous 'finest hour' speech of 18 June 1940 (Hitler knows that he will have to break us in this island or lose the war). Churchill himself may have written this part of the dialogue (41). Chapman adds, that it is no surprise that Korda was the first film producer to be knighted in 1942, and while cynics may suggest that it was Churchill's reward, there can be no question that Korda did more than anyone else to establish the cultural and commercial viability of the British historical film (44). Belén Vidal argues

that art cinema shifted the focus of criticism in the 1950s from craft and realism to the uniqueness of vision of the individual artist. In the 1960s quality

cinema started to be displaced by the politicised aesthetic of art cinema and the avant-garde, and the changing taste of younger and more diverse audiences. From the 1960s Free Cinema to Black British cinemas in the 1970s, and 'the state of nation' films of the 1980s, realism has progressively lost its consensual connotations, taking on instead the politically charged agenda of oppositional cinema. (23)

At the same time, according to John Hill, "the versions of nation on display in the critically valued quality films privileged 'Englishness' or more specifically a distinctive Southern take on white, middle-class Englishness, at the expense of other national (Scottish, Welsh, and Irish) and regional identities within the UK; these films were explicitly 'consensus-seeking' as they highlighted the 'elements of national character' that were regarded as binding the community together" (33).

History and monarchy films made in the 1970s—*Henry VIII and his Six Wives* (Waris Hussein, 1972), *Mary, Queen of Scots* (Charles Jarrott, 1972), *Luther* (Guy Green, 1976) etc.—all contributed to the revival of the genre in part provoked and

financed by successful television historical series, a trend to be repeated 30 years later, in the 2000s, or the 'Noughties.' Although the number of feature films produced in Britain each year had been falling steadily since 1972, to an all-time low of just 24 films made in 1981, they picked up again in the mid 1980s, when, according to Sarah Street, the average number of films produced each year was more than double the output of 1981, partly due to heritage films (114).

The term *heritage film* was first used by Charles Barr in 1986 in relation to the 1940s films dedicated to the "rich British heritage" (qtd. in Leggott 81). However, the term quickly became associated with a certain type of *period drama* that came to prominence in the 1980s, typified by films such as *A Room with a View* (James Ivory, 1985) and *Howards End* (James Ivory, 1992). The heritage text was commonly understood as a film that drew upon a work of classic literature, dwelt upon the lives and properties of the upper classes, and was set roughly in the period between 1860 and World War II (Leggott 82).

The film marking the recovery of British cinema in the early 1980s was *Chariots of Fire* (Hugh Hudson, 1981), a period film based on the true story of the rivalry between

two runners, who eventually won places on the British team for the 1924 Olympics. The film had many of the hallmarks which typified subsequent heritage films: precise and loving photography of sites of national heritage (in this case, Cambridge University), a focus on male rivalry and bonding, and a nostalgic view of the past. It heralded the ascendancy of the most dominant British genre for the following decade: quality historical films (often also referred to as heritage), including *Heat and Dust* (James Ivory, 1987), *A Passage to India* (David Lean, 1985), *Maurice* (James Ivory, 1987), *The Remains of the Day* (James Ivory, 1993) etc. These were box office hits in both Britain and America, continuing the profitable export of films which offered a particular construction of Englishness (Street 115–116).

The so-called heritage debate that ensued amongst scholars of British film culture initially called attention to their political implications, with some commentators deeming them to be nostalgic and conservative within the context of reactionary Thatcherite ideology. But further analysis, prompted by gay and feminist readings, led to more nuanced and varied positions regarding their gender politics, their appeal to audiences,

their umbilical link with the heritage industries, and their generic delineation and coherence (Leggott 81).

Ironically, as Sarah Street states, the Thatcher years provided the Cultural-political background to the revival of British cinema in the 1980s. While Thatcher's commitment to the market economy offered little assistance to film producers, a fortunate combination of temporary tax incentives, the multiplex boom, and the international success of heritage costume films saved the industry from extinction. Since the Thatcher government left the film industry dependent on television, particularly Channel 4, it meant that many lower-budget films that found funding were critical of Thatcherism (115).

According to Claire Monk, in the 1980s the notion of 'quality' became the basis for the exportability of British cinema as it had been in the 1930s (184). Charlotte Brunson speaks about four markers of quality present in these productions: "a 'literary source,' 'the best British acting,' 'money' (in lieu of an expensive look) and 'heritage export appeal'" (qtd. in Vidal 24).

Heritage film, however, represents just one aspect of the heritage industry as a whole, and it is not confined to

Thatcherite Britain, but is a characteristic feature of post-modern culture. The heritage industry may transform the past into a series of commodities for the leisure and entertainment market, but in most cases the commodity on offer is an image, a spectacle, something to be 'gazed at.' History, the past, becomes in Fredric Jameson's phrase, "a vast collection of images" (66).

In Higson's opinion, "the past is displayed as visually spectacular pastiche, inviting a nostalgic gaze that resists the ironies and social critiques often suggested narratively by these films" (91). It is the tension between visual splendour and narrative meaning in the films which makes them fascinating. As much as the films turn away from modernity toward a traditional conservative pastoral Englishness, they also turn away from the hi-tech, special effects dominated aesthetics of mainstream popular cinema. They transform the heritage of the upper classes into a national heritage: private interest become naturalised as public interest. Still, these are films for a relatively privileged audience. The national past and national identity emerge in these films not only as aristocratic, but also as male-centred, while the nation itself is reduced to the soft

pastoral landscape of southern England untainted by the modernity of urbanisation or industrialisation (Higson 92).

The election of New Labour in 1997 with its modernist agenda and the continuing economic upturn of the late 1990s and early 'Noughties' saw a significant shift in the heritage film: a widening of the heritage appellation by primarily locating films in present-day London. Films such as *About a Boy* (Chris and Paul Weitz, 2002), *Love Actually* (Richard Curtis, 2003), *Closer* (Mike Nichols, 2005), and *Notes on a Scandal* (Richard Eyre, 2006) etc., all examine the City in different ways, exploring elements of the changing metropolis by focusing on class, cultural difference, sexual deceit and reconstituted family structures within a middle- or upper-middle-class framework. *The Queen* (Stephen Frears, 2006) also tackles some of these themes in the recent past of 1997 but can, at the same time, be considered a modern monarchy film. As Fitzgerald remarks, the use of a leading British star (Hugh Grant, Jude Law, Judy Dench, Helen Mirren, and Keira Knightly) for each film as was the case with earlier heritage films, is important, but there is also as much concentration on the *mise-en-scène* as on the narrative (Fitzgerald 47).

Let us now examine two new heritage films to illustrate the simultaneous change and continuity in the genre. In Julianna Pidduck's opinion *Elizabeth* (Shekhar Kapur, 1998) marks a postmodern turn in the British period drama, allowing a playful, performative sensibility to overtake the realist mode. Furthermore, contrary to a British heritage tradition premised on precise dialogue, pastoral mis-en-scène and subtle dramas of love and class distinction, these Elizabethan films (including *Shakespeare in Love*, John Madden, 1998) employ the lexicon of corporeality and sensuality (172).

Moya Luckett agrees that *Elizabeth* narrates a 'new history,' one that reinforces the power of images over archival knowledge, and thereby legitimises a similar strategy for more contemporary narratives. The film might be seen in the light of Tony Blair's attempts to update the monarchy by demonstrating how the image of a monarch might produce national renown, even in the face of very real domestic problems and their potential threat to nationhood (91).

According to Renée Pigeon *Elizabeth* has both "the vulnerability of Lady Diana and the ruthlessness of Thatcher," and can be popular both with left- and right-wing audiences

(19). Elizabeth's survival in history and within the narrative of the film proves the strength and necessity of the long-term survival of the English monarchy, where the monarch is not only the head of state and of the Commonwealth, but (though often forgotten in our globalised and secular world) is still the 'head' (more precisely by title since 1559, *the governor*) of the Church of England, too. As emphasized in *The Queen*, Diana, just like young Elizabeth, was ruled by her heart unlike Queen Elizabeth II, who rules the monarchy by and through tradition. And as *Elizabeth's* transformation into the Virgin Queen was inevitable both for her personal and institutional survival, the transformation and renewal of *The Queen* (Elizabeth II) is also necessary for survival. Paradoxically, however, *The Queen* itself, although directed by Stephen Frears, a well-known socialist-realist director (and genre-hopper), contributed more to the survival and renewal of the monarchy through the film's positive reception rather than its explicit criticism. Using Korda's traditional recipe of monarchy films, the viewer is reminded that the Queen might be old-fashioned, but still has enough humility to seek consensus and enable renewal and survival. However, more sceptical critics, like

Higson, claim that “by aiming for the middle ground, the quality heritage film risks falling between two stools, neither genuine art nor genuinely popular” (qtd. in Vidal 27).

As success is defined mostly by profit and US reception, it is equally important, according to Martin A. Hipsky, that heritage audiences in America are composed of those in search of ‘the cultural capital’ to which they believe their educational background entitles them. Heritage films made in the 1990s thus became more ‘painterly’ to serve American audiences, as well. This is particularly noticeable in the use of tableaux (99). Gibson remarks (122) that the director of *Elizabeth*, Shekhar Kapur, a veteran of Bollywood, also wanted “to use some finesse, some melodramatic and chaotic tone, something like the intrigue of *The Godfather* (Francis Ford Coppola, 1982) and the shooting style of *Trainspotting* (Danny Boyle, 1996).”

While there is consensus among filmmakers on the necessity and marketability of visual period accuracy, the role of ‘the historical truth’ within the film’s narrative and its parameters has always been met with a more ambivalent response from critics and audiences. Whatever the current fashion in monarchy films, the expectation is

always that it will represent history ‘as it really happened,’ but the key to convincing audiences that historical truth is being represented appears to lie in the film’s ability to reproduce the look of the period accurately (McKechnie 218).

A history film tells us more about the time in which it was made than about the time in which it was set. Long shots, the use of wide-angle lenses, deep focus and high-key lighting schemes stress the grandeur of each expensive set. These aspects also accentuate ‘a directed, structured and particular’ sense of stasis and nostalgia that is internal to the text. Countryside travelling sequences shot from carriages or horseback (modes of transport that accentuate the ‘pastness’ of the landscape) and interior scenes orchestrated around ritualised acts such as afternoon tea or the social ball, became typical set-pieces that could be re-adapted and extended to other period serials (Vidal 30).

For the non-professional historian, knowledge—particularly in the case of monarchs—is generally based on school textbooks, previous media texts and the viewing of famous period portraits. McKechnie argues that audiences will only accept Henry VIII as ‘authentic’ if he looks as he does in the portrait by Hans Holbein the Younger.

Makers of recent successful films with historical content recognise that the conscious evocation of a period through production design is necessary. This obligatory accuracy of appearance can demonstrate the necessary level of authenticity so that greater narrative freedom can be taken (219).

We can also support this statement with the success of both *Elizabeth*, starring Cate Blanchett, who resembles Elizabeth I on her coronation portrait from school textbooks, or *The Queen*, starring Helen Mirren, reminding us of the aging Queen Elizabeth II well-known from her media appearances. Stella Bruzzi explores the role of costume itself within the films and examines “the fetishistic value of history and historical clothes” (36). She raises the issue of whether one looks at or through the clothes. I would go one step further, and ask whether we look at or through ‘the text-book or media credited public image of a monarch’ as well (37; emphasis mine).

In the ‘Noughties’ according to Harper (12) “a period of tremendous global shifts, tremors and surprises,” there has been a slight moving away from the traditional heritage film with only a few examples that might match the original definition, such as *Pride and Prejudice* (Joe Wright,

2005) and *Elizabeth, the Golden Age* (Shekhar Kapur, 2007). Furthermore, according to Leggott, “as British film culture has long known a strain of iconoclastic or deliberately ‘inauthentic’ approaches to history (from the avantgarde contribution of Derek Jarman and Peter Greenaway to the *Carry on* films etc), films like *Notting Hill* (Roger Michael, 1999) or *Bridget Jones’s Diary* (Sharon Maguire, 2001) could be labelled as ‘contemporary’ heritage films” (82). Monk even speaks about anti-heritage films, the parody of the expectation of a period film e.g. Michael Winterbottom’s 1996 film, *Jude* (based on Thomas Hardy’s *Jude the Obscure*) (193). The characters wear clothes, not costumes. Christopher Eccleston’s gaunt face replaces the soft features of conventional heritage heroes. Kate Winslet wears no make-up, and the settings are carefully chosen to avoid the picturesque. It is not surprising that the film shocked an audience used to more lyrical adaptations, and the opening sequence is even shot in black and white (Gibson 119).

Television, in the 1970s, 1990s, and the 2000s, also paved the way for the continuing success of heritage films. UK broadcasters, BBC and Channel 4, have forged partnerships with top independent film companies such as

Working Titles and Miramax. Vidal claims that the British film industry is notorious for its instability. Largely deprived of state support, the interdependence between film and television has helped to define the British film production sector in crucial ways resulting in a move towards the serial, a more sustainable and marketable format (29).

Vidal labels this new genre a new 'syncretic' heritage product, which is created to attract wider soap/costume/heritage audiences (33). The genre has defined the star personas of Colin Firth and Keira Knightly and keeps providing platforms for young British actors such as Romola Garai, Carey Mulligan, and James McAvoy. Just as important is the distinctive work of star television writers such as Andrew Davies, Michael Hirst, and Peter Morgan, which has introduced distinctive auteristic styles into established generic frameworks. Davies has established a strong reputation for 'sexing up' classical serials while upholding 19th century emotional repression. Hirst's script for *Elizabeth* and the *The Tudors* (BBC, 2007–10) updates the Elizabethan monarchy drama with abundant doses of sex and violence. Finally, Morgan's work offers perhaps the most consistent and effortless example of the crossover between

political drama and the heritage genre, in films such as *The Last King of Scotland* (Kevin McDonald, 2006), *The Other Boleyn Girl* (Justin Chadwick, 2008), and *The Queen*.

The monarchy film and biopic of the 1990s has become self-reflective about the narratives of history and nation, fulfilling a myth-making (and myth-breaking) function that is difficult to dissociate from the evolving media narratives (e.g. around Diana's transformation from fairytale princess in the early 1980s to suffering soap-opera heroine in the 1990s). This is in contrast to Helen Mirren's (as both Elizabeth I and II) quiet dignity and small contained gestures in both *The Queen* and *Elizabeth* (Tom Hooper, 2005 BBC miniseries). While in *The Private Life of Henry VIII* the tableau (or portrait shot) is introduced at the beginning of the film to seek out the private man behind this public image, both in *Elizabeth* and in *The Queen* it is the other way round. In *Elizabeth*, Cate Blanchett is transformed into a 'walking tableau' with make-up, costuming and lighting (Vidal 38, 42). Likewise, in *The Queen*, Helen Mirren's character, Elizabeth II, despite some public humiliation and inevitable consensus-seeking transformations to keep up the monarchy, kept her dignity, and

at the end of the film, in the final garden scene she, the Queen, is depicted literally and symbolically as a 'walking tableau,' dignified and also metaphorically worthy of a new Oscars coronation in 2007. In sum, the *monarchy film*, and thus the British (or rather English) Monarchy is still alive, seems safe, sound, spectacular and glorious.

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Film & Culture: Glossary

DOROTTYA JÁSZAY | **Film & Culture** ▶

abstract film / experimental film | An avant-garde film trend in the 1910s and 1920s, whose main representatives are primarily fine artists, such as: Viking Eggeling, Hans Richter, Fernand Léger, Marcel Duchamp, Walter Ruttmann, etc. These directors experimented with new composition principles discovered at the beginning of the century, and they tried to combine them with the possibilities of the film medium (which were then less stricter than). These artists experimented with the creation of “visual music:” the composition of painting, rhythm, and movement. These films are usually stripped to the pure graphic form, rejecting the display of human actions or narration. They also refer to Wassily Kandinsky’s *synesthesia principle*. Examples: Léopold Survage: *Coloured Rhythm*, Viking Eggeling: *Diagonal Symphony*, Fernand Léger: *Mechanical Ballet*.

action film (action-adventure film) | An extremely successful and influential mode of popular cinema that foregrounds spectacular movements of bodies, vehicles and weapons, and state-of-the-art special effects. These highly dynamic elements (with the actor’s

physical performance a central attraction) are usually held together by fast-paced, goal-oriented, and pared-down narrative structure. The action film is strongly associated with the adventure film, with swashbucklers, pirate films, historical epic films, and safari films all popular from the 1910s.

adaptation | Revision of a piece of art or literature into film. Adaptation vs. Inspiration.

amateur film | Low budget films made by hobbyists using simple cameras and cheap raw material.

(camera) angle | The placement of the camera in relation to the subject of the image.

animation film | A film created by the process of photographing drawings, puppets, silhouettes, or inanimate objects frame by frame through stop-motion photography, with each frame recording a minute-progressive change in the subject.

art film | A type of film with serious artistic intentions as distinct from the commercial films made in Hollywood.

auteur film | According to *auteur* theory, the director is the controlling force of a film; an artist who infuses the entire work with his or her personality and

point of view and all of whose films can be related in terms of similar techniques, style, and themes.

available / ambient light | Naturally available light in a setting; the natural light that seems to surround a character.

background | The setting, characters, and the general spatial area to the rear of the image, behind the foreground where the major action takes place.

biopic (biographic picture) | A biographical motion picture.

burlesque | A characteristically silent film genre; tra-gi-comic figures, common men, with a fast-paced plot, its humour often wild and absurd. Origins: commedia dell'arte, vaudeville, pantomime, variety show, circus. Following an initial boom at the beginning of the 20th century in Europe (France, Italy), from the 1930s it starts to decline.

camera movement | Any motion of the camera that makes the image seem to move, shift, or change perspective.

close-up (CU) | A shot in which the camera seems to be very close to the subject. The head of a person, a small object, or part of an object fills the screen.

cognitive film theory | A theory which examines how the human brain behaves when the viewer watches a film.

This question had already been posed by theoreticians of the early 20th century (Hugo Münsterberg, Jean Mitry, Rudolf Arnheim), however, cognitive theory—in opposition to its forbearers—does not seek psychological, but natural scientific answers. It is characteristically interdisciplinary, containing elements of philosophy, biology, Artificial Intelligence, psychology, ethology, linguistics. Its main representatives are: James J. Gibson, David Bordwell, Joseph and Barbara Anderson, and Richard Allen.

comedy | A film genre or mode of considerable variety, range, and commercial success that appears in every national cinema and is defined by the type of response it elicits from the audience, namely, laughter. It is marked by a lightness of tone and a resolution governed by harmony, reconciliation, and happiness.

computer generated image (CGI) | Elements of a film produced with the aid of computer technology.

cowboy shot / knee shot | A medium shot of one or more characters from the knees up.

crane | A vertical movement of the camera when lifted by a crane.

credits | The list of those responsible for the making of a film.

crime film | An extremely wide-ranging group of fiction films that have crime as a central element of their plots.

cross light / side light | Light illuminating the subject from both sides, generally in an area perpendicular to the lens axis.

cross-cut / intercutting | Parallel display of two or more scenes. Characteristically it is the presentation of different actions that take place simultaneously.

cut | The instantaneous change from one shot to another by means of splicing the two shots together.

depth of field | The area of acceptable focus that extends both in front of and behind the primary plane of focus in a film image.

diegetic | Those motifs of film narrative which appear as part of the world of actions in the film.

diffusion filter | A filter that softens subjects, generates a dreamy haze.

director of photography | The individual in charge of putting the scenes on film; hence, the person responsible for the set or location lighting; the general composition

of the scene; the colours of the images; the choice of cameras, lenses, filters, and film stock; the camera settings; the camera setups and movements; and the integration of any special effects.

dissolve | A technique frequently used to switch from one image to another, while it refines the switch. At the end of transition the end of a shot is copied on the beginning of the other shot.

documentary film | A film that deals directly with factual reality, and tries to convey that reality as it is instead of fictionalizing it. These films are concerned with actual people, places, events, or activities. However, the very act of putting reality on film changes that reality to some degree; the subject matter must be selected and given form and shape. Documentaries can be discussed in terms of the degree of control that the filmmaker imposes upon the reality he or she records. What is true of all these films, however, is that they try to give the audience a feeling, a sense, or a perspective of the reality that actually exists even if some filmmakers might use obvious cinematic techniques to achieve this or even preconceived scenes and narrative lines.

dubbing / post-dubbing / mixing / re-recording | The recording of dialogue and various sounds, and their integration into the film after it has been shot.

end titles / closing credits | The names of all the performers and their roles, the complete list of technical and production personnel, the acknowledgement for various services, and the list of music and recordings that appear at the conclusion of a film.

epic film | In film, the term 'epic' generally applies to a work of great scope, spectacle, and action that features both heroic action and heroic virtue. The hero, like his literary prototypes, is a great figure, a noble warrior, and an intense lover.

establishing shot | The opening shot of a sequence, which establishes location but can also establish mood or give the viewer information considering the time and general situation.

étude | A film that is much shorter than a classic fiction film, and both freer and more liberal in a formal and narrative sense. Frequently serves as the framework for personal content and is often barely distinguishable from experimental film.

experimental film | Usually a short film which tries to work out a narrative idea, a new kind of visual language or technical procedure. French, German, and Russian avant-garde artists explored the nature of the new means of expression offered by the then new film medium in the 1910s and 1920s. Its great era is the 1960s and the 1970s.

exposition | The introductory, opening part of a film narration in which we are acquainted with basic information. If there is no exposition, we talk about 'in medias res.'

exterior | Scenes shot at exterior locations.

extreme close-up (ECU) | A shot very close to the subject so that only a small portion or detail is shown or the entirety of a small object.

extreme long shot | A shot taken at a great distance from the subject, frequently offering a wide view of a location.

fade in–fade out | A gradual transition / dissolution from one scene to another. Fade out: from light to dark; fade in: from dark to light.

fantastic film | Films which step over the border of reality, *irreal* elements appear as reality. There are 3 types: 1.) those that use the results of scientific-technical

development (e. g. *Blade Runner*); 2.) those that have supernatural elements in them (e. g. *Dracula*, *The Exorcist*); 3.) those that take place in imaginary worlds or have mythic heroes (e. g. *Conan the Barbarian*, *Flash Gordon*, *Star Wars*, *Jurassic Park*, *Independence Day*).

feature film | The term applies to any full-length fictional film that plays at a commercial theatre. Such films run anywhere from ninety minutes to two hours, though longer films are not uncommon.

fiction / narrative film | A film with imaginary characters and events. The term generally applies to most feature and commercial films. Many fiction films use actual places; some may incorporate real people and events into the story, though their rendition is largely fictional. Some fiction films attempt to create an aura of truth and verisimilitude by employing a documentary film style, but this does not alter the fictional nature of the work. Purists would argue that even documentaries are fictional, since the very act of selecting what to film, the unnatural situation of the filming itself, and the editing of the work present a world that exists only on the screen. Nevertheless, the intention of a

film should be taken into consideration. Fictional films, which are made primarily for entertainment, are very different from documentary films, which deal with subject matter and employ techniques whose main purpose is to increase the viewers understanding of some factual aspect of the world outside the theatre.

fill light | A soft light, frequently placed near the camera on the side opposite to the key light, which fills in areas left unlit or softens the shadows made by the key light, thus reducing contrast.

film frame | 1.) The individual photographs on motion-picture film. 2.) The borders of the image on the screen that enclose the picture like a frame on a painting.

film noir | Films characteristic of 1940s and 1950s America. Its origins go back to the depression atmosphere of America in the 1930s, and disappointment after WW II. Rejecting the naive faith in the beatific American lifestyle, it focuses on the destructive content under the glamorous surface. One of its most important narrative techniques is the flashback which starts right from the exposition. It exhibits a complicated, twisty plot, evil, rain-soaked streets, claustrophobic spaces,

and almost exclusively black and white raw material. Light-shade effects are extremely important. French new-wave and modern gangster film draw from it.

filter | A transparent sheet of coloured glass or gelatin placed in front of or behind the lens of a camera to control the transmission of the various light waves of the colour spectrum.

final cut | The version of a film that is deemed complete and ready for the final stages of post-production.

fish-eye lens | An extreme wide-angle lens that takes in nearly a 180-degree field of view.

flashback | A sequence of pictures recounting some past events inserted in a scene.

focus | 1.) The point behind the lens where the light rays from a point being photographed converge to form an image. 2.) The degree of acceptable sharpness and definition to create a clear image on the film. 3.) The degree of sharpness and definition of the image. 4.) The location from which a subject will record sharply on film.

foreground | The front area of a scene closest to the audience, where the major action generally takes place.

freeze (frame) | A single frame that is repeatedly printed

on a duplicate copy of the film so that the image projected on the screen seems frozen for a desired length of time.

French avant-garde | 1920s French film whose main representatives are Louis Delluc, Jean Epstein, Germaine Dulac, René Clair, Luis Bunuel, and Fernand Léger. Addresses the important aesthetic question: in what way can film be separated from other forms of art, especially literature, painting and music. Regarded as pure film—‘cinema pur.’ Includes significant films inspired by surrealism (Germaine Deluc: *La coquille et le clergyman*, Luis Bunuel: *An Andalusian Dog*, Jean Cocteau: *Le sang d'un pocte*).

French new wave | French film movement from the end of the 1950s. Their aim was to allow film to find that independence which had been lost around 1924, shortly before the appearance of sound film. It is characterised by subjectivity and an auteur film attitude. It includes cinema vérité. Its main representatives: Jean-Luc Godard, Francois Truffaut, Claude Chabrol, and Alain Resnais.

full shot / full figure shot (FS) | A long shot that takes in the entire figure of a character, with the head near

the top of the frame and the feet near the bottom.

gaffer | The chief electrician in a film production responsible for supplying, placing, operating, and maintaining the required lights as well as the power source for illumination both in the studio and on location.

gag | A comic motion picture idea, and a characteristic element of burlesque and silent film.

gangster film | A distinct genre in American films that traces the rise and fall of a gangster, either fictitious or based on some well-known person.

German expressionism | A German film movement from the 1910s and 1920s which had as its inspiration the fine arts, literature, and theatre (Oskar Kokoschka, Egon Schiele, Bertolt Brecht). It sought to suggestively display internal mental processes on film. It rejected realism and naturalism and focused on intensity, visionary tones, unusual solutions, and exaggerated stylisation. Examples: Robert Wiene: *Dr Caligari*, Friedrich Wilhelm Murnau: *Nosferatu*, Paul Wegener and Henrik Galeen: *Golem*, Fritz Lang: *Metropolis*.

German new wave | A German film movement from the 1960s which propagated the spiritual and economic

rebirth of German film. Characterised by a cool, precise, distant attitude, and a strict approach to film making, it adapted the most prestigious works of literature in contemporary Germany. Examples: Peter Fleischmann: *Hunting Scenes from Bavaria*, Werner Herzog: *Signs of Life*; second wave: Wim Wenders, Werner Schroeter.

green screen | The technique of photographing or filming an actor or object against a green monochrome backdrop, and replacing the backdrop with material from a different image using a colour filter.

hand-held shot | A shot taken with an unmounted, portable camera held by the cameraman, sometimes with the help of a body brace, while he or she moves about.

handheld camera | An unmounted, portable camera.

historical film | A film purporting to deal with a historical period and the actual events of that period, though the treatment of characters may be highly fictional and great liberties might be taken with the events themselves.

horizontal montage | The interlinking of pictures or scenes; editing them after one another.

horror film | A genre of film that seeks to cause fright and

even terror in the viewer. The term ‘horror,’ which is applied to all works of this genre, means an extreme feeling, almost to the point of revulsion and disgust, caused by something shocking. The horror film allows us to see all kinds of frightening events, to sense the same fear and terror as the characters on the screen, yet to enjoy these feelings because we know, sitting safely in the audience, that ultimately no harm can happen to us.

impersonal shot | The sight cannot be identified with one particular character’s point of view.

inner cut / intra-sequence cutting | Cut in one scene or a sequence of scenes in which temporal-spatial or narrative factors remain unchanged—in opposition to inter-sequence cutting.

insert | A short close-up or extreme close-up which is inserted in an ongoing scene in order to highlight, emphasise, and provide metaphoric association.

interior | Scenes shot at interior locations or at a studio.

iris | A circle-shaped broadening or narrowing picture clipping, mostly characteristic of the silent film era.

jump cut | A sudden cut IN a scene—NOT between scenes. The middle part of the shot is not filmed or it is cut

out—the result is a break of continuity.

key light | The major source of illumination for a subject or scene.

legs | A support upon which a camera is mounted.

lens | A piece of glass or other transparent material with curved sides for concentrating or dispersing light rays.

lighting | The illumination of performers, action, and setting in the making of motion pictures.

location | Any place other than a studio where a film is in part or completely shot.

long / full shot | A shot that shows the subject at a distance. Characters are seen in their entirety with some area above and below them also visible. The shot takes in some of the surrounding environment as well.

long take | A lengthy shot.

magic hour | Those few minutes at sunrise or sunset when light change quickly and dramatically, providing an orange glare to the shot in early shooting, and a clear blue in late shooting. During this time the crew can shoot night pictures while some light still appears.

main titles / front credits | The credits that appear at the beginning of a film.

master shot | 1.) The individual photographs on motion-picture film. 2.) The borders of the image on the screen that enclose the picture like a frame on a painting.

match cut / match-image cut | A film cut in which objects in two shots graphically match, helping to establish a strong continuity of action and/or a metaphorical link. A cut from one shot to another in which the two shots are matched in action or subject by 1.) a continuity of action by the same subject, or 2.) a similarity in action by two different characters or perhaps by the same character at different times moving in the same direction in the same part of the image, or 3.) a similarity in the two subjects' shape and form.

medium close-up (MCU) / medium close shot (MCS) | A shot of a character between a medium shot and a close-up that includes the area from the chest to the top of the head.

medium long shot (MLS) | A shot somewhere between a long and medium shot that does not give the same expanse as a long shot, but still shows the total area of a subject or terrain.

medium shot (MS) | An intermediate shot between a long

shot and a close-up that generally shows a character from the knees or waist up or the full figure of a seated character.

mini-series | A previously defined number of episodes in a series usually dealing with a continuous narrative.

mockumentary / mock documentary | A type of film or television show in which fictional events are presented in a documentary style for the purpose of parody.

montage | A term taken from the French word, *monter*, 'to assemble.' The process of editing a film and of assembling all the shots, scenes, and sequences into a final motion picture.

musical | A specific genre of film that focuses on song and dance.

non-diegetic | Film elements which comment on, explain or colour the plot through narration, subtitles, and other accompaniments.

out-of-focus | Not focused, blurry.

over the shoulder shot (OSS) | A shot made from over the shoulder of a character, with the back of the head, the neck, and the shoulder generally seen at the side of the frame. The camera focuses past the character

on some object or person that he or she is seeing.

panning | The horizontal axial movement of the camera from one part of the picture / scene to the other, which may follow the movement of a character or an object.

poetic realism | A French lyrical film style or movement from the 1930s lasting to the outbreak of WW II. At the beginning of the 1930s avant-garde ends, however, sound film gives a new rise to the film industry (some of its main representatives: René Clair, Jean Renoir, Marcel Carné, and Jean Vigo).

point of view | The term, in relation to narrative form, normally applies to the eyes through which we view the action. In film, the dominant perspective belongs to the neutral camera, although there are frequent divergences from this perspective to those of various characters.

post-production | That part of filmmaking that comes immediately after the shooting is completed and includes editing, the addition of special effects and optical transitions, and the mixing of all sound tracks.

practical lights | Every source of light that is visible in a scene.

pre-production | The time period before filming when all

the elements required for shooting a film are planned, costed, and coordinated.

production / live sound | Sound recorded from its original source as opposed to sound derived from recordings.

production manager | The individual in charge of the daily business arrangements for shooting.

props | Any moveable object used on a set or in a scene.

reaction shot | A shot which cuts away from the main scene in order to show the reaction of a character to it.

romance | A film that emphasizes a love relationship at the expense of other story elements. The relationship itself is presented in an emotional, sentimental, and generally positive manner that glorifies the feelings of each character for the other and heralds love as the saving grace of human existence, even when environment and circumstances lead to ultimate sacrifice or unhappiness.

romantic comedy / “romcom” | A funny movie, play, or television programme about a love story that ends happily.

rough cut | The first stage of offline editing.

scene | A larger structural unit of film narrative, the ends of which are marked by larger jumps in space and time. Usually consists of one or more shots. Scenes

usually also have exposition, unfolding, and ending.
schedule | A project plan for each day's shooting for a film production.

science fiction film | Sci-fi films can be considered a subgroup of fantasy films even though this subgroup extends the possible and gives an aura of scientific authenticity to its events and created reality. It is characterised by stories involving conflicts between science and technology, human nature, and social organisation in futuristic or fantastical environments.

semi-documentary | A fiction film that uses the techniques of the documentary to create authenticity for its subject.

sequence | A unit including multiple scenes. It is connected by the identity of space-time relations or narrative continuity.

series | A progression or sequence of episodes, of no previously defined number, relating to a narrative theme.

short film | Any film of three reels or less that runs no more than thirty minutes.

shot-countershot (reverse shot) | A basic tool of films based on narration. It shows two spatial positions in the

same shot but from opposing directions alternately. It is a characteristic type of shot in which a situation is recorded from behind the back of a character, composing his/her half profile into the picture. The term is NOT synonymous with reverse shot. (Reverse shot is always the counter side pair of a shot, and it serves to make the space of the film, the situation more plastic to the viewer.)

shot / take | A film structural unit lasting from one cut to the other, a continuous piece of time and space recorded by the camera.

sitcom / situational comedy | A comic film dependent on the interaction of a small group of characters, often including the members of the same family.

slapstick | A subgenre of comedy film prevalent in early cinema and silent cinema that foregrounds physical and broad comedy. Slapstick films are performance-driven and tend to consist of a relatively attenuated narrative used to string together a series of gags, pratfalls, chases, escapades, and so on.

soap opera | A term originally from radio and also now applicable to television afternoon serials that feature sentimental, romantic, melodramatic, and

escapist events among a group of related individuals.

soft light | An open-faced lamp that creates a diffuse and soft illumination with subtle shadows from a distance and no shadows when placed close to the subject.

sound | The audio accompaniment for a film or scene.

spot | A televised advertisement.

steadicam | A camera stabilizer mount for film cameras which allow for smooth filming despite the operators movement.

(film) stock | Unexposed film, also referred to as raw stock.

stock shot / stock footage | Standard shots of actions, events, or settings previously photographed for newsreels, documentaries, or even for feature films and presently stored in a stock footage library or laboratory from which they can be purchased or rented.

storyboard | An illustrated outline of a screenplay; in which particularly characteristic shots are drawn the way the director wants to see them on the screen.

straight cut | An immediate change from one shot to another without an optical transition. This type of immediate change is the staple cut of most film narratives and normally occurs imperceptibly within

individual scenes to allow us different views of the action.

stunt double / stunt man / stunt woman | An individual who substitutes for an actor or actress in order to perform some difficult or dangerous action.

subjective camera / photography | The sight which can be identified with a character's subjective point of view, as if we saw it 'with his/her eyes.'

telefilm / television film | A feature-length motion picture that is produced for, and originally distributed by or to, a television network, in contrast to theatrical films, which are made explicitly for initial showing in movie theatres.

thriller | Any film that creates excitement and suspense, especially a mystery or crime film, though the term is also employed on occasion for spy or adventure productions.

tilt | The vertical movement of the camera.

time jump / time lapse | A method of filming some process, frequently unnoticeable to the eye, over a lengthy duration by shooting one frame at a time at predetermined intervals. When the film is projected at normal speed, the process will seem to speed up and can be viewed during a brief period.

transition | Any technique used for changing from one scene to another, generally indicating a movement in space and time.

travelling | A horizontal movement of the camera straight on location; usually running on rails.

vertical montage | The sound composition that completes a picture (speech, noise, music): parallel appearance, synthesis, and editing of picture and sound.

visual effect | Special effects achieved in cinematography through photographic techniques or processes, as distinct from those achieved before the camera with normal shooting, which are sometimes called mechanical effects.

voice over | The voice of an off screen narrator or a voice heard but not belonging to any character actually talking on screen.

war film | A motion picture dealing with war either as the major action of the film or the background to the film's action. Although war films are generally thought of as combat films that focus primarily on preparations for fighting and actual armed conflict, the genre also includes other types of

situations that are directly and indirectly related to war.

western film | A film genre popular since the earliest days of motion pictures that derives from the history and legends of the western part of America, especially during the last half of the nineteenth century.

“whodunit” | A complex, plot-driven variety of the detective story in which the audience is given the opportunity to engage in the same process of deduction as the protagonist throughout the investigation of a crime.

zoom in | To increase the focal length of a zoom lens in the process of a shot so that the camera seems to move in to the subject as it is continuously magnified.

zoom out / zoom back | To decrease the focal length of a zoom lens in the process of a shot so that the camera seems to move away from the subject as it is continuously decreased in size.

zooming | The movement of the camera either toward or away from a subject or such apparent movement due to the use of zoom lens.

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