Two Movies

Where They Came From
How They Work and
What They Mean

Richard G. Patterson

Two Movies

Where They Came From
How They Work and
What They Mean

Richard G. Patterson

RGP - Los Angeles

Text © 2009 Richard G. Patterson

The Browning Version © 1953 Trustees of the Terence Rattigan Trust

Il disprezzo © 1954 R.C.S. Libri S. p. A - Milan, Bompiani

Asquith Film of *The Browning Version* © 1951 Javelin Films Ltd.

Figgis Film of *The Browning Version* © 1994 Paramount Pictures

Le Mépris © 1963 STUDIOCANAL IMAGE / COMAGNIA CINEMATOGRAFICA CHAMPION S.p.a.

RGP
135 S. Medio Drive
Los Angeles, CA 90049
richard@rgpost.com

To Tristan,
who shares my love of movies
and probably understands why
I love these two in particular.

Contents

Preface ..... *i*

The Browning Version
- *The Rattigan Play* *1*
- *The Asquith Version* *47*
- *The Figgis Version* *101*

Contempt
- *Moravia's Novel* *203*
- *Godard's Film* *229*

Preface

The play had so excited and moved me that I wished to communicate, however imperfectly, some of that emotion to others.
Andrew Crocker-Harris in *The Browning Version*
by Terrence Rattigan

This began with a desire to revisit my all time favorite film and enhance my own appreciation of it by writing about it. In an attempt to justify writing about *Contempt* I expanded my ambitions to include other adaptations so that the end result could be a book which might have some academic value. *The Browning Version* seemed somehow to be a natural choice because it was a film I had discovered much more recently and loved. I thought about adding *To Have and Have Not* but realized that I did not want to write about a movie that seemed to be a travesty of the novel from which it was supposedly adapted. I forgot about looking for other movies when I found an excuse to write a long essay on *Contempt* as part of my work towards a master's degree. I did not feel I was able to do complete justice to the movie in my essay, but it temporarily satisfied my desire to analyze it, and my other work caused me to table the idea of expanding it into a book.

The idea continued to simmer in the back of my mind, though, especially since I had done a fair amount of work on *The Browning Version* during a period when I was not working on my degree. As I thought about it I found all kinds of reasons why an analysis of the two movies made sense together, including the fact that both had roots in ancient Greek literature. The fact of the matter though is that I wanted to write about them because they are movies I love, and my love of movies has been a major theme in my life. I do not love *The Browning Version* in the same way I love *Contempt*, but it is still a movie that reminds me of why I wanted to make movies and represents the hold that movies still have on my imagination and soul.

Contempt I saw when I was 24 or 25 and embarking on what I hoped would be a career as a filmmaker. I also saw it during an on-again-off-again period in the courtship of my wife. It immediately became enshrined in my mind as The Perfect Movie, a film which operates on many different levels and is as much an essay on western civilization as it is a searing probe of a tortured love relationship or a celebration of the process of filmmaking, not to mention a celebration of Brigitte Bardot's sex appeal. I saw it in a theater in Honolulu where I was stationed in the army. I was so moved by it that I decided to walk back to my quarters even though it was raining. A policeman thought there was something suspicious about a young man walking in the rain and felt he had to question me. I am sure I was tempted to tell him about the movie I had just seen, but I don't actually recall the conversation.

The film of *The Browning Version* I love is the Mike Figgis version made in 1994. I missed it when it played in a theater and did not see it until it was on cable television a few years later. I was in my mid-fifties, dealing with the fact that my career as a filmmaker had not panned out and with a sense of guilt or failure in other areas of my life as well. The film seemed like a good example of the naturalistic, literary, character-based drama I associated with Masterpiece Theater and Merchant-Ivory productions. It had, however, even more of an emotional impact on me than I usually experience with such films. It touched the sentimental part of my nature as well as the cerebral, partially because there were themes in it that resonated so strongly with me and partially because it was simply designed to work that way on its viewers.

Part of what I want to explore is the difference in my responses to these two movies and how the movies provoke those responses. To do this it seems to me one must carefully analyze the construction of each movie. Only by walking on a firm bed of detail can one arrive at valid observations about the meaning or impact of a movie. There is, of course, a danger of getting so absorbed in detail that one forgets the goal of the journey. This is definitely a risk for me since I have aspired to make films and have devoted way too much of my life to talk about film production technique. It is also necessary to keep in mind that the "construction" of a movie involves all manner of intangible elements and is not just a matter of plot, much less how many cuts there are or what the focal length of the lens was.

A movie is the result of innumerable choices, some made consciously, some unconsciously, and some inflicted by nature or financiers. One approach to the construction of a movie is to see where it came from, how it happened. This may or may not be relevant to the impact of the final product, but it can, I believe, help reveal what the final product is. It can provide a field against which the finished movie stands out in greater relief. This is particularly true of a film adapted from an earlier literary work. When I saw *Contempt* and *The Browning Version*, I knew nothing about the novel or play on which each was based. Nor did I realize that *The Browning Version* had been adapted previously into what some considered a classic of English cinema. It seemed natural to me to begin with the works from which the movies were adapted in order to see more clearly what each movie was. Examining the transition from literature or drama to film also opens the door for reflection on film generally as an art form. Having two different film interpretations of the same play promised to help pinpoint exactly what was going on in each and why I like one film much more than the other.

Ultimately the question for me is why I love movies so, why I staked my life and livelihood on a career in filmmaking and whether my inability to succeed in the way I had hoped means that my love of movies was a cruel trick the gods played on me. I wonder if I have spent my life in Plato's

cave fascinated by the shadows on the wall and unaware that the truth is to be found by walking out into the sun light of real life. I did not grow up in a movie theater the way some of my contemporaries seem to have done. I am old enough to have gone to Saturday matinees occasionally as a kid, but my exposure to westerns and serials was the result mainly of cheap afternoon programming for the local television station. My pre-pubescent fantasy life was fed much more by radio and comic books than by movies. As a teenager I viewed movies as the thing you did on a date, sometimes not hesitating to leave before the movie ended in order to get to a party. I did tell the high school newspaper that my favorite actor was Alec Guinness, not only because I thought *The Bridge on the River Kwai* was cool, but also because I had seen him in *The Man in the White Suit*, which somehow made it to a revival house in Birmingham.

During my freshman year in college I saw *The Seventh Seal*, and my whole attitude towards movies changed overnight. I discovered that foreign films at least were capable of dealing with existential issues in the same way I was discovering that philosophy and literature did. I majored in philosophy, but I was increasingly drawn to literature and during a year of post-graduate work in literature I saw enough movies to convince me that I wanted to go to film school.

Once I began trying to make films and realized that I was out of sync with mainstream Hollywood, I often fell back on a distinction between art and entertainment. I figured the production of art is focused primarily on the material or what is to be expressed while the production of entertainment if focused primarily on the audience it is trying to engage. I was interested in art not entertainment, but like most distinctions whose function is to bolster the ego, this one cannot hold water for very long. While there are obviously extreme cases that illustrate the theory, most films exist in the gray swamp of reality in between. I doubt that there is one aesthetic theory that can encompass all types of films, but it is my hope an analysis of two films that I think work in very different ways can point to the whole fertile valley where so many regions remain to be explored.

One other odd note I might add is that I do not respond to movies primarily in terms of the story or plot. In fact I very often do not remember the story of a movie that I know I love. I often remember something much more vague like the “texture” or “emotional tone” of the movie or perhaps just certain moments or scenes. The images of autumn leaves blowing in the foreground in a shot of the house in *The Conformist* sticks in my mind much more than the details of its story. There is also a dolly shot in *The Conformist* where the camera pulls back rapidly in a hallway as someone gets off the elevator, and I have felt strongly that if anyone could fully explain why the camera pulls back in that moment he would have captured the essence of the movie. In the same film there is a tracking shot on the street which seems comparable to an operatic aria. On the other hand there are

hundreds of tracking shots in movies which strike me as arbitrary or completely pointless. Music often has more of an impact on me than dialogue. Sometimes what sticks with me is a kind of visual metaphor like the shadows of the clouds moving across the distant valley in the final image of *Shadowlands*, which I remembered even though I had forgotten the name of the film.

The frustration or bitterness I felt as a result of my inability to make the films I dreamed of making did have a dampening effect on my enthusiasm for movies. I became much less tolerant of the "garbage" I thought Hollywood was churning out and even moralistic about the allocation of resources to what I felt were juvenile "comic books." The fact that I enjoyed the most stable and financially rewarding portion of my career as a technician in the explosion of digital visual effects did not enable me to be enthusiastic about the movies I worked on or the contribution I was making. Nonetheless I continued to watch perhaps a hundred movies a year. Many of these were screenings of foreign films submitted to the Academy which often understandably were never distributed commercially in the US. Occasionally I will still see something that makes my jaw drop in wonder. Even with films where I wonder why on earth someone would make such a thing, I am generally encouraged that there are still cultures and circumstances that permit filmmakers to express themselves in completely offbeat ways. Usually I will see three or four films a year that restore my faith that movies are truly the all encompassing art form that Wagner aspired to realize.

The Browning Version

Rattigan's Play

Terrence Rattigan wrote *The Browning Version* in 1946 when he was 35 years old and had already achieved phenomenal success as a playwright. The son of a diplomat, Rattigan was educated at Harrow and Oxford and had a play produced in the West End while he was still a student at Oxford. At 25 he wrote *French Without Tears*, which had a run of 1000 performances. He had a new play produced almost every year, and in 1944 he became the first playwright since Somerset Maughm to have three plays running simultaneously in the West End.

Rattigan's first plays were comedies and despite his success (or perhaps as he was sometimes inclined to believe because of it) drama critics did not treat him as a "serious" playwright. His celebrity image as the dapper man-about-town did not help in this regard, but critical opinion began to change with the production of *The Winslow Boy* in 1946. Based on an historical court case about a school boy accused of petty theft, Rattigan chose not to present it as a courtroom drama but rather as a domestic drama focusing on the tensions and conflicts within the family of the accused.

For his next play Rattigan chose an even more uncharacteristic and ambitious project, a one-act play modeled on a Greek tragedy but set in the living room of a teacher at a school resembling Harrow. The result was the play by which Rattigan reportedly wished to be judged and remembered, even though he went on to write a dozen more including *Separate Tables* and *The Deep Blue Sea*.

Rattigan is traditionally viewed as one of the last masters of the "well made play." The term, which ironically came to have pejorative connotations, derives from the theories of the French playwright Eugene Scribe. Between 1815 and 1861 Scribe with the help of a staff cranked out over 450 plays. In the process he analyzed the way in which events on stage held the interest of an audience and developed what he considered to be the laws governing the theatrical experience. From this he deduced his principles for the construction of a satisfying play. Needless to say his analysis was reflective of the society in which he lived and of the way in which theater was evolving as a popular form of entertainment.

Given the financial success Scribe enjoyed, it is clear that his principles worked for the audiences of his time. Scribe was the first playwright with enough clout to demand royalties from the performance of his plays, and he founded the Society of Authors, which led to the current generally accepted relationship between playwrights and the commercial exploitation of their work. His principles evolved along with the theater and were the subject of heated debate for over a century, but they are still very much in evidence in the teaching and practice of screenwriting. The term denouement comes from Scribe as does the concept of "the obligatory scene."

Why a set of principles for the construction of a play should be controversial can be sensed from the way in which Scribe summarized his own per-

spective. In an address delivered when he was admitted to the Académie Française, Scribe said:

> You go to the theatre not for instruction or correction, but for relaxation and amusement. Now, what amuses you most is not truth but fiction. To represent what is before your very eyes every day is not the way to please you; but what does not come to you in your usual life, the extraordinary, the romantic, that is what charms you. That is what one is eager to offer you…[1]

Scribe's concerns with principles of formal construction are often associated with what some regard as manipulative entertainment, theatrical presentations whose only goal is excitement of some sort and which "pander" to an audience's sentimental sensibilities. Opposed to this type of "theatricality" is an "art of drama," which has as its goal something "higher" or "deeper" than titillation.

This competition between art and entertainment seems to be a perennial one, fueled in part by limitations in the resources available for the production of one or the other. The debate associated with it became particularly heated in Victorian England, however, when the call for dramatic art was based on a philosophical analysis of what was wrong with the prevailing culture and of how the popular theater was a means for reinforcing the status quo. By this time the idea of the "well made play" had evolved in England to connote a type of naturalistic, character-driven drama revolving mostly around romantic relationships. Social critics saw that the mechanics of the plot construction for popular theater relied on the restrictive, middle class mores that they sought to overthrow. They called for a theater that challenged social conventions rather than exploiting them for emotional effect.

Ibsen's plays, which were being translated in to English, were heralded as an example of dramatic art committed to social change rather than theatrical effect. George Bernard Shaw, first as a critic and then as a playwright, became the principal champion in England of the theater as forum for ideas and instrument for social change. Few critics bothered initially to analyze the formal aspects of Ibsen's plays, which are of course tightly constructed examples of character-based drama whose themes carry pronounced overtones of social criticism. The battle lines between art and entertainment were drawn with a concept of the importance of Ideas in drama. Rattigan saw his own work in the context of this debate.

> I believe that the best plays are about people and not about things. I am in fact a heretic from the now widely held faith that a play which concerns itself with, say, the artificial insemination of human beings or the National Health Service is of necessity worthier of critical esteem than a play about, say, a mother's

1 Turney.

> relations with her son or about a husband's jealousy of his wife.
>
> I further believe that the intellectual avant-garde of the English theatre – or rather, let's be both brave and accurate, and say of the English-speaking theatre, since in my view, the Americans are the worst offenders – are, in their insistence on the superiority of the play of ideas over the play of character and situation, not only misguided but old-fashioned.

This is the opening of a long letter from Rattigan published by *The New Statesman And Nation* on March 4, 1950. It was followed by ten letters published over the next two months from playwrights and critics including James Birdie, Peter Ustinov, Sean O'Casey and Christopher Fry. The fracas culminated with a missive from none other than George Bernard Shaw and finally Rattigan was allowed a last word in the May 13 issue. It was of course largely a tempest in a teapot allowing each contestant to joust with whatever straw man best suited his temperament. Embedded within it are genuine differences at least in style if not in artistic intent, and Rattigan's final summary is worth quoting for what it reveals about his public persona as well as his motivation as a writer:

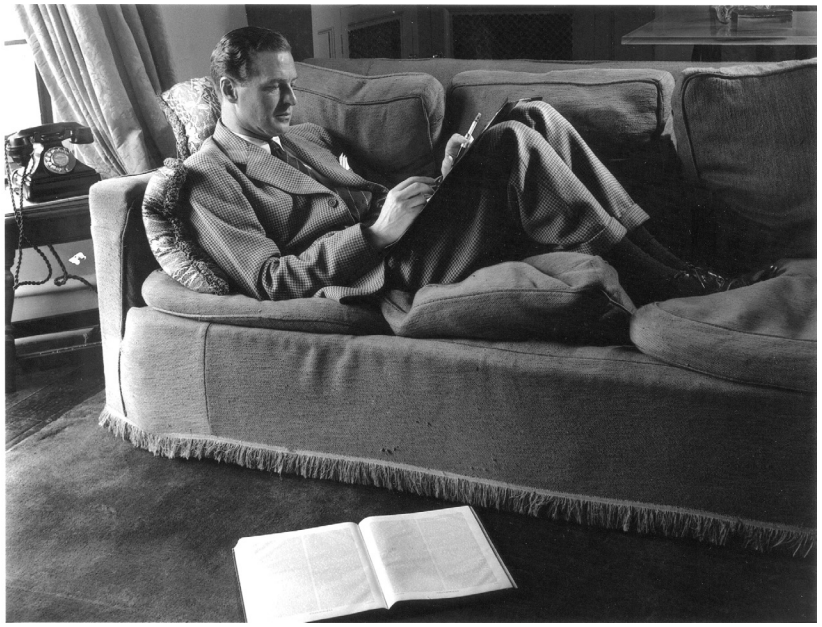
> Sir, – I have no doubt that your readers are as relieved as I am at your decision to close this controversy – if by that term we can dignify the weekly belabouring of a cheeky fourth former by some of the biggest and brainiest boys in the school.
>
> Nevertheless, despite the severity of his punishment, the cheeky fourth former must confess himself quite unrepentant and still cheeky enough to ask why, if what he said was, as so many of the illustrious contributors to this series have either stated or implied, so nonsensical as hardly to merit a reply, it should in fact have merited not merely one, but six. Isn't there something just a little suspect in this formidable unanimity of august indignation? Nonsense – even flagrantly irreverent nonsense – is surely better ignored, or curtly and contemptuously dismissed. So thunderous a response as I seem to have provoked inevitably leads me, and perhaps your readers, to believe that my heresy must have made some sense, and perhaps even dangerous sense. And that is a flattering thought.
>
> Still, the battle, unequal though it was, is over. All I would do now, in valediction, is to remind your readers of the remark that originally caused all the fuss. "I believe," I said, "that the best plays are about people and not about things." By that admittedly prodigious over-simplification I did not mean that no good plays contained ideas, nor that all plays of character are necessarily good plays, nor any of the other idiocies which some of my antagonists have ascribed to me. What is more, I was perfectly aware of the impossibility of entirely disjoining people and things – a point so obvious that I confess I was surprised to find it

so often made – and of the danger of attaching labels to creative work.

Nor was I willfully ignoring the vital question of the writer's powers of expression – (or lack of them) – or the strength of his literary imagination (or lack of it). All I meant by my statement was that, in my view, the successful creation of living characters upon the stage (by whatever medium of dramatic expression, realistic, poetic, expressionistic, impressionistic, surrealist, apron-stage, circular stage, revolving stage, revolving audience or just flatly box stage and reactionarily naturalistic) has always been, is now, and will remain a higher achievement for the dramatist than the successful assertion of an idea or series of ideas (however much those ideas might contribute towards a solution of the human predicament, however they might befit a series of articles in *The New Statesman And Nation*, or a preface to the published plays.) I was, in fact, naively stating my personal preference for such a play as *Macbeth* over such a play as *The Master Builder*; or – to demonstrate the unprejudiced nature of my loyalties – for *Hedda Gabler* over *Measure for Measure*, or, even, and this I state solely in order to refute Bridie's assertion that I haven't read any of Shaw's plays and Shaw's presumption that I don't like those I have read, for *Candida* over *The Millionairess*.

But I verge again on the cheeky, and I mustn't risk another caning. Someone, I suppose, is almost bound not to burst into your columns with the confident assertion that Rattigan believes there are no ideas in *Macbeth*, and no characters in *The Master Builder*. Let me save him his time and trouble by saying I don't believe anything of the kind. It is all surely a question of emphasis, or rather, for the process of creation is far less conscious than most critics seem to suppose, of the focus of the dramatist's original inspiration. Which came first – the chicken or the egg – the people or the idea? I think it's hypocrisy to say that one can't possibly judge. Arrogantly, let me state my firm belief that I can judge and, didactically, let me reiterate my continued preference for plays in which the ideas have sprung from the characters over plays in which the characters have been created as mouthpieces for the ideas.

Well, sir, I cannot, in conclusion say with perfect truth, that I have altogether enjoyed my weekly whackings, but I can at least assure you that my behind – if Sean O'Casey will forgive the middleclass euphemism for his uncompromisingly proletarian monosyllable – my behind, if red, is so no more from the harsh treatment it has received than from blushful pride at the high distinction of the canes that have belaboured it. While not only my behind but the whole of my anatomy is still positively quivering with the shock and delight of having been considered worthy of the high honour of a birching from the head boy himself, who with characteristic and Olympian generosity, dealt far more leniently with the cheeky fourth



Rattigan "at work." He may have been working with a photographer on his public image here, but he apparently did outline and write his plays in this way.

former than with the school prefects who had been bullying him.

And so, encouraged thus in my cheek, I shall wish my opponents well of their theatre that is – to quote one of them – "one third arena, one third temple, on third music hall." Personally, I shall just stick to the theatre.

Rattigan's eagerness to promote his views about drama seems to have stemmed not only from his love for a certain type of theater but also possibly from the hurt of being dismissed by critics as a "commercial" or lightweight playwright. He always chafed at the notion commercial success was incompatible with seriousness or that comedy was less significant than tragedy. He addressed this issue with his own urbane style in a preface to the first volume of his collected plays published in 1953:

> It will save a good deal of falsely modest circumlocution if I state at once that the five plays in this volume have all had very long runs. Two of them, *French Without Tears* and *While the Sun Shines*, both played for over a thousand performances, and I have it on the authority of the late Mr. John Parker, the omniscient editor of *Who's Who in the Theatre*, that, on those grounds, I can lay claim to a sort of world's record, in that I am apparently the only playwright, until now, who has written two plays so blessed with longevity. *Flare Path* ran for eighteen months, *The Winslow Boy* for fifteen, and *Love in Idleness*, after a season in London limited first to three months and then extended to six, survived nearly two years on Broadway.
>
> I have a highly superstitious nature and in reciting these, to me, agreeable figures, it is not, let me assure the reader, hubris that has led me so to invite the all-too-possible Nemesis of five quick successive future flops. In fact, I have composed that complacent-seeming opening paragraph with my fingers firmly crossed. But facts are facts and it would be highly dishonest of me, just because I am now enjoying the honour at last of a collected edition, and indeed of writing a real preface to it just like a real dramatist, to attempt either to deny or to conceal the most relevant fact of all — that I am — or rather have been until now — avaunt Nemesis — a popular playwright.

This fact has not, I admit, caused me anything but the most acute, if slightly mystified, pleasure until now, when, in attempting to repay my publishers' compliment by taking myself seriously as a dramatic author, I find myself at some disadvantage. I envy now those dramatists, and there are not a few, who, in their prefaces, are able confidently to commend their plays to the discriminating reader on the bare grounds that undiscriminating audiences have firmly rejected them. Students of my friend Stephen Potter's Lifemanship manuals will know what I mean when I say that in the matter of writing prefaces to plays a dramatist is instantly 'one up' from the moment he is able to state that 'his play pleased not the million', a quotation which must of necessity bear two strong inferences to the reader; if, on the one hand, he is able to admire the play he can plainly count himself as one in a million; but if on the other, he is not, he stamps himself at once as a boor, who, like the rest of the scorned 'general', cannot tell caviar from suet pudding.

These five plays, however, as I have already had the honesty to confess, did please the million, and I find myself thus inevitably 'one down'. I am not able, as is my 'one-up' rival, to attack the state of the modern theatre, to deplore the commercialism of Shaftesbury Avenue (all these plays were performed either in Shaftesbury Avenue or within a hundred yards of it), to revile the short-sightedness of West End managers (all my managers have had offices in the West End, and none of them, with regard to my own plays, has seemed noticeably myopic), to pay tribute to the courage and enterprise of small repertory theatres outside London. (I would willingly do so, were I not deterred by the memory of one earnest young repertory manager who once said to me, in all good faith: 'What's so nice about doing your plays in my theatre is that their profits pay for the good ones.')

In commenting on his decision to turn to more serious drama with *The Winslow Boy* he says

> I have claimed above that I have never allowed myself to be guided in my subsequent work by anything the critics may have had to say in disparagement or praise about my previous endeavours, and in examining my motives for turning, at this stage in my career, from light to serious comedy, I can acquit myself of any attempt to try and 'give them what they want' (I mean, of course, the critics. Audiences, apparently, had already got it.) True, I totally disapproved — and still do disapprove - of the widely held notions that writing seriously for the theatre inevitably means writing serious plays, that serious plays are more difficult to write than comedies — in my case the reverse has been true — and that it is necessarily worthier to make an audience weep than to make it laugh.

The letter to *The New Statesman And Nation* was written six years before the premiere of John

Osborne's *Look Back In Anger*, which Rattigan was sure would be a complete flop and which, of course, radically altered English theater. Rattigan, who had always been viewed as something of a throwback to outmoded conventions, fell even further out of favor. He continued, however, to write for movies and television as well as the stage right up until his death in 1977. He wrote at least as many screenplays as he did plays for the stage. He received two Oscar nominations and at one point was reportedly the highest paid screenwriter in the world. He was a contract writer at the Warner Brothers studio in Teddington when *French Without Tears* was produced, and he had a long, very productive relationship as a writer for director Anthony Asquith. Nonetheless he regarded himself primarily as a playwright.

Rattigan knew before he was a teenager that he wanted to be a playwright. He fell in love with the theater at a very early age thanks partially to the influence of an aunt who took him to matinees. He began trying to write plays at 11 and spent most of his time at Oxford writing plays or dramatic criticism even though he was ostensibly studying history.

When attempting to explain his success as a playwright Rattigan cited his "sense of theater." He associates this with the excitement he felt as a boy when he was mesmerized by the performance of a play and caught up in the audience's reaction to certain moments. It is in the interaction between a performance and its audience that "theater" exists, and it is the indefinable moment of catharsis or epiphany or heightened shared awareness that is the essence of the theatrical experience. Rattigan knew better than to try to articulate or define this phenomenon in any abstract or analytical way. It was in a very real sense the love of his life, and what it meant was that a playwright must inevitably be conscious of his potential audience as he writes. It is not just the "material" that concerns him; it is the experience of an audience at a performance as well.

Rattigan was bold enough to attempt to explain this with two metaphors. One was to say that a playwright must be a bit of a schizophrenic.

> In the other preface I said that in my view a sense of theatre 'implied in its possessor a kind of deformity of the creative mind, a controlled schizophrenia which will allow a dramatist to act as an audience to his own play while in the very process of writing it'. When, in early days, my heroines rushed into their second-act paroxysms of hysterics and fell to the floor in dead, but graceful, faints; when my handsome heroes crushed some fatal document violently between the palms of their hands and stared with horror and amazement into space; when my villains turned quickly on their heels with curt, sardonic laughs and quietly left the room; and above all, when the curtains slowly fell—I never wrote of them as falling fast, for the reason, I suppose, that if they had the plays would have ended a second or so sooner,

an unbearable thought—it was at such ecstatic moments that I was most conscious of being a member of my own audience, and of participating myself in the emotions that I, as author, had aroused in them.

It might be argued that this sense of audience—participation implies no more in its possessor than a fairly lively imagination; that there is nothing mystical nor even instinctive about it, and that all it amounts to is the cold and conscious exercise that all creative artists must of necessity train themselves to perform. The novelist must be reader to his own novel, the painter viewer of his own painting, and the composer listener to his own music. They cannot write, paint, or compose in a complete vacuum. Yet in those branches of the arts there is no talk of some mysterious sixth sense or split mind that the artist must possess before he practises. Talent is all.

Nevertheless in the field of playwriting — and it will, I trust, be remarked that I do not use the word art — I believe that talent, in the usually accepted sense of the term, is not all. A novel can be great with only one reader to account it so; a painting may be a masterpiece, even though it is hidden away in a cupboard in the painter's studio; and a score of music can be a work of genius even in manuscript. But a play can neither be great, nor a masterpiece, nor a work of genius, nor talented, nor untalented, nor indeed anything at all, unless it has an audience to see it. For without an audience it simply does not exist. No audience means no performance, and no performance means no play. This fact, sadly lamented though it may have been over the centuries, by aspiring, talented but unperformed dramatists is hard, I admit, but utterly inescapable.[2]

The second metaphor introduced in this same preface to the second volume of his plays was the infamous Aunt Edna, the representative of that imaginary audience who some critics felt summarized exactly what was wrong with Rattigan's plays.

> …[P]lays, though they may give incidental pleasure in the library, are first intended for the stage. If they are not, they are not plays, but novels, poems, or philosophies in dialogue form, and their author, writer of genius though he may well be, has no right to the title of dramatist.
>
> From this there follows a simple truth, and for the purpose of its illustration let us invent a character, a nice, respectable, middle-class, middle-aged, maiden lady, with time on her hands and the money to help her pass it. She enjoys pictures, books, music, and the theatre and though to none of these arts (or rather, for consistency's sake, to none of these three arts and the one craft) does she bring much knowledge or discernment, at least, as she is apt to tell her cronies, she 'does know what she likes'.

---

2 Second Preface x - xi]

Let us call her Aunt Edna. She is bound to be someone's aunt, and probably quite a favourite one. She plays bridge rather well, goes to church on Sundays, and — but I must stop, or I shall be straight into a new play and the disconcerted reader may find the curtain rising to disclose the lounge of a small hotel in West Kensington.

Now Aunt Edna does not appreciate Kafka — 'so obscure, my dear, and why always look on the dark side of things?' — she is upset by Picasso — 'those dreadful reds, my dear, and why three noses?' — and she is against Walton — 'such appalling discords, my dear, and no melody at all'. She is, in short, a hopeless lowbrow, and the great novelist, the master painter, and the composer of genius are, and can afford to be, as disregarding of her tastes as she is unappreciative of their works.

Not so, unhappily, the playwright, for should he displease Aunt Edna, he is utterly lost. Though by no means a vindictive lady, nothing, I fear, will prevent her from avenging her unsatisfactory afternoon by broadcasting that evening in the lounge of her hotel in West Kensington: 'Oh, it was so dull, my dears, don't think of going to it. So much talk, so little action, so difficult to see the actor's faces, and even the tea was cold.'

She will be listened to. Aunt Edna always is. The playwright who has been unfortunate or unwise enough to incur her displeasure, will soon pay a dreadful price. His play, the child of his brain, will wither and die before his eyes. At this crisis in his life — for it is a crisis — he may possibly comfort himself with the hope of another performance of his play elsewhere before a more discerning audience; but the hope is likely to be vain, for, as I have maintained in the first preface, audiences do not, in matters of intelligence and discernment, differ much between one country and another. Aunt Edna is universal, and to those who may feel that all the problems of the modern theatre might be solved by her liquidation, let me add that I have no doubt at all that she is also immortal. She, or her ghost, is, I believe, as strong a force in Moscow as in London; perhaps, from the evidence, even stronger, for her English equivalent does not nearly so peremptorily demand that every picture tell a story, or that every play say something that is proper for her to hear.

Perhaps the best thing that can be said about Aunt Edna is a remark that Rattigan made about Noel Coward in a preface to a collection of reviews celebrating Coward's career: "Authors usually write shockingly badly about their own work…"[3]. It is generally agreed that Rattigan did himself a grave disservice in creating this character and escorting her into the world of drama criticism. In an interview with John Simon in 1962 Rattigan tried to clear up some of the misunderstanding with what seems on the surface to be some rather fierce back peddling.

---

3 Coward p. xx

> Aunt Edna is badly expressed but what I tried to say about Aunt Edna – my imaginary typical theatergoer – is that an audience is a constant – has not varied much from Sophocles to Tennessee Williams. I feel very strongly that we don't have to aim at our audience directly, as at a target, but we must never lose sight of them because if they don't come we're lost – we have no play – nothing.
>
> …[T]he dear old girl sees the new Osborne and loves it.. You can't shock the old girl. And my view about her remains constant – her taste is bloody good – her taste is better than the critics'…
>
> Even with Brecht, who is now a cult, Aunt Edna will go to the ones she likes – she will go to *Mother Courage* but she won't go to the *Bad Woman of Setzuan* or whatever it's called. She makes up her mind and she says "Right. *Mother Courage* rather good play – very interesting. Press in."[4]

Perhaps 50 years later it is easier to see beyond the seeming condescension with which he regarded his audience and to grasp the respect he felt for the ability of even the most "hopeless lowbrow" to respond to characters with empathy and to sense the moral and emotional significance of private moments and events made visible through the contrivance of theater.

Analyzing drama in terms of impact on the audience is nothing new. Aristotle's *Poetics* can be read in this way. The question is perhaps how the excitement aroused in audiences by 19th century melodrama is related to the catharsis or wonder resulting from the pity and terror aroused in Greek audiences by *Oedipus Rex*.

In describing this boyhood experience as a theatergoer, Rattigan made an interesting comment on the nature of his response:

> If my neighbours gasped with fear for the heroine when she was confronted with a fate worse than death, I gasped with them, although I suppose I could have had but the haziest idea of the exact nature of the lady's peril; when my neighbours laughed at the witty and immoral paradoxes of the hero's bachelor friend, I laughed at them too, although I could have appreciated neither their wit nor their immorality; and when my neighbours cheered the return of some favourite actor I cheered with them, even though at the time of his last appearance in London I had, quite possibly, not been born.
>
> All of which, no doubt, sounds very foolish — seemingly no more than an expression, in a rather absurd form, of the ordinary child's urge to ape the grown-ups. Yet I don't think it was only that. Up in my galleries (or, as my pocket money increased proportionately with my snobbishness, down in my pits), I was experiencing emotions which, though no doubt

4 Simon p.24

> insincere of origin in that they were induced and coloured by the adult emotions around me, were none the less most deeply felt.[5]

Aside from the indication that there is something infectious about audience reaction in a theatre there is an implication that his deeply felt emotions were more meaningful than his more limited conscious or verbal understanding. The emotional state is real and valuable despite its questionable origins. It is in fact so valuable that it becomes the basis of the ambition which shaped his life.

> When I came, therefore, to try to reproduce, as a precocious playwright, the emotions that had been aroused in myself as a precocious member of an audience, the results, though no doubt ludicrous, were at least instinctively theatrical.[6]

Needless to say Rattigan does not provide a psychological explanation of how deeply felt emotions can be "insincere of origin." In saying that the emotions he felt as a boy were "induced" by the responses of the adults around him rather than being his own immediate response to the action of the play he does seem to be saying that what he grasped was not the meaning of the play but the form of the theatrical experience. His juvenile efforts as a playwright resulted in excessively melodramatic or clichéd efforts to orchestrate his audience's emotions. They were presumably "ludicrous" because they could not come anywhere near their goal of engaging the audience sufficiently take them on an emotional rollercoaster ride.

Even after he decided to pursue a career as a professional playwright, Rattigan had five plays rejected before he hit the jackpot with *French Without Tears*. He was obviously not only refining his craft but also learning how to tap into his own more mature emotions. And he was realizing that the playwright's relationship with the audience was a bit more complex than he had first imagined.

> There is a wide difference between 'theatre' and theatricalism, as wide in fact as the difference between Maugham and Sardou. Long before I even got my first rejection slip from a manager, my heroines had ceased to [faint] at moments of crisis… My heroes and my villains had stopped glaring at each other, boldly on the one side and malevolently on the other. They had merged gradually into one and had become much the same person. Impossibly happy endings and convenient last-act suicides had been, or at least were in process of being, eliminated. Now self-discipline began to tighten even more, and those grandly built-up entrances for the star, together with those comic or dramatic exit lines to take them off to applause, both much beloved of Aunt Edna's connections in the gallery, by Aunt Edna

---

5 Preface vol 2 xiv

6 Preface vol 2 xiv

herself and, to be honest, by me, were sadly but ruthlessly included in the list.

I was learning, in fact, that although Aunt Edna must never be made mock of, or bored, or befuddled, she must equally not be wooed, or pandered to, or cosseted. I even made a rather startling discovery; that the old dear rather enjoys a little teasing and even, at times, some bullying.

It is as well that she has this slight masochistic strain in her, or if she had not there would be no such thing as good drama, but only good theatre.[7]

The hierarchy of "theatricalism," "theater," and "drama" defines the second dimension of Rattigan's ambition. He had no doubt of his success as a creator of theater; he at least pretended to be less confident in his claim to be a dramatist, though not as hesitant to accept the label as many of his critics were to apply it. *The Winslow Boy* and *The Browning Version* were the beginnings of his attempt to stake his claim as a dramatist. He eventually claimed to be embarrassed by some of his earlier successes, but he never disowned his "light" comedies nor denigrated in any way the craft of theater.

He was adamant, though, that good theater was not just a matter of technique or craft. He was equally adamant that it was not a matter of "eloquence, the poetic gift, or the powers of rhetoric,"[8] even though he could admire verse drama and the attempts by dramatists such as T.S. Eliot, Christopher Fry and others to reinvigorate the language of contemporary theater. He, himself, was committed to a form of naturalism in which characters spoke completely in the vernacular.

His most telling comment about the sense of theater, however, concerns the necessity of indirection:

> Sense of theatre does not lie in the explicit. An analysis of those moments in the great plays at which we have all caught our breaths would surely lead to the conclusion that they are nearly always those moments when the least is being said, and the most suggested. 'As kill a King?… Ay Lady 'twas my word.' 'She'll come no more. Never, never, never, never, never.' 'Finish, good lady, the bright day is done and we are for the dark.' 'Cover her face: Mine eyes dazzle: she died young.' 'Mother, give me the sun.' One can multiply instances, but surely the point is here.
>
> Has not sense of theatre then something to do with the ability to thrill an audience by the mere power of suggestion, to move it by words unspoken, rather than spoken, to gain tears by a simple adverb repeated five times or in terms of comedy to arouse laughter by a glance or a nod? Surely, in comedy as in tragedy, it is the implicit rather than the explicit that gives life

7 Preface vol 2 xvi

8 Preface vol 1 p. xix

to a scene and, by demanding the collaboration of an audience, holds it, contented, flattered, alert and responsive.

The power of implication in drama admits no argument. About comedy my view can plainly be challenged by the supporters of the Congreve-Wilde 'gilded phrase' school. It is too large a question to enter into now. Let me merely state that I have always firmly believed that the weapons of understatement and suggestion are even more effective in comedy than in tragedy, and I have with diligence, discipline, and self-restraint always practised that belief…

I am sure that this instinct for the use of dramatic implication is in fact a part of the mystique of playwriting, and, in my view, by far the most important part; for it is the very quality that can transform a mere sense of theatre into a sense of drama.[9]

Despite his attempt to reduce the importance of implication or suggestion to that of just another technique for engaging the audience, Rattigan seems to want to say that there is more at stake by summoning up the "mystique of playwriting" and by invoking a transformation of a "mere sense of theatre into a sense of drama." It is as though his instincts tell him that the experience of "those moments in the great plays at which we have all caught our breaths" involve a heightened state of awareness which puts us in touch with something vitally important that cannot be verbalized. In any event he is much less interested in the analyzing such moments than he is in created them.

I am inclined to latch onto this moment in Rattigan's perspective on his own work because so much of what he says about his sense of theatre seems to imply the kind of rollercoaster aesthetic whose ultimate embodiment is the visual effects extravaganza. One could claim that the difference between Sardou and Maugham is simply one of sophistication in technique. As audiences catch on to the tricks by which they are held on the edge of their seat, playwrights need to devise ever more subtle tricks. One way this is done is to create more believable characters and situations to elicit empathy. Once you have hooked the audience into identifying with someone, you can jerk them around emotionally. Admittedly the thrill of watching a beleaguered hero finally get the best of his nemesis may take place in a different part of the brain that the thrill of seeing an entire city engulfed in apocalyptic explosions, but the reason for buying the ticket may be essentially the same. Real life is a dull, unsatisfying affair so we need cheap thrills, especially if one doesn't have a taste for suicidally extreme sports.

Even visual effects professionals know how to talk about the importance of "story." All the mayhem and gravity-defying stunts are in the service of "storytelling," which is the creative heart of movie making. My question may be whether anyone understands why storytelling is an important

9 Preface 1 xx-xxi

or popular pastime. When John Simon asked Rattigan if he could summarize his own vision, Rattigan gave a refreshingly candid answer:

> No. Because it varies from person to person, from play to play. It's a vision of a human being or of a situation between two human beings which is personal to you and which you are seeing with your God's eye view and you are saying, "I can communicate this to an audience." And I don't know why one does it. One does it because – just because it makes one some money, I don't know.

Obviously for Rattigan the difference between "theatricalism" (rollercoasterism) and "theater" is character. And every screenwriter in Hollywood knows he is supposed to write "character-driven" scripts. Even the term "sitcom" comes from the idea that good comedy is rooted in situations involving characters rather than just funny lines. The saving grace note in Rattigan's commercialism is the "which is personal to you." This means that the starting point for Rattigan was some instance of the human predicament which resonated with him and for which he felt he had some intuitive understanding that permitted a "God's eye view" of it. Needless to say it does not mean the content of his plays was autobiographical. It means that what shaped his plays was not simply what he imagined would get a rise out of an audience but something he knew about life and felt he could communicate.

The image of Rattigan as a boy in a theater spellbound by the action unfolding before him makes me want to look at the difference between his experience and the experience of a boy in his own home witnessing a conflict between his parents. Theater is obviously "make believe" where the action on stage has no implications for the life of the spectator other than what he can learn from it. The experience of theater is not the witnessing of a conflict per se. Suppose the actors on the stage had a monumental ego conflict and something provoked them to forget about the performance and launch into a real life blowout. Some of the audience might relish this "reality show;" some might be embarrassed for the actors; none would enjoy a "theatrical experience" in which conflict is one aspect of a structured "action" viewed from an Olympian perspective. Even when information is deliberately withheld from the audience as a means of engaging their interest, ultimately the audience attains the same "God's eye view" from which the playwright worked. What is apprehended from that distance is not just the events or the behavior of the characters, but some "meaning" embodied in the play as a whole.

Rattigan's objection to plays of ideas was couched in terms of the creative process: which "came first," the ideas or the characters. This can be interpreted as a matter of priorities as well as a description of the development of a particular play. He was reacting to a movement which saw theater as a means of social reform and which he thought was selling it short as propaganda or political

rhetoric. He did not necessarily object to any of the theatrical techniques employed by avant-garde theater. He was able along with Aunt Edna to embrace some of Brecht's plays which he thought relied on character. He does not seem to have recognized Brecht's claim that traditional theater further hypnotized an already sleepwalking audience rather than waking them up.

There is no doubt that part of what attracted Rattigan to the theater was the "glamour" of its world, and his public persona was someone who would seem completely at home in a Noel Coward play, but he also had a private life which enabled him to understand the dynamics of love relationships or the complexities of the emotions raging beneath the surface of seemingly ordinary people. Perhaps even as a boy he felt, as would Andrew Crocker-Harris, the need for "something that would make life supportable," and the excitement he experienced in the theater pointed the way.

The Characters

Andrew Crocker-Harris is obviously the central character in *The Browning Version*. Rattigan said there was a classics master at Harrow named J.W. Coke-Norris, who retired while he was there and who rebuffed a student's attempt to give him a book as a going-away present. To some extent the genesis of the play is probably in Rattigan's efforts to imagine how Coke-Norris became the kind of man he was.

We do not really learn much about Andrew's past. We know that he was a brilliant scholar at Oxford who took every possible honor and that he began teaching at the school immediately upon graduation from Oxford. We know that he met Millie 20 years ago when he was doing a walking tour in the Lake District and knocked on the door of the house where she was staying. We know that he has been at the school 18 years. This would presumably mean that he is in his early forties, perhaps just 40. (Rattigan, in fact, considered inserting a line in the play that would make it clear that Andrew was 40 when he felt the actor playing the part was playing him as though he were much older.) We can probably assume that he did not marry Millie until he knew he had the teaching job, which would mean they knew each other about two years before marrying. They have no children.

We know little else about Andrew's youth except that he is not from a wealthy family. This would probably mean that he had a scholarship to Oxford, as did Rattigan. When he was about 18 Andrew wrote a verse translation of The Agamemnon. We know that he had high hopes for his career and, according to Millie, he felt he had a vocation for teaching and hoped to become a headmaster.

He teaches the lower fifth. English public schools like Harrow are divided into upper and lower divisions, roughly comparable to the division between junior and senior high school in the Unit-

ed States. Grades are called "forms" and the division between upper and lower school corresponds to a division between the upper and lower fifth form. The organization of the curriculum and the path that a student takes as he progresses towards graduation appear to vary from school to school, and there was actually a discussion in Punch magazine shortly after the opening of *The Browning Version* regarding the significance of the fact that Andrew is teaching the lower fifth. In researching his book on Rattigan, B.A. Young confirmed with someone at Harrow that the job of teaching classics in the lower fifth would have indeed been a plum assignment for someone fresh out of Oxford. It can also be assumed that someone teaching classics to the lower fifth would also be teaching more advanced students as well. It seems reasonable to assume that had Andrew been a more popular or successful master, he might have been given other duties and relieved of his teaching responsibilities in the "soul-destroying lower fifth."

What is perhaps more relevant is the fact that the classics were still regarded as the core of any curriculum. Schools like Harrow were very slow to adopt a "modern" curriculum which gave equal weight to sciences and humanities. In order to specialize in the sciences, a student had first to satisfy the basic requirements in classics. This is the point of Taplow's anxiety about whether he will get his "remove" and be permitted to switch to a science curriculum in the upper school.

Andrew also organizes the schedule of classes for each term. In Rattigan's time Coke-Norris was the "Organization Master" responsible for the timetable of classes. While this seems to be a significant contribution to the administration of the school, other masters (e.g. Frank Hunter) are not necessarily aware of Andrew's role since the published timetable always bears only the Headmaster's name and not the name of the person who actually prepared it.

Andrew is having to retire due to a problem with his heart. He has taken a position at a "crammer's" in Dorset, a smaller school for "backward" boys run by an Oxford colleague. The new job will be much less demanding, but also will pay much less than his current one. He is hoping that the school will provide him with a pension, even though technically he is retiring too soon to be entitled to one.

The rest of what we know about Andrew comes either from his description of himself or the descriptions of him given by other characters. Whether or not we should take Andrew's description of himself at face value is a matter of interpretation. Before we begin exploring possible interpretations of Andrew, it may be helpful to review some of the basic information about the characters.

Andrew's wife Millie is described as "a thin woman in the late thirties, rather more smartly dressed than the general run of schoolmasters' wives." She is the daughter of the owner of a men's

clothing shop in an arcade in Bradford, and she has a very modest income of her own from a dowry. Her uncle, Sir William Bartop, is apparently much wealthier and more prominent than her father. She is having an affair with Frank Hunter, one of the other masters at the school; and there is reason to believe that this is not the first extramarital affair she has had. She is clearly much more of a social animal than Andrew. She is painfully aware of social status, and she knows how to charm. The interpretation of her character may be the most critical element in the interpretation of the play as a whole. The distinction between fact and interpretation in her case is not an easy line to draw so I shall postpone most of the discussion of her character.

Frank Hunter is a younger science teacher at the school. He is a popular master and is described as "rugged" and "self-confident." He is apparently somewhat athletic, although the only sport he demonstrates knowledge of is golf. He canvassed for Labour in the last election, a fact which, combined with his relative youth, helps make him seem "different" from the other masters to Taplow. He professes to be bored by the science he teaches, and the ambivalence with which he views his involvement with Millie points to a more basic conflict within him about his own nature.

John Taplow is described as "a plain, moon-faced boy of about sixteen, with glasses." He is taking "extra work" from Crocker-Harris, an arrangement for which his father pays Crocker-Harris directly; and he is anxious to complete his classics requirement so that he can study science in the upper school. He would rather be playing golf than being tutored in Greek on the next to last day of term, but he is sufficiently intimidated by Andrew not to think of cutting. When his lesson is cut short, he says there is no need to refund any money to his father, which may be an indication of his family's financial circumstances. Millie's father met Taplow's mother at a "fete" where she and Millie's uncle both gave speeches.

Taplow may be taking extra work, but he is clearly a bright and perceptive student. The interpretation of his motive in giving his teacher a present is the fulcrum around which action of the play pivots. I would be inclined to say that the description of him as "plain" and "moon-faced" are an indication that what matters most is what is projected onto him by the other characters.

Dr. Frobisher, the headmaster of the school, is described as looking "more like a distinguished diplomat than a doctor of literature and classical scholar." Rattigan also tell us, he is "in the middle fifties and goes to a very good tailor." There is no information about his background nor is any needed. We see everything we need to know in the way he deals with Andrew and Millie.

The only other characters in the play are Mr. and Mrs. Gilbert. Peter Gilbert is Andrew's replacement. He is a brilliant student fresh out of Oxford who met his wife on a holiday in the Lake

District. There is a suggestion that his wife has more money than he, and she expresses surprise that Millie does her own cooking. The couple obviously functions as a kind of shadow of Andrew and Millie. There is an exchange between them in which Gilbert tells his wife not to "swank" by implying she has more social status than she actually does. Millie's tendency to present as though she comes from a prominent family is a recurring motif in the play and may have even influenced the decision not to grant Andrew a pension.

The Action of the Play

The Browning Version is a one act play which takes place in one room virtually in real time. The only dramatic license in terms of the passage of time may be the amount of time allowed for Taplow to go to the village and return twice. The first time he is sent by Millie to fill Andrew's prescription so that she can be alone with Frank. She gives him money to buy himself a treat as well. He returns to begin his lesson eight pages later (just under 8 minutes in the BBC broadcast version of the play). He then leaves again (page 22) and returns with the gift (page 37 – a lapse of 6:12 in the BBC version). The only issue with this is the question of whether he bought the book he gives Andrew only after he left the second time. It seems as though this is the intended implication since the gift is to some extent a response to Andrew's revelation that he himself had written a verse translation of the *Agamemnon*. But he also mentions that he has been reading the Browning translation so the implication is that he discovered the book, decided to buy it and then read part of it before coming back to give it to Andrew. Dramatic license certainly allows for time compression of this sort, and it would not be an issue at all if it were not for the question of whether Taplow's gift is in fact at least partially the bribe that Millie says it is. Her interpretation has more credibility if Taplow bought the book on one of his trips to town after she overheard him mocking Andrew. Except for this consideration the play leaves it to the audience to decide exactly what mixture of components there are in Taplow's decision to buy the book for Andrew. It is, I believe, typical of the way the play works that his motivation is deliberately unclear. It is both an artful bribe and a sincere expression of sympathy and appreciation.

The action of the play progresses on four levels:

1) A sequence of seemingly everyday events,
2) The revelation of information mainly for the benefit of the audience,
3) The revelation of information between the characters themselves, and
4) The emotional or psychological impact that the characters have on one another.

Pages	Event
1	Taplow arrives for lesson with Andrew.
2 - 7	Frank arrives to see Millie, chats with Taplow
7 - 9	Millie arrives, sends Taplow to village

9 - 14	Millie and Frank discuss plans for summer
14 - 17	Andrew arrives, shows Frank time-table
17-18	Taplow returns, Millie & Frank leave
18 - 21	Taplow and Andrew discuss Agamem-non
21-22	Frobisher arrives, Taplow dismissed
22 - 27	Frobisher discusses pension & prize-giving
27 - 28	Millie speaks to Frobisher as he leaves
28 -30	Andrew gives Millie news of pension & ceremony
30 - 32	Gilberts arrives to see flat
32 - 35	Andrew & Gilbert talk as Millie shows Mrs. Gilbert around
35 - 37	Gilberts depart
37	Mille & Andrew talk about Gilberts; Mille exits.
38 - 40	Taplow brings gift
40 - 41	Frank returns for dinner. Andrew shows him Taplow's gift, Taplow leaves
41 - 43	Millie "explains" Taplow's gift. An-drew exits.
43 - 46	Frank reprimands Millie, breaks with her
46 - 53	Andrew returns; Millie exits; Frank offers advice.
53	Millie re-enters to set dinner table as Frank leaves.
53 - 54	Millie and Andrew discuss plans for summer.
54	Frobisher phones; Andrew tells him of his decision.
54	Millie and Andrew sit down to dinner.

Given the fact that this is the next-to-last day of the last term for Andrew at the school, the occurrence of all these events within the time frame of the play is perfectly believable. Things are coming to a head and need to be resolved before everyone leaves. That Andrew would insist on tutoring Taplow that afternoon is unusual as Frobisher notes, but it is indicative of his character. His commitment to doing things in the manner he believes right and proper is central to a definition of who he is. Others (including the audience) may view this trait as rigid or stuffy. ("I have given you exactly what you deserve. No less; and certainly no more.") It is, however, one of the sources of the power he wields over his students and also an important element in his relationship with his wife.

A glance at the time line for the play makes it clear that Andrew is the spine of the structure. Once he enters, he only exits briefly at the moment when he seems to have been completely broken. His exit allows Frank and Millie to have time to resolve their relationship, but it also sets up his return as a rising from his own ashes.

Many of the events in the play are used for conveying information about who the characters are so that the story can have its full impact. The real action of the play consists of nine moments which have a significant impact on Andrew or in which Andrew reacts.

Page	Event
20	Taplow's "enthusiasm" stirs Andrew's memories of his youth.
24, 26	Frobisher denies pension and requests he relinquish his ceremonial place.
29	Millie attacks Andrew for acquiescing.
32	Gilbert tells Andrew he is Himmler of Lower Fifth.
38	Taplow gives Andrew the book.
42	Millie debunks Taplow's gift.
51	Hunter makes a gesture of friendship.
53	Andrew decides not to go to Bradford.
54	Andrew reclaims his proper ceremonial place.

Literary Context

There are two literary references looming behind *The Browning Version*: *Goodbye, Mr. Chips* and the *Agamemnon*. Both figure explicitly in the dialog and are clearly intended as pointers to a context within which the meaning of the play can be better appreciated. It is as though the play exists as a relief against the background established by the other works. (There is another literary echo which may be worth noting as well: George and Martha in Albee's *Whose Afraid of Virginia Wolfe* may be the next generation in this lineage.)

Goodbye, Mr. Chips is a novella written by James Hilton in 1933, which enjoyed great popularity and was made into a movie starring Robert Donat and Greer Garson in 1939. (A musical version of it was filmed in 1968 with a screenplay by none other than Terrence Rattigan.) Millie's reference to Mr. Chips is an indication of the extent to which the character of Mr. Chipping had become a cultural stereotype. *Goodbye, Mr. Chips* is a sentimental novel and an even more sentimental movie.

It is tempting to view *The Browning Version* as an ironic rebuttal of *Goodbye, Mr. Chips*. Mr. Chips is a classics teacher at an old English boarding school. He has settled into a rut in his life when he falls in love and marries a woman who revitalizes him and enables him to become a much beloved personification of the traditions of the school. Mr. Chips was known for his sense of humor and was not a scholar of any depth. He regarded mastering the classical languages as a kind of initiation ritual for an English gentleman, and he took pride in his ability to play cricket well even at the age of 50. The entire story is told from the point of view of Chips as an old man enjoying his comfortable retirement in lodgings near from the school. He is summoned back out of retirement to become acting headmaster during the war. It is surely no coincidence that both Chips and the Crock met their wives while on a walking tour in the Lake District. (The film version of *Goodbye,*

Mr. Chips exports this scene to the Alps in order to combine it with the development of a relationship with a German colleague at the school.)

One suspects that when Rattigan hit upon the idea of using a character based on Coke-Norris as the subject for a serious one-act play modeled on a Greek classic, he may well have seized the opportunity to show the world what a "crock" of sentimentality *Goodbye, Mr. Chips* is. It may also be that the way in which Rattigan turns everything in *Goodbye, Mr. Chips* on it head is simply a sly literary in-joke. Or the play may be an example of what Anthony Powell described as one of Rattigan's favorite formulas: "Take a hackneyed situation and reverse it."[10]

Except for the need to understand Millie's allusion to Mr. Chips, the audience need have no familiarity with *Goodbye, Mr. Chips* in order to experience the full impact of *The Browning Version.* Neither Rattigan himself nor any of the critics ever seem to have commented on a relationship between his play and *Goodbye, Mr. Chips*, but it may have just seemed too obvious to merit discussion.

Goodbye, Mr. Chips has pleasures of its own to offer the reader, and the 1939 film is widely regarded as a classic. Donat won an Academy Award for his performance, and the film was nominated for six others in a year that is legendary for the number of classics it produced (*Gone With The Wind*, *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington*, *Wuthering Heights*, *Stagecoach*, *The Wizard of Oz*, etc.) The main relevance of Mr. Chips to this analysis may be the help he can offer in pinning down the nature of sentimentality when we consider the way in which Rattigan's play evolved into the two films versions.

The *Agamemnon*, on the other hand, is a conscious model for the construction of the play, and there are numerous ways in which *The Browning Version* resonates with references to the it. One of the more indirect references is, I believe, the image of the siege of Troy as a metaphor for what happens to Andrew in the course of the afternoon. At the outset Andrew is clearly a character who has fortified himself by adopting a rigid persona. He even describes part of this process in his confession to Peter Gilbert when he explains how he became a "character" in his relationships with his students.

The first event which weakens Andrew's defenses is the way in which Taplow's reaction to the *Agamemnon* reminds him of his own youthful passion. Taplow has entered not only Andrew's home, but his repressed inner self. Like the Trojan horse in which invaders were allowed to enter the citadel of Troy, Andrew's own meticulous devotion to his teaching responsibilities exposes him to an intrusion which makes him vulnerable. The recollection of his own enthusiasm and of his efforts to convey his excitement to others via his own verse translation of the *Agamemnon* is an opening in the

10 Young p 19

armor of his psyche which makes him all the more vulnerable to the attacks which ensue.

Dr. Frobisher delivers the first wave of the attack when he informs Andrew of the school's decision not to award him a pension. And he twists the sword with his request that Andrew relinquish his proper position in the ceremonies in favor of another more popular master who is also leaving.

At this point the relevance of the *Agamemnon* becomes much more direct as Millie is presented first as an accomplice in the attack and ultimately as Clytemnestra, the vengeful wife who murders her husband and speaks boastfully about it.

There is also a parallel with the setting for the *Agamemnon* in terms of the contrast between the public space presented on stage and the private space off stage. The screen separating the sitting room from the rest of the house functions like the door to the palace where the murder takes place in the *Agamemnon*. Rattigan plays with this public/private demarcation, reversing it at times so that the sitting room is the private area in contrast to the public space of the school and town beyond the door. He also uses it to reflect the public and private personas of the characters.

Millie's attack on Andrew is presented in two phases. First she attacks Andrew for acquiescing in the school's decision about the pension. She also reveals that she knew Frobisher was going to ask Andrew to relinquish his position in the ceremonies and had encouraged Frobisher to do so. Then after Andrew is made even more vulnerable by the discovery that he is regarded as "The Himmler of the Lower Fifth" and by Taplow's gift, Millie delivers the final blow by debunking Taplow's motives. Even though this might seem to be a minor event in comparison to the school's decision to deny Andrew's request for a pension, it is in fact a devastating blow and perhaps a supreme example of Rattigan's ability to orchestrate a "theatrical" moment. He has set it up with a one-two punch in which Andrew is opened up, hit, torn open more and then hit again. Perhaps the prime function of Frank Hunter's character in the play is to provide a reaction to Millie's attack on Andrew. The fact that he witnesses it and the impact that it has on his feelings about her provide a kind of echo chamber which amplifies the viciousness of her act.

Frank's gesture of honesty and friendship towards Andrew after Millie's attack is a reprise of Taplow's honesty and openness which began the whole cycle. Andrew's seeming equanimity implies that he has regrouped in some way. He appears to have simply re-established his defenses and on the surface he rejects the gesture with a bitter reference to his own gullibility about Taplow's "bribe."

Andrew has resumed his public persona; but, when he is alone with Millie, he reveals that something has changed within him. He tells her that he does not intend to join her in Bradford for the month of August; and, indeed, that he does not expect her to join him when he assumes his new

position in Dorset. Finally he informs the headmaster that he has changed his mind and is not willing to relinquish his proper position in the ceremonies the next day.

Andrew may have described himself to Hunter as a corpse that could not be revived except by a miracle, but he has in fact survived Millie's latest blow and reclaimed at least some portion of his integrity. Taplow, the invader, has also been the bearer of healing medicine for Andrew's heart. The magnitude of this event points straight into the depths of Rattigan's understanding of human nature.

The final event in the play may seem simply to be an ironic curtain line: He and Millie sit down together as he says, "Come along, my dear. We mustn't let our dinner get cold." However, given the shift that has occurred not only in Andrew but also in our perception of Millie as a result of Andrew's explanation of her to Hunter, this final action becomes symbolic of the entire play. Dining together is a step in the dance of love and hatred which binds them together.

Information Management

In order for the play to tell Andrew's story, the audience needs information about him and the circumstances surrounding the events it is able to witness directly. Every character in the play tells us something about Andrew. Even Mrs. Gilbert, who has only just met him, tells us how Andrew and Millie met. Taplow, Frank and Millie all talk about him before his entrance. Frobisher tells us that Andrew has been at the school 18 years and is perhaps the most brilliant classics scholar ever to teach at the school. Peter Gilbert tells Andrew and us that he is known as the Himmler of the Lower Fifth. Andrew spells out his financial circumstances for Frobisher and describes himself and his past experiences to both Frank and Gilbert.

Controlling the flow of such information is one of the ways in which Rattigan keeps the audience engaged. The most obvious and extreme example of this is the timing of the revelation that Andrew is fully aware of Millie's affair with Frank. Knowing this too soon would deflate the tension created by the sense that the affair is their secret and the anticipation of what may happen when and if Andrew discovers it. Discovering instead that Andrew already knows about it has almost as much impact on the audience as it does on Frank. This is again a prime example of what I believe Rattigan meant by his "sense of theatre."

Another example of his sure-handed technique is the handling of news about the pension. It might be tempting to inform the audience earlier that Andrew is hoping to get a pension so that there could be some "suspense" or anticipation associated with Frobisher's visit. What Rattigan does is the opposite. We have no idea what Frobisher wants to discuss with Andrew. Frobisher sidles up to it without saying directly what is

on his mind, and Andrew deduces and responds to the decision before we have any idea what is at stake. The net effect of this, however, is to heighten the impact of Millie's attack on Andrew after Frobisher leaves.

We are given a clue that the pension is an issue between Andrew and Millie when Andrew corrects himself as he says to Frobisher, "But I thought – my wife thought, that an exception was made some five years ago –" As a result we are probably suspicious of Andrew's obliviousness when Millie says, "Well? Do we get it?" The ensuing explosion makes perfectly clear what is at stake with the pension, and its impact on the audience is heightened by the fact that there has been no reason to expect it. Withholding the information engages the audience by having them discover the circumstances as they witness the interactions between the characters.

There are two principal threads in the background information we need about Andrew: that having to do with his career and that having to do with his relationship with Millie. The information is provided by various characters as the play progresses. In some instances we are given information in advance to set up our understanding of an event that we shall witness. In other instances we are given information which alters our perspective on an event that has already taken place. There is very little, if any, dialog in *The Browning Version* that seems "expository." It all seems to be part of an exchange which is both natural and relevant to some immediate emotional or psychological situation. It all also has overtones which enrich the main themes or motifs of the play.

Two examples may serve to support this claim. Perhaps the two bits that seem to come closest to being expository are Frank's comment, "He ought never to have become a schoolmaster, really. Why did he?" and Frobisher's remark, "Now you have been with us, in all, eighteen years, haven't you?"

Frank's question comes out of his reflections on the difficulty of achieving any kind of natural relationship with the students. The relationship between masters and students is a predominant theme in the opening scene and a major thread running throughout the play. We witness Frank's interaction with Taplow which includes a virtual embrace when he coaches him in his golf swing as well as Frank's complicity in his mimicry of Andrew. Millie chides him teasingly for encouraging disrespect, and Frank responds by expressing an ambivalence about his role which is characteristic.

Andrew is not only a general presence looming in the background of the scene, but also seems to be the principal thing separating Frank and Millie. It is natural therefore that he should be a topic of thought and conversation. It is plausible that Frank would never before have wondered why Andrew became a schoolmaster and that the conjunction of his interaction with Taplow and his liaison with Millie would raise the question.

Frobisher's remark is part of the way in which he sidles up to communicating what he doesn't want to say directly. It is obvious in retrospect that both Frobisher and Andrew know perfectly well how long Andrew has taught at the school. Making this remark is a kind of formality that pretends to be a clarification when in fact it is simply a way of approaching a subject obliquely. Frobisher does not have the nerve to come right out and tell Andrew that the board has refused his pension. He wants to delegate that task to Andrew. Rattigan can also get away with this degree of exposition because the audience knows nothing about what is coming and will not necessarily latch onto the fact that both of them know all too well how long Andrew has been at the school. Frobisher is revealing himself as the kind of circumspect politician that a headmaster must be. He is also providing a satirical variation on the public/private persona theme that runs through the play. I think it is safe to assume that an audience will see through Frobisher's "diplomacy" to the fear or cowardliness beneath.

Before we see Andrew, we know from Taplow and Frank that students are intimidated by him and consider him without feelings and barely human. Students call him "The Crock," a nickname which may not have had the same associations it is likely to have with a contemporary American audience; but which surely indicates that the students view him more as a phenomenon than as a human being and perhaps exploits a connotation of crocodile and crocodile tears. Crock also has a secondary meaning of a broken piece of earthenware rather than just a pot or jar.

Taplow offers an interpretation of Andrew's repression and expresses sympathy for him despite the fact that he feels Andrew does not want others to like him.

We also learn before we see Andrew that his wife is unfaithful. Even she refers to him as The Crock in her explanation to Frank of why Andrew became a teacher. She tells Frank (and us) that his career began auspiciously and that he had ambitions. Although she will later reveal the depth of her contempt for Andrew, she describes him with a degree of sympathy and sadness rather than complete bitterness. She is, of course, primarily interested in Frank and considers talk of Andrew to be a depressing distraction.

Frank seems initially to share the students' view of Andrew. He is also apprehensive about Andrew's arrival for fear that he will be caught in his affair with Millie. Andrew may seem barely human, but he is also set up as a judge of others behavior. Taplow has described his experience in the classroom in a way that conjures being summoned before a magistrate for a breach of the law.

Taplow tells us that Andrew is leaving the school. Millie reveals that Andrew's prescription is for his heart. Eventually Frobisher confirms what we have probably surmised: Andrew is having to retire early because of a medical problem. Andrew professes to be looking forward to the

change in his career when he rejects Frank's expression of sympathy, but we already know enough to be suspicious of his acquiescence in his fate. Only when Andrew opens up, first the Taplow and then to Gilbert, do we get a clearer picture of the frustrations of his career. By this time we have probably adapted a view of him similar to that of Frank and the students, so the revelations of his own feelings can alter our perspective on him and move us in a way they would not have been able to do had he expressed them earlier.

The same is true for his own view of his relationship with Millie. He is introduced as a cuckold. Even a student sees him as shriveled up emotionally, and his wife describes him as unfeeling to the point of being dead. When he finally reveals that he has known all about Millie's affairs, he tells Frank that she is as much to be pitied as he, because neither got what they needed from the marriage. Although he attempts to present his situation as farcical, his revelations underscore its tragic dimensions. We go from seeing him as a victim to seeing him as someone struggling with his own responsibility and guilt.

Obviously it is impossible or pointless to discuss the way in which information about Andrew is revealed in the course of the play without discussing the way in which that information is intertwined with the action of the play and its emotional impact or meaning. The point here is simply to indicate the extent to which the structure of the play is partially a matter of controlling the flow of information about the central characters. What we know about them affects our interpretation of their actions and our emotional involvement with them. It is not as though there is a certain amount of background information which has to be gotten out of the way in order for the dramatic events to make sense. The events themselves are largely an unfolding of information about the characters and their background as well as a movement towards something new. We move back in time as we move forward; events flush out depths in the characters and relationships. Information that is revealed causes us to reassess our interpretation of what we have seen and "moves" us into a different relationship with the characters. It seems cynical to label this effect as "manipulation" of the audience. "Orchestrating emotional responses" may be a less pejorative expression for the way in which the craftsmanship of the playwright produces an experience which an audience values.

Meaning and Interpretation

On the surface *The Browning Version* seems to exist in the space created by a stark contrast between the *Agamemnon* and *Goodbye, Mr. Chips*. The *Agamemnon* is, at least in Taplow's eyes, about "a wife murdering her husband and having a lover and all that."[11] *Goodbye, Mr. Chips* is about the revivifying power of love and marriage:

---

11 Rattigan p.4

He had been at Brookfield for over a quarter of a century, long enough to have established himself as a decent fellow and a hard worker; but just too long for anyone to believe him capable of ever being much more. He had, in fact, already begun to sink into that creeping dry rot of pedagogy which is the worst and ultimate pitfall of the profession; giving the same lessons year after year had formed a groove into which the other affairs of his life adjusted themselves with insidious ease. He worked well; he was conscientious; he was a fixture that gave service, satisfaction, confidence, everything except inspiration.

And then came this astonishing girl-wife whom nobody had expected — least of all Chips himself. She made him, to all appearances, a new man; though most of the newness was really a warming to life things that were old, imprisoned, and unguessed. His eyes gained sparkle; his mind, which was adequately if not brilliantly equipped, began to move more adventurously. The one thing he had always had, a sense of humor, blossomed into a sudden richness to which his years lent maturity. He began to feel a greater sureness; his discipline improved to a point at which it could become, in a sense, less rigid; he become more popular. When he had first come to Brookfield he had aimed to be loved, honored, and obeyed – but obeyed, at any rate. Obedience he had secured, and honor had been granted him; but only now came love, the sudden love of boys for a man who was kind without being soft, who understood them well enough, but not too much, and whose private happiness linked them with their own. He began to make little jokes, the sort that schoolboys like – mnemonics and puns that raised laughs and at the same time imprinted something in the mind.[12]

In contrast to Mr. Chips Andrew is a brilliant scholar who sees himself as a failure, whose contemptuous and unfaithful wife has long ago succeeded in killing him, and who commands obedience with "soulless tyranny." His esoteric jokes elicit only pity, and the comic persona which he adopted in his relationship with the students has ceased to work.

ANDREW: I knew, of course, that I was not only not liked, but now positively disliked. I had realized, too, that the boys – for many long years now – had ceased to laugh at me. I don't know why they no longer found me a joke. Perhaps it was my illness. No, I don't think it was that. Something deeper than that. Not a sickness of the body, but a sickness of the soul. At all events it didn't take much discernment on my part to realize I had become an utter failure as a schoolmaster. Still, stupidly enough, I hadn't realized that I was also feared. The Himmler of the

12 Hilton p. 31f

> lower fifth! I suppose that will become my epitaph.[13]

If this were a complete description of Andrew, he would probably seem to most members of the audience merely a pathetic victim. Even Brooks Atkinson, reviewing the New York production of *The Browning Version*, seems to have viewed Andrew in this way:

> [T]o me Mr. Rattigan's schoolmaster is pure sentimentality and I cannot grieve over his misfortune.[14]

One key to seeing beyond this is the image of Millie as Clytemnestra. When Clytemnestra murders Agamemnon, she is taking revenge for the fact that he killed their daughter, Iphigenia. Clytemnestra feels justified in taking Aegisthus as a lover while her husband is fighting at Troy, because Agamemnon sacrificed Iphigenia in order to be able to sail off to war. Her justification is reinforced by the fact that Agamemnon has brought Cassandra home with him, presumably as a mistress. The murder at the center of the Agamemnon is only one link in a chain of inexorable events going back at least a generation.

Implying that Millie is Clytemnestra suggests that she has in some way been wronged. Andrew himself provides the explanation of Millie bitterness, although he attempts to dismiss their problem as inconsequential:

> ANDREW: You see, my dear Hunter, she is really quite as much to be pitied as I. We are both of us interesting subjects for your microscope. Both of us needing from the other something that would make life supportable for us, and neither of us able to give it. Two kinds of love. Hers and mine. Worlds apart, as I know now, though when I married her I didn't think they were incompatible. In those days I hadn't thought that her kind of love – the love she requires and which I was unable to give her – was so important that its absence would drive out the other kind of love – the kind of love that I require and which I thought, in my folly, was by far the greater part of love. I may have been, you see, Hunter, a brilliant classical scholar, but I was woefully ignorant of the facts of life. I know better now, of course. I know that in both of us, the love that we should have borne each other has turned to bitter hatred. That's all the problem is. Not a very unusual one, I venture to think – nor nearly as tragic as you seem to imagine. Merely the problem of an unsatisfied wife and a henpecked hus-

13 Rattigan p. 34

14 NY Times Oct 23,1949,section 2 p.1

band. You'll find it all over the world. It is usually, I believe, the subject for farce.[15]

His attempt at detachment is not very convincing, however, after the way Rattigan has set up Andrew's confession of the "great wrong" he has done Millie by marrying her. Clearly Rattigan was not writing a farce.

Andrew's description of the discrepancy between the two kinds of love that he and Mille needed is as explicit as the play gets and is a fairly bald statement of a principal theme of the play once allowance is made for the fact that it is filtered through Andrew's own perspective. While it would be a mistake to interpret this simplistically in sexual terms, there is clearly a significant sexual component in "the problem." Andrew's reference to his own ignorance of "the facts of life" obviously implies sexual naiveté and inadequacy, but an overly literal (or physical) interpretation risks reducing the problem to a subject for farce. Given the fact that Andrew teaches Greek, it is probably safe to assume that he has in the back of his mind the two types of love described by Plato in *The Symposium*.

Agamemnon sacrificed his child in order to go off to war. His father had butchered the children of his brother and served them to him at a banquet as an act of revenge. Andrew and Millie have a childless marriage. The barrenness of their marriage is not just a literal result of their incompatibility but a metaphor for it. Andrew has gone off to war and betrayed his wife by the simple fact of who he is, what the focus of his life is. On the simplest level, he is cerebral and perhaps ascetic, while she is physical and worldly. There marriage seems to be a classic case of the attraction of opposites. It is not hard to imagine how the student on a solitary walking tour in the Lake District was smitten by the beautiful girl at the mansion where he sought refreshment.

FROBISHER. …Has anyone ever told you, Crocker-Harris, that you have a very attractive wife?

ANDREW. Many people, sir. But then I hardly need to be told.

Similarly it is not hard to imagine how the shopkeeper's daughter admired the brilliant and ambitious scholar: "[H]e wasn't always the Crock, you know. He had a bit more gumption once."

Mr. Chips and his wife also had no children, because Mrs. Chippings died in childbirth along with the baby; but Mr. Chips felt he had thousands of children in his students through the years. The relationship between schoolmaster and student is a theme running through *The Browning Version*, but it is hardly a sentimental image of parent and child.

15 Rattigan p. 50f

FRANK. …Why can't anyone ever be natural with the little blighters?

MILLIE. They probably wouldn't like it if you were.

FRANK. I don't see why not. No one seems to have tried it yet, anyway. I suppose the trouble is – we're all too scared of them. Either one gets forced into an attitude of false and hearty and jocular bonhomie like myself, or into the sort of petty, soulless tyranny which your husband uses to protect himself against the lower fifth.

Frobisher refers to the "soul destroying lower fifth" and Gilbert is "petrified" at the prospect of having to maintain discipline with his students. Millie bribes Taplow in order to have a few minutes alone with Frank and then interprets Taplow's gift to Andrew as a bribe. Andrew, despite his reputation, seems to be the one with the most sympathy for the students: "They aren't bad boys. Sometimes – a little wild and unfeeling, perhaps – but not bad." It is this sympathy which enables him to be so touched by Taplow's gift.

The frustrations he has experienced as a teacher reveal the connection between his early literary ambitions and his sense of vocation. There is buried deep within him an idealistic commitment and a desire to share his passion for literature which represent a kind of love, a desire to nurture which is often associated with parenting.

ANDREW; For two or three years I tried very hard to communicate to the boys some of my own joy in the great literature of the past. Of course, I failed, as you will fail, nine hundred and ninety nine times out of thousand. But a single success can atone and more than atone for all the failures in the world. And sometimes – very rarely, it is true – but sometimes I had that success. That was in the early years.

It seems as though such an ambition is as doomed to failure as his marriage. Given the nature of an institution like the English public school, the odds are just too great. A teacher who is motivated by something less idealistic and passionate stands a much better chance of "success," just as a marriage based more on compatibility and less on the passionate attraction of opposites is much more likely to be a comfortable arrangement. So the passionate scholar becomes The Himmler of the Lower Fifth and young love gives way to bitter hatred. His heart seems to be exhausted.

On his last day at the school, however, he gets a glimpse of the possibility that one student may have sensed something of the passion and beauty obscured by exercises in construing Greek. Taplow has revealed an "interest in the rather more lurid aspects of dramaturgy" and even expressed appreciation of him as a teacher. This victory is hardly unmitigated, but it does reveal that a flame

still flickers in Andrew's soul; and it may be giving him the strength to salvage something of his life. He is able at the very least to reclaim his ceremonial position at the school for his last hour, and he is able to assert himself with his wife enough to be a commanding presence at the dinner table.

ANDREW: Come along, my dear. We mustn't let our dinner get cold.

He is inviting her to join him in a meal before it is too late for them to enjoy it properly. The implication may be that some degree of balance has been restored to their relationship as a result of his revival. She may also be more available because of the end of her relationship with Frank, but there is, of course, no guarantee that she will join him in Dorset.

If Millie is Clytemnestra, then Andrew is Agamemnon, the weary warrior:

ANDREW: I can bear anything.

The armor of his rigid persona is not just a fortification he can hide behind; it is also an expression of an inner strength and integrity. To view Andrew as heroic rather than simply as a henpecked pedant or prig requires an instinctive sympathy with the part of him that required something that would "make life supportable." The play makes no attempt to elaborate on why life is such a burden, but it is something more basic than the frustration of teaching classical literature to boys who are more interested in golf or of suffering the barbs of a wife who has lost all respect for him. It has to do, I believe, with passion, with the incompatibility of inner fire and everyday life. Andrew and Millie both suffer from this in different ways. Frank and Frobisher both seem to be immune – at least so far as we can see within the context of the play.

Frobisher is the only other character in the play whose diction approaches the formality of Andrew's. They both relate to the world with a very self-conscious sense of style, but there is, I believe, a world of difference. Frobisher is maneuvering. His public persona is a polished shell enabling him to slide through the world with as little friction as possible. Andrew's self-conscious diction is part of his effort to hold himself together, a means of preserving some scrap of what he knows makes life worthwhile. Others mistake him for dead, but Taplow can't help but like him.

Much has been written about the relationship between Rattigan's sexual preferences and the content of his plays. Part of the revival of interest in Rattigan's plays has been associated with the emergence of gay studies as a legitimate academic discipline. If one is primarily interested in Rattigan himself, there can be no doubt that his plays shed light on the way he dealt with his own sexual and emotional needs. If, however, one is concerned more with how a play "works" than where it came from; consideration of Rattigan's own love relationships may not be particularly helpful in articulating the impact and meaning of

the play. I do not mean to discount the relevance of his life to a fuller understanding of his work. I certainly recognize that the "meaning" of his work cannot be apprehended without some sense of the context in which it was created, but I also believe that the emotional and psychological issues which permeate at least this play are universally human and not restricted to a particular personality type or sexual orientation. In fact I would argue that it is a sign of Rattigan's talent that he was able to write about elements of his own relationships in a way that revealed their universal dimensions without making them empty abstractions.

Certainly the kind of pain embodied in Andrew and Millie can be related to the pain experienced by a gay man living in England in the mid-twentieth century when homosexuality was a crime and someone like John Gielgud could be arrested. Rattigan has been faulted by some for rewriting roles in plays to change a character from homosexual to heterosexual in order to make the play more acceptable, but the discrepancy between private passion and public persona is not limited to a gay sensibility. The need for love takes many forms, but it knows no gender boundaries. In commenting on the lewd behavior of Major Pollock in *Separate Tables* Rattigan said, "If I had written the man as a homosexual the play may have been construed as a thesis drama begging for tolerance specifically of the homosexual. Instead it is a play for the understanding of everyone."[16]

16 NY Times from Young p136

There are two other footnotes concerning the structure of the play in the form of ideas Rattigan considered and rejected. The first is the possibility of having Andrew die of a heart attack at the end of the play.

> [T]he endings to *The Browning Version* and *The Deep Blue Sea* […] are, I know from experience, unsatisfactory to an audience in their inconclusiveness. The unregenerate, younger me would not have hesitated, in either instance, to have given both plays a satisfactorily 'tragic' end – death from heart trouble in the one, a second and successful suicide in the other. I would, I venture to think, have run little risk with the critics in so doing, for they, bless their hearts, have almost as much of Aunt Edna in them as myself, indignantly as they may deny the imputation; while audiences would certainly much have preferred, with both plays, to have left the theatre knowing that Andrew Crocker-Harris and Hester Collyer were both safely out of this unkind world and in a better place. Indeed, and rather ironically, I have, by a few critics, been even blamed for bringing down the curtain on these plays on quasi-happy endings. If only they knew how strongly the temptation had worked in me to contrive for them just the very endings that they felt I had run away from. But Paula Tanqueray's suicide has always seemed to me just a little suspect in its neatness and a little troubling in its convenience (I blush for the impudence). While *La Dame aux Camelias'* pro-

longed and romantic death pangs were surely not for Crocker-Harris.[17]

Surely this is an example of an alteration that would have radically changed the "meaning" of the play. Even if Andrew had been allowed his moment of assertiveness with the head master before he died, the implication would be that Millie had killed him with one last fatal stab when she cynically interpreted Taplow's gift. Any apparent revival after that moment would be only a last gasp or twitching in the throes of death. Why an audience, much less a critic, would prefer to have the play end this way is an interesting question. I suspect Rattigan is right to sense that it has to do with "neatness." In other words it provides a purely formal satisfaction. It provides a more complete "resolution." It might be more in keeping with the *Agamemnon* or the inversion of *Goodbye, Mr. Chips*, but it would, I believe, cheapen the play and satisfy only the viewer who was seeking excitement rather than insight.

When he saw a revival of the play in 1976 Rattigan expressed some desire to revise it and proposed among other things splitting it into two acts. The first act was to end with Andrew learning that Millie has burned his translation of the *Agamemnon*. It is difficult to see how this would strengthen the play. If one starts from the notion that a break in the middle of the play is necessary for some reason, the extra bit of spite from Millie might be an effective closing line for the first act. It would presumably come after Andrew has given Millie the news from Frobisher about his pension and the plans for his farewell remarks. The break might imply a passage of time which would give Taplow more time to buy the book for Andrew. That Andrew would inquire about the manuscript of his translation might indicate the extent to which his session with Taplow has revived his old aspirations, and Millie's revelation that she burned the manuscript would serve to prefigure her debunking of Taplow's gift. The main argument against this alteration seems to be the tightness of the original construction of the play and the intensity a single sustained act adds to the final impact.

17 Praface 2 xvii

Performance

This is, of course, one "reading" of *The Browning Version*. A play, like a musical composition, must be performed to be fully realized, and there is always considerable room for interpretation. In the course of rehearsals for any play actors may try a dizzying array of readings of lines or whole scenes as everyone works their way towards what will hopefully be a coherent interpretation. Sometimes an actor will form an interpretation of a play by trying different renditions in order to elicit responses from the director or the other actors. The interpretation may never be fully articulated or even verbalized at all, but it is what guides or inspires the performance. One of the benefits of being able to see (or even just hear) different ac-

tors performing the same role is the way in which it can reveal how much is up for grabs when dialog is performed.

Rattigan obviously appreciated the contributions of actors to his plays, as much as he may have also enjoyed satirizing their egos in *Harlenquinade*, the one act comedy packaged with *The Browning Version*. In his 1962 interview with John Simon he attempted to distinguish the kind of instinct required of an actor from the analytical intelligence required to understand a play:

> Well, I don't know any intelligent actor or actress who's good. I know plenty of intelligent men and women who also act. I suppose the ability to submerge one's own personality into the personality of another must call for a kind of perception. Is it a question of someone looking at himself and saying, "Oh, no I can't possibly do that?" Or is it a question of Larry Olivier, for instance, identifying himself with Oedipus without having the faintest idea of what he's playing – not the faintest – but of so identifying himself that he was able to work that animal cry from instinct. I asked him afterwards – it profoundly moved me – "How did you come to this?" He said, " Well, I did visualize myself as a wild animal trapped and the net was closing in on me – and suddenly I saw that the net was complete and there was no escape and I was a wild animal and I gave this cry."[18]

Each of the characters in *The Browning Version* can be played in a variety of ways which will have a different effect on the overall impact of the play. Suggesting some of the possibilities may shed some light on the construction of the play and the effect it can have.

Frobisher has the least substantial role. He is on stage for only about 11% of the duration of the play and his principal function is to deliver the decision about the pension and to ask Andrew to relinquish his rightful place in the ceremony. He also provides a foil for Millie. His interactions with her reveal a completely different side of her character than we see either with Frank or Andrew. Rattigan commented on the necessity of keeping secondary characters somewhat sketchy so that they did not distract one's attention to much from the principal characters.[19] It might seem that it does not matter too much how Frobisher is played.

The most critical consideration in the interpretation of Frobisher is, I believe, the extent to which he is viewed as satirical. This is a fairly intangible thing, but I would be inclined to describe it in terms of a temptation faced in interpreting Frobisher. The temptation is to make him more

---

18 Theatre Arts April 1962 p.76

19 Young p. 73

"interesting" to the audience by emphasizing a comic dimension of his role. The most obvious example of this is when Frobisher commits what the stage directions describe as a gaffe by saying, "It's sometimes rather hard to remember that you are perhaps the most brilliant classical scholar we have ever had at the school…" In his attempt to extricate his foot from his mouth he succeeds only in inserting it even further by alluding to Andrew's "heroic battle…with the soul destroying lower fifth." There is a lack of sensitivity which can easily be seen as comic. The question is how comic.

One conventional way of discussing this is to put it in terms of how "broad" the interpretation or performance should be. Broader tends to be funnier at the risk of being shallower. Depending on the audience "subtler" may be more satisfying than "broader." While this distinction seems to point to something familiar or recognizable, it is not immediately obvious exactly what it connotes. Another approach is to describe it in terms of the attitude of the actor towards the character. It is the difference between a performance where there is a certain distance or judgment separating the actor from the character and one resulting from a complete empathy between the actor and the character. Even when the overall intent is satirical, actors are often advised to find a way to play the character that involves genuine empathy and to let the satire come from the interaction of the character and the situation. If the actor shares Millie's evaluation of Frobisher as an "old phoney," it will probably be apparent in the way he delivers these lines. Some actors can enjoy playing an old phoney. They may have a gift for capturing details of behavior which are immediate give-aways for hypocrisy and insensitivity and which make the performance an amusing caricature. Like a caricature certain traits are emphasized with broad strokes which appear to define the essence of the individual.

There is no question that a performance which is a kind of caricature can be entertaining or engaging. That is why it is a temptation when the character is as sketchy as Frobisher is in *The Browning Version*. The question is whether it is appropriate or necessary in the overall context of the play. Does it heighten the impact of Andrew's situation or does it distract from a real appreciation of it? A balance must be maintained between immediate impact for its own sake and the overall cumulative effect of the whole play.

No matter how Frobisher is played there will be an ironic underscoring of Andrew's plight. Frobisher forges on after his initial blunders and describes Buller in a way that only serves to reflect poorly on Andrew and to set up the contrast between Andrew and Fletcher. One could also play Frobisher as simply insensitive. He might realize his remarks would be considered tactless without really feeling any sympathy for Andrew. He might just want to avoid the unpleasant task of relaying the board's decision without feeling it is anything more than just a nuisance or mildly un-

pleasant duty. If the actor emphasizes Frobisher's anxiety and the dread with which he approaches a gruesome duty on this last day of term, his blunders may come across as painfully pathetic fumbling in the face overwhelming emotional obstacles as he digs himself deeper and deeper into a hole. He could still maintain his urbane gloss simply because he wears it everyday just like his well-tailored suits, but the audience would not get a dose of comic relief. We might sense Frobisher's limitations without being so inclined to smile about them. The irony in the scene would be more grim. The focus would probably remain more concentrated on Andrew. Whether this would be desirable is a typical decision faced by actors and directors in the performance of the play.

Mr. and Mrs. Gilbert present a similar choice. In the BBC Radio adaptation and the Caedmon recording of the play as well Mrs. Gilbert is given a somewhat comic interpretation. She sounds a little ditzy or silly. Peter Gilbert is allowed to sound irritated with her and the tension between the couple seems to be on the brink of erupting into something unpleasant. Neither of these choices is inevitable, and I suspect they were both made in the interest of heightening the energy of their scene.

It would be entirely possible to play Mrs. Gilbert as young and even a little naïve without having her seem silly. The stage instruction "Breathlessly" for Mrs. Gilbert when she says, "Oh. Do you cook?" does seem to encourage a satirical interpretation of her, but it is entirely possible that a girl from a wealthy family might be surprised that Millie would do her own cooking. Playing her "straight" might flatten the scene, but it would not remove the irony of the contrast she and her husband provide to Millie and Andrew. The same is true for the tension between them. All of their exchanges leading up to his suggestion that he married her for her money could be delivered as a kind of teasing repartee which has a much playfulness in it as it does explicit tension. The suggestion of an underlying problem would still be there, but the scene would not be pumped up for its own sake. Peter could be embarrassed and uncomfortable without taking it out directly on his wife. I obviously suspect that a subtler interpretation of the scene would be more effective. I am even inclined to put it in terms of respect for the audience's ability to be interested enough to see what it going on without having it belabored. I also believe that maintaining the focus on Andrew would be beneficial and in keeping with the tight, even claustrophobic structure of the play.

The role of Frank Hunter does not present the same broad choices as these minor roles. Its biggest challenge is how to realize the description of him as "a rugged young man – not perhaps quite as rugged as his deliberately-cultivated manner of ruthless honest makes him appear, but wrapped in all the self-confidence of the popular master." There is not much evidence of his "ruthless honesty" in his initial scene with Millie, especially if we believe his later confession that he intended to

end their affair when he came to visit her during the summer. His name seems to embody his inner conflicts: He struggles to be frank, and he is something of a predator. He is at odds with himself in virtually every aspect of his life. He is not interested in the science he teaches and says the science curriculum attracts "all the slackers." He is popular with the students, but uncomfortable with the way in which he achieves that popularity and afraid of them despite his seeming self-confidence. He enjoys his affair with Millie enough to sustain it, but feels it is dishonest and improper – even despicable.

In the course of the play his innate decency gradually seems to win out. His decision to end the affair with Millie sooner rather than later is precipitated mainly by witnessing the cruelty with which she punctures Andrew's enjoyment of Taplow's gift. The impact of this along with the shock of discovering that Andrew knew about their affair all along apparently brings him to his senses. He is able to take responsibility for his behavior and to be open about it with Andrew. His attempt to restore Andrew's appreciation of Taplow's gift is a sincere gesture. His suggestion that he come visit Andrew in Dorset may be absurd and ineffectual, but it is nonetheless a sincere gesture of friendship as well. Even Andrew recognizes it as such in rejecting it initially.

When Frank and Andrew shake hands as they say good-bye, it is the first time they have connected as peers. One of the small things they share during this moment is a sympathy for Taplow. Andrew agrees to let Frank take word to Taplow that he has obtained his remove, although it is "highly irregular." For a very brief moment the two men are free from the restrictions of the social convention and able to express their better nature.

Whether this kind of interpretation of Hunter's role in the play can have any bearing on the way an actor actually performs the part is something only an actor could know. The way in which Hunter attempts to reassure Andrew in the end will presumably be different if he is doing so out of genuine regard for Andrew than if he were doing so out of an inability to accept what he has just witnessed and a desperate attempt to make it go away. How this difference can be manifest in the speech and behavior of an actor is part of the enigmatic gift that possesses talented actors. No amount of conversation with James Lipton can explain it or even describe it adequately.

As I indicated earlier I believe Taplow's character is deliberately undefined. This insight is of course even less helpful to an actor preparing for the role than the kind of interpretation offered for Hunter. Is it possible for an actor to play Taplow without deciding whether he bought the book as a bribe? Even if his primary goal is to keep the audience from knowing, does he have to believe one way or the other himself? Or can he believe that Taplow himself does not "really" know why he bought the book? Does the actor even have to decide whether Taplow bought the book after Millie

witnessed his mimicry of Andrew? It is perhaps the only logical conclusion; since if he had bought it before his last lesson with Andrew, he surely would have brought it to the lesson to give to him.

Surely it is reasonable to assume that Taplow bought the book both as a bribe and as a sincere expression of gratitude and sympathy. It might not have occurred to him to buy the book if he were not worried about Millie's having seen his disrespectful behavior. Given an impulse to buy a gift, it might not have occurred to him to buy a verse translation of the *Agamemnon* if he did not have some admiration for Andrew's appreciation of classical culture. Perhaps the key for an actor is exactly how much sensitivity Taplow should reveal when Andrew opens up to him.

We know already from his conversation with Frank that Taplow is a perceptive and perhaps more capable of sympathy than most of his classmates. I think Andrew would have to sense a fair degree of interest and empathy in order to be able to talk about his desire to translate the *Agamemnon*. The moment between them should I think be an extraordinary one emotionally, but it should also seem natural and almost inconsequential. I suspect Taplow's most difficult line may be "Shall I go on, sir?" Andrew has apparently withdrawn into his private reflections and the stage directions say Taplow "steals a timid glance at him." That glance might convey everything about how Taplow really feels towards The Crock and how aware he is of the intimacy of the moment.

An actress's interpretation of Millie is a pivotal point which determines the balance of the entire play. One of the things that seems to have happened in the course of the play's history is a shift in the interpretation of Millie. Rebellato describes this evolution:

> The critics of the first production generally agreed with *The Sketch's* verdict that 'there has not been this year a more hateful woman on our stage', and one described Mary Ellis's performance as "a virulent piece of over-sexed nastiness.' The first professional London revival in 1976 at the King's Head, Islington, directed by Stewart Potter, seemed to provoke similar feelings. Nigel Stock's Crocker-Harris was greatly praised, B.A. Young admiring the 'little explosions of passion that trouble his existence.' However Barbara Jefford was felt to be hampered by a role which was 'just a bit too insensitive for real credibility'…
>
> In 1980, *The Browning Version* and *Harlequinade* were the first Rattigan plays to be performed at the National Theatre, featuring Alec McCowen as Crocker-Harris, Geraldine McEwan as Millie and Nicky Henson as Frank Hunter. But now critical perceptions had changed. According to B.A. Young, McEwan's Millie was 'never outwardly unpleasant, simply uttering her barbs of cruelty as if they were everyday conversation and so emphasizing the sadness of having to live with them so long'. For Michael Gillington, McEwan 'rescues the wife from vulgar bitchery and

> shows her as someone equally trapped'. And of Millie's cruelest moment Robert Cushman notes that "Miss McEwan lets you see exactly why she does it'. Only Sheridan Morley demurred, wishing McEwan had been the 'snobbish and vindictive wife' he felt Millie to be. Eight years later, at the Royal Theatre in London's West End, Dorothy Tutin's Millie 'strides around the stage with physically hungry savagery' her thwarted desires only able to be released in the form of spite.[20]

One of the most striking features of John Frankenheimer's direction of the *Dupont Show Of The Month* version of the play for CBS in 1959 is the way in which he introduces Millie. We first see her in a large close up with a cigarette dangling from her lips in a way I associate more with women playing slot machines in Las Vegas than with a well-bred or even just socially ambitious English woman of the 1950's. This seems to be an early indication of Frankenheimer's tendency to go for heightened impact even in a drawing room drama. It is as though he feels he must set up her behavior by presenting her initially in an unappealing way or by making her seem hardened.

Millie is largely defined by her relationship with three men: Andrew, Frank and Forbisher. We see her first in a relationship characterized by an imbalance. Frank's inability to return the kind of passion she feels for him seems at first to be a function of the immediate circumstances. He is nervous and hesitant for fear of being discovered, but we soon realize that the imbalance is inherent in the relationship. He simply does not love her in the way she loves him. She professes to understand and not care so long as she can feel he finds her attractive. The key issue here is how desperate to play her and whether her passion can be played in a way that makes her sympathetic or at least appealing. Can she be sexy in an attractive way?

We are, of course, witnessing the dissolution of her relationship with Frank rather than its inception, which surely must have involved a flirtation invested with sensuality if not sexuality. We get a glimpse of her flirtatiousness with Frobisher, and there is a fair amount of latitude in how this can be played and perceived. If we have already formed a judgment about Millie, we may be inclined to view her exchanges with Frobisher as unappealing manipulation. Her own contemptuous description of him as an "old fool" or "old phoney of a headmaster" certainly seem to confirm this interpretation of her flirtatiousness. It might be possible, though, for an actress to play the scene with Frobisher in a way that would reveal playful sexuality as a completely instinctive response in Millie – something that points to an attractive facet of her personality and is at odds the contempt she expresses for him.

Do we really believe that Millie would kill herself if Frank does not come to Bradford? Does

---

20 Reballato p. xxii

she really believe she might? The obvious answer is that neither we nor she really believes it. She "means it" in exactly the same way she wants to believe Frank "means it" when he tells her later that they are through. It seems at the moment to be the appropriate expression of what she feels. She is clinging to Frank, driven by needs which cause her to humiliate herself and to act in ways that she has promised herself to avoid. She cannot refrain from expressing anger about the fact that Frank "forgot" to sit with her at Lords. She is reduced to pleading with him rather than charming him and seducing him.

How we respond to Millie's dilemma with Frank will obviously color our interpretation of her relationship with Andrew. If we view her initially as a passionate woman who cannot find someone who reciprocates her passion in a way that nourishes her, we shall be quick to understand Andrew's explanation of how their marriage degenerated into the current stand-off. If, on the other hand, we see her as a self-destructive woman using her charms to seduce inappropriate men who are certain to frustrate her, we may understand the fury which she directs at Andrew; but it is hardly likely we shall find it sympathetic. At best it would be the fury of a natural force, a harpy whose behavior is ordered by things beyond human control. Andrew would be view largely as a victim, responsible only for the fact that he allowed himself to be seduced. There is perhaps some justification for this view in the parallel nature of Andrew's failure as a schoolmaster. He was seduced by naïve ideals in a world which is hostile to naïve idealism. He was doomed by the realities of the English educational system, even though he himself was a product of that system.

Presenting Millie as a destructive force of nature may be the easiest way to give coherence to the events of the play, but it is surely not what an advocate of a "theatre of character" intended. The most constructive approach for the actress playing Millie is probably to begin with the assumption that she is a sympathetic character, find the aspects of her which can be appealing to others and work from there to discover the roots of the clearly unsympathetic behavior which makes up so much of her role in the play. The problem, of course, is to find moments in the play when Millie can reveal her sympathetic aspects. She seems angry and contemptuous so much of the time. Even her generosity with Taplow clearly stems form a selfish desire to be alone with Frank and her attempt to connect with him via her uncle seems like "swanking."

The issue here is whether principal characters in a drama must be "sympathetic."

ANDREW: We are both of us interesting subjects for your microscope.

Is a detached fascination or clinical interest sufficient to engage the audience so that they can be open to whatever effect a play seeks to create? It is a common assumption in writing plays or screenplays that the audience must identify with

one or more of the characters and that this identification is only possible if the character is basically "sympathetic." This is often understood in simplistic terms so that clichéd or formulaic information is used to insure audience sympathy, but such a misunderstanding does not invalidate the idea.

Villains may be exempt from this need for sympathy, and it has been suggested that Millie is perhaps Rattigan's only dyed-in-the-wool villain. According to Wansell

> She is the only true villain Terence Rattigan ever allowed himself to create. He called her 'an unmitigated bitch'.[21]

It may seem presumptuous to claim that Andrew Crocker-Harris understands his wife better than her creator, but I do believe interpreting Millie in this manner reduces the complexity of the play and the value of what it has to offer. I also must question whether Rattigan himself really viewed her so simplistically, given the absence of the context of his remark.

One way to distinguish "drama" from "melodrama" is in terms of the complexity of the audience's sympathy for the adversaries in the conflict which is being presented. Clear cut conflicts between the good guy and the bad guy have a different kind of entertainment value than a conflict between two sympathetic and complex characters. Millie may be cruel, but she is also passionate and alive. We can sympathize with her needs, and we can find her attractive.

Another common dictum for playwrights is that passivity is not sympathetic and that the principal character in a drama must be "active." It is often considered virtually axiomatic that drama is essentially the presentation of action as embodied in a central character. A corollary of this is that victims are unsympathetic and the central character in a drama cannot just be a victim.

It is easy to see Andrew as a victim – both of his wife and of the school's board of governors. He can even be viewed as a victim of nature, because his weak heart is forcing him to retire. Certainly Andrew's passivity is a central issue in the play.

MILLIE. …And what did you say? Just sat there and made a joke in Latin, I suppose?

ANDREW. There wasn't very much I could say, in Latin or any other language.

MILLIE. Oh, wasn't there? I'd have said it all right. I wouldn't have sat there twiddling my thumbs and taking it from that old phoney of a headmaster. But then, of course, I'm not a man.

The theme of gender appropriate behavior is one which the play shares with the *Agamemnon*, and there is certainly no doubt that within the boundaries of that play Agamemnon is a victim. Andrew's acquiescence is viewed as evidence that

21 Wansell p. 174

he is "dead." Both Taplow and Millie have their reasons for thinking that Andrew is unfeeling to the point of being dead. An audience's cumulative frustration with Andrew's passivity while he is being attacked from all sides is one of the reasons a critic could respond to the original production by saying

> …[W]hen at the end Mr. Portman utters into the telephone these apparently quite unexciting words, 'I am of the opinion that occasionally an anticlimax can be surprisingly effective,' [the audience's] heart responds as to the sound of a trumpet.[22]

Our perception of Andrew evolves during the course of the play. We develop an image of him based on reports from other characters before we see him. We then adjust that image as we observe his behavior and learn more about him. At some point, though, Andrew himself begins to change.

It is another common prescription for drama that the principal character must change and that this change should be integrally related to the events of the play. Andrew's change is certainly triggered by the events, but it is more a recovery of his lost self than a change in his basic nature.

MILLIE: …he wasn't always the Crock, you know.

Andrew reconnects with the passions of his youth through a realization of how completely he has failed. It is as though he must hit rock bottom before he can stand again. He knew he was "dead," but it takes Taplow's enthusiasm for the Agamemnon and Gilbert's revelation of his epithet to push him into the realization that he can still be alive. He tastes for a moment the joy of a shared passion for literature when Taplow gives him the book, and is perhaps able to see Millie's jealous cruelty for what it is once he recovers his equilibrium. He experiences in a few minutes a metaphor for his life and marriage, and it enables him to see things "in a different light." The most that he can do is to tell Millie he is not going to join her in Bradford and to announce to the headmaster that he will speak last at the ceremony as is his privilege. These are small gestures but in the context they are tantamount to rising from the grave.

It is probably true that to experience Andrew's resurrection in this way an audience must be sympathizing or identifying with him for much of the play. What is the basis for this sympathy, and how can a performance insure that the audience is drawn into the character? Andrew is set up by a considerable amount of information before he makes his entrance. We have heard that he is "barely human" and protects himself against his students by means of a "petty, soulless tyranny." His entrance is also a threatening intrusion just as Millie's entrance was.

The door is pushed open. FRANK has made a move towards MILLIE but stops at

---

22 Young 79

the sound. MILLIE has recovered herself as ANDREW CROCKER-HARRIS appears by the screen. Despite the summer sun he wears a serge suit and a stiff collar. He carries a portfolio and looks, as ever, neat, complacent, unruffled. He speaks in a very gentle voice which he rarely raises.

All of the details of his appearance and manner can be interpreted as unappealing traits. Even his entrance throws cold water on passion. It is easy to see him as the epitome of English repression and academic pedantry. How one responds to the English stiff upper lip is entirely a function of what sense one has of its roots. Part of what *The Browning Version* is about, I believe, is the meaning of this aspect of Englishness. Some analyses of Rattigan's plays emphasize the way in which they attack the emotional and sexual repression so common in the English personality, but the portrayal of Andrew Crocker-Harris is not simply an attack on or an examination of the devastating effects of repression. It is an exploration of how the repression functions as a means of survival and how it can be possible to break out of it. A defense mechanism is, after all, constructed in order to defend something precious. It can become an obstacle to life, but its primary purpose is survival.

Why does Andrew wear a serge suit and stiff collar on a hot summer day? A contemporary American may assume that this is an indication of a vain attempt to maintain "appearances" and a stubborn refusal to let go of inappropriate traditions. The stiff collar signifies an unnatural stiffness in his personality which is unappealing. It is also possible, however, to see his attire like his speech as an indication of his integrity. Even in the summer sun he is true to his sense of what is right and proper.

The key to the interpretation of Andrew in a performance may be in casting someone with charisma. There is potentially a discrepancy between what we have been led to expect and what we actually see when Andrew enters, and the only thing that is going to make this apparent is the natural charisma of the actor. Charisma is probably impossible to define, but one source of it is a sense of self and an integrity which generates a magnetic energy. I think it is highly likely that a young man who won every conceivable honor at Oxford and seduced a glamorous, ambitions girl could have had this kind of charisma. I also think it is plausible that it has survived despite the battering that his ego has taken over the years.

We hear a lot during the course of the play about Andrew's ability to maintain discipline, but we actually see no direct evidence of it. Based on what we hear before Andrew enters, we might expect a ferocious tyrant, although we have been briefed not to expect that by Taplow's commentary on sadism.

The only concrete example of his "tyranny" is the story of his humiliation of Taplow when he

laughs out of politeness. Even this, however, can be construed as a matter of standards or expectations rather than tyranny. Andrew does not want his students pretending to know or feel something they do not actually know or feel. Taplow is being reprimanded for compromising his integrity for the sake of social intercourse. There are obviously many other factors in play during the exchange, and the actual outcome of the moment is never revealed because the story is cut short by Millie's entrance. Taplow seems to view the incident mainly as an indication of how Andrew withdraws from any normal human contact. His point is that Andrew "seems to hate people to like him" not that Andrew has cruelly humiliated him in front of his classmates.

Andrew may be viewed as a joke, but he commands by example. That seems to be the only explanation for the difference between what we hear about him and what we see of him. Andrew is not cruel. He clearly feels sympathy for the students regardless of his inability to show it. He just expects them to adhere to the same ideals as he does – ideals represented by the traditions of classical education. The unruffled exterior and the "very gentle voice which he rarely raises" are both part of the fortification inside of which he is trapped and part of the "rod of iron" by which he "rules."

The implication is that Frobisher's epithet reveals more about Frobisher's lack of understanding than it does about Andrew. Frobisher sees the effect on the students, and his limited imagination supplies the only explanation it can. Similarly Frank misinterprets Taplow's fear of cutting his extra work. Taplow's image of Andrew following him home is an instinctive metaphor for his own conscience and an indication of the extent to which he has internalized Andrew's expectations.

Many commentaries on the play describe Andrew as pedantic. There is obviously justification for this in Andrew's strict adherence to the rule regarding announcement of form results and his insistence that Taplow take extra work on the next to last day of term. There is no reason to conclude, however, that Andrew is focused solely on petty and trivial aspects of his work. He may seem to some of his colleagues to be a corpse going through the motions of teaching, but we get to see beneath the surface during his lesson with Taplow. If anything Andrew's problem is that he cared so much about the larger issues involved in education that he had to retreat from a world that seemed impervious or even hostile to them. He is indeed "all shriveled up inside" but an actor can convey sense of what remains and what it once was.

In the BBC radio version of the play Nigel Stock has Andrew express frustration and irritation when Millie tells him she has sent Taplow to the chemist. He raises his voice, speaks rapidly and seems cross with Millie. It adds a certain energy to Andrew's entrance, and it is certainly a plausible reading of the dialog, but it seems to me to get Andrew off on the wrong foot. Lee Richardson in the Caedmon Audio recording of the play

delivers the same lines with complete equanimity. This is obviously more in keeping with the stage direction concerning how Andrew speaks, and the seeming discrepancy between the content and the manner in which it is delivered points to something unique about the character. The result is, I believe, even more impact for his entrance.

One intriguing point of attack in considering how to interpret Andrew is the way in which he addresses Millie as "my dear." Is it conceivable that there is still some shred of affection in his use of this formality? Clearly it is an expression that was adopted early in their marriage. What is the significance of the fact that he still employs it? Mille also calls Andrew "dear." She even begins her cruelest attack on him with "My dear." Sheila Allen as Millie in the Caedmon recording emphasizes the irony in her use of the term, and Millie seems much more likely to address Andrew in this manner when others are present than she does in private. It is almost as though for her the term has become a weapon, a way of reiterating for Andrew how contemptuous of him she really is.

Andrew's use of the term seems more natural. It can be seen as part of the façade of civility he maintains at all times. He also addresses Frank as "my dear Hunter" at a time when he is clearly trying to rebuff him or push him away. The formality can be interpreted as signifying condescension. It has enough connotations of glib social interactions that it may be viewed as a sign of superficiality. Once again, though, I believe the more effective interpretation would be to allow some element of affection to cling to the phrase as though the performance of social ritual engenders the spirit behind it no matter what the circumstances.

When Andrew says goodbye to Gilbert and wishes him well, he addresses him as "my dear fellow." I see no reason not to interpret this as a sincere expression of good will and sympathy. He has opened up to Gilbert in an uncharacteristic manner. As disturbed and embarrassed as Andrew may be, he clearly has responded positively towards Gilbert and is able to offer him encouragement. The civility which is second nature to him opens the door to genuine generosity.

Part of what I sense in this aspect of Andrew's manner is an abstract commitment to civility which is rooted in a passionate, albeit repressed, need for emotional connection and loving support. He knows he needs it, and he believes that others are equally entitled to it. It is part of what makes life "supportable."

There is another striking moment of how this civility functions in his marriage. As he is showing Frank the time table for the next term, he makes the polite gesture of including Millie in the exchange:

ANDREW. …that's a new idea of mine – Millie,
this might interest you –

MILLE. (Suddenly harsh.) You know it bores me to death –

ANDREW. Millie has no head for this sort of work.

Andrew surely knows that Millie not only has no head for this sort of work but finds it petty and probably thinks it is pathetic of him to do it without getting credit for it. It might be possible to play Andrew as an oblivious pedant who can still think his wife might be interested in his work, but it is the gesture that counts. He need not believe she has any interest, but he can believe that he owes her enough respect to include her in the conversation. Rather than just being a hen-pecked and cuckolded fool, he is a man who can bear anything with dignity. This is a character that requires a very powerful presence on the stage.

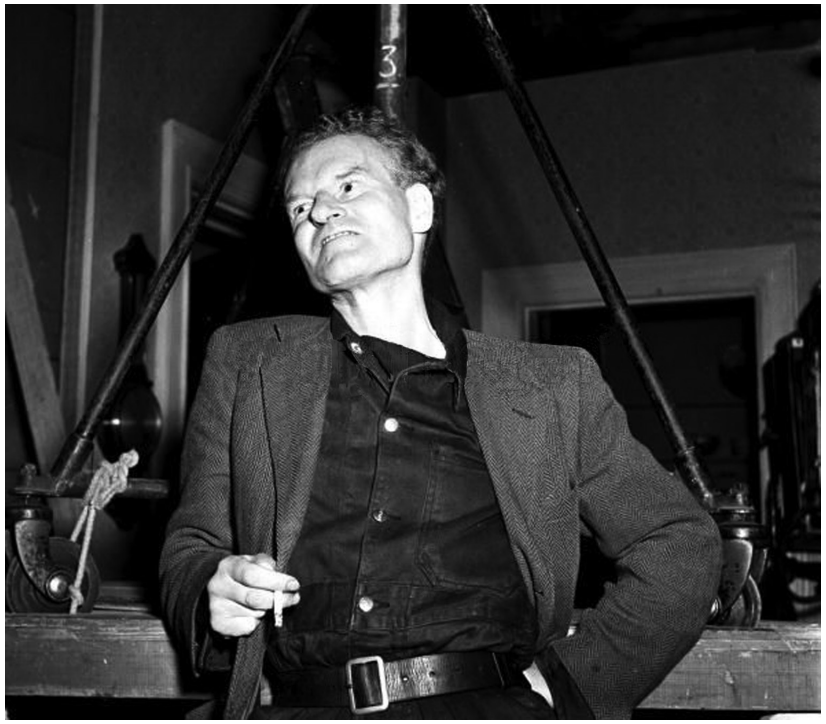
The Browning Version was written for John Gielgud. He had originally been very enthusiastic about it, but by the time the production was ready to get under way he had lost interest. Part of the problem was that *The Browning Version* was part of a package of two one-act plays, the second of which was a farce about a theatrical touring company. After Gielgud officially withdrew, the plays were offered to Laurence Olivier and Vivien Leigh. They liked the farce, but did not think The Browning Version was right for them. Ironically the Lunts read and liked *The Browning Version* but Rattigan did not dare show them the farce since the two central characters being spoofed in it were modeled on the Lunts. Alec Guinness was offered the play. He was interested but unavailable for the time when the play was scheduled to be produced. Frederic March was offered the role and Cedric Hardwicke as well. Finally Eric Portman was cast and won an award as best actor of the year for his performance.

The Asquith Version

Anthony Asquith was born in London in 1902. His father, Herbert Henry Asquith, was a Liberal prime minister of England from 1908 to 1916 and became 1st Earl of Asquith and Oxford in 1925. In his youth Anthony aspired to be a composer, but he abandoned these ambitions when he became convinced he did not have the talent for it. He studied classics at Oxford and became intrigued by the cinema. Along with G.B. Shaw and H.G. Wells, he was instrumental in founding the Film Society in London shortly after leaving Oxford. He visited Hollywood with introductions enabling him to stay with Mary Pickford and Douglas Fairbanks. He observed Lubitsch and others working on their movies and then returned to England to begin working in the film industry there. His father is reputed to have regarded his involvement with movies as something of a joke, but he began writing and working as an assistant director, and by the time he was 25 he was co-directing *Shooting Stars*.

During the next few years Asquith came to be regarded as a promising virtuoso of cinematic technique comparable to Hitchcock. His 1929 *A Cottage on Dartmoor* is considered by some to be a classic of English silent cinema, but Asquith had difficulty finding a niche during the thirties. His reputation for being "artistic" may have worked against him, and his career seemed to have run aground by 1938 when he was able with some help from Shaw to get an assignment directing Leslie Howard and Wendy Hiller in a film adaptation of *Pygmalion*. *Pygmalion* was a resounding success receiving four Oscar nominations including Best Picture, and Asquith was launched on a phase of his career in which he adapted plays, eschewing the technical virtuosity of his early films for the an understated style more suited to the filming of plays. Unlike Hitchcock, who is reputed to have regarded actors as cattle to be herded into his compositions, Asquith's charm endeared him to actors. His sensitivity enabled him to bring out the best in them and to see the emotional potential in dramatic scenes. His next picture was an adaptation of a phenomenally successful play by a new young playwright, Terrence Rattigan's *French Without Tears*.

While he was still at Oxford Rattigan had written a play about the romantic entanglements of some students. When it was produced in London, Rattigan announced his intention to abandon any preparation for a diplomatic career and devote his life to the theater. His father agreed to support him in that endeavor for two years, and when he failed to get another play produced by that time he was forced to seek employment. He found it as a screenwriter for Warner Brothers in London. He did not achieve much success at first as a screenwriter, but it enabled him to support his playwriting habit until he hit it big with *French Without Tears*. Even after the success of the play he was unable to get out of his contract with the studio, partially because they were able to lease his services out to other studios for many times what they were required to pay him. Paramount bought the screen rights to *French Without Tears*,



Asquith in 1952 at work on The Importance of Being Earnest,. *the movie he made after* The Browning Version

and Rattigan was one of three writers credited with the screenplay.

Rattigan and Asquith hit it off well, and worked together on eight more films over the next 26 years, including three more adaptations of Rattigan's plays. During the Second World War Rattigan was assigned to the film unit of the RAF and worked with Asquith on *The Way to the Stars*, which featured Michael Redgrave as an aviator. After the war Rattigan continued to collaborate with Asquith and one of the projects he proposed to Asquith and producer Anatole de Grunwald was a film based on a famous trial. Neither the producer nor the director saw its potential as a film, so Rattigan wrote it as a play. *The Winslow Boy* marked a turning point in Rattigan's career since it was a serious drama. The play was a success, and Asquith directed the film version from a script by Rattigan. When he followed with *The Browning Version*, it was natural that he would adapt it for the screen for Asquith to direct.

The Screenplay

Since *The Browning Version* is a one-act play set entirely in one room, it became a classic example of the way in which a play is "opened up" when it is adapted for the screen. Physically the space is expanded to include the entire school, and the time of the action is extended to encompass at least 24 hours. A dozen speaking parts have been added, although the character of Mrs. Gilbert has been dropped.

Some of the alterations can be derived from a cardinal rule of screenwriting: show; don't tell. Instead of just having Taplow tell Frank about the incident in the classroom when he laughed to be polite, we also have that scene in the classroom. Instead of having Frank talk about his relationship with the students, we witness his interactions with them in his classroom.

More of the additions and alterations can be ascribed to a desire to flesh out or mine more deeply the possibilities inherent in the original story. In the process of doing this, however, Rattigan has managed to alter both the emotional impact and the "meaning" of his play. Drama critics who ap-

preciated the claustrophobic intensity of the one act form felt that the film adaptation weakened the impact. Most also felt that the additional scene at the end in which we hear Andrew's farewell remarks sentimentalized the play. Rattigan, however, won the best screenplay award at the 1951 Cannes Film Festival. My own assessment is that the speech itself is not a problem, given the way in which the overall meaning of the work has shifted, but that the students' response to the speech may be facile. To see why we must analyze the structure and impact of the film adaptation.

Andrew is on screen for only a little over half the film. Before we see Taplow practicing his golf swing in Andrew's house, we have had 20 minutes of scenes taking place at the school earlier in the day. Taplow's appointment for extra lessons is at noon rather than at the end of the day. The scenes with the Headmaster have been moved from the house to the cricket field, and several hours pass before Taplow brings his gift and Frank stops by the house for drinks. Some of the exchanges between Frank and Andrew have been postponed until a dinner party that evening at the Headmaster's house. The story continues the next morning with Millie's departure, the farewell address and a final exchange between Andrew and Taplow.

Perhaps the biggest change is the way in which the role of Gilbert is expanded and altered. Rather than using him and his wife as almost a form of comic or ironic relief in the middle of the meltdown, the wife is eliminated and Gilbert functions as proxy for the audience and in a sense becomes a kind of moral center for the film. He is still a double for the young Andrew, a brilliant Oxford scholar who has taken all the honors and been offered a good teaching job at the school and as such he underscores what has become of Andrew during his career. Bringing Gilbert in at the very beginning of the film and letting him observe Andrew in different settings during the course of the entire film makes him even more effective mirror for Andrew. The elimination of Mrs. Gilbert and all of the banter about their marriage sharpens the focus on the parallel between Gilbert's potential career and Andrew's. Allowing Gilbert to observe Andrew's last class enables him like the audience to form an initial judgment of Andrew as a teacher and a human being, and the way in which that judgment is transformed as he comes to know Andrew better parallels the path along which the audience is led.

Gilbert is still the one who informs Andrew that he is known as "The Himmler of the Lower Fifth," but the moment is moved to a scene in Andrew's classroom after Andrew has returned to gather some papers and discovered the manuscript of his verse translation of the Agamemnon. Instead of coming on the heels of the argument with Millie about his pension, there is the additional "beat" with Andrew alone in the empty classroom reflecting on his years at the school and on the abandoned ambitions of his youth.

Gilbert intrudes on him in a private moment rather than arriving at the climax of a marital conflict, so that the emotional context of the remark is very different, and the scene is much more intimate than it could be in the house with the wives going and coming. The empty classroom becomes a visual metaphor for Andrew's failure as a teacher and for the responsibility that Gilbert faces. At the end of the scene Gilbert is given a moment alone in the classroom ostensibly to deal with his anxieties about facing a classroom of students, but coming after his gaffe he is confronting his own limitations in a way that sets him up to feel more sympathy for Andrew.

(There is a telling bit of dialog added for the film in which Andrew responds initially to Gilbert's revelation by saying, "Himmler? Oh yes, the Gestapo chief." In 1946 Rattigan had no doubt that theater audiences would know who Himmler was. Five years later it seemed necessary to remind film audiences and 43 years later the reference will be changed from Himmler to Hitler.)

The scenes with Gilbert are indicative of the shift of emphasis in the film to Andrew's failure as a teacher rather than the struggle of his marriage. The film ends with a scene between Andrew and Taplow in which Taplow expresses admiration for Andrew's manuscript and Andrew bends the rules by letting Taplow know that he has received the promotion permitting him to study science. (In the play he gives Hunter permission to deliver the news.)

The ending of the play seems to have been transposed into a lunch which Andrew and Millie have at home before Andrew has learned about his pension or received the gift from Taplow. It follows the temporary resolution of the tension between Millie and Frank in which she says she would kill herself if he did not come to Bradford. She examines herself in the mirror after Frank leaves clearly looking for evidence that she can hold onto Frank, and then she goes to offer her husband lunch telling him it is "only cold." (The play ends with Andrew taking the initiative: "Come long, my dear. We mustn't let our dinner get cold.") Instead of a climactic moment where things still seem to hang in the balance, Andrew and Millie's cold lunch together is a perfunctory ritual punctuated only by Andrew's resetting of the clock. Andrew's obsession with resetting clocks is a touch added for the screenplay as is Frobisher's comment on Andrew's punctuality.

In the film we see Millie leaving the next morning and we know that the only thing on her mind is Frank. There is every reason to believe the marriage has in fact ended. We stay with Andrew and see him tell Frobisher he has decided to exercise his prerogative of speaking after Fletcher. It is almost as though Millie's departure has helped him retrieve some of his integrity. His farewell remarks then turn into a heartfelt apology for his failure as a teacher. The point of the film seems to be that he has failed in a noble calling and that his only redemption is in acknowledging his failure. The coda with Taplow suggests

two things: he may resume his work on the translation of the Agamemnon, and at his new school he may be less rigid and more sympathetic to the needs of the students.

Another indication of the way in which the structural changes cause this shift in emphasis or meaning is the aftermath of Millie's debunking of Taplow's gift. In the play this is the one moment when Andrew exits the stage. He takes his medicine and leaves the room. When he returns Millie checks the contents of the bottle and Andrew assures her that he would never take an overdose. In the film Andrew takes the medicine bottle and leaves, but he is going to change for dinner and he does not return to the sitting room. There is no exchange about an overdose, and the first part of the scene between him and Frank occurs because Frank decides to go to him after he has told Millie he is leaving her. The difference seems slight, but it does involve a shift away from focus on the relationship with Millie. Frank's pursuit of Andrew also militates against my interpretation of the Andrew's re-entry in the play as a resurrection. In the film Andrew withdraws, clearly wounded and in need of medication, but the scene with Frank ends on Andrew's admission that Millie has long since succeeded in killing him. The irony in this remark like the irony in his reframing of the incident with Taplow seems in the film to imply that Millie's cruelty is only another blow that he can withstand. Dialogue has been added which emphasizes the clarity of Andrew's vision, his ability to "face facts":

Play	**Asquith Film**
FRANK: She's out to kill you.	FRANK: She's out to kill you.
…	ANDREW: Powdered glass, you mean?
…	FRANK: Not that kind of killing. Something deadlier than poisoning the body.
ANDREW: My dear Hunter, if that was indeed her purpose, you should know by now that she fulfilled it long ago.	ANDREW: The soul? Oh, yes, in that other sense she is, as you rightly say, "out to kill me." That is only another fact that I have managed to face – as indeed I have faced the more important fact that she succeeded in her purpose long ago.

In the film the principal transformation that takes place in Andrew is this increase in clarity. It is an element in the play ("I am now seeing the matter in a different light…"), but the real point of the play seems to be the actions that indicate that Andrew is back on his feet: his decision not to accompany Millie to Bradford and his decision to insist on his rightful place in the ceremony. In the last moment of the play it seems to be Andrew who is in charge. In the film the payoff is more his farewell remarks in which he expresses the full realization of his failure as a teacher. The film has prepared for this by giving Andrew reflective moments alone where the discoveries of the day have

a chance to sink in rather than just being fended off by the irony with which he fortifies himself. It is as though the addition of the farewell speech gathers threads present in the play and pulls them to the foreground. Andrew achieves a different kind of integrity by publicly acknowledging and apologizing for his failure. Whether the boys would have appreciated the acknowledgment is another matter, which we shall address eventually.

The roles of Taplow, Frank Hunter and Frobisher are all expanded as the play is "opened up" into a screenplay. Taplow is given several scenes during the initial setup. In the chapel we see enough of him to sense that his attitude towards The Crock is somehow different from that of his classmate. Then we see him in Hunter's science class where he has the temerity to suggest that the experiment has not worked because Hunter was using the wrong proportions for the ingredients. This is probably the least satisfying addition made for the film, and it is unclear to me what purpose it was intended to serve other than providing an occasion for the conversation between Hunter and Taplow about his promotion. It obviously shows us that Taplow is serious about wanting to study science, since he already believes he knows more than the teacher; but it does not make Taplow more engaging or sympathetic. Perhaps it portrays him as precocious in some way that can be related to his appreciation of the *Agamemnon* or his empathy for Crocker-Harris. It seems more likely to me that it was written simply to provide the excuse for the exchange between Frank and Taplow and to show more of how Frank deals with students.

When Taplow arrives in Andrew's classroom he is able to reveal that Andrew has a heart problem and the expression of sympathy or pity for Andrew which comes during his opening scene with Frank in the play is transferred to a conversation among the classmates.

The rest of the scene in Andrew's classroom is mostly a straightforward presentation of what Taplow describes in his conversation with Frank later. There is an additional element in the exchange between Andrew and Taplow when Andrew corrects the work that Taplow is doing, but this is more about Andrew than Taplow.

The other main addition to the function of Taplow in the film revolves around the manuscript for Andrew's verse translation of the *Agamemnon*. Taplow spots it on the desk when he brings Millie a message from Frank the next morning. Having Taplow serve as a go-between to deliver Frank's farewell gesture seems a bit gratuitous and is justified only by having Taplow take Andrew's manuscript when he leaves. He returns the manuscript to Andrew after the ceremony with a mild apology but without really seeming afraid of how Andrew will react. Perhaps we can believe that a student who can critique the science teacher's experiment would have no qualms about taking a very personal manuscript from the desk of another teacher not to mention returning it in person and offering his

critique of it. When Andrew responds as though he is genuinely interested in Taplow's opinion of the translation, we are being told something about the transformation that has taken place in Andrew, but we are also being asked to believe something about Taplow's sophistication and taste.

The stretch that is required for this is part of the larger sentimental stretch represented by the cheers of the students after Andrew's farewell remarks. We have seen enough of Taplow during the remarks to believe that he is the one leading the "Good old Crock!" cheers in the midst of the tumultuous applause.

Whether or how well the ending of the film works may depend on what the viewer is looking for in the movie. It is hard not to conclude that there was an agreement to send the audience out of the theater feeling good which dictated the choices for the ending. Imagine what the net effect of the film would be if the students had responded in what would surely be a more realistic manner, by being embarrassed for the old man or by being sobered with the realization that this man of whom they had been so contemptuous was a human being after all who has failed in the way we all fear we may. Imagine if Rattigan and Asquith had stuck with the instincts involved in expanding the role of Gilbert and viewed the speech more through the eyes of Gilbert and Frank rather than Taplow. There is a look of sympathy from Gilbert that almost seems to trigger the change in tack in Andrew's remarks, and certainly the last glimpse we get of Gilbert does not seem to be one which will easily give way to cheers for the Old Crock. Frank's amazed admiration for Andrew's integrity and courage builds to a point where we can believe his applause may express more than the polite response required by the ceremony, but it is still hardly cheerful applause. Imagine if the students and other teachers had been too sobered or ashamed to applaud at all. The net effect would have been sobering and caused the exit from the theater to feel like a funeral procession, but surely this would have been the kind of anti-climax that Andrew felt to be most effective.

There is a bit of dialogue from Wilson in Andrew's classroom which may be an indirect indication of how Rattigan viewed the ending.

WILSON: I say, do you think he's dying? Heart problem's nearly always fatal isn't it? I mean, in plays and films people are always saying, "The old ticker's a bit sick, you know." They always die in the end. I say, supposing he dies in the class, right in front of us!

Wilson's excitement at the morbid possibilities involved in Andrew's condition is typical adolescent sentimentality. Its immediate function is to provoke a discussion of sadism, but it also plants a seed of ironic distance from the excesses of adolescence. Being able to cheer for Good Old Crock may be another example of adolescent excess of feeling,

although it is hard to sense any ironic distance intended in the ending of the film.

The expansion of the role of Hunter seems primarily aimed at showing rather than telling us something about his relationship with the students. His attitude towards the last day of class is about as relaxed as the students, and he basically strives to provide entertainment before letting them out early. In substituting this scene for his conversation with Millie about the boys Rattigan and Asquith emphasize the "attitude of false and hearty and jocular bonhomie" that Frank describes in the play. The contrast with Andrew's classroom is obvious, but Frank's own self-consciousness and ambivalence about it is not necessarily apparent. Nor is his boredom with teaching science evident. His attitude could be "a bit of end-of-term," and he might well be a dedicated and enthusiastic teacher the rest of the year.

Another element that has been dropped in the presentation of Frank is his political activism. In the play Taplow knows he canvassed for Labour in the last election. There is no indication of that in the film, and nothing Frank says or does implies that he is the least bit concerned about politics.

Frank is used in three scenes prior to his rendezvous with Millie. He is introduced as one of the ushers taking up collection during the morning service, and when he avoids returning Millie's look, we have an indication of the imbalance we shall see later in their feelings for each other. He has a brief exchange with one of his students who wants him to do an experiment involving an explosion at his class and an exchange with Millie in which she invites him for a drink at noon, another small piece of evidence that she is pursuing him.

The headmaster insists on introducing Frank to Gilbert and there is a brief scene on the way to Frank's classroom in which the contrast between Frank and Andrew is expressed not only in terms of classroom discipline but also in a more basic contrast between the humanities and science. Little is made of this except for the facetious association of Frank with the inhumane results of science, i.e. atomic warfare.

After his class Frank encounters Mrs. Frobisher who invites him to a farewell dinner for the Andrew and Millie. The main purpose of this scene seems to be to let Mrs. Frobisher comment on Millie and implicitly question why she ever married Andrew. Since we do not really know yet that Frank is involved with Millie, the irony of this exchange is realized only in retrospect, and Frank appears mainly as good humored and polite.

The rest of Frank's dialogue in the film is pretty much straight from the play although scenes have been broken up or transposed to fit the revised timeline. We do get the additional touch of having Frank return the cigarette case given to him by Millie and we see Frank's reaction to Andrew's farewell address.

Frank's transformation is more emphatic in the film than it is in the play. He breaks with Millie and reaches out to Andrew in the play, but the film seems to emphasize more how he has seen his own failings or limitations as a result his confrontation with Andrew. His last gesture in the play is to persuade Andrew to let him tell Taplow about his promotion. The last thing we see of him in the film is his admiration for Andrew's farewell speech.

That Frobisher's role should be expanded to stretch from the very beginning of the film to the end is only natural given the way in which the script has been opened up. Two things strike me about his role in the film. The first is a minor observation: I suspect Rattigan enjoyed the opportunity to demonstrate even more the headmaster's florid diction and tendency towards circumlocution:

FROBISHER: So prodigious is your predecessor's sense of punctuality that the boy's have been known to set their watches by his comings and goings.

The second thing that strikes me about Frobisher's function in the film is the use of him to inform the audience explicitly upfront of things that the play allows the audience to figure out as the action unfolds. We are informed at the outset that Andrew is leaving the school due to health problems. We also see Frobisher discussing Andrew's situation with a member of the school board before he tells Andrew of their decision. We learn only that someone must inform Andrew of some bad news, but it puts the scene between Frobisher and Andrew on a different footing in the film than in the play. It almost seems to go against Rattigan's ideas about the sense of theater involving things unsaid. At the very least it points up a difference in technique for engaging the audience. Rather than engaging the viewer by requiring him to figure out what is going on, the film engages the viewer's expectations by informing him that something is about to happen to a character whom the story has been following.

To some extent the additional scenes with Frobisher are simply the best way to "flesh out" his character. He and the General discuss his efforts to persuade Fletcher to stay at the school:

FROBISHER: I need hardly tell you, General, that to persuade him to stay I tried every ruse in my repertoire.

GENERAL: Well, that's pretty extensive I grant.

Frobisher also makes a mildly diplomatic effort to get the General to inform Andrew of the decision instead of having to do it himself.

FROBISHER: You don't think, General, that it might come better from you as head of the governing body?

GENERAL: No, certainly not. Your business, headmaster. Sorry.

The General's mildly amused response indicates he knows the game Frobisher is playing.

Earlier in the classroom Frobisher goes out of his way to inquire about a student's mother but gets the student's name wrong.

The other characters added for the film function more as a chorus than as integral elements in the drama. Mrs. Forbisher, Betty Carstairs and the other women at the dinner party provide commentary on Andrew and Millie's marriage.

MRS. FROBISHER: I'm terribly sorry for her.

MRS. WILLIAMSON: I'm afraid I can't agree. I always found her quite detestable.

MRS. FROBISHER: Think how much she's had to contend with, poor dear. After all they're complete misfits.

MRS. WILLIAMSON: Yes. A marriage of mind and body. It never has worked since the world began.

Mrs. Williamson's summary of the problem precedes Andrew's own description of it to Frank, and the exchange is a parallel to the exchange between Frank and Andrew where Frank expresses his judgment of Millie and Andrew defends her. The film has chosen to indicate that at least some of the masters' wives see that the Crocker-Harris's marriage is strained. Perhaps others besides Betty see that Millie is having an affair with Frank. The main function served by these characters seems to be to hammer home one of the themes of the story. The theme of the marriage of misfits climaxes with Andrew's line before the fade out as they watch the fireworks:

ANDREW: I don't think that either of us has any longer the right to expect anything further from the other.

The obliviousness of Betty's husband provides a kind of caricature of Andrew's cerebral abstractedness. Wilson and his mother provide additional perspectives on Andrew. The porter showing Gilbert the campus even provides a contrast with Andrew by winking and letting Wilson enter the chapel late.

The Cast

By the time the film was scheduled for production Eric Portman was not available to play the role of Andrew Crocker-Harris. I can find no indication of whether it was offered again to John Gielgud, but Michael Redgrave accepted the role when it was offered to him. Redgrave was 42 years old. He had graduated from Cambridge and taught school for a few years before becoming an actor in 1934. He had been acting in films since his first role in Hitchcock's *The Lady Vanishes* in 1938, and he had been nominated for an Oscar in 1947 for *Mourning Becomes Electra*, his first American film. He had previously worked with Asquith and Rattigan in 1945 in *The Way to the Stars*. He was,

of course, even more established in the theater. In addition to his university education and his experience as a schoolmaster, Redgrave may have brought something else more personal to the role. He was married for 50 years and had three children, but late in life he confessed to his son that he was bisexual and reportedly had hesitations about getting married because of it. He received he best actor award at the Cannes film festival for his performance in *The Browning Version*, and according to his son and daughter *The Browning Version* was one of his three favorite roles, along with *The Loneliness of a Long Distance Runner* and *The Dambusters*.

Redgrave himself did not view the role of Crocker-Harris as in any way personal:

> Rattigan's script was a marvel of its kind. There are scripts, now and then, where every line seems so right that you do not have to learn them. It is enough to repeat the words a few times for every line to fall into place. Rattigan's script also gave me that rare opportunity, such as I had in *Dead of Night*, and would have again as Barnes Wallis in *The Dam Busters*, to create a character totally different from my own. This is not necessarily the highest achievement of acting. I could equally, if not more, admire a Garbo, who could change her mood in a score of different ways without ever changing character. Nevertheless, it is one of the most satisfying.[1]

He summed up his view of Andrew in another comment in his autobiography:

> One thing I learned from working with Fritz Lang — or, rather, relearned, for I think I knew it already — was that not only should a film have a strong central idea, but its idea should be such as can be conveyed in a single sentence. Not all good films, I realize, conform to this criterion. But I have found when answering that other favourite question, 'What's it about?' that if you can awaken the interest of your questioner in a sentence or two — 'It's about a ventriloquist who thinks he's possessed by his dummy,' 'It's about an embittered schoolmaster whose defences break down because someone, unexpectedly, is kind to him' — it's a fair, though not complete, test of the appeal that your film will have at large.[2]

In the BBC interview included with the Criterion DVD Redgrave refers to Andrew as "an elderly schoolmaster." The use of "elderly" and "embittered" to describe the character seem to point in a different direction from my own interpretation of the play. It is particularly striking that he should view Andrew as "elderly" when in fact the character is intended to be two years younger

---

1 Mind's I p.196

2 Missing Reference

than Redgrave was at the time, especially since Rattigan had been concerned about Eric Porter's tendency to play him as old. Of course one must not take too literally Redgrave's use of the term as it may just function as a metaphor for all the ways in which Andrew has been worn down during his 18 years at the school. The same can be said for "embittered." I would be more inclined to describe the character in the play as resigned or perhaps defeated than embittered; and, despite the fact that Andrew says their love has turned into "bitter hatred," I don't see anything that Andrew does in the course of the play or the film as an indication that he hates her. He seems to have withdrawn and armored himself against her, but his is not actively trying to destroy her.

It may be indicative of the way in which Redgrave prepared for a role that his descriptions of his portrayal of Andrew begin with three physical traits: his voice, his hair and his eyeglasses:

> The 'look' of a part is always highly important, especially in films, where once the first scenes are in the can it is too late and too expensive to make any substantial changes in one's appearance. For *The Browning Version* I did a number of camera tests. There was the question of spectacles. I was in two minds about this. Spectacles are the first thing that actors lay hold of when they have to play an academic character. So I thought, I won't wear spectacles. I tried one camera test without. Then another, with: the first pair concealed too much of the expression in my eyes, so I asked them to make me another without rims to the lenses, and then, when these seemed to suit, a spare pair for safety's sake.
>
> I also asked for camera tests with sound. I wanted a light head-voice for Crocker-Harris, and I knew that when one first assumes a pitch or an accent different from one's own, it is hard to get a true impression of what it will sound like to an audience because the sound in one's own ear at first is often very exaggerated.
>
> I lightened my hair with very strong peroxide, which in black-and-white photography would give a look of hair that was fading and turning grey. I also had the hairdresser shave the crown of my head (though to my annoyance this bald patch was seen in only one shot in the film).

> Despite these preparations it was a terrible beginning. We had to do the last shots first, and these last scenes were very emotional. There were none of the scenes of minor importance which one usually did first so as to work one's way into the film. I can still see perfectly clearly in that film where the camera angle changes during a scene, where my make-up changes; even my weight changes from scene to scene. (At that time I could gain weight and

> shed it almost at will, which was very useful for certain character parts, because even a slight change of weight would show immediately in my face, altering its expression. But in taking on *The Browning Version* at such short notice, I had not had time to lose as much weight as I wanted at the start.)[3]

Michael Redgrave was 6'2" tall, and it is safe to assume that he could be a fairly commanding physical presence when he was in his thirties and forties. For *The Browning Version* he obviously chose to diminish that effect by his posture and physical mannerisms as well as his voice. His use of his hands especially seems to emphasize the way in which Andrew has withdrawn and is as Taplow says "all shriveled up inside like a nut." At the same time he is meant to be an intimidating presence in the classroom, although it is be more the rigidity and severity of his adherence to the rules than his manner or physical presence which causes the students to fear him. The gesture by which he summons Taplow to the front of the class epitomizes the power he has over his students. Even in the play when Taplow imitates it, the stage directions say he "very gently, crooks his forefinger to him."

Redgrave commented on the difficulty of achieving the right balance of self-possession and obsequiousness in relation to a scene with Frobisher:

> In the scene with the headmaster at the cricket match, there is another mistake in my playing, which shows if one looks for it. Not many in the audience would spot it, I think, but C. A. Lejeune, the Observer critic at the time, who had been bowled over by Portman's performance in the part, noticed it immediately. 'For such a big man,' she wrote of me, 'his performance is wonderfully delicate' — ominous compliment — 'but it is the delicacy of a floorwalker rather than a scholar.' And, as far as the cricket—match scene went, she was right. At the last minute, and to my surprise, Wilfrid Hyde-White had been cast as the headmaster. A very successful actor in his chosen field, but too smooth and urbane, I thought, for this part. I tried to adjust myself, but in doing so I somehow slipped into a manner that was too deferential, almost obsequious, where my character should have stood his own ground more firmly. 'The delicacy of a floorwalker' — how one phrase like that remains in the memory long after recollections of the most lavish praise have faded, and all the more so if one recognizes its partial truth.[4]

Whether Wilfrid Hyde-White is too smooth and urbane to be believable as the headmaster of a prominent English public school is difficult for me to judge. He seems appropriate for role as revised for the film, though of course the role may have been rewritten specifically for him. He en-

3 Mind's I p.195f

4 MI p.196f

ables Frobisher to manage his gaffes and lapses of memory with aplomb and his smoothness seems appropriate for someone described in the play as "more like a distinguished diplomat than a doctor of literature and classical scholar." The satirical aspect of the portrait is subdued, but the irony of his political instincts and maneuvering is not lost. I personally like him in the role and enjoy the way in which his smooth wit enables him to glide through the day in contrast to Andrew's turmoil.

Redgrave's misgivings about his scene with Hyde-White may be valid. It is when they walk along the cricket field that I am most aware of the way in which Redgrave holds his hands in front of himself in what I would be inclined to call a "mousey" gesture. As Andrew surmises what Frobisher is after with the pension and the ceremony, he could have been more challenging or simply called Frobisher's hand without doing him any favors. Redgrave adopts a similar slumped over posture with his hands in front of his chest during the exchange with Frank and Millie regarding the seat at the concert. How far this mannerism tips the balance in Redgrave's interpretation of the character is another matter, but it may have been a factor in my own initial reaction to the film. Only on a third viewing of the film did I begin to like Redgrave's performance and to be moved by it.

Perhaps even more powerful than the ending speech is the scene between Andrew and Frank while Andrew is getting ready to go to the headmaster's for dinner. This corresponds to the moment in the play when Andrew re-enters as though he has risen from the grave. When Andrew lets Frank know that he is aware of Millie's affair with him, Redgrave's body language conveys a very different attitude. He seems refortified enough to dismiss the incident of Taplow's gift as "a lot of fuss," but he also seems more self-possessed and sure of himself. In the final moment of the scene he seems to have claimed the moral high ground via the clarity of his self-knowledge. Even though he is pronouncing himself long dead, he has acquired a kind of stature which contrasts with his previous tendencies towards obsequiousness.

Only another fact that I have managed to face.

Wilfred Hyde-White's performance in *The Browning Version* is only one in a long string of stage and film roles which lasted 50 years despite the fact that he is reputed to have said, ""I learned two things at drama school: first, that I couldn't act; second, that it didn't matter." He is, of course, fondly remembered by many as Colonel Pickering in the film version of *My Fair Lady*.

Jean Kent's casting as Mille Crocker-Harris was a watershed moment in her career. Kent grew up in vaudeville and had been acting in films since she was 13. She was at the peak of her career and was something of a star, although she tended to be cast as the other woman or a femme fatale. Apparently Kent had liked the play of *The Browning Version* and was very interested in the role when she learned it was being made as a film, even though the character was supposed to be about ten years older than she was at the time. The role had initially been offered to Margaret Lockwood, but Kent had just starred in *The Woman In Question* for Asquith so presumably she was able to let him know that she was intrigued by how the character could be made sympathetic despite her coldness. She later concluded that playing a cold, older woman at that point was bad for her career, even though her performance was well received critically.

Millie is introduced in the chapel scene as the person who happens to be sitting next to Gilbert. She does seem a bit more glamorous than one might expect to find in the school chapel. The two women sitting behind her are attractive enough but seem staid in comparison. Millie makes a friendly gesture of identifying the headmaster for the visitor sitting next to her, but there are vaguely conspiratorial overtones in her look and we start the film with an image of her making contact with an unknown younger man. She also casts a furtive glance at Gilbert after the lady behinds her responds to the headmaster's remarks about her.

There is a rather pointed close up of Millie glaring at Frank during the collection hymn. We obviously at this point cannot know what is at stake, but we get a clear image of the intensity of her emotions. As they

leave the chapel she chats with Gilbert, but she is clearly distracted and interested in something else until she realizes he is Andrew's replacement. She then makes a characteristically caustic remark about Andrew's career, which is perhaps the first indication in the film that Andrew has failed in some way. (Taplow and Wilson have reacted to the announcement of Andrew's departure in a way that indicates he is not beloved.)

Most of the time Kent seems to have focused on Millie's jealous anger or contempt as though the key to her character is "Hell hath no fury like a woman scorned." Even when she professes her love for Frank, her expression is colored by hurt and anger, and it is certainly easy to imagine that Frank is tiring of her behavior even as he insists he has no intention of breaking off with

her. The few times we see her smiling and being sociable with the Headmaster seem, in retrospect at least, to be hypocritical, but she does seem to be genuinely pleased by his flattery.

Perhaps the moment when she seems most vulnerable is after she has slapped Frank and obviously regrets doing so. She moves almost immediately into a desperate attempt to hold onto Frank and into a state of denial when Frank announces that he is breaking off with her and not coming to see her in Bradford.

Kent's performance is certainly consistent, and there is no denying the power of her contempt or her desperation. Seeing her desperation with Frank helps us understand the roots of her contempt for Andrew, but I cannot help but wonder if Kent could have used her beauty and sensuality to make Millie more appealing in some way without undermining the role.

Nigel Patrick as Frank Hunter seems surprisingly urbane for a science teacher, and I find myself wondering if he were cast because his persona resembled that of Rattigan. The cigarette case Millie has given him and the way in which he rolls a cigarette between his fingers seem more characteristic of a London socialite than a schoolmaster. While he is appealing and sympathetic enough, there is perhaps initially a suggestion of superficiality or narcissism in Patrick's portrayal. He lacks the earnestness implied by some of Frank's dialogue in the play, and he no longer seems to fit the description in the original stage directions as "a rugged young man – not perhaps quite as rugged as his deliberately-cultivated manner of ruthless honesty makes him appear, but wrapped in all the self-confidence of the popular master." Patrick's Frank seems to have more of the self-confidence of a ladies' man than of a schoolmaster. Even in the play it is difficult to know how his ruthless honesty would be conveyed. It almost seems as though Rattigan began with an idea of a man of science but let it evolve as he wrote both the play and the screenplay so that the emphasis shifted from unsparing honesty to an arc in which he moves from being a Lothario to someone capable of making a gesture of genuine friendship and of admiring integrity. "Ruthless honesty" seems more pertinent to Andrew and Millie's relationship than it does to Frank.

Patrick is able to make Frank seem genuinely touched by Andrew's revelations and his gesture of friendship seems sincere. His desire to be of some help to Andrew is convincing when he pressures Andrew not to go to Bradford with Millie. The way in which he responds to Andrew's farewell remarks – first as Andrew seems to lose his train of thought and then as Andrew offers his apology – reveal his feelings for Andrew and the way in

which Andrew's ordeal has made him realize his own failings.

It is, of course, with the character of Gilbert in the film that Andrew's situation has the greatest resonance, and casting Ronald Howard makes Gilbert a totally appealing and sympathetic character. Ronald Howard, the son of Leslie Howard, had played one of the principal roles in the film of another Rattigan play which Asquith directed, *While the Sun Shines* (1947). He was

32, but he seems to embody the youthful earnestness of a recent Oxford graduate even if he is eight or ten years too old. (In the play his age is specified as twenty-two and he has taught for two months. In the film he does make one reference to having taught eleven-year-olds, so presumably he could have left Oxford at least a year or two earlier.)

He professes to feel lucky because of the position he has been offered at the school and seems appealingly self-effacing. When he comments

that he finds observing Andrew's class "extremely informative," there is a sense of how he judges Andrew as a teacher. His remark about human

nature seems rather pointed and even a bit challenging the way Howard delivers it.

ANDREW: Perhaps you would care to glance at some of these.

GILBERT: Well, not just now if you don't mind.

ANDREW: You might find them very informative.

GILBERT: Well you see, sir, the information I'm looking for hasn't very much to do with Latin verse.

ANDREW: Oh, indeed. What has it to do with?

GILBERT: Human nature.

He is quick, however, to realize his tactlessness in repeating the Himmler epithet to Andrew, and is obviously moved by Andrew's summary of his years of teaching. Howard is able to convey genuine remorse when he apologizes for having hurt Andrew. Gilbert also attends assembly the next morning so that we are able to see him react to Andrew's reference to the Himmler epithet. Howard's expression reflects not only Gilbert's remorse at having told Andrew about the nickname, but also his sympathy for Andrew and his shared sense of the nobility the teaching vocation.

Brian Smith's interpretation of Taplow seems to be based on the assumption that Taplow's gift to Andrew is totally sincere despite the fact that he is concerned about losing his promotion if Millie

tells Andrew about his mimicry of him. There is no indication of any duplicity when he gives him the book, and the final scene in which he says that he prefers Andrew's translation of the *Agamemnon* to Browning's underscores his admiration for him. In fact it seems as though Asquith has decided that the gift is sincere, partially to help set up the pay off of the student's cheering in the end. Certainly the way in which Taplow's role is expanded supports the notion that the gift is sincere. Even with his fellow students Taplow expresses sympathy for Andrew.

The self-possession and ease with which he explains his presence in Frank's classroom make Taplow seem somewhat precocious. That he would persist in his critique of Frank's experiment and discuss Andrew's policy regarding promotions in front of a classroom full of upperclassmen surely bespeaks an unusual degree of self-confidence.

During his tutoring session when Taplow asks Andrew if he should go on with the translation, he seems concerned that his remark about the other students might be taken as insulting to Andrew. He seems to want to get the lesson back on track as much from a desire to distract Andrew from the remark as from any fear that he may have harmed his chances for promotion. His anxiousness seems more related to the politeness which caused him to laugh at Andrew's Latin joke than to any self-interested scheming to obtain his promotion. When Taplow gives Andrew the book his concern that the Greek inscription may not be grammatically correct seems like normal anxiety in interpreting what he takes to be a negative reaction in Andrew rather than revealing any indication of duplicity. That he would have the temerity to "borrow" Andrew's manuscript from his desk certainly suggests that he is not acting out of fear. The expression on Smith's face as he portrays Taplow's reaction to Andrew's farewell apology also underscores the genuineness of his feeling for Andrew.

The Production

Asquith's deceptively simple direction is a case study in the classic conventions of film grammar. The film is still essentially a stage play even if it has been "opened up." The meaning is primarily in the dialogue and the visual dimension of the film serves to enhance the impact of the dialogue. The composition of the shots for the most part is determined by the same considerations that influence the blocking of the action on a stage.

Asquith described his approach to direction as primarily problem solving:

> Technique is after all nothing mysterious; it is merely the answer to the question "How?" – "How shall I put this particular scene on the screen?" The may obviously be a hundred and one ways of approaching a scene. It will be different with different directors, but al long as a director treats the scene as unique and particular and not as a specimen of a genus, his answer to the question "How?" has a chance of success.[5]

According to Redgrave as quoted by R.J. Minney in his biography of Asquith was more than open to suggestions. (Redgrave refers to him as "Puffin," the nickname Asquith's mother gave him because of the shape of his nose).

> Michael Redgrave then talked of his scenes in *The Browning Version* in which he played the ageing schoolmaster Crocker-Harris. 'I remember particularly the scene,' he said, 'in which Crocker-Harris, the villain—hero of the play, has to digest the fact that he is known as the Himmler of the Lower Fifth. The set for that scene – the classroom — was a very big one with only two people in it.
>
> 'Puffin said: "Where do you feel like going? Where would you like to be for that bit?" And I said: "I would like to walk away from the camera, with my back to it – away – away to the end of the long classroom, take in the names carved on the walls, the initials and so on. Then come back again and come into close-up." I wanted to do this great circumambulation in this scene for my very long speech.
>
> 'Puffin said: "Fine! Fine! But the sound people said, "We are going to pick up quite a lot of noise from the arc lights as the distance between the player and the camera gets longer and longer." One doesn't hear so much about arc noises these days. I don't know why it is, but it's just as well.
>
> '"I can either do it your way," said Puffin, "and put the sound on afterwards – or I can follow you with the camera." I said:
>
> "No. I will dub what I am saying afterwards." Not many directors, especially of Puffin's magnitude, would say to the actor: "Where would you like to go? What would you like to do?" and be able to accommodate the actor's wishes with his own concept of how it should be done. He could afford to give one those bits of latitude. He was so humble and truly modest as really good artists usually are au fond.'[6]

Obviously Asquith sensed the emotional potential of the large empty classroom as well as the logic of seeing Andrew from Gilbert's perspective. Redgrave may have been primarily concerned with the need to have something to do during a long bit

5 Minney 131f

6 Minney page ?

of dialogue, and it seems as if he may have added a bit of dialogue as an added justification for his walk: Those boys sitting down there…". In any event the net result was typical of a very basic type of collaboration involved in filmmaking.

The classroom is used for five scenes in the film and this one may be worth dissecting as an example of the directing style of the film. It begins with Andrew alone in the classroom after he has learned that he will not receive a pension from the school. It has been set up by his telling Millie that he is going to his classroom to collect some papers. He walks along the cricket field while everyone else is walking in the opposite direction. He pauses to applaud the team as it comes out of the clubhouse and then walks off alone.

He enters the classroom in a full-figure shot as a silhouette in the doorway and the part of the classroom we see looks almost gloomy. The camera pans with him as he walks towards his desk, and he pauses to wipe perspiration from his face and neck. The pause serves to emphasize the step up to his desk. The fact that his desk is on a platform is exploited on several occasions in which students or Gilbert must look up at Andrew when they are speaking to him. The metaphor may be obvious, but it is also natural enough to work beneath the surface. Mainly we are aware that Gilbert and Taplow look up to Andrew. Gilbert, of course, looks up to Andrew even before he himself has begun to sympathize with him.

As Andrew pauses to put his handkerchief away he seems to be looking at the desk apprehensively. He then steps over to open the top of the desk in order to remove some books. Again the piece of business is perfectly natural and motivated by his reason for coming to the classroom, but the image does have metaphorical impact as Andrew begins to open the Pandora's box of reflection on his years at the school. The shadows cast by the sun coming through the window heighten this mood. He gathers some books and then turns to remove things from the cabinet behind his desk. Something falls to the floor from the cabinet and he bends over to pick it up. His posture as his face goes into darkness seems to convey defeat or dying. As he stands with the notebook he has picked up off the floor, there is a cut to a medium shot so that we can see his reaction before we know what he is reacting to. Then there is a cut to a close-up of the manuscript cover, and we have the real justification for this scene. In collecting his things Andrew has re-discovered the passion of his youth which he had told Taplow was lost forever.

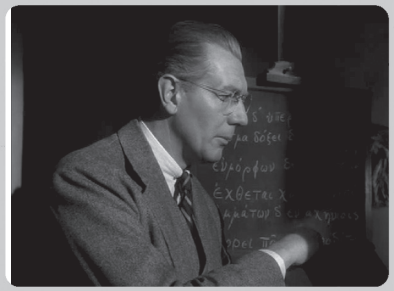
When we cut back to the medium shot, there is a sound of the door opening and Andrew pulls the manuscript to his chest as though he feels a need to protect it and hide it.

The
AGAMEMNON
of AESCHYLUS
Rendered into English Verse
by
A. CROCKER-HARRIS

"Oh I'm so sorry, sir I didn't expect..."
"Come in... come in..."

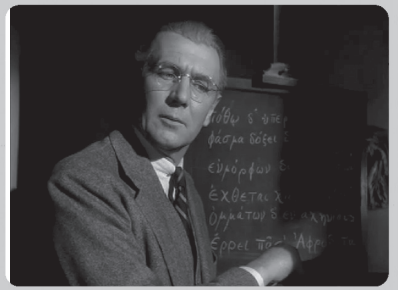
"I'm even told that you're known as the Himmler of the Lower Fifth."

"Himmler of the Lower Fifth? Who told you that?"



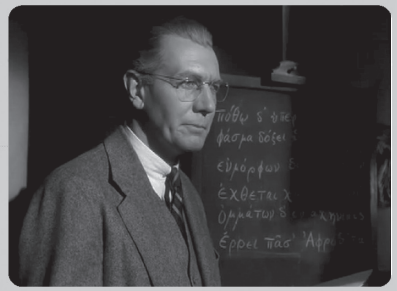
"Well, the headmaster amongst others..."

"I think he exaggerated. I hope he exaggerated."



"He only meant you kept the most wonder discipline..."

"They're not bad boys..."



"I'm afraid I shouldn't have said that. I've been tactless, I'm afraid."

"Of course, from the very beginning I realized I did not possess the knack of making myself liked, but…

Gilbert enters the classroom unaware that Andrew is there in a medium shot similar to the one we started with except that Gilbert is not seen so much in silhouette.

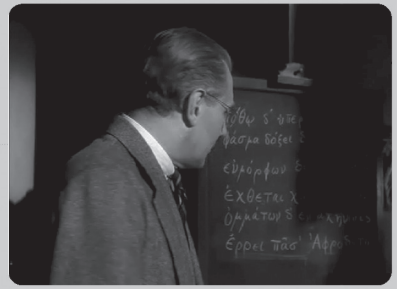
The camera dollies back and pans to include Andrew seeing Gilbert before Gilbert sees Andrew. Andrew then turns back towards his desk to continue removing his things as the conversation with Gilbert begins. Much of the time Andrew has his back to Gilbert so that both are facing the camera. Even though Gilbert does most of the talking and explains his presence in the classroom by revealing his personal feelings, the composition makes him seem less significant than Andrew's actions as he continues to gather his things. Gilbert is an interloper in Andrew's private moment up until the point where he makes the remark about Himmler.

There is a cut to a medium shot of Andrew as he reacts to "Himmler of the Lower Fifth," and asks Gilbert who told him that. A medium close up of Gilbert responding sets up the latter medium close up in which he begins to realize his gaffe. Andrew's initial reaction to Gilbert's apology seems to be hostile, but he tries to downplay the significance of the remark.

As Andrew turns away from Gilbert, there is a cut to a wider shot which is the first of two long cuts following Andrew as he walks around the room reminiscing. The cut back to Gilbert shows he growing remorse and when Andrew's walk around the room ends with them face to face, Gilbert lowers his eyes and is momentarily at a loss for words. The cut back to Andrew as he sees that Gilbert is disturbed and attempts to relieve Gilbert's discomfort by apologizing for embarrassing him is a sort of punctuation in which the emotional weight of the scene begins to shift to Gilbert. Andrew returns to his earlier position at his desk gathering his things with Gilbert hanging his head in the foreground.

Gilbert's apology is now deeply felt and is seen in a medium close up of him again looking up at Andrew. He no longer feels simply that he has tactlessly revealed a joke about Andrew. Now it is clear that he feels he has hurt Andrew, and he is genuinely remorseful.

Andrew continues his reflections on his career, but he has regained some of his ironic self-defense



"At the beginning at least I did try very hard…"

"…sometimes I had that success…"

"…to communicate to the boys…"

"That of course was in the early years…"

"…some of my own joy in the great literature of the past."

"Of course, I failed as you will fail…"

"…the boys used sometimes to laugh at me, not with me but at me…"

"...at my little mannerisms and tricks of speech..."

"...and that made me very happy..."

"...I used to encourage the boys' laughter by rather overdoing those little mannerisms..."

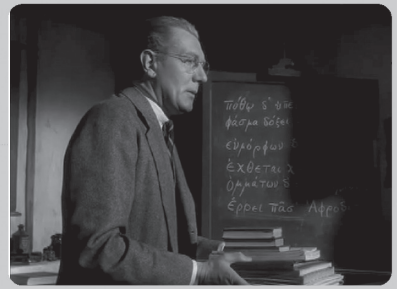
"...at least they found me funny as a character..."

"...for a time at least I had quite a success as a school master."

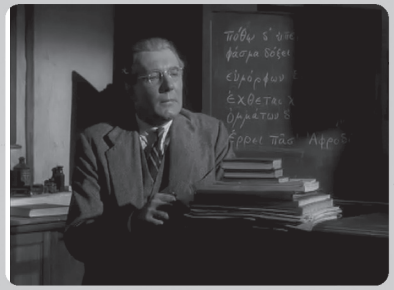
"I fear this is all very personal..."

"You need have no fears about the lower fifth."

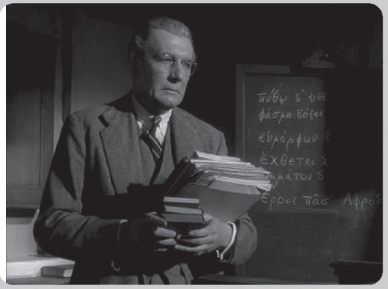
"I'm afraid I said something just now that hurt you very much. It's myself you must forgive, sir."



"...I should have known for myself..."



"I knew, of course, that I was not only not liked but now positively disliked..."



...an utter failure as a schoolmaster. Still, stupidly enough I had not realized I was also feared."

"Well, I bequeth you this room..."

"You will, I know, respect the confidence I have just made you."

"I should hate you to think I wouldn't..."

"…Good-bye, my dear fellow, and my best wishes…"

and dismisses Gilbert's apology. He sits down almost as though he is being crushed or drained by the full realization of his failure, and there is a note of anger as he rises to leave: ("Still, stupidly enough, I had not realized that I was also feared.")

There is a cut to a wider angle with Gilbert in the foreground as Andrew begins to leave. The camera stays with Gilbert as Andrew exits the frame. Gilbert is still at a loss for words, but he gathers himself together just in time to turn and open the door for Andrew. The camera follows him as catches up with Andrew and settles into a two shot of them facing each other on equal footing.

There is a final cut to an over the shoulder shot of Andrew as he asks Gilbert to respect confidences he has just made him and a corresponding shot of Gilbert assuring him that he will. There is another matching pair of shots as they say good-bye and wish each other well, and one last shot as Andrew reacts to the idea of his "future career" and turns to exit.

Again the camera stays with Gilbert in the wider shot as Andrew leaves and Gilbert closes the door. Gilbert then turns to take his place at the desk with some hesitancy and the scene ends on a shot of the empty desks in the classroom.

Aside from the formal symmetry it provides, perhaps the most striking thing about the quiet moment with Gilbert alone in the classroom is that is it an obvious moment for a music cue; but it is all the stronger because instead of music we hear

only the ringing of the school bell in the distance outside. This is, of course, consistent with the rest of the film as there is no score at all except with the opening and end titles. The only other music in the film is the organ music heard coming from the chapel and the hymn sung by the congregation. The music over the opening credits sounds to me like stock music for credits although the music department for the film apparently consisted of Arnold Bax and Kenneth Essex. The music at the end sounds like a bit of butchered Beethoven designed to rouse the projectionist and reassure the audience.

The film also makes sparse use of off-screen sound effects. About the only sounds that are not tied directly to things seen are the sounds issuing from Hunter's classroom, the sound of his students running through the hall as heard by the students in Andrew's class, the school bell, the sound of the fireworks during the headmasters dinner party, and the motor and horn of the taxi waiting out front for Millie in the morning.

The fireworks are perhaps justified by the ironic contrast between an end of term festivities and the apparent end of the Crocker-Harris's marriage. The sound of course combines a sense of celebration with an echo of warfare. The main function of the fireworks, however, seems to be to provide the occasion for a theatrical lighting effect as Millie and Andrew talk of going their separate ways.

The school bell is heard several times during the day starting with the opening shot as Wilson runs to chapel. It rings at the end of Andrew's class, emphasizing the ominous silence with which the students await Andrew's next instruction. It rings while Andrew and Millie are silently having lunch together, and provokes Andrew to excuse himself to reset the dining room clock. The sound of the bell while Gilbert sits alone in the classroom has already been mentioned, and finally it summons Andrew to the prize ceremony where he is to make his farewell remarks. The ringing bells are, of course, a natural bit of ambience for a school campus, but the also serve to underscore aspects of the story concerned with beginnings and endings. There is an inevitable association with the question of for whom the bell tolls. It summons Andrew to the encounter with his failure as it summons Gilbert to a confrontation with his limitations. The passage of time, which is reinforced by associating the bells with Andrew's apparent obsession with punctuality, is part of what seems to have defeated Andrew in his mission. He had some success at first, but he was worn down as the years went by.

The sound of the taxi outside the house in the morning puts pressure on Millie as she debates whether to make any kind of parting gesture towards Andrew and the sound of the taxi driving away adds a note of finality to Andrew's situation.

There is one other sound effect that has a gathering impact as the film progresses, the sound of a door opening or closing. This is also, of course, a visual motif, and it may seem strained to credit such a natural aspect of the action as a stylistic motif adding to the emotional impact of the film, but I think a case can be made for it in a film about passages – beginnings, endings, arrivals and departures – and about intrusion or the penetration of defenses. There are some 38 moments when a door opening or closing plays a role in the scenes.

0:01:49	Door closes on Wilson
0:02:16	Porter opens door for Gilbert
0:02:23	Porter lets Wilson go in
0:02:27	Wilson closes door behind Wilson
0:06:51	Frobisher and Gilbert as Frank closes classroom door
0:07:07	Frobisher opens Andrew's classroom door
0:10:22	Taplow enters classroom
0:11:40	Students react to sound of door opening
0:20:14	Off screen sound of classroom door closing as Gilbert leaves
NOTE:	There is no sound of the door when Millie arrives while Taplow is imitating Andrew.
0:23:50	Millie closes the door as Taplow leaves
0:25:14	Front door closes OS as Andrew arrives
0:27:24	Door OS as Taplow returns
0:26:52	Taplow enters sitting room
0:36:25	Frank leaves Millie closes door
0:36:53	Millie opens door enters sitting room
0:37:04	Andrew closes dining room door
0:47:35	Andrew enters classroom
0:48:23	OS Door classroom door opening
0:48:25	Gilbert enters classroom
0:53:20	Gilbert opens door for Andrew
0:55:59	Millie closes sitting room door
0:56:11	Taplow opens door to enter sitting room
0:59:27	Frank opens & closes door to enter sitting room
1:00:52	Taplow closes door OS as he leaves
1:01:53	Millie enters in background
1:03:18	Andrew closes door as he leaves with medicine
1:03:43	Frank opens door as he starts to leave
1:03:54	Frank closes door to say "We're finished..."
1:30:08	Frank opens door to leave for real
1:06:05	Frank knocks & opens bedroom door
1:08:33	Frank stops Andrew from opening door
1:08:55	Andrew finishes opening bedroom door
1:09:07	Millie opens door to enter hallway
1:09:24	Franks opens door as they leave house
1:09:30	Andrew closes door behind them
1:10:38	Carstairs opens door for ladies leaving dining room
1:15:01	Millie opens dining room door
1:15:18	Millie opens billiard room door & closes it behind her
1:20:58	Millie closes front door as she leaves

The most emphatic of the door closings is the moment when Frank closes the door he has partially opened with the intention of going to tell Frank that Millie was lying about Taplow. He pauses as Millie says Andrew will think Frank is only telling him that out of pity. When Frank closes the door to resume talking with Millie, it signals the end of their relationship. He looks at

According to Wikipedia the exterior locations were filmed at Sherborne School in Dorset, a venerable public school founded in 1550. This may be based on an identification of the square tower seen in the opening and closing shots, but it appears that some liberties were taken in constructing the setting for the film. The opening and closing shot seem to be the same angle on the school, but the opening shot has additional buildings added behind the main building. The courtyard used for some scenes appears to be real, but the setting for the final exchange between Andrew and Taplow is probably a set.

The school chapel is presumably a set designed by Carmen Dillon, who won an Oscar for Hamlet *(1949) and received BAFTA nominations for her work on The* Accident *(1967),* The Go-Between *(1970) and* Julia *(1977).*

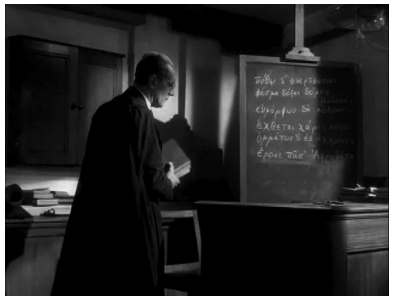
her for a moment and says, "We're finished, Millie, you and I."

Similarly when Andrew hears Millie shut the front door behind her on her way to get into the waiting cab, the closing door adds a sense of finality to their breakup.

The play of *The Browning Version* takes place in one room. The Asquith film has 16 different locations or sets:

1. The School Campus Quadrangle
2. The School Chapel
3. The West Cloisters (Hallway)
4. Frank's Classroom
5. Andrew's Classroom
6. Crocker-Harris Sitting Room
7. Crocker-Harris Garden
8. Crocker-Harris Entry Hall
9. Crocker-Harris Dining Room
10. Cricket Field
11. Tent on Cricket Field
12. Andrew's Bedroom
13. Frobisher Dining Room & Billiard Room
14. Frobisher Sitting Room
15. Frobisher Patio
16. School Assembly Hall

"Opening up" the play by spreading the action around several settings is a natural tendency in filming a play, but it also contributes to the shift in emphasis from Andrew's marriage relationship



to his failure in his career. The use of additional settings is judicious and the choices for the most part are obvious. The only two that seem to require any justification are the tent on the cricket field and the headmaster's house.

The cricket field itself is a fairly obvious solution to the question of how to move the conversation between Andrew and Frobisher out of the house into a setting the presents other opportunities for elaboration of themes. The tent is less obvious, but seems to be a natural and elegant solution to how to permit more fluidity in the grouping of the characters than would be possible with everyone seated and watching the match. Andrew and Frobisher can finish the first part of their conversation and move into the tent to join the others for tea during a break in the game. In the tent Frobisher can make his rounds leaving Andrew and Millie to have a private conversation. The tent also allows Frank to take his leave of Millie and provides an occasion for Wilson and his mother to observe Andrew and Millie.

Perhaps a dinner party at the headmaster's house is an obvious means of moving the final scenes of the play out of the Crocker-Harris's house and keeping Frank with them. The gathering of characters at Frobisher's house provides an occasion for recapitulating some of the themes. The gossiping wives provide an explicit statement of a major theme ("marriage of mind and body"). The presence of Betty Carstairs underscores Millie's anxieties about losing Frank. The party in general emphasizes the extent to which Andrew is a misfit in the social world of the school. The celebratory dinner also contrasts with the stifling lunch. The tension of the final exchange between Andrew and Millie is heightened by a semi-public setting involving fireworks.

The photography by Desmond Dickinson of the various settings added for the film creates a realistic image of the world in which the action takes place. Since the story takes place on the last two days of the spring term, it is not surprising that the image of the school is somewhat idyllic. The chapel and the West Cloisters convey a sense of tradition underscoring the theme of "the noblest calling that a man can follow – the care and molding of the young." Even the details of Andrew's classroom probably evoke a sense of the traditions of public schools for those familiar with them.

The lighting in Andrew's classroom and in the dining room of Andrew's house is fairly moody with deep shadows in keeping with the somber theme of Andrew's failure. Except for the fireworks effect the rest of the lighting seems completely naturalistic or at least conventional in terms of black-and-white photography.

There are two elements in the art direction which stand out as motifs: clocks and mirrors. Andrew's punctuality and his association with time is an element added to the play for the film. During the class he notices Wilson checking the time and tells him, "It lacks nine and a half minutes of eleven…" In addition to setting the clock during lunch, he sets his own watch and the clock on the mantel by the chimes. (He is nonetheless late to his appointment with Taplow.)

A mirror is a fairly obvious metaphor for introspection or self-awareness, and there are three in the Crocker-Harris house which are used rather pointedly.

The mirror in the entry hall is used only once; but when Millie looks in it before lunch, the image seems almost consciously reminiscent of the Queen addressing her mirror in the Disney version of Snow White. In this case the mirror is a means of underscoring her vanity and her anxiety about losing Frank.

The mirror above the mantel in the sitting room is included in at least a dozen shots, and, given the nuisance that a mirror can be in a film set (reflecting the camera, crew, lights, etc.), one must assume that there was a conscious decision to put a mirror above the fireplace for stylistic or thematic reasons.

The first use of this mirror is during the scene between Millie and Frank after she has sent Taplow to the village. Frank is standing in front of the mantel with his back to the mirror so that when Millie approaches him we are able to see her from two sides at once. Neither of them looks into the mirror. The point of this is not obvious, but it may have to do with seeing Millie from two

different perspectives as Frank and Andrew do.

Later when Andrew is showing Frank the schedule for the next term, the school bell rings and he walks over to the mantel to set the clock. At first the as Andrew sets the clock the mirror permits us to see Andrew's front and back simultaneously while also putting him between Frank and Millie in the mirror. When Andrew turns to face Frank and dismiss the idea that his new job is something to be sorry about, we get a complementary composition in which the interest shifts to the direct view of Andrew on the right side of frame. This shift underscores the shift in Andrew's manner from the somewhat ironic and even slightly self-pitying description of the job to the resumption of his pride and fortified public persona. In turning to face Frank and Millie, he is also turning his back on their reflections. The mirror in this case is clearly associated with "reflection" in the sense of inner awareness, and it enables the shot to become a miniature visual metaphor for the turn Andrew makes, which is the pivotal point of the story.

When Millie returns to the house after the cricket game and discovers Andrew clearing his desk, she walks over to the mantel and turns to continue talking to him. Asquith has obviously made a conscious decision to place her in front of the mirror. She turns her back on Andrew and preens in mirror as she asked him why he did not come back to the cricket match, and both sides of her profile are visible as she talks about Gilbert.

Asquith also has Andrew walk over to stand in front of the mirror while he describes Taplow's gift to Frank. In this instance the mirror frame behind Andrew simply seems to be a graphic element in the composition.

When Millie re-enters the room to join Frank and Andrew, the mirror catches her reflection so that we see two of her: a reflection of her associated with Andrew and her full figure associated with Frank. She then goes over to look into the mirror as she puts on earrings while Andrew and Frank continue there conversation across the frame.

When Millie takes the book from Andrew and begins to debunk Taplow's gift, she moves across

the room, and Andrew and Frank move so that Frank ends up in front of the mirror as Andrew leaves the room. During Frank's confrontation with Millie he is framed by the mirror reflecting mainly a door. Again the mirror seems to be mainly a graphic element in the composition, and it is probably best not to make too much of the

other instances in which the mirror is visible in the background.

The third mirror is in Andrew's bedroom. The shot is not such that the camera can see a reflection, but Andrew is clearly looking into the mirror as he ties his tie and brushes his hair. It is perhaps significant that this "bit of business" is used to set up a shot where Andrew is looking at himself and Frank is looking at Andrew. The content of the scene reveals that Andrew is much more aware than Frank imagines him to be.

It is hard to know how much weight to give to the use of visual motifs like this or how to gauge their contribution to the impact of the scenes. They surely contribute in some way to the formal coherence of the work and probably have an effect on the viewer even if it is subliminal.

There can be no doubt, however, about the impact of the compositions and staging in terms how we see the actors in the scenes. It is often instructive to view a movie like this with the sound turned off to see how much about the relationships between the characters is conveyed not only through the expressions and gestures of the actors but also through the compositions of the shots and the blocking of the action. This is most obvious in the extended scenes between Millie and Frank.

The first scene between Mille and Frank in the sitting room after Taplow has left on his errand consists of just two shots. The first is just over a minute and a half long. It begins on a full figure shot of Millie as she starts to offer Taplow money for some ice cream and pans over with her as she walks over to give him the money and shut the door behind him. There is a medium shot of Millie at the door as she turns to begin speaking to Frank, and the camera dollies back as she walks over to Frank in front of the mirror. The camera pans with Millie as she turns and walks away from Frank and dollies back again to permit a two-shot of them as Frank approaches her to offer her a cigarette. She then turns away from him again and walks towards the camera. With

While you're there, you might as well slip into Stewart's and have an ice cream."

"Thanks awfully, Mrs. Crocker-Harris."

"Thank you for coming…"

"Care to come back for cocktails this evening?"

"…if you may…"

"Do you know I haven't seen you for over a week…"

"Give me cigarette…"

"Ihad expected to be in Devonshire in September."

"You haven't given it away yet, I see…"

"Then you'll have to come to me in Auguest."
"But Andrew will be there."

"Luckily it's a man's case. I don't suppose any of your girlfriends would want it."
"Oh, don't be silly…"

"I think I can manage Septemer."

"Well that would be better from every point of view."

"Except that it means I shan't see you for six weeks."

"You'll survive that all right."
"Oh yes, I'll survive it, but not quite so easily as you will."

"Oh, Frank,darling, I love you so much."

a minimal adjustment the camera is able to frame a close up of her in the foreground with a medium shot of Frank behind her. Even without the dialog it is clear that her first approach was tentative and her real feelings are being revealed as she turns her back on him and walks away again. Frank approaches her and she turns on him as he plays with his cigarette eventually dropping it. He retrieves the cigarette and walks over to the mantel to use an ash tray. Now the camera pans off of Millie to stay with Frank, and he turns to speak to her. At this point there is a cut to a medium shot of Millie and pans with her as she moves over to confront Frank. Frank turns away from her as they talk, and just as Millie professes her love for him the scene is interrupted by the sound of Andrew coming in the front door. The staging of their conversation is a choreographed skirmish in which Millie is attacking Frank (either with complaints or with a desperate need) and Frank

"He should never have become a schoolmaster."

"How did you meet in the first place? I've often wondered."

"He wasn't always The Crock, you know…"

"It's me you should be sorry for."

"I am."

"Then show me."

is moving away or attempting to mollify. There is clearly an imbalance in the relationship.

The scene with Millie and Frank in the garden consists of five shots again starting with a sustained shot which is a minute and twelve seconds. Millie and Frank walk side by side through the garden, and the camera pans with them until they come to a bench where Millie prepares to sit down. She sits, but he remains standing with the result that the next cut, an over-the-shoulder angle on Millie has him looming over her and the complementary angle favoring him clearly puts him in a dominant position. She rises to confront him and there is a cut to another over-the-shoulder shot where she is literally in his face. There is a cut to the reverse angle on him, and he kisses her. This is the full revelation of their affair and of her betrayal of Andrew, who is on the other side of the wall behind them.

When the film returns to Frank and Millie in the garden, they have separated and apparently cooled off a bit. They are both seated although she is lower than he is. He smokes and plays with his cigarette avoiding her look until he realizes that he had forgotten he was supposed to sit with her at the concert at which point he turns to face her and apologize. He rises to walk away from her and she follows until the come to rest in a two-shot of him with his back to her. He turns partially when he responds to her, and then she turns her back on him and walks away. When she finally turns to respond he still faces away from her crushing his

"Look, I really must be going."

"Betty Carstairs has got her eye on you. I saw you at that tea party…"

"It'ss all right, my dear; as it happens we gave the seat away…"

"Frank, have you never been in love…"

"I know you're not in love with me, but haven't you ever been in love with anyone?"

"Do you think it's any pleasanter to think you cut me because you forgot?"

"I told you I'm sorry. What more can I say?"
"Why not the truth?"

"I meant to be so brave and not meantion the concert. Why did I."

"Believe it if you like. happens to be a lie, but believe it all the same."

"Frank…"

"For heaven's sake show me some pity…"

"I'll come down for the cricket this afternoon. Any chance of seeing you?"

cigarette with his foot. She again approaches him, but he still does not turn to face her. She turns away so that they have their backs to each other although he turns his head as he listens to her. He starts to leave, and only after he has exited frame does she turn to stop him. She exits frame to go to him, and the next cut is a medium shot of them at the door. He reassures her, and she follows him back into the house. Again the main impression of the scene is of her pursuing him and his turning away from her, which is of course precisely the nature of their relationship.

The brief scene between Millie and Frank in the hallway in which he assures her he is coming to Bradford plays in a single shot and is notable mainly for the way in which Millie moves to the window to watch Frank leaving.

Their scene together after she has debunked Taplow's gift begins with Millie standing at Andrew's desk and Frank at the mantel as Andrew exits through the door to the hall. It immediately cuts to a close up of Frank as he reprimands her and then to Millie from his point of view with her back to him. It cuts back to a wider shot of Frank approaching her, and the camera dollies back to end in a two shot of them as she turns to keep her back to him. She starts to walk away from him, and he heads for the door. He pauses as he opens the door, and she walks over to the mantel. There is a close-up of her at the mantel as she drives home her point that it is futile for him to tell Andrew she lied about Taplow. There

""I'm coming to Bradford." "I think if you don't I shall kill myself."

"I am allowed two at a time."

"In heaven's name, Millie, how could you?"

"Well, why not? Why should he be allowed his comforting little illusions..."

is cut to a close-up of Frank at the door hesitating and closing the door. After he tells Millie they are through, it cuts back to Millie turning around so that her back is to the mantel and smiling at Frank in an appeasing manner. A brief cut back to Frank as he says he meant it is followed by a dolly shot close-up of Millie as she moves from the mantel to the sofa and sits. The camera then tracks with Frank as he moves across to the mantel where she had been. There are two pairs of complementary close-ups of him looking down on her and then the camera stays with her as she rises to challenge him and walk past him. He circles around behind her. The over-shoulder close-up on her is even tighter as she turns on him again. There is a brief cut to a corresponding angle on him and then a cut back to her as she slaps him. On the slap it cuts back to him, and there are cuts back and forth with the same angles before there is a side angle two shot in which she reaches out to him and he pushes her away. She turns away from him not wanting to listen to what he is saying, and the camera drops back for a wider shot as she tries to get away from him. She walks into a close-up, and he pursues. She turns to pursue him as he exits frame, and the camera tracks after her as she goes over to kneel on the couch and appeal to him. He finally heads for the door in the same shot, and she is left in the room alone.

The staging and compositions in this sequence clearly reflect the shifting balance of power in the struggle going on between them. It begins with Frank's reprimand and ultimatum. If she won't

"You're to go to his room now and tell him it was a lie." Certainly not."

"We're finished, Millie, you and I."

"All right. See what happens. He knows I don't lie to him."

"Oh, Frank, really…"

"He knows I tell him the truth and he'll hate you for your sympathy…"

"I mean it, Millie."

"He" think you're making fun of him like Taplow."

"Oh, don't be silly, darling…"

"Come and sit down amd forget all about…"

"Frank, I don't understand. What is this: what have I done?"

"…artful little boys and their five-shilling presents and talk to me."

"I think you know what you've done, Millie. Go and look after Andrew."

"forget!" If I live to be a hundred…"

"Why all this sudden concern for Andrew?"

"…I shall never forget the glimpse you've just given me of yourself."

"Because I think he's been about as badly hurt as a human being can be."

"Hurt? Andrew? You can't hurt Andrew; he's dead."

"At your urgent invitation."

"Why do you hate him so?"

"I don't hate him. You can't hate the dead; you can only despise them and I despise Andrew…"

"Decency! You're a fine one to talk about decency, when all these months you've been deceiving him."

"Frank, forgive me…"

"Frank, I don't care how much you humiliate me…"

"I think you better learn the truth…"

"I can't let you go. You're all I 've got…"

"You wouldn't. You've tried to tell me so often before…"

It'll be all right in Bradford. You'll see."

"I'm not coming to Bradford, Millie."

"…but I've always kept you somehow….:

Looking from the dining room through the sitting room to the hall. The door to the dining room is the door to the left of Andrew's desk.

tell Andrew, she lied about Taplow he will. Then the balance shifts when she starts a counterattack which stops him from going. She tries to use seduction as she invites him to sit down with her. When he refuses and continues his attack, she rises to fight him on his level and eventually slaps him. She immediately regrets the slap even though he concedes it was earned. She tries again to approach him, but he rejects her and starts to leave. She becomes desperate and pursues him virtually pleading on her knees.

The direction of this scene seems to be a clear example of "problem solving." Given the room, the two characters and the nature of the exchange between them, how should it be presented? While there may be any number of ways this scene could be staged and shot, there is a clear logic to the solution that Asquith adopted.

The room of course is a set which has been designed to accommodate this scene as well as others, but it is a set for which all four walls have been built. At some point we see every wall and corner in this room.

There is no way of knowing whether the scene might have been story-boarded or blocked out before the set was designed, but it is fairly common for a set to be designed to provide as much latitude as possible for staging and shooting so that each scene can be worked out by the director and actors when it is actually shot.

This last scene between Frank and Millie follows the pivotal scene in which Millie punctures Andrew's joy at having received the book from Taplow. Again the direction of this scene has a kind of straightforward logic and clarity typical of Asquith. It begins with a wide shot containing all three characters, and the characters even converge as Andrew expresses his pleasure at the gift. Once Millie takes the book and begins her attack, the scene devolves into individual shots until she has delivered the blow and offers the book back to Andrew. The camera drops back to a wide shot as he tosses the book on his desk and takes the medicine bottle with him as he leaves. The scene began with Millie coming between Andrew and Frank, and it ends with Frank as a buffer between Millie and Andrew.

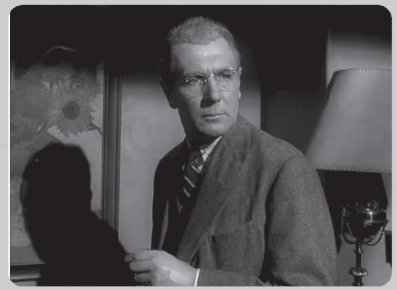
One other directorial choice worth noting is the way in which Asquith handles the moment during Taplow's private lesson when Andrew opens up to him, recalling his own attempt to translate the Agamemnon. Taplow sits beside Andrew and the entire lesson is shot in a side angle two shot. The camera dollies to the left as Andrew leans forward to refer to his text and then dollies back as he leans back again. As Andrew's thoughts turn inward he turns and faces away from Taplow. As a result the camera is able to see his full expression.

Two seemingly insignificant lines in this scene have been cut for the film: Taplow's second and third "Shall I go on, sir?" The second was before

The scene begins in a fluid moving camera shot in which Millie comes between Frank and Andrew while Frank tells Millie about the gift Andrew has just received.

Once Millie knows the gift is from Taplow, she takes the book and begins her attack.

As Millie moves away from the group saying , "the artful lillte beast" the scene splinters into single medium shots.



There are individual medium shots of Frank, Andrew and Millie until the point where Millie completely punctured Andrew.

As Mille returns the book the camera includes all three with Frank now between Millie and Andrew.

Andrew exits dropping the book on his desk and picking up the bottle of medicine.

The lesson takes place entirely in one shot with only a slight camera move to accomodate Andrew's lean forward to examine the text.

Andrew began his reverie about his own translation of the Agamemnon and the third came after Taplow had commiserated with Andrew on the loss of his manuscript. ("Hard luck, sir.") Apparently Asquith felt it was sufficiently clear that Andrew was drifting off and there was no need to milk the moment by having Taplow feel awkward. I suspect this may represent a missed opportunity in terms of the intensity of the audience's involvement with Andrew, but presumably both Asquith and Redgrave felt it was better for the pacing of the scene.

The warrior who can bear anything under seige by memories of his own youth.

The Figgis Version

One evening as Mike Figgis was dressing to go to a dinner party in the Hollywood Hills, he had the television set on and was channel surfing. He came across an old black-and-white British film that he had not seen:

> There was something about it which immediately caught my attention, which was to do with the style of acting and this kind of very underplayed drama that obviously had a lot of tension. And looking back I think it was quite early on in the film. I'd missed the opening scenes where, but it was still at an early enough stage for me to have a certain specific kind of interest in. The film wasn't over. And so I was dressing, and more and more I became fascinated by the film, and I ended up having to just sit down and watch it. And I kept looking at my watch and thinking I'm going to be extremely late.[1]

The film was *The Browning Version* directed by Anthony Asquith. When he finally arrived at the dinner party, he confessed why he was late and was amazed to discover that his hostess was involved in an attempt to remake the movie. She worked with Ridley Scott, who had acquired the remake rights with the intention of directing it himself but had decided to turn it over to another director. Figgis had at this point directed four features and had attracted considerable attention with his first two: *Stormy Monday* and *Internal Affairs*. His hostess asked if he would be interested in directing a remake of *The Browning Version*.

Figgis was born in England in 1948, but spent the first eight years of his childhood in Nairobi before his family returned to England to live in Newcastle. He studied music at Trent Park College of Education and began his career as a musician, playing guitar and keyboards. He was a member of an R & B / Soul band called Gas Board with Bryan Ferry playing clubs in Newcastle in 1965. He then joined an experimental theater group called The People Show first as a musician and then as an actor. Experimental theater led to multi-media experiments, which sparked an interest in film. *Slow Fade,* one of his theatrical productions, led to an opportunity in 1984 to make a television film, *The House*, and that opened doors for him eventually to make *Stormy Monday* in 1988.

Figgis professes to have been hesitant to take on a remake of *The Browning Version* because he thought it was such a perfect movie. The producers encouraged him to view it more as a revival of a play, and obviously he decided to do it. The result is a classic case study in what can happen when a movie is updated or remade.

The Script

Ridley Scott had originally intended to make the film with Anthony Hopkins in the lead role and had engaged Ronald Harwood to write the

---

1 Criterion DVD interview

script. A native of South Africa Harwood studied at the Royal Academy of Dramatic Arts but abandoned acting in the Fifties to become the backstage dresser for a Shakespearean actor. He eventually wrote a play based on his experiences. He had been writing plays and screenplays since the early Sixties, but in 1980 *The Dresser* was a huge hit in London. Harwood adapted it for the 1983 film, and was nominated for an Academy Award along with the film's director Peter Yates and the actors, Tom Courtenay and Albert Finney. (More recently Harwood won an Oscar for his screenplay for *The Pianist* (2002), was nominated for *The Diving Bell and the Butterfly* (2007). He also wrote the screenplays for *Love in the Time of Cholera* (2007), *Being Julia* (2004)and *Cry the Beloved Country* (1995).

Harwood has sole screenwriting credit for the 1994 production of *The Browning Version*, and there is no way to know exactly how much influence Figgis had on the script. There is a copy of Harwood's script in the collection at the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences which is a "Final Draft" dated May 28, 1993, and the differences between that script and the finished movie are typical examples of the kind of tinkering that goes on when a film is actually shot and edited. Most of the alterations are minor but in some instances they have a significant impact on the meaning of the film, particularly the changes in the ending.

The screen credit says the film is based on Rattigan's play, but the script itself acknowledges that it is based as well on Rattigan's screenplay. Much of Harwood's screenplay is obviously modeled on Rattigan's and even in some scenes taken verbatim.

Figgis says he only saw the Asquith film one more time after his initial discovery of it on television. He wanted to see it from the beginning to get the whole experience, but he did not want to be overly influenced by it in making his own version. The key to his interest in the film seems to be his response to Redgrave's performance. In an interview about the Asquith film he describes Andrew Crocker-Harris as

> …an incredibly passionate man who was a stoic. This man is the epitome of the stoic, which means that he's a person who's not going to show his feelings and who has immense pride and inner strength. And through a bad marriage and through a combination of these personality characteristics has somehow fallen out of time with himself. He's no longer someone whom people can relate to. He's at a certain age.

He views the British public school system as designed to cultivate this kind of stoicism, and he describes the "devastating" impact of the film in terms of a desire to see the character open up emotionally and overcome this repression. The pivotal moment in the story for him is the moment when

Taplow in giving Andrew the book breaks through his armor.

Figgis views the brilliance of the Rattigan's writing in terms of the way in which the audience is enabled to see beneath the surface of Andrew's repression.

> These repressed characteristics or these hidden characteristics are something which of course the audience can see and the genius of the writing here is that we are let in, we the audience are let in on this secret early on. We like this man.
>
> We like him because he is so well written and we like him because he is so beautifully played in the original by Redgrave. And so we know that he's misunderstood and that's a really interesting ability in a great writer and a great director and a great actor to immediately - and remember this was a one-act play - So within five or ten minutes we've got to know that this is the good person, this is a person whom we sympathize with and everybody else is coming and misunderstanding.
>
> And I mean you can do that in a crude way in which case the drama's not going to work on anything like the same level. But if you do it in this brilliant piece of writing in such a subtle way then all of our aspirations for the drama are that please somebody come along to understand him. So finally when the great breakthrough scene occurs, it's the most brilliant heartbreaking scene where the boy

MIke Figgis ca 1993

actually gives him a gift. And at first he even misunderstands that it is a gift. He's almost prepared to sort of sabotage it and one can see Rattigan going right the to edge here, going "Please, open up and let this appreciation in, but no, it's carried right to the precipice of stoicism. It's painful to watch.

And I remember so clearly the first time I saw the film going "For God's sake! you know, break through" and then finally when he does it's devastating, But it has to be devastating by that point because we've gone so far with the withholding of this piece of information. So when it does come through it really is a revelation and the film turns on that incident and goes from one kind of film to another kind of film without ever - and again this is why we're talking about quality British cinema here - without ever lapsing into a sort of crass sentimentality that often cinema lurches towards

> in a moment like this; you know, let's milk this for all it's worth.
>
> It remains stoic and in fact he continues to put the knife in after the event and it's even more painful now because all the nerve endings are exposed so it's...It is actually an immensely cruel piece of drama. Cruel in order to be kind, in order to get finally to a point of revelation or of understanding about human nature. By the end of this film one has had to go on a very tough journey with the character. It's quite devastating to watch.

Even allowing for the off-the-cuff nature of these remarks, it seems clear to me that the foundation has shifted between Asquith's or Redgrave's interpretation of Andrew Crocker-Harris and Figgis's. The clearest indication of this may be Figgis's "We like this man." Not everyone shares his immediate sympathy for Andrew as portrayed by Redgrave. Take for example the following excerpt from a review on the internet by Steve Evans:

> Asquith directs at a mannerly pace, building his themes methodically. Younger audiences weaned on flash-cutting and cursory character development may grow impatient with these wholly unlikable characters. But we ought to approach these stuffed shirts with compassion—or at least appalled fascination—in order to appreciate their plight. Redgrave's repressed professor, while an inspired creation, is still an arrogant and obnoxious man. Only in the final act does his essential humanity force its way to the surface. But it is Redgrave's ability to transform this unsympathetic man into a pitiable figure that ultimately makes the film such a rewarding experience. That, and the jaw-dropping dialogue. There are lines in this picture that slice clean to the bone.[2]

Needless to say I do not share the view that Redgrave's Crocker-Harris is "an arrogant and obnoxious man," and I have trouble imagining how anyone can respond to him in that way. Nonetheless even Redgrave himself apparently referred to Andrew as the "villain-hero of the play"[3] and his summary of the character as "an elderly, embittered schoolmaster whose defences break down because someone is kind to him"[4] seems to imply a degree of analytical distance lacking in Figgis's response. Redgrave was careful to emphasize that he felt he himself was nothing like Andrew Crocker-Harris and in fact liked the role because of the challenge it presented in playing someone so totally different.

This might seem like a slight difference in emphasis in describing a character were it not for the evidence presented by Figgis's film. Albert Finney's Crocker-Harris is a very different man

---

2 www.dvdverdict.com/reviews/browningversion.php

3 Minney 138

4 Mask or Face 139

from Michael Redgrave's, and the difference is found in the script as well as in Finney's performance. Figgis clearly wanted to make sure the audience found Andrew sympathetic.

Harwood's script "opens up" the play even more than Rattigan's screenplay. The action now takes place over three days rather than one, and there are scenes in the surrounding countryside and nearby village as well as at the school and Andrew's house. Scenes have been added to expand the depiction of student life and more attention is given to the cricket match. In spite of the additional material the Harwood/Figgis film is 18 minutes shorter than the Rattigan/Asquith version.

Many scenes have been altered in fairly basic ways but the overall thread of the story remains the same. It begins with Gilbert's arrival in time for the morning chapel service and ends with Andrew's farewell remarks and a final exchange with Taplow. Most of the basic story points remain unchanged: Andrew's wife is having an affair a science teacher; Andrew learns he is not receiving a pension and is asked to speak before Fletcher; Andrew learns what the students call him; Taplow gives Andrew a book after Mrs. Crocker-Harris has overheard his imitation of Andrew; she debunks the gift; Andrew insists on speaking last; he apologizes for his failure as a teacher; and he tells Taplow he has received his promotion.

There are however, several, alterations in the story which are not simply accommodations to the more contemporary setting or efforts to elaborate on existing motifs. First of all there is a change in Andrew's situation conveyed by a seemingly minor alteration of some dialogue.

FROBISHER: You know, it's extremely unlucky ill health should have forced your retirement…

ANDREW: Well, I felt that I could have continued, Headmaster. If you remember it was yourself and the governors who thought that my health was…

FROBISHER: Well, quite so, quite so… I was going on to say that it's unlucky about your having to retire before becoming eligible for a pension.

The real reason Andrew is leaving is not that his doctor says he must, but that the headmaster and the governors of the school want to get rid of him. Andrew does still have a heart condition. Taplow tells the other students and Gilbert that he knows the medical problem forcing Andrew to retire is his heart. We see Andrew take some pills twice during the film, once before his private lesson with Taplow and once right before he goes into the prize giving ceremony. There is, however, no dialogue about the medicine in the finished film. Taplow is not sent to get a refill nor does Andrew ask him for water to use in taking a pill. There is no discussion of the possibility of his taking too many of the pills. Other than his emotional vulnerability Andrew shows no signs of an illness.

This de-emphasizing of Andrew's illness is taken even further by one of the changes that took place between Harwood's final draft and the edited film. Harwood's script has Andrew explain why he is late for his lesson with Taplow:

ANDREW: I'm not as spry as I once was. I get very breathless. I had to rest. Excuse me for a moment, I need to take my pills.

The reason for this change is not just to make Andrew less a victim of ill health and more a victim of his own failure as a teacher. It is related to a new theme which has been introduced into the story: the death of Western civilization or at least the replacement of traditional culture by modern culture. The school wants to modernize. Gilbert has been hired to establish a new language department focusing more on modern languages and may even phase out the teaching of Greek and Latin. Andrew has become obsolete.

Laura (nee Millie) does say that the doctor says Andrew's new job will be less of a strain on him, but his new job is teaching English as a second language rather than prepping slower students for their exams. There is perhaps the implication that although Andrew is still fit to teach classics at a public school, he cannot find such a position because other public schools are as intent on modernizing their curriculum as this one.

The theme of Western culture culminates in Andrew's farewell remarks:

Rattigan/Asquith Version	**Harwood Final Draft**	**Figgis Film**
A valedictory address, as those of you who have read your Plato's *Apology* will remember, can be of inordinate length, but as I, unhappily, am not Socrates, and as I have often believed that Vita longa, ars brevis,[1] is a more suitable apothegm than the one in more general use, and in connection with the word brevitas, it is, I think, of some small interest -- it is, I think, of some small interest --	…	The study of the Classics is, in my view, the foundation of our culture, and culture is simply an expression of what is best in society – philosophy, decent government, justice, art, language. Our classical heritage is no longer valued and how can we help mold civilized human beings, if we no…if we no longer believe in civilization.

Rattigan/Asquith Version	Harwood Final Draft	Figgis Film
You must excuse me. I have prepared a speech, but I find now that I have nothing to say, or rather I have three very small words, but they are most deeply felt. They are these: I am sorry. I am sorry because I have failed to give you what you have the right to demand of me as your teacher: sympathy, encouragement, and humanity. I'm sorry because I have deserved the nickname of "Himmler" and because by so doing I have degraded the noblest calling that a man can follow -- the care and molding of the young.	I am sorry. I am sorry because I have failed to give you what you had the right to demand of me – sympathy, encouragement, and humanity. I apologize too for not having fought harder for those standards of excellence in which I so much believe. I allowed those standards to atrophy and I allowed myself to atrophy. I have deserved the nickname of Hitler of the lower Fifth because I have degraded the noblest calling a man can follow – the care and molding of the young.	I am sorry. I'm sorry because I have deserved the epithet Hitler of the Lower Fifth. I'm sorry because I have failed to give you what it is your right to demand of me as your teacher: sympathy, encouragement, humanity. I have degraded the noblest calling a man can follow: the care and molding of the young.
I claim no excuses. When I came here I knew what I had to do, and I have not done it. I have failed, and miserably failed. I can only hope that you and the countless others who have gone before will find it in your hearts to forgive me for having let you down. I shall not find it so easy to forgive myself. That is all. Good bye.	When I came here I believed I had a vocation for teaching – I knew what I should have done, but I did not do it. I knew that our classical heritage was no longer valued, and I did nothing. How, I asked myself, can we help to mould civilised human being if we no longer believe in civilization? Study of the classics, in my humble view, is the foundation for our culture, and culture is simply the expression of what is best in society: philosophy, decent government, justice, art, language. Yes, I knew these things and I did nothing when I should have shouted my beliefs from the rooftops. I have failed, and miserably failed, and I can only hope that you and the countless others who have gone before you will find it in our hearts to forgive me for having let you down. I shan't find it easy to forgive myself. That is all. Good-bye.	When I came to this school, I still believed…I… that I… I had a… a vocation for teaching. I knew what I wanted to do and yet I…I did not do it. I cannot allow excuses. I have failed and miserably failed. And I can only hope that you can find it in your hearts, you and the countless others who have gone before you, to forgive me for having let you down. I shan't find it easy to forgive myself. That is all.

The change in the remarks that Andrew had prepared reflect a change in the conception of Andrew from a pedantic academic to someone wishing as he told Frobisher "to touch on a matter of some gravity." More importantly perhaps, Andrew's personal failure is presented as a part of a larger failure of the establishment, which no longer believes in civilization.

The differences between Harwood's final draft and the finished movie seem designed to enhance this theme. Harwood's script has a moment where Andrew starts rehearsing his speech in his study earlier in the morning, and the opening is taken from the Asquith film with its reference to Plato's *Apology*. The implication seems to be that Andrew's comments on our classical heritage are, for Harwood, part of Andrew's apology. The devaluation of the classics was already well advanced when Andrew began teaching, and his failure to fight against it is part of his personal failure. The filmed version implies that the comments on the study of classics were part of Andrew's prepared remarks and not part of his spontaneous apology. The decline in commitment to the classical tradition is made to seem more of a contemporary issue than a fait accompli, and there is an obvious connection with the establishment of a modern language department and the governors' decision to terminate Andrew.

The theme of modern versus traditional culture is reflected in three other motifs in the script: science versus humanities, sportsman versus scholar. American versus English. The first two are motifs which can be found in the Asquith film, but receive additional emphasis in Harwood's script.

Frank Hunter has been turned into an American. Even though Laura says he is "more English than the English" because of his coldness with her, everything else about him – his dress, his familiarity with the students, his manners, his diction, his flippant humor – is clearly intended to be American and, I think, to appear only superficially appealing.

Even though Frank professes to appreciate the history and tradition of the school, his appreciation seems a bit like that of a tourist and his joke about the uncomfortable beds conveys something of the way in which he takes the tradition with a grain of salt. In the Harwood script Frank is infatuated with the history and tradition of the school. He goes out of his way to show Gilbert a statue of King Charles and a bench where Byron and Shelley are supposed to have sat together discussing their dreams of going to Greece. His anglophilia is indicated in the description which says "He affects an old fashioned, untidy English look with half-moon classes. […] Under his academic gown he wears an alpaca jacket."

His exchange with Frobisher about science has also been expanded a bit:

Rattigan/Asquith Version	Harwood/Figgis Version
FROBISHER : And this, unless my ears deceive me, is the science upper Fifth where Hunter manufactures his nauseous odors of his perverted branch of learning.	FROBISHER : Up here is the upper Fifth science where Mr. Hunter manufactures foul smelling concoctions for his own perverted branch of learning.
HUNTER : How much more perverted, sir, than say certain passages of the Greek anthology?	HUNTER : Not as perverted as the Classics. Won't Mr. Gilbert be teaching the boys about rape and murder and incest?
FROBISHER : Unworthy, Hunter. A good dose of the Classics might still save you scientists from destroying this pleasant little planet of ours.	FROBISHER : Unworthy, Mr. Hunter. If you knew more about the Classics, you scientists, you might be less keen to destroy this little planet of ours. Wasn't it Einstein who said, "We don't understand science properly"?
HUNTER : I'm sorry, sir. I'll see you later, Gilbert.	HUNTER : No, I believe he said we don't know how to use it sensibly. Have a nice day, Mr. Gilbert.
FROBISHER : Bad that…	
GILBERT : What was that?	
FROBISHER : The noise in his classroom.	
GILBERT : Oh.	
FROBISHER : A good chap, Hunter, in many ways but no sense of discipline and, of course, like all scientists a trifle narrow-minded.	FROBISHER (reacting to noise in classroom): If only he had a little more discipline…but of course he's an American, you see.

The prejudice against science in the earlier film seems like a minor instance of stodgy conservatism and is not taken up anywhere else in the film. Harwood has connected it to an underlying theme about modern culture. The chairman of the board of governors, Lord Baxter, is head of Euro-Space Industries instead of a general as he was in the earlier film. Harwood's screenplay also had Frobisher commenting on the bank of telephones installed for the students by a parent, Sir Gerald Hamley of Hamley Communications. Dr. Rafferty, the head of the science department, is the one who explains to Hunter in a deliberately crass bit of dialogue that the current expression for "Cut along" is "Fuck off!"

This expression is used much more naturally and sincerely by Buller in his response to Taplow's effort to offer sympathy and moral support. In contrast Andrew expresses a similar sentiment to Hunter by saying, "I'd rather like to be left alone at the moment, thank you." When Hunter persists, even Andrew's coldest rejection is bathed in an aura of civility:

HUNTER: Is there anything I can do to help you? … I'd like to help…you.

ANDREW: Yes, don't take sides; it's so very unbecoming.

Civility is a correlate of civilization, and there are moments in the film when Andrew seems to embody civility. After he suffers the humiliation of being asked to relinquish his status in deference to Fletcher's popularity, he is able to gather himself and complement Fletcher on his cricket playing. He is able to generously "bequeath" his classroom to Gilbert with sincere wishes for success right after Gilbert has clumsily informed him that he is known as "the Hitler of the Lower Fifth." At a moment when he has been thrown completely off balance by Taplow's gift, he is able not only to make gracious and witty conversation with two alumni, but to recall their names. Frobisher whose job demands more social skills than Andrew's is constantly forgetting names, even of Gilbert, whom he had just introduced and addressed by name a few seconds earlier. Lord Baxter is also unable to remember the name of an employee whom he has mentioned in a clumsy effort to relate to Adakendi.[5]

None of this should be taken to imply that the meaning of the film is a comment on the death of Western civilization. The film is not "about" Western civilization at all. It is "about" Andrew Crocker-Harris, and it uses views about modernity as a way of delineating his character and enhancing his stature. Casting Andrew as a representative of classical culture and tradition gives him more substance than his more "modern" colleagues.

There is, of course, also a downside to Andrew's conservatism. Two students complain to Gilbert that Andrew always opposes anything new, and Andrew's civility seems to cloak an unwillingness to stand up for himself. In fact Andrew's acquiescence seems to have moved to the foreground in Harwood's screenplay. Laura's response to the news that Andrew will not receive a pension is one of the elements that has survived more or less intact from the play

LAURA: And what did you say? … You just stood there and made some joke in Latin, I suppose.

ANDREW: There was very little I could say, in Latin or any other language.

LAURA: Well, I would have said something. Don't you worry; I would have said something.

ANDREW: I'm sure you would.

Harwood has her elaborate on this, though, in a bit of dialogue that perhaps replaces "marriage of mind and body" as a summary of the conflict:

LAURA: You know what you are? You're a wimp. You always were and you always will

5 Figgis has apparently altered the joke on Baxter. In Harwood's script Baxter says right off that he has a Nigerian chap working for him whose name he can't remember, but follows with "You probably know him." Adakendi responds, "Probably not." This can be read as a way in which Adakendi puts Baxter in his place and presumably it was felt that allowing Baxter just to shoot himself in his own foot played better.

> be, a double first class wimp. … You know, I think I could have forgiven you anything if you had just once said "No. Enough." – not just to me but to every setback you've ever had.[6]

The issue is not just an incompatibility between the sensual and the cerebral, but a question of integrity and self-assertion. Andrew does, of course, eventually say "No. Enough." to her when she makes a conciliatory gesture after her cruelty about Taplow's gift. He also says "No" to Frobisher regarding the order of speakers at the prize-giving ceremony. In this sense Harwood has reverted to something closer to the theme of the play than the main theme in the Asquith film. As with the play the relationship between Andrew and Laura is not definitively ended. Their separation may be temporary. Andrew's farewell remarks seem to have enabled Laura to recover some of her respect for him, and her last words are "I'll write."

The issue is not Andrew's failure as a teacher. In fact despite his own harsh judgment, there is evidence he has in fact succeeded in at least the one in a thousand times which "can atone for all the failures in the world." In the play and earlier film these successes only happened in his early years at the school, but Harwood has clearly decided to present Taplow as an instance of Andrew's success even in his last year.

6 As we shall see, part of this dialogue was originally used much later as part of the resolution of the relationship between Andrew and Laura

He also introduces two alumni who go out of their way to pay their respects to Andrew and who, despite their own considerable success in their careers, still regard Andrew with awe. When Trimmer says, "God help me, I'm still terrified of the old bugger" he is revealing not that Andrew traumatized him for life but that Andrew represents the voice of conscience demanding perhaps unattainable levels of discipline and excellence. The scene takes place in front of a scoreboard, and the alumni have just been asked to account for what they have "been up to" in their lives. Andrew playfully assumes the position of a superior officer telling the brigadier general to "stand easy," and they instinctively address him as "sir." Trimmer expresses regret that Andrew is leaving the school and later goes out of his way in the middle of the concert to give Andrew his card and offer financial assistance.

> TRIMMER: This isn't the best moment, sir, but we're not staying the night, so uhmm … If ever you need any financial advice or assistance – indeed, anything of that sort, please telephone. I'd like to help. Think of it as umm… as repayment.
>
> ANDREW: Why thank you very much. This is extremely civil of you.

When Foster tells Andrew, "The old place won't be the same without you sir;" he is sincerely expressing a sense of loss that contradicts the

opinion of the board of governors. It is almost as though even he can see that Andrew represents the backbone of a tradition that has infused the school for centuries.

These additions to the script help make the applause following Andrew's farewell remark more believable. The implication is that Andrew's judgment of his own failure is simply the application of his own impossible standards to himself and overlooks the inspiration he has provided students and colleagues over the years. Modernization of the school may be inevitable, but there is still a deeply felt nostalgia for the values and tradition Andrew embodies.

The use of the cricket match to delineate Andrew is more subtle or oblique. The contrast between the popular cricket player and the feared scholar is obvious enough, and in the play it is used simply to underscore the failure of Andrew as a schoolmaster and set up the issue of his place in the speaking order. Asquith uses the cricket match simply as a means of punctuating the scene in which Frobisher informs Andrew about the pension and asks him to speak first. Fletcher's farewell remarks in the Asquith film function as a double edged sword puncturing the pomposity of the school traditions and classical scholarship and at the same time making Fletcher seem awkward and trivial in comparison to the depth of feeling in Andrew's apology.

Harwood's script sets up Fletcher more prominently in the beginning as everyone exits the chapel and the students crowd around him seeking his autograph. Andrew has to make his way through the crowd against the tide. Fletcher's farewell remarks no longer contain anything that punctures pomposity and seem mainly designed to make him seem shallow in comparison to Andrew.

Rattigan/Asquith Film	**Harwood/Figgis Film**
Well, chaps, I never was much good on my hind legs except perhaps at running with them. In fact I shall feel much less nervous today facing the Australians than I am on this platform. So just let me say what I have to say in a single sentence and then let me relax and enjoy myself with you all listening to Mr. Crocker-Harris's gilded and classical epigrams. Good-bye, good luck, and let's win the public school sports again next year.	Well, chaps, I'm not much good…you know…you know, on my feet except when I running between the wickets. So I'll just say I'm really… sad, you know… to be leaving this wonderful old place. I've loved it here. So… you know… good luck and good-bye.

Harwood and Figgis use the cricket game as punctuation for the conversation between Andrew and Frobisher just as the earlier film did, but they also make a very different use of it as well. There is an almost lyrical treatment of the game, which culminates in the slow motion shots of Fletcher's final pitch after the scene in the library between Andrew and Frank. This is as much a result of direction as screenwriting, but from the very first shot of the cricket players taking the field there is a celebratory aspect to the depiction of the game that seems completely sincere and not at all satirical. The immaculate green playing field, the white uniforms and the soft light make for seductive images. There is also an attention to detail in close ups of the wickets and of the pitchers hands which seem to be an indication of a fondness or fascination with the game. As Andrew says of Fletcher to Trimmer and Newton, "He's a superb player and quite beautiful to watch, isn't he." [7]

The Classics scholar is able to appreciate the performance of a sportsman, and we are reminded that sports of this sort are as much a part of the public school tradition as Latin and Greek. The final sequence of the cricket game conveys an image of the sportsman who is completely at one with himself in moments of peak performance and is celebrated by his teammates. In its own way this is an ideal comparable to one which motivated Andrew as a teacher. Coming after the scene in the library the image of Fletcher is particularly poignant as a contrast to the agony Andrew is experiencing in his internal conflicts and his conflicts with his wife and the school.

There are other touches in Harwood's screenplay designed to ensure that Andrew is sympathetic. The opening shot of the film is of Andrew alone and is clearly a signal that he is a character who will be the focus of our attention. (This is actually an addition made in the filming and is not in the final draft script.) Most of the initial scenes with Andrew are comparable to his depiction in the Asquith film until we come to the "end of term treat" for his class. At first Andrew's critique of the student's reading seems harsh and humiliating; but, as he begins to read and comment on the text himself, his passion for the work becomes obvious. He is swept up by it, and Taplow at least is able to sense, and in some small way share, his enthusiasm. Clearly in this film Andrew is not someone who is already dead. His passion may not be shared by his students, but it is real; and he would clearly like to communicate it to them.

There is a moment after his class and after the brief exchange with Gilbert about the importance

---

7 This line was not in the final draft of Harwood's script. The scene with Trimmer and Newton occurs because Trimmer is looking for the ball which has been hit beyond the bounds near the tree where Andrew is still absorbing the impact of Taplow's gift. The scene between Andrew and the alumni is basically the same but there is more of an air of awkwardness and Andrew responds to the comment on Fletcher getting his hundred simply with "Well, it was only to be expected." as he walks away

of modern languages when Andrew is in the classroom alone and hears the sounds of boys outside in the quadrangle. He goes to the window and looks down on them. They seem small in the distance and their uniforms make them indistinguishable, almost like a swarm of insects. There is no clear indication of what Andrew is thinking and the moment is obviously open to interpretation, but it is hard in retrospect not to view it in terms of a "god from afar" who looks "graciously upon" the students. (This moment is not in Harwood's final draft. The script has Andrew going to look out the window to collect himself after the bell has interrupted his reading.)

The next additions Harwood makes for Andrew are during the lesson with Taplow when Taplow inserts his own free translation. Harwood's re-interpretation of this moment is worth comparing to the play and the Asquith film because of what it implies about Andrew and his relationship with Taplow.

Play	Rattigan/Asquith Film	Harwood Final Draft	Figgis Film
ANDREW: Taplow – I presume you are using a different text from mine –	ANDREW: Taplow – I presume you are using a different text from mine –	ANDREW: Taplow – I presume you are using a different text from mine.	ANDREW: Taplow – I presume you are using a different text from mine –
TAPLOW: No, sir.	TAPLOW: No, sir.	TAPLOW: No, sir.	TAPLOW: No, sir.
ANDREW: That is strange for the line as I have it reads: ητις τοισνδ ε π ανδρι κομπ αζεις λσγον. However diligently I search I can discover no 'bloody' – no 'corpse' – no 'you have slain'. Simply 'husband' –	ANDREW: That is strange for the line, as I read it, reads: ητις τοισνδ ε π ανδρι κομπ αζεις λσγον. . However diligently I search I can discover no 'bloody' – no 'corpse' – no 'you have slain'. Simply 'husband' –	ANDREW: That's strange, for however diligently I search, I can discover no 'bloody' no 'corpse,' no 'you have just so foully murdered' simply ε π ανδρι , 'husband'.	ANDREW: That's strange I see no 'foully murdered' no 'bloody corpse,' simply ε π ανδρι , husband.
TAPLOW: Yes, sir. That's right.	TAPLOW: Yes, sir. That's right.	TAPLOW: Yes, sir. That's right.	TAPLOW: Yes, sir.

Play	Rattigan/Asquith Film	Harwood Final Draft	Figgis Film
ANDREW: Then why do you invent words that simply are not there?	ANDREW: Then why do you invent words that simply are not there?	Andrew, for once seems rather at a loss. ANDREW: Then why do you invent words that simply are not there?	ANDREW: Then why do you insist on inventing words that simply are not there? … Go on, Taplow. Go on; I wish to understand.
TAPLOW: I thought they sounded better, sir. More exciting. After all she did kill her husband, sir. She's just been revealed with his dead body and Cassandra's weltering in gore –	TAPLOW: Well, I thought they sounded better, sir. More exciting. After all she did kill her husband. She's just been revealed with his dead body and weltering in gore –	After a moment's hesitation, Taplow takes the plunge. He leans towards Andrew. TAPLOW: Today, in class sir, when you read from the play – He finds it impossible to continue.	TAPLOW: Well, I think of it like this, sir. There she is, Clytemnestra. She really hates her husband, Agamemnon. He returns from winning the war, and what does she do. She welcomes him back and then murders him. She stabs him over and over and then makes a speech…
…	…	ANDREW: Go on, Taplow. Go on; I want to understand -	…
…	…	TAPLOW (again summoning courage): Today – in class – I thought you read – well – passionately, sir. And for the first time I got a sense of the drama, the horror, the emotion – it was – it was so – so vivid, sir –	…
…	…	ANDREW: I'm flattered, Taplow, but still puzzled as to why that should encourage you to rewrite Aeschylus.	…

Play	Rattigan/Asquith Film	Harwood Final Draft	Figgis Film
…	…	TAPLOW: Just think of it this way, sir, there she is, Clytemnestra, she hates her husbanad, Agamemnon. He returns form winning the war, and what does she do? She welcomes him back and then she murders him! Stabs him over and over -	…
ANDREW: I am delighted at this evidence, Taplow, of your interest in the rather more lurid aspects of dramaturgy, but I feel I must remind you that you are supposed to be construing Greek, not collaborating with Aeschylus.	ANDREW: I am delighted at this evidence, Taplow, of your interest in the rather more lurid aspects of dramaturgy, but I feel I must remind you that you are supposed to be construing Greek, not collaborating with Aeschylus.	ANDREW: I'm delighted in your interest in the more lurid aspects of dramaturgy, Taplow –	ANDREW: I'm delighted in your interest in the more lurid aspects of dramaturgy, Taplow; but I still fail to understand why you should wish to improve Aeschylus.
TAPLOW: Yes, but still, sir, translator's licence, sir – I didn't get anything wrong – and after all it is a play and not just a bit of Greek construe.	TAPLOW: Yes, but still, sir, translator's licence, sir – I didn't get anything wrong – and after all it is a play and not just a bit of Greek construe.	Laura passes on her bicycle. LAURA: Andrew, there's cold meat and salad on the kitchen table – She disappears.	
ANDREW: I seem to detect a not of end of term in your remarks. I am not denying that the Agamemnon is a play. It is perhaps the greatest play ever written –	ANDREW: I seem to detect a not of end of term in your remarks. I am not denying that the Agamemnon is a play. It is perhaps the greatest play ever written –	ANDREW (barely acknowledging her): - but I'm still not clear as to why you should think you can improve Aeschylus.	…

Play	Rattigan/Asquith Film	Harwood Final Draft	Figgis Film
TAPLOW: I wonder how many people in the form think that? … Sorry, sir. Shall I go on? … Shall I go on, sir?	TAPLOW: I wonder how many boys in the class think that? … Oh, I'm sorry, sir. Shall I go on, sir? … Shall I go on, sir?	TAPLOW: Well, sire, surely there's no crime in trying to make him – well – alive. Why can't we get some – yes, some life into our translations, sir. Why can't we translate like you read today? Why can't we use words like 'bloody' and 'corpse' and 'murder'? He waits for Andrew's reaction.	TAPLOW: Today in class, sir, for the first time I got a sense of the horror. It was so vivid. I mean, why can't we put more life into the translation, sir, like you did? Why can't we use words like 'bloody' and 'corpse' and 'murder'?
ANDREW: When I was a very young many, only two years older than you are now, Taplow, I wrote, for my own pleasure, a translation of the Agamemnon – a very free translation – I remember – in rhyming couplets.	ANDREW: I remember when I was a very young many, only a few years older than you are now, Taplow, I wrote, for my own pleasure, a translation of the Agamemnon – a very free translation – I remember – in rhyming couplets.	Andrew glances at him then smiles faintly. ANDREW: When I was a very young man – only two or three years older than you are now, I wrote, for my own pleasure, a translation of the Agamemnon – a very free translation – I remember – in rhyming couplets.	ANDREW: Ummm… When I was a very young many, not much older than you are now, I wrote, for my own pleasure, a translation of the Agamemnon – a very free translation – I remember – in rhyming couplets.
TAPLOW: The whole Agamemnon – in verse? That must have been hard work, sir.	TAPLOW: The whole Agamemnon – in verse? That must have been jolly hard work, sir.	TAPLOW: That must have been hard work sir -	TAPLOW: That must have been hard work.
ANDREW: It was hard work; but I derived great joy from it. The play had so excited and moved me that I wished to communicate, however imperfectly, some of that emotion to others. When I had finished it, I remember, I thought it very beautiful – almost more beautiful than the original.	ANDREW: It was hard work; but I derived great joy from it. The play had so excited and moved me that I wished to communicate, however imperfectly, some of that emotion to others. I remember, I thought it very beautiful – almost more beautiful than the original.	ANDREW: Yes, it was. Very hard work. But I derived great joy from it. The play had also excited and moved me - as it did you. I wished to communicate, however imperfectly, some of that emotion to others. I felt much the same thing today in class. My translation, I remember thinking was very beautiful. (a faint smile) Almost more beautiful than the original.	ANDREW: Yes, it was; it was – very hard work; but I derived great pleasure from it, because the play had excited and moved me as it did you; and I wanted to communicate, however imperfectly, some of that emotion. A little like what happened in class today. My translation, I remember thinking was very beautiful – almost more beautiful than the original.

Play	Rattigan/Asquith Film	Harwood Final Draft	Figgis Film
TAPLOW: Was it ever published, sir?	TAPLOW: Was it ever published, sir?	TAPLOW: Was it ever published, sir?	TAPLOW: Was it ever published?
…	…	…	ANDREW: I'm sorry?
…	…	…	TAPLOW: Was it ever published?
ANDREW: No. Yesterday I looked for the manuscript while I was packing my papers. I was unable to find it. I fear it is lost – like so many other things. Lost for good.	ANDREW: No. I didn't finish it. Yesterday when I was packing my papers, I looked for it, but … I'm afraid it is lost – like so many other things. Lost for good.	ANDREW: No. He falls silent.	ANDREW: Oh no. No it was never published. …
TAPLOW: Hard luck, sir. … Shall I go on, sir?	TAPLOW: Oh, hard luck, sir	Taplow stares at him, trying to understand, feeling sympathy. Then: TAPLOW: Shall I go on, sir?	TAPLOW: Shall I go on, sir?
ANDREW: Now, go back and get that last line right.	ANDREW: Now, go back and get that last line right.	ANDREW: No. Our time has run out.	ANDREW: Ahh, no, I fear we've run out of time.

The stage directions for the play explicitly describe Andrew as "*Murmuring gently, not looking at Taplow*" when he says, "When I was a very young man…" Redgrave turns to look at Taplow as he comments on the "note of end of term" and his tone is reproving. He looks away from Taplow as he says the *Agamemnon* is perhaps the greatest play ever written, and then he becomes sufficiently absorbed in his own thoughts to ignore Taplow's question as to whether he should go on. Harwood's final draft has Andrew staring off into space as he begins to recall his translation. In the Figgis's film Finney pauses and pours lemonade for both of them after Taplow asks why he can't use words like 'bloody' or 'corpse'. Then he looks directly at Taplow and addresses his reminiscences to him. He is sharing something with him and relating to him on a completely new footing. He takes himself back to a time when he was almost a peer of Taplow, and Taplow temporarily ceases to address him as 'sir'.

Much of what happens in the scene is a matter of the acting and directing, but the basis for it is in the script and Harwood drives the point home by adding an exchange as Taplow is leaving:

ANDREW: Scientia est celare scientiam. 'The art of learning is to conceal learning.' And I wouldn't try it on any of your friends. It isn't particularly funny.[8]

8 Andrew's joke is a riff on the epigram Ars est celare artem "Art is to conceal art" or "The art is in concealing the art."

This is clearly a generous gesture and more than compensates for whatever humiliation he may have inflicted on Taplow in the classroom. It even makes one want to reconsider what actually did happen as Andrew called on Taplow to account for his laughter. When Taplow explains that he laughed out of politeness, the final film includes an initial response from Andrew ("I beg your pardon?") which indicates that he may be genuinely surprised by Taplow's explanation or caught off guard by the fact that a student could be motivated by such a feeling for him.

The scene in which Taplow gives Andrew the book has been relocated to an exterior setting overlooking the playing fields, but Harwood preserves much of the dialogue from the play. Most of the difference in the impact of the scene is due to the directing and acting, but there can be little doubt in this film that Taplow's gift is completely sincere and not at all the bribe that Laura claims it is.

Harwood has altered the final scene between Taplow and Andrew as well. Rather than have Taplow approach Andrew to return his manuscript and ask about his promotion, Harwood sets up a moment in which Andrew shakes Andrew's hand and says goodbye on behalf of a group of students. Andrew enjoys the diplomatic formality of the proceedings and characteristically informs Taplow that he has obtained his promotion by telling him first in Latin.[9] There seems little doubt that the scene is meant to be played as Finney does with genuine affection.

There are also substantial alterations in the script in the roles of Laura and Frank and their relationships with Andrew and with each other.

Laura is introduced in the chapel when the headmaster refers to her pointing out that Andrew had already been at the school for three years when he married her, but there are none of the exchanges between Laura and Gilbert or Frank during the service. She introduces herself to Gilbert after the service with a flattering joke about his youth. She already knows who he is, and she mentions the plan to form a new language department.[10]

---

9 Greek in the final draft

10 Her comment that Andrew was "only head of the classical languages" seems to introduce a complication in terms of Andrew's status at the school. In the play and earlier film the fact that Andrew was still teaching classics to the lower fifth seems to be an indication of how his career floundered. Gilbert is pleased to be given the lower fifth straightaway, but the implication is that he will advance to a higher status rather than be stuck with the "soul-destroying lower fifth." At a school like this there are surely upperclassmen studying the Classics in preparation for university. No mention is made of who is teaching them, but if Andrew is head of classical languages at the school surely he must be. If he has an occasional success with a lower fifth student like Taplow, then he would presumably have similar successes with older students who are even better equipped to appreciate classical literature

In her initial exchange with Frank there is only a hint of familiarity and a mildly suggestive comment about keeping "our bodies in shape." There is no scene with Laura and Frank alone at the house before Taplow's lesson. In fact Frank has come to the house at Andrew's behest to turn in his information for the class schedule, and Andrew arrives almost immediately after Laura. There is nothing in the dialogue that explicitly reveals the nature of her relationship with Frank, and it is not really until the following morning when she invents an excuse to go into the village that we learn of her affair.

Laura goes to Frank's flat in the village with the obvious intention of having sex with him. She has also learned that her mother will be in Canada for the summer, and she invites Frank to stay at her mother's cottage with her for month before she joins Andrew at his new job. Her comment "Don't worry; I'm not pregnant." as well as his initial remark, "I thought we agreed never to meet here." make it clear that they have been having an affair for some time. It is also clear from her behavior and dialogue that the basis for the affair is primarily sexual, but her suggestion that they ought to tell Andrew about their relationship indicates that she hopes that it can be more than a brief affair. The fact that Andrew is leaving the school presumably puts some pressure on her to solidify the relationship with Frank in some way.

The scene is Frank's flat is over five minutes long and replaces all the scenes between Frank and Millie in the play or Asquith film. Frank balks at her invitation to spend a month with her during the summer, offering the excuse that his father is not well and he may have to return to the US. She clearly interprets this as a rejection and compares him to Andrew.

Instead of discussing why Andrew became a schoolmaster, they discuss what happened to Andrew's marriage. It is Laura who gives the first indication of how she and Andrew were incompatible. Unlike Millie she expresses frustration rather than contempt, and she accepts responsibility for her part in the marriage. Her "déjà vu" remark seems to imply that this is not the first affair she has had, but she does not seem to have deliberately tormented Andrew by letting him know about her affairs. She never refers to Andrew as dead or completely unfeeling, and she does not become angry with Frank in the way Millie does.

Harwood Final Draft	Figgis Film
	FRANK: Laura.
LAURA: Were you expecting someone else?	LAURA: Were you expecting someone else?
FRANK: I thought we'd agreed you wouldn't come here, it's risky Laura -	FRANK: I thought we agreed that we wouldn't meet here.
LAURA: Who were you expecting?	LAURA: Who were you expecting?
FRANK: I thought the new guy, Gilbert. Laura, you take such crazy chances.	FRANK: Gilbert, the new guy.… Laura, come away from the window please.… Would you please come away from the window.
LAURA: Yes, but it's fun, isn't it. Go on, admit, yesterday was fun. (exasperated, he starts to dry his hair with a towel) Well, don't take a vote on it -	LAURA: Aren't you going to say hello?… I love you guilty… the puritan in you. I love fucking you. You talk when you make love.
The sound of a kettle whistling. FRANK: Be with you in a moment. The kettle's just boiling.	FRANK: The kettle's boiling.
LAURA: Which is more, apparently, than we can say for you.	LAURA: Which is more, apparently than we can say for you.
He disappears. She wanders over to the kitchen door and watches him.	FRANK: Laura, I haven't got much time.
	LAURA: No, I don't think I have either.
	FRANK: Tea?
LAURA: Tea. You're more English than the English. I thought at least you'd offer me three fingers of rye.	LAURA: Oh Frank, you're more English than the English.
He lifts the tea-tray, passes her awkwardly as he carries it into the main room. She regards him beadily.	
LAURA: (teasing him) No crumpet?	
FRANK: What?	
LAURA: Crumpet is slang for a bit of fluff. Me…I'm your bit of crumpet, Frank.	
FRANK: Oh. (pouring her tea) I haven't got long, Laura -	

Harwood Final Draft	Figgis Film
LAURA: (wry) No. I don't think I have either. (brief pause) But I'm the bearer of good news -	
No. I don't think I have either.	
FRANK: If Gilbert happens to walk in just say you're delivering a message form Andrew -	FRANK: If Gilbert does come, let's just say you're here delivering a message from Andrew.
LAURA: Oh, to hell with Gilbert. I said I'm the bearer of good news.	LAURA: To hell with Gilbert.… I've got good news.
FRANK: What?	FRANK: Oh? What?
LAURA: I had a letter from my mother. She's lending me her cottage in Dorset for the summer. Andrew starts his new job in September. But I won't join him immediately. That means you and I can be alone there together for a whole month.	LAURA: Don't worry I'm not pregnant. … I've had a letter from my mother. She's decided to visit my sister in Canada, so I can have her cottage in Dorset for the whole summer.
(he tries to smile)	FRANK: That's great.
LAURA: I didn't mean to over-excite you. (he laughs softly but unconvincingly)_ Think. Just the two of us. For a whole month. You will come, won't you. Frank, I need you. I need to be with you.	LAURA: Andrew starts his new job in September, but I don't have to go there immediately, so that means you and I can be alone together, if you like. Just think, darling, a whole month. … You will come, won't you. I need you. I need to be with you.
FRANK: I may have to go back to the States, my dad's not been well – He falls silent, removes his half-moon glasses, cleans them. She watches him, her mood changing. She becomes more aggressive.	FRANK: You know, my father's not well. I may have to go back to the states.
LAURA: God, you remind me of him.	LAURA: Go, you remind me of him.
FRANK: Of who?	FRANK: Of who?
LAURA: Of, whom, of whom? Of Andrew, of course. He wasn't always the Crock, you know. He was only just a bit older than you are now when I first met him. But just as - ungiving. He was so - pure, so idealistic – She breaks off. He replaces his glasses, looks at her.	LAURA: Of whom. Of whom. Of Andrew, of course. He didn't always used to be the Old Crock, you know. He wasn't much older than you are now when I first met him. He was so pure, so… so idealistic. But just as ungiving.
FRANK: What happened to him?	FRANK: What happened to him?
LAURA: I did.	LAURA: I did.
FRANK: Were you never happy together?	FRANK: Weren't you two ever happy together?

Harwood Final Draft	Figgis Film
LAURA: (truthfully and with some regret) I can't remember -	LAURA: I can't remember…can't remember.
FRANK: Laura - I - (he loses courage)_I feel sorry for him.	FRANK: Laura, I… I feel sorry for him.
LAURA: No, you don't, Frank. you feel guilty because you're screwing his wife. (a smile) Or, to be more accurate, because his wife is screwing you. But that's all right. I like taking you by surprises. I love you guilty. It's the puritan in you. Suffering gives you pleasure.. You don't really like to talk when we make love. Just like Andrew. If I remember correctly.. (he goes to the window, looks out) I think we should tell him.	LAURA: No you don't. You feel guilty because you're screwing his wife; or, to be more accurate, because his wife is screwing you. … I think we should tell him.
He turns to look at her, alarmed. FRANK: Tell him what?	FRANK: Tell him what?
LAURA: About us.	LAURA: About us.
FRANK: Jesus Christ, are you insane? I think you're totally insane -	FRANK: What are you insane? That's the stupidest thing I've ever heard. And what the hell would you want to tell him for, Laura? What are we talking about now – marriage, divorce?
LAURA: Don't get you knickers in a twist, Frank. My biological clock isn't ticking, don't worry, it's just that -	
FRANK: What the hell do you want to tell him for. What are you talking about, divorce, marriage?	
LAURA: (turns to him, back to the window) I'm talking about us. I don't want to become just good friends -	LAURA: We're talking about us. I don't want us to become just good friends.
(momentary silence; then he starts to say something; she holds up a hand)	FRANK: Listen, Laura…
LAURA: Deja vu. This has happened before. I know what you're going to say now. You're going to say, I'm not ready to settle down. (she waits) Isn't that what you were going to say?	LAURA: Don't! Déjà vu. I know exactly what you are going to say now. You're going to say you're not ready to settle down. … Isn't that what you were going to say?
And as he turns away from her CUT TO	

One of the biggest differences between Harwood's final draft and the film as shot is the development of the relationship between Frank and Laura. In Harwood's script Laura is seen leaving the house during Taplow's private lesson. She goes to she school where Frank is exercising in a small gym near the library. The school choir is rehearsing right outside on the library steps and Laura waves to Dr. Lake (the choirmaster) as she passes. Frank is lying on his back more or less strapped into an exercise machine.

> Laura has entered and watches him with a faint smile. …[H]er mood is dangerous, edgy.
>
> Frank continues to exercise but he watches Laura.
>
> She gazes at him with a faint smile - mischievous, sexy. Then, elegantly she takes off her panties and tosses them aside. … [She] pulls at his shorts, sits astride him…

Laura jokes about the angelic choral music outside accompanying them. Frank is nervous about being seen, but obviously does not resist. The script cuts back outside for more choir rehearsal and then rejoins Frank and Laura post coitum.[11]

> Frank is turned away from Laura. He seems unable to look at her. But Laura is looking at him and she's sad, disappointed.

There is already an indication that Laura's relationship with Frank is replicating her relationship with Andrew in some way. She is eager and playful; he is uptight. She elaborates on this in the scene in his flat where dialogue in the script is even more explanatory than it is in the film.

Harwood's Laura seems more predatory than Figgis's, and the connection between her affair with Frank and her initial attraction to Andrew is given more emphasis in the script.

Laura's interactions with Frobisher are more or less the same as they are in the play and Asquith film, although she does not indicate that she knew Frobisher was going to ask Andrew to speak first. In fact she is present when he does and is silent when he seeks to enlist her moral support for his request. In the scene at the house with Frobisher she speaks in Andrew's behalf reminding Frobisher of Andrew's academic honors at Oxford. In the other versions it is Andrew himself who reminds Frobisher that he was every bit the scholar that Gilbert is. There is one bit of throwaway dialogue from Laura to Frobisher about how hot it is, but there is no indication that Frobisher had discussed anything with her beforehand.

Laura's cruel interpretation of Taplow's gift takes place at the lunch with not only Frank, but Dr. Rafferty, Diane and Gilbert present. The presence of all the other's has amplified Andrew's pleasure at the gift, and Laura's jab seems all the

---

11 There in an indication in the final draft that three intervening scenes have been deleted

more cruel. Harwood has also fleshed out her interpretation of the gift a bit.

Play	Rattigan/Asquith Film	Harwood Script	Figgis Film
My dear, because I came into this room this afternoon to find him giving an imitation of you to Frank here. Obviously he was scared stiff I was going to tell you, and you'd ditch his remove or something. I don't blame him for trying a few bobs' worth of appeasement.	Because, my dear, I came into this room this morning to find Taplow giving an imitation of you to Frank here. Obviously he was scared stiff I'd tell you, and you'd ditch his promotion or something. I don't blame him for trying a few shillings' worth of appeasement.	Because when I came into the garden yesterday Taplow was giving an imitation of you to Frank. Obviously he was scared I was going to tell you and that you'd put him on Cromwells or stop his switch to Frank's form or some other Hitlerian torture. The book was clearly an insurance policy – a sweetener – a bribe.	Because… Yesterday I saw Taplow doing an impersonation of you for Frank. Obviously he was afraid that I would tell you and that you would put him on Cromwells or stop his switch to Frank's form or some other Hitlerian torture. The book was clearly an insurance policy – a sweetener – a bribe.

Taplow's impersonation of Andrew in Figgis' film is limited to the single line "You have obtained exactly what you deserve – no less and certainly no more." (Harwood's final draft also has him imitating Andrew's response to Taplow's plan to play golf: "Then, Taplow, you must unfix it mustn't you.") This bit is also recited by several of his classmates and seems to be a mantra associated with Andrew. In the play and Rattigan screenplay Taplow does a much more sustained impersonation of Andrew involving the incident of his laughter at the Latin epigram. In those versions there is a question regarding how much of the performance Millie may have witnessed or overheard. Harwood makes up for this by giving Laura the line "Is that you, Andrew?" as she enters the house, but Taplow's concern still seems a bit exaggerated. (Harwood's final draft has Taplow and Frank waiting in the garden rather than inside the house, presumably because audiences might wonder about leaving the front door unlocked. They do not see Laura approaching because an umbrella over the garden table blocks their view.) Whether he is genuinely worried about being disciplined because of the remark is much less of an issue in Harwood's script, however, because it seems so clear that the gift is completely sincere and not at all a bribe.

There is another alteration in Harwood's script which may affect how we view Laura's behavior. The end of her relationship with Frank has hap-

pened during the morning before the luncheon where Andrew mentions Taplow's gift. To some extent Laura's behavior can be seen as a reaction to the rejection she has just suffered from Frank.

There is no extended discussion with Frank after Laura punctures Andrew's pleasure. Laura does not venomously question why Andrew should be allowed to have his illusions when she is denied all comfort. Frank simply tells her to go tell Andrew it was a lie and leaves to go find Andrew when she refuses. She offers only a brief explanation of her refusal to the rest of the group:

FRANK: Laura, go and tell him it was a lie.

LAURA: Certainly not. It wasn't a lie.

FRANK: Then I'll tell him.

LAURA: I wouldn't do that if I were you. … He'll only hate you for your sympathy. Andrew doesn't need sympathy. That's his strength.

This is probably as close as Laura comes to expressing contempt for Andrew to anyone but him, although her irony is a far cry from the vehemence with which Millie justifies her cruelty and turns on Frank in the play. There is, of course, the question of why she would choose to puncture Andrew's pleasure. Laura is not the "unmitigated bitch" or harpy that some saw in Millie in the play or Asquith film. She is surely reeling from the discovery that Andrew will not receive a pension and from the realization that her affair with Frank is a dead end. She is hurt and angry. She has also just watched Andrew eat crow in agreeing to speak first at the ceremony reinforcing her disappointment in him. She justifies what she has done simply as telling the truth, but there is none of the importance placed on the idea that she never lies to Andrew as there is in the play or Asquith film. She clearly deceives Andrew in having the affair with Frank, and does not hesitate to invent a fib to explain her trip into town to see Frank.

In general I would say that in Figgis's film, Laura's cruelty seems to be less of a bloody murder than simply yet another skirmish in an ongoing conflict. The impact is as much due to its timing as it is due to its content. Andrew is exceptionally vulnerable, and this may just be the final straw.

Her comment that Andrew does not need sympathy is an indirect expression of how she feels cut off or shut out by him. Rather than describe him as dead, she views him as "ungiving", as too self-contained to need her or as too abstracted or repressed to be able to satisfy her needs. She seems to be implying that Andrew hates her, but we are given no evidence of such hatred in what we see of Andrew. In fact Harwood's final draft has Andrew asking his wife's lover to be kind to her.

Laura is also not the snob that Millie is. All mention of her Uncle has been dropped. There is also no indication that she has any degree of financial independence. Harwood's final draft re-

tained Frobisher's reference to Andrew's wife's "allowance" when discussing the decision regarding the pension, but that has been dropped in the film. All we know about Laura is that her mother has a cottage in Dorset, and she has a sister in Canada. She does not argue with Andrew about the amount of income they will have to live on. The issue for her is simply whether Andrew had been forceful enough in attempting to get the pension.

At the end of the cricket match when Andrew emerges from the library, he spots Laura, and she walks over to him. This is followed immediately by a scene in their bedroom where they are both dressing to go to the concert. Laura offers to tie Andrew's bow tie for him and then makes a gesture of apology for her cruelty:

LAURA: You left Taplow's present behind. I put it in your study.

ANDREW: Thank you.

LAURA: It wasn't a very good impersonation.

Andrew, of course, lets her know that he feels it is over between them, that he can or will not take any more; and she agrees to leave first thing in the morning.

Very little actually happens between them during the concert. Andrew receives a gesture of support from Trimmer, while Laura is neglected by Frank – all against the background of the headmaster's bumbling socializing. Laura leaves in the morning with the porter after telling Andrew that he looks "very impressive", but then evidently changes her mind and shows up at the ceremonies in time to hear Andrew's remarks. She is able to give him a kiss on the cheek and say, "Well done." She goes ahead and leaves to catch her train saying only that she will write.

Obviously in the last 20 minutes of the film Andrew and Laura's marriage is seesawing back and forth in a delicate balance of hurt, love, power, remorse, forgiveness, and rejection. In some ways the film is as unresolved and open ended as the play, but the tension in the marriage is overwhelmed by the emotional release of the resolution of Andrew's relationship with the students and the school.

The ending of Harwood's final draft is very different and reflects a different attitude towards Laura. First of all the scene before the concert takes place in the living room after they are both completely dressed except for Laura's earrings and Andrew's bow tie. Immediately there is less of a sense of intimacy than Figgis achieves by having Laura partially dressed. Figgis has them in the bedroom and Laura is just in her slip. She comes over to get perfume and a necklace from the dresser where Andrew is trying to tie his bowtie. She puts the perfume on standing next to him in a way that bespeaks years of intimacy, and her offer to help him with his tie is gentle and respectful if not affectionate. Andrew is gentle with her as well when he says "No," but she is clearly hurt and

pulls back. When she crosses the room to the other mirror to finish putting on her dress, Andrew straightens his tie and then comes over to button up the back of her dress, again with an air of natural intimacy.

Harwood's scene includes an initial gesture from Laura, but it culminates in her being irritated by his clumsiness. He also discards any immediate reference for Andrew's remark about expectations, and the ensuing exchange seems to be more cerebral and even ironic than the exchange in the final film. More than anything the Laura of the script seems bitter, and it seems clear that the relationship is completely over.

Harwood Final Draft	**Figgis Film**
LAURA: It wasn't a very good impersonation.	LAURA: Let me do that.
He is apparently extremely calm; barely looks at her, but summoning courage	LAURA: You left Taplow's present behind. I put it in your study.
ANDREW: (very gently) I don't think either of us has any longer the right to expect anything from the other	ANDREW :Thank you.
LAURA: (not yet understanding the full import, amused) My fault, I suppose.	LAURA: It wasn't a very good impersonation. … I'm sorry.
ANDREW: No. Don't take all the blame. That would be quite wrong and unjust. We inhabit two different worlds, you and I. We always did. We always will. It is, I believe, what is known as incompatibility. I have not yet decided where I shall go but I shall not be accompanying you to Dorset tomorrow after prize giving.	ANDREW: Laura, we uhh… we inhabit different worlds you and I. We always have; we always will.
She stares at him blankly He cannot manage to tie his tie. His clumsiness irritate her.	LAURA: What are you saying?
LAURA: Oh, give it to me.	ANDREW: I'm saying, "No." I'm saying, "Enough."
She ties his tie	LAURA: We better not keep the headmaster waiting.
They look and don't look at each other.	LAURA: Do you still expect me to come to your prize giving?

Harwood Final Draft	Figgis Film
LAURA: I think I could have forgiven you anything if only once you had said, No. Enough.' Not just to me. But to every set-back you've ever had. (He is still, just gazes at her) Yes, I know. It's as much my fault as yours. And she adjusts his tie.	ANDREW: I don't think either of us has the right any longer to expect anything of the other.
	LAURA: Right. Well, I'll leave first thing tomorrow morning then.
	ANDREW: As you wish.

Moving Laura's line about saying "No" to the earlier scene enables Figgis to redefine the climactic moment of the film. Andrew's reclaims his integrity not just by insisting on his proper status during the prize giving ceremony but by saying "No" to Laura and perhaps ending their marriage. This is hardly the kind of moment to which ones heart "responds as to the sound of a trumpet" as one critic described the moment in the play when Andrew informs the headmaster of his intention of speaking last. It is a double edged sword in which Andrew does what in the play he said he did not want to do: add "another grave wrong" to the one which he had already done to her by marrying her. The fact that Laura in this film is far more sympathetic than Millie in either the play or the previous film makes this moment even more distressing.

When Laura leaves with Foster in the morning, there is a moment in Harwood's script when she is ready to go, but Foster is clearly waiting for her to say goodbye to Andrew. The script says she is "forced to cross to Andrew," and she gives him a peck on the cheek. This is the point in the script where she says, "I'll write," perhaps for Foster's benefit as well. Needless to say the impact of this seems very different from the kiss and the final goodbye in the film.

The Harwood script does have Laura present at the prize giving but there is no indication that Andrew's remarks have moved her in any way. Afterwards she says good bye to Diana in the courtyard but does not speak to Andrew. He only tells her that she'll miss her train if she doesn't leave. Harwood ends the marriage, but Figgis decided to leave room for hope or to at least pay tribute to the depth of the emotional bond that has existed between them for 15 years.

The role of Frank has been substantially altered in Harwood's script, both in his relationship with Laura and in his relationship with Andrew. Frank's relationship with his students has been "updated" and adjusted to reflect the fact that he is an American, but it remains essentially the same as it is in the Asquith film. His ambivalence towards the "little blighters" in the play has been eliminated in the films. Harwood's Frank is perhaps even more comfortable and familiar with his students than the Frank of Asquith's film. His exchanges with Taplow have been cut down substan-

tially, presumably because they seemed redundant or unnecessary.

The essence of Frank's role with Laura seems fairly summed up by Laura's own description: *she* is screwing *him*, and he is not ready to settle down. Frank seems to be simply a young man who is at the school for three years and has availed himself of the local entertainment. We do not see him attempt to placate Laura by promising to come visit her in the summer when he has no intention of doing so. Nor is he provoked enough to turn moralistic on her. His concern with decorum is a concern to enjoy sex without creating any gossip or scandal. Whether or not he is sniffing after Diana is uncertain because he may also just be playing up to her husband, who is his boss as head of the science department.

More importantly in Harwood's script Frank's rejection of Laura comes before Laura's puncturing of Andrew's pleasure in Taplow's gift. Laura's behavior does not precipitate a moment of truth for Frank in which he tells her he is breaking off their relationship. Frank's rejection of her is more passive, but it can be viewed as part of the explanation for her behavior later that day.

The changes in Frank's relationship with Andrew are a bit more telling. Again several scenes have been collapsed into the exchange in the library after Laura's cruelty. Frank tries to divert conversation away from Laura at the luncheon by offering Andrew champagne. He seems to have genuinely shared Andrew's pleasure in the book, and he senses that Laura is about to puncture it.

When Frank catches up with Andrew in the library, he makes a rather awkward attempt to repair the damage:

Harwood Final Draft	**Figgis Film**
FRANK (gently): Andrew?	FRANK: Andrew? … I want to make something clear about Taplow. He has a genuine affection for you, Andrew, please believe me. … I think you should treasure that book.
ANDREW: Go away.	ANDREW: I'd rather like to be left alone at the moment, thank you.
FRANK: No. I want to talk to you -	…
ANDREW (voice flat, almost toneless): Go away. Please.	…
FRANK: I want to make something clear. About Taplow. He has a genuine affection for you, Andrew, believe me, please -	…

Harwood Final Draft	Figgis Film
ANDREW: I'm not particularly concerned with Taplow. Nor with you if it comes to that.	…
He rises, goes to the window, looks out.	…
FRANK: I think you should treasure that book.	…
ANDREW: I'd like to be left alone at the moment, thank you -	…
FRANK: You may find it'll mean something to you -	FRANK: You may find that it'll have a special meaning to you.
ANDREW: Oh, yes. It will mean something to me all right.	ANDREW: Oh, yes, it will mean something. It will remind me of my own foolishness.
Silence.	…
FRANK: I'm going to be impertinent now. I'm going to give you some advice –	…
ANDREW: I'd really rather you didn't –	…
FRANK (summoning courage): Make a life for yourself.	…
ANDREW: I'm not sure I understand.	…
FRANK: I think you do. You don't deserve – you – you've been badly treated, Andrew -	FRANK: You…don't deserve this. I mean… You've been treated badly, sir.
ANDREW: By the school, do you mean?	ANDREW: By the school, you mean?
FRANK (avoiding Andrew's gaze): Not only by the school.	FRANK: Not just by the school.
(ANDREW narrows his eyes, trying to decode what's being said)	ANDREW: Never, never presume to know the secrets of a marriage.
FRANK: You're not too old to make the break, you could find someone who really cares for you, who – who'll be – loyal and – who won't – who'll be faithful –	FRANK: Take my advice… sir. Make a new start for yourself. You could still find someone who will care for you and who'll be loyal and who won't… who'll be faithful.
ANDREW sucks in his breath and closes his eyes, a sudden realization like a stab of pain.	…
ANDREW (quiet): Of course I should have guessed. How stupid of me.	…
(he stares at FRANK)	…
Yes, yes, just her type. Clean cut. Innocent.	…
FRANK turns away -	…

Harwood Final Draft	Figgis Film
FRANK: Take my advice. Make a new life for yourself.	…
ANDREW: Why? Do you want to marry her?	…
Still not looking round, Frank shakes his head.	…
Silence	…
ANDREW: I'll give you a word of advice now. Never, never presume to know the secrets of a marriage.	…
(he finds a chair, sits)	
You see, we are both interesting subjects, Laura and I, for the kind of cheap easy analysis of which you Americans are so fond. We were incompatible from the moment we met, although neither of us knew it then. We both required love but of different kinds. Worlds apart. So, it's not very tragic and not very unusual. Merely the problem of an unsatisfied wife and an inadequate husband. Often, I believe, a subject for farce.	ANDREW: Ahhh… Hmmh…We…we were incompatible from the moment we met, although neither of us realized that at the time. Of course Laura was uh… was only 22 years of age. We both required love, but of a different kind…worlds apart…worlds apart…So it's not really very tragic…or abnormal – just the problem of a dissatisfied wife and an inadequate husband, often I believe a subject for farce.
FRANK: Is there anything I can do to help? I'd like to help -	HUNTER: Is there anything I can do to help you? … I'd like to help…you.
ANDREW: Yes, be kind to her. And don't take sides; it's always very unbecoming.	ANDREW: Yes, don't take sides; it's so very unbecoming.

In the finished film there is no explicit indication in the dialogue that Andrew knows Laura and Frank are having an affair. Certainly there is no indication that Laura told him from the outset as there is in the previous screenplay and the original play. There is no opportunity for Frank to be horrified by the discovery that Andrew has known all along about the affair. It is reasonable to assume that given the dialogue in the final draft of the script the intention is to have Andrew realize at this moment that Frank has been having an affair with Laura, and Finney's performance seems to imply that he is dealing with this as new information when he reacts to Frank's comment on Laura's infidelity.

Frank's expression of sympathy regarding the way in which Andrew has been mistreated is certainly a veiled confession of his own affair. That Frank would know Laura has been unfaithful to Andrew may be enough to incriminate him, but, unlike his predecessors, the Andrew of Figgis's film is not about to discuss his wife's infidelity explicitly with her lover. It is also possible that, while Andrew may have suspected that Laura was

unfaithful or may have known she was unfaithful in the past, Frank's confession really is a revelation which drives yet another nail into his cross and even precipitates his decision finally to say "Enough" to Laura. If so, his own account of their marriage may be a way of "processing" the information.

Frank seems in this scene to be motivated primarily by sympathy for Andrew though of course his own complicity with Laura's cruelty is also a factor. We have actually seen little evidence of how Frank can know the sincerity of Taplow's feelings. He apparently did not know Taplow at all before that morning, and the only thing Taplow has told him about Andrew is that he will not tell him about his promotion. Taplow's remarks about how he could like Andrew, but that Andrew does not seem to want to be liked have been moved to his conversation with his classmates before Andrew arrives in the classroom. It is reasonable to assume though that Frank dismisses Taplow's concerns about whether he will get in trouble for imitating Andrew. We have seen Laura relating to Taplow in a familiar manner and have no reason to believe that she would want to hurt Taplow. She is simply using him to hurt Andrew. Taplow's offense would also surely seem minor to both Laura and Frank given what we have seen of the behavior of students, and Andrew himself seems too kindly disposed to Taplow to regard such an imitation as a punishable offense.

When Andrew says that the book will remind him of his own foolishness, it carries less force than it did in the play when we were forced to decide for ourselves whether Taplow's gift was in fact a bribe. It may well be that the gift has been spoiled for Andrew more by the fact that Laura has used it to be deliberately cruel than by any real doubt about Taplow's sincerity. Andrew obviously knows Taplow much better than Laura does.

In the play it seems to be the fact that Andrew has allowed himself to display emotion in front of a student that causes him to pull back into bitter irony:

FRANK: (*Hopelessly.*) I think you should keep that book all the same. You may find it'll mean something to you after all.

ANDREW: Exactly. It will mean a perpetual reminder to myself of the story with which Taplow is at this very moment regaling his friends in the House. 'I gave the Crock a book, to buy him off, and he blubbed. The Crock blubbed. I tell you I was there. I saw it. The Crock blubbed,' My mimicry is not as good as his, I fear. Forgive me. And now let us leave this idiotic subject and talk of more pleasant things. Do you like this sherry? I got it on my last visit to London -

In the play Andrew feels he has lost all connection with his students except the fear he in-

spires. The realization of this has left him vulnerable to the suspicion that he is being manipulated in return, and the fact that he was moved to tears by Taplow makes him feel that he has been further reduced to an object of particular derision. There is no basis for this in Figgis's film. Andrew has a very different relationship with Taplow. There is no mention of how students fear him. The line "Still, stupidly enough, I hadn't realized I was also feared" has been cut from the scene with Gilbert. The discovery that he is called "the Hitler of the Lower Fifth" also seems to carry less weight. Andrew even seems to make light of it, and he says as he leaves the classroom, "The boys do still call me The Crock, don't they?" In Harwood's final draft Andrew indicates to Gilbert that he knew he had been called the Hitler of the Lower Fifth but thought they had long stopped calling him that. Calling him The Crock can be viewed as a sign if not of affection at least of a kind of acceptance of him as an institution at the school, a presence to be reckoned with, just as Trimmer refers to him as "the old bugger."

Frank instinctively addresses Andrew as "sir" during this scene, whereas he normally just calls him Andrew. Frank may feel that he is submitting to a judgment of his own behavior, and he relates to Andrew almost as a student. He does not possess the self-confidence that would enable him to reach out to Andrew as the character did in the previous versions with his proposal to visit Andrew at his new school. His gesture is tentative and awkward because it is also a confession. His American manners seem here to be immature. He almost turns and leaves twice during the scene: first when his initial gesture is rebuffed and secondly when Andrew does not seem to be responding to his advice/confession.

The fact that Andrew does eventually respond with his description of how he and Laura were "incompatible" from the very beginning requires some explanation. It does not necessarily follow that someone opens up immediately to the person who has just been revealed to be having an affair with his wife. Laura may pretend that Andrew does not need sympathy, but clearly the point is that Andrew is human and requires sympathy and understanding just like any other person. The connection that he felt with Taplow seems to have been destroyed at least temporarily, and, despite the complications, he may see in Frank's gesture an opportunity for some kind of human contact. Nonetheless the drift towards pathos in Andrew's monologue is abruptly ended when he rebuffs Frank's final offer to "help."

Andrew's description of the marriage to Hunter has also been substantially cut from the dialogue in the play and earlier film.

Most of the irony has been removed from Andrew's description and even the remark about being a subject for farce need not be played with ironic detachment. Finney in fact delivers it with more pathos than irony and on the whole the dialogue in the Figgis film seems much more straight

from the heart. The reference to a bitter hatred is gone as is the reference to his own ignorance of the facts of life. The substitution of "abnormal" for "unusual" may be designed to clear the air of any hint that the problem between Andrew and Laura is simply sexual even though "inadequate" has a much more sexual connotation than "henpecked".

Play	Rattigan/Asquith Film	Harwood/Figgis Film
FRANK: Why won't you leave her?	FRANK: But why won't you leave her?	
ANDREW: Because I wouldn't wish to add another grave wrong to the one I have already done her.	ANDREW: Because I should not wish to add another grave wrong to the one I have already done her.	
FRANK: What wrong have you done her?	FRANK: What wrong have you done her?	
ANDREW: To marry her. … You see, my dear Hunter, she is really quite as much to be pitied as I. We are both of us interesting subjects for your microscope. Both of us needing from the other something that would make life supportable for us, and neither of us able to give it. Two kinds of love. Hers and mine. Worlds apart, as I know now, though when I married her I didn't think they were incompatible. In those days I hadn't thought that her kind of love – the love she requires and which I was unable to give her – was so important that its absence would drive out the other kind of love – the kind of love that I require and which I thought, in my folly, was by far the greater part of love. I may have been, you see, Hunter, a brilliant classical scholar, but I was woefully ignorant of the facts of life.	ANDREW: To marry her. … You see, my dear Hunter, she is really quite as much to be pitied as I. We are both of us interesting subjects for your microscope. Both of us needing from the other something that would make life supportable for us, and neither of us able to give it. Two kinds of love. Hers and mine. Worlds apart, as I know now, though when I married her I did not think that they were incompatible. Nor I suppose did she. In those days I had not thought that her kind of love – the love she requires and which I have been unable to give her – was so important that its absence would drive out the other kind of love – the kind of love that I require and which I had thought, in my folly, was by far the greater part of love. You see, Hunter, I may have been a very brilliant scholar, but I was woefully ignorant of the facts of life.	ANDREW: Hmmh…We…we were incompatible from the moment we met, although neither of us realized that at the time. Of course Laura was uh… was only 22 years of age. We both required love, but of different kinds…worlds apart…worlds apart…So it's not really very tragic…or abnormal – just the problem of a dissatisfied wife and an inadequate husband, often I believe a subject for farce.

Play	Rattigan/Asquith Film	Harwood/Figgis Film
I know better now, of course. I know that in both of us, the love that we should have borne each other has turned to bitter hatred. That's all the problem is. Not a very unusual one, I venture to think – not nearly as tragic as you seem to imagine. Merely the problem of an unsatisfied wife and a henpecked husband. You'll find it all over the world. It is usually, I believe, a subject for farce.	I know better now, of course. I know now that the love that we should have borne each other has turned into a bitter hatred. And that's all the problem is. Not a very unusual one, I venture to imagine – nor hardly so tragic as you seem to think. Merely the problem of an unsatisfied wife and a henpecked husband. You'll find it all over the world. It is usually, I believe, a subject for farce.	…

In the end it is Andrew who extends his hand to Frank during the emotional outpouring after his farewell remarks. Any sign of Frank is noticeably absent during Andrew's speech so we have no indication as in the previous film that he is moved and inspired by Andrew's apology. The change that he has undergone during the film is mainly a matter of a sense of guilt or shame for his part in the mistreatment of Andrew. Andrew's extended hand is a gesture of acceptance or forgiveness from someone standing on much firmer moral ground.

Tom Gilbert fulfills more or less the same function in Harwood's script as he does in the earlier film, although he does not function as a proxy for the audience in his attitude towards Andrew, and there is the added element of the new modern languages department. Gilbert is older in this film. He has a wife and two children. In the beginning he is even more strongly associated with Laura and Frank, perhaps as a means of connecting him emotionally with the challenge posed to Andrew both by the modernization of the school and by his wife's infidelity. The tension in his exchange with Andrew after observing the class is not based on a moralistic judgment about Andrew's teaching methods but on the policy change which is rendering Andrew obsolete. Andrew views a modern languages department as comparable to a "trendy" interest in the Russian language, which has faded with the cold war.

Gilbert is present at the lunch when Andrew tells of Taplow's gift, and he is the one who translates the inscription. Andrew has previously opened up to him and bequeathed him the classroom; so that, by the time the gift is being discussed, Gilbert's alignment seems to be more with Andrew than with Frank or Laura. He corrects Frank's version of the inscription, and Andrew agrees that "gentler is the better translation."

Gilbert is seen at the prize ceremony when Andrew speaks of the importance of classical learning, but there is no indication that he has undergone any kind of change of heart or enhanced sense of his own limitations.

Frobisher is treated more satirically or even harshly by Harwood than by Rattigan. His memo-

ry lapses are much more pronounced, and he twice attempts a witty remark about moving house and divorce, which is painfully inappropriate although he is too oblivious to know it. When he gets Wilson's name wrong, he also inquires about his father, who has apparently been dead long enough for Wilson to make a joke about his corpse. Forbisher brushes off Mrs. Wilson's complaint about the food at the school, saying in justification that he doesn't believe in stuffing the boys. He compares his own job to that of a headwaiter, and his effort to hustle the Nigerian king is bald and only slightly less blundering than Lord Baxter's.

Taplow's role has been expanded mostly by a series of scenes dealing with student life at the school. The main theme of these scenes is the hazing of younger students by upperclassmen and a plot by some of Taplow's friends to take revenge on one of the upperclassmen. The use of student prefects or "scholars" for administration and discipline of the student body is a long standing tradition in British schools, and the abuse of younger students by older students seems to have been an inevitable part of that tradition. The sadistic prefect is represented in the script by Trubshaw, who replaces Andrew as the person recording Wilson's late arrival at the chapel and whacks Taplow's classmates on the head as he tells them not to run. Taplow is apparently a favorite target for Trubshaw[12] and Taplow's classmates persuade him to participate in a practical joke played on Trubshaw on the very last night of term. Harwood's final draft had some other scenes about the younger students. Taplow and his friends have a coded language similar to pig Latin which they use when authorities are around. Rather than just talking as they walk outside about their plans for revenge, he has the group go into the lavatory to share a secret cigarette and discuss the plan. When an older student comes in, they hide the cigarette and speak in code. There is also a scene with the boys digging for worms in the school garden, with the Headmaster commending them for their gardening work.

The main scene with Trubshaw is one in the shower where he harasses Taplow and tries to extract gossip from him about Laura. Taplow refuses to say anything about whom Laura might be "shagging" even though he has just seen her coming from Frank's flat in the village.[13] Trubshaw needles Taplow first by talking about Laura in a sexual way and then by making lewd comments about Taplow's mother.

Earlier that morning Dr. Rafferty had come to speak to Buller while the boys were washing up

12 In Harwood's final draft, Taplow is Trubshaw's "fag," i.e. he has been chosen by Trubshaw to be his servant.

13 The only peculiar thing about this scene is why the boys are taking a shower in the middle of the day rather than first thing in the morning or at the end of the day. Harwood's final draft does have this scene take place in the morning in Trubshaw's room rather than the shower, but he also has another scene later in the day in which the boys are changing into their formal attire for Parent's Day.

and brushing their teeth. He informs Buller that his parents have called to say they cannot come to the school to pick him up and that he must ride the train home alone. Taplow attempts to sympathize by telling Buller he'll get used to it, implying that Taplow's parents are distant or neglectful of him as well. The somewhat idyllic image of the school is tempered by the suggestion that the students there are deprived of their parents and subjected to sadistic abuse from the older boys. The closest thing Taplow seems to have to parents are Andrew and Laura. He seems comfortable in their house when he comes for his extra lessons and even Laura treats him with familiarity. ("Taplow, why don't you go and get the lemonade; you know where everything is.")

Harwood has added scenes when Taplow is in the village and finds the book he gives Andrew. At the same time he sees Laura leaving Frank's flat, and he seems to back away from the street so as not to be seen by Frank. In a strange way each of these scenes seems to be there to justify the presence of the other. There is no reason why we need to see Taplow finding the book in the village. We could certainly believe that he had a chance to buy it without seeing him do so, just as we do in the play and earlier film. Why Harwood wants him to know that Laura and Frank are having an affair is unclear to me unless it is to support his interest in Clytemnestra's murder of Agamemnon and his sympathy for Andrew. Perhaps Taplow's own family is torn by similar conflicts and perhaps when Taplow says to Andrew, "I understand" we are meant to feel that he understands Andrew's plight even more than Andrew could possibly imagine. In Harwood's final draft he made it clear that Frank saw Taplow in the street after Laura left, but that scene also comes after the hazing by Trubshaw in which Trubshaw asks him who is "shagging" Laura. In the finished film Taplow seems to evade notice by Frank.

There is another scene in the film that seems even more gratuitous: the mildly comic bit with Foster attempting to take charge of girls disembarking from a bus. They disperse without paying any attention whatsoever to his instructions. This scene is not in Harwood's final draft of the screenplay and the key to it aside from a desire to begin the afternoon's festivities with a bit of comic relief may be Figgis's ideas about the way in which British schools cultivated stoicism by excluding any taint of sexual romanticism from their education even to the point of bowdlerizing the classics.[14] To supplement the images of heartlessness and sadistic abuse prevalent at the school, he adds a comic metaphor for the traditional attempt to control or repress sexuality. Foster, the guardian of the gate, is unable to contain the girls who arrive for the festivities.[15]

14 Interview on Criterion DVD

15 One critic commenting on the ways in which the film had updated the play and previous film seemed skeptical about the fact that the school would still be for boys only. Sherborne School where much of the film was shot is in fact still a boys boarding school, although there is a nearby girls school with which it is affiliated

The character of Betty Carstairs has been replaced by Diana Rafferty. Diana may be more of a friend of Laura's than Betty was of Millie. In the scene after the morning chapel service, Diana comes up to ask Laura a question, but she may also be using that as an excuse to meet Gilbert. Laura whisks Gilbert away with a seemingly neutral response, but there is obviously room for interpretation, and the exchange would hardly seem worth including without it.

DIANA: Laura.

LAURA: Diana.

DIANA: Are we still going into town.

LAURA: Uh…darling, I'll be right back.

Diana, who is several years younger than Laura, is a harbinger of Laura's own obsolescence in a way that obliquely mirrors the replacement of Andrew by Gilbert.

At the concert Frank sits with Diana and Dr. Rafferty even though he had said he would be joining Laura and Andrew. This bit has replaced the earlier event (a cricket match or concert) where Frank forgot to join them and they sold their extra ticket to someone else. In the Harwood screenplay, however, it comes at the end of the film after Laura seems to have given up on her relationship with Frank.

Casting

The casting of Albert Finney and Greta Scacchi and their interpretations of Andrew and Laura Crocker-Harris reflect the difference in emphasis of the Harwood script. Finney is an interesting replacement for Anthony Hopkins, who seems an obvious choice for the role. Hopkins had just done both *Remains of the Day* and *Shadowlands*, two films to which *The Browning Version* was inevitably compared, and not always favorably, by critics when it was released. To some extent Finney was cast against type. He is quoted in the publicity for the release as saying, "I never before played a part that is so isolated and stoic."

Finney was 57 when he did the role. Harwood's screenplay has changed Andrew's age to mid-50's. There is no explicit mention of this in the finished film, but making Andrew 10 to 15 years older than he is in the play does create require some other adjustments. Harwood's script has Laura say Andrew was "only just a bit older" than Frank when she first met him. The script describes Frank as "about 30". Harwood's script

says Andrew has been at the school for 22 years and Laura for 15 of those years. The finished film has changed this to 18 years and 15 years and adds the information that she was 22 when he met her. The arithmetic works if Andrew and Laura knew each other for one or two years before they married and she joined him at the school; but it does mean that Andrew was probably 35 when he married. The line from the play in which Andrew says he was "woefully ignorant of the facts of life" when he married has been dropped, and it probably would be difficult to imagine Albert Finney as a man in his mid-thirties in England in the 1970's who was naïve in the way this line implies.

Finney's inherent vitality and charisma makes it seem reasonable that he would be married to Scacchi who is 24 years his junior. (There is a parallel in the marriage of Dr. Rafferty, who is described as 45-ish, and Diane, who is 30.) Even more than 30 years after he played Tom Jones, Finney still has overtones of a roguish sexuality which makes his presence on screen very different from that of Michael Redgrave. Finney has such a robust vitality that one might assume that any health problems he is experiencing in late middle-age must surely be from having lived a bit too hard. Even though Laura says Andrew was "pure", "idealistic" and "ungiving" and Andrew himself describes their relationship as that of "a dissatisfied wife and an inadequate husband," there are moments at the end when they look at each other with a tenderness and affection that reveals another aspect of their relationship.

When Finney holds her hands and looks up at Scacchi in her slip, it is hard not to sense a passionate attraction he feels towards her even though he is preparing to tell her their relationship is over. First of all, even though the slip she is wearing is not particularly provocative, Scacchi is simply a very appealing, sensual and sexy woman. The look in Finney's eye surely reveals that he is not oblivious to this no matter how incompatible they may have been sexually or psychologically.

The gentleness with which Finney finally says "No" to Laura and the obvious hurt that Scacchi reveals in response are testimony to the feeling they have for each other despite their differences. One may want to say that Laura is simply hurt that any man would reject her, but this rejection is very different from the coldness or indifference she sensed in Frank. Andrew is clearly a man she loved and not someone with whom she played. Likewise Finney is not the dried up remains of a man that Redgrave tended to play; he is fairly bursting with emotion that he must contain. We can sense that the reason he has accepted what others might consider to be abuse from Laura is

that he adores her in some way, perhaps not unrelated to the way in which he is able to appreciate the beauty of Fletcher on the cricket field. It may not be an appreciation that satisfies Laura's needs in any way, but it is real and passionate nonetheless. The seed of this is contained, of course, in the line in the play in which Andrew says in response to Frobisher he "hardly need[s] to be told" that he has an attractive wife. Redgrave delivers this line in the Asquith film, but there it seems more like the acknowledgment of an objective fact than an expression of a life-defining passion.

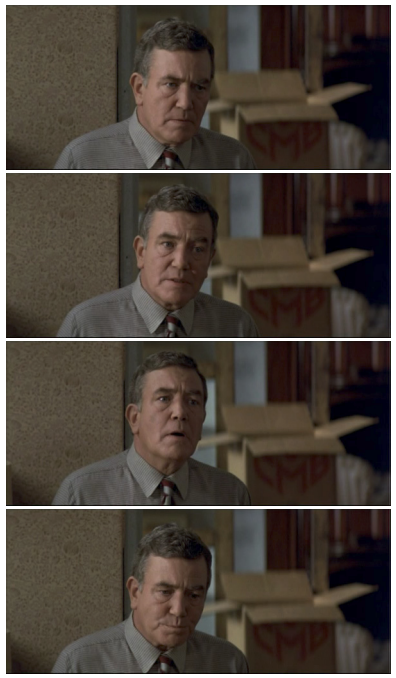
The film ends with Andrew watching the minivan carry Laura away and then removing his academic robe. The loss of Laura is clearly associated with the loss of his teaching vocation. He accepts responsibility for his own role in both, but the film presents him as someone who aspired to the impossible, whose passion was at odds with the facts of life.

Andrew may feel he has deserved the epithet "Hitler of the Lower Fifth," but it is not at all clear that Figgis agrees with him. Andrew as played by

Finney certainly intimidates the students and even Gilbert, but what we see of him has a decidedly paternal or avuncular aspect. This is emphasized in his relationship with Taplow and visible in Finney's face. It can also be sensed in the satisfaction Finney reveals when he remembers the names of Trimmer and Newton and jokes with Newton about communications in Greek.

Much of the time the emotion visible in Finney's expression seems more a sadness or weariness than affection for his students. Even this emotion evokes a very different response than the ironic detachment so often seen in Redgrave's Andrew. Finney's performance seems shot through with a sense of loss. Even as he watches his wife leave the breakfast table to go into the village, there is a premonition of loss without any hint of suspicion or jealousy.

In Andrew's dealings with Frobisher Finney never gets anywhere near obsequiousness. He seems genuinely taken aback when Frobisher tells him he will receive no pension, and there is at least a hint of a challenge in his question about past exceptions. The script no longer has him laying responsibility for this question off on his wife as he did in the play. He clearly sees that no matter how unreasonable the decision may be there is nothing he can say to change it, and he accepts it with characteristic resignation.



When Frobisher sidles up to the request to let Fletcher speak last and Andrew cuts to the chase with "So, do you wish me to speak first," Finney seems as though he is calling Frobisher's hand and not trying to make it easier for him. Frobisher fumbles and even tries to drag Laura into his plea. Andrew agrees to speak first in a way that

does not seem to be the least bit acquiescent or servile. We can, of course, see that more is going on beneath the surface as Frobisher and Baxter rub it in with their bumbling attempts to say there is nothing "personal" about the matter, and Laura's glance reveals that she does not like Andrew's response.

The fact that Andrew needs a moment alone rather than going into tea with everyone makes it clear that he is disturbed by Frobisher's request. When Taplow approaches him he obviously regards it as an intrusion and expresses impatience. All this of course helps set up the moment when Andrew realizes that Taplow is giving him a gift,

and Finney is able to make Andrew's emotional response to the inscription completely believable.

When he informs Frobisher of his decision to exercise his privilege and speak last, he clearly stands on equal footing with both Frobisher and Baxter and is forceful in claiming his right. Finney's face seems to be carved from stone while Frobisher's and Baxter's seem flabby in comparison.

Perhaps the most striking moment in Finney's performance is the way in which he plays the scene at lunch which sets up Laura's cruel remark. He has just been on an emotional roller coaster ride dealing with Frobisher's humiliating request that he speak last, being moved to tears by Taplow's gift and encountering two very successful alumni who have gone out of their way to pay their respects to him. He is in an expansive mood that Laura notices immediately, and he beams with pride and satisfaction as he shares the story of the gift with his colleagues. He seems to enjoy a private joke when Diana stops Gilbert from reading the inscription in Greek and asks what it means, clearly enjoying his relatively rarified status as a classical scholar. He basks in the collective agreement that Taplow's gesture was "a wonderful thing to do." He connects with Gilbert as he agrees on the aptness of his translation, and then glows with pleasure as he says "I would rather have this present than anything else I could think of." His initial reaction to Laura's "cunning little brat" is glimpsed across Frank's arm as he pours champagne for Andrew in an attempt to distract him from what he senses is brewing in Laura, and he persists in asking her "Why cunning?" as a vulnerability begins to infect his joy.

Greta Scacchi

Laura is supposed to be in her late-thirties. Andrew tells Hunter she was 22 when they met, and according to Frobisher she has been at the school for 15 of the 18 years Andrew has been there. Greta Scacchi was actually 33 when she played the role. She had been born in Italy but grew up mainly in England and Australia. She studied acting at the Bristol Old Vic Theater School and had her first film roles in 1982 in *Das Zweite Geicht*, a German film, and in 1983 in *Heat and Dust*, a Merchant Ivory production. She had apparently turned down the role in *Basic Instinct* (1992) that propelled Sharon Stone into the Hollywood stratosphere, but she had been in *Presumed Innocent* (1990) and *The Player* (1992) as well as a string of other films.

It is interesting to speculate to what extent Greta Scacchi is an updated version of Jean Kent. Obviously both are glamorous in a style of their period. Attempting to compare their performances in *The Browning Version*, however, is complicated by the difference in the conception of

the character in the two films. Certainly Scacchi brings a softness and an emotional warmth to the role that is very different from the venom which seems to permeate Kent's performance. There is a playfulness in Laura which is totally absent in Millie.

There is even a moment when she stands by her man reminding Frobisher of the prizes Andrew won at Oxford.

Most of these moments, of course, are just background to the pivotal points in the story, but they serve to put her behavior in a completely different context from that of the play or Asquith film.

The first glimpse of her crueler side comes when she answers Frank's question about Andrew's new job.

Her reaction to Frank's hesitancy is more hurt than anger, but the frustration fuels her attack on Andrew after news of the pension. There is, however, in her parting shot about saying "No" a glimpse of the disappointment and frustration beneath the anger.

Her expression when Frobisher tries to drag her into the request to have Andrew speak last seems to be a mixture of distress and disappointment which slides towards contempt. When she asks Andrew if he is coming into tea, she seems to reveal an apprehension which is compounded by Andrew's request that Frank escort her to tea.

Her debunking of Taplow's gift takes place in a much more public setting than it does in the play or the previous film and builds quietly from the first moment she notices Andrew's mood. When

she concludes her explanation "…a sweetener…a bribe" she does it with a gently condescending tone and smile as though she is explaining it to Andrew for his own good. The surgical precision with which she has punctured his mood is, of course, not lost on the others at the table. It may seem like just an unnecessary bit of petty cruelty which has ruined the mood of the luncheon, and one may assume that it is not terribly different from other such moments which have punctuated their marriage, but in the larger context it is for Andrew a devaluation of everything he values most. She glances at him one last time before he leaves the table as though to survey the damage she has done, but there is a way in which her own frustration shines through her anger.

When she sees him after the cricket match there is some suggestion of contrition in her expression, and it is she who walks over to join him.

As they dress that evening and she offers to tie his tie, it is a gentle gesture of reconciliation accompanied by first an oblique acknowledgment of her cruelty and than an explicit apology. She is clearly hurt when Andrew says "No" and even seems to have a moment of stunned disbelief before she pulls away from him. The implication seems to be that she felt the incident would blow over and they could continue as before.

Matthew Modine

Casting Matthew Modine as the Americanized Frank Hunter was probably a matter of his ability to project a certain kind of easygoing informality and energy. He grew up in California and Utah before going to New York to become an actor when he was 20. His first film role came in 1983 when John Sayles cast him in *Baby It's You*. He is reputed to have turned down the role Tom Cruise played in *Top Gun* (1986), but received a lot of notice for his role in Stanley Kubrick's *Full Metal Jacket* (1987).

Modine is able to make Frank Hunter's joking with the students and bantering with the headmaster seem completely natural. His Hunter is a far cry from the urbanity of Nigel Patrick in the Asquith film, and he is also devoid of the seemingly affected anglophilia and even the earnestness described in Harwood's final draft. The greatest payoff with Modine's character for me comes during the luncheon when he responds to Andrew's description of Taplow's gift first with genuine enthusiasm ("Taplow! That's fantastic!") and then with sincere sympathy. ("It's a lovely gift.") Modine does this with an unfettered spirit and open generosity that may seem American in comparison to a typically English irony or indirection, and it enables him to connect with Andrew and share his pleasure. It also, of course, sets up Laura's spitefulness much more powerfully than anything Frank does in the play or the Asquith film. Modine has one brief moment in which he seems concerned that Laura may be inclined to take a jaundiced view of Taplow's gift, but he does not interpret these lines as an effort to divert the conversation from an impending disaster as

he does when he offers Andrew champagne once Laura has begun her attack.

The real crux of Modine's performance, of course, is the scene in the library with Andrew after Laura's attack. This is a scene which might be worth analyzing in detail, but perhaps it is sufficient to recognize that Modine must convey a complex mixture of guilt and sympathy bordering on compassion as he offers Andrew advice and asks if he can help.

Michael Gambon

Michael Gambon had been a fixture of British theater, television and film for 30 years, and it is easy to understand why he was cast as the headmaster, Dr. Frobisher. The character has come a long way from the deliberately underwritten role in the play, and Harwood has taken him in a much more satirical direction than Rattigan did for the Asquith film. Gambon is fun to watch even if at times he seems to belong in a different movie. He's not quite Alastair Sim, but he does a wonderful job of sticking his foot in his mouth and sailing

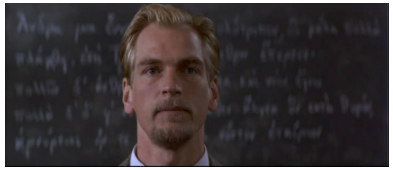
through the days' festivities without a clue. There are, of course moments, when he is something other than an object of ridicule. His observation that Andrew "must be one of the most brilliant scholars ever to come to this school" is delivered with genuine sincerity, although he fumbles in attempting to explain why he forgets the fact. In the end he does rise to the occasion and acknowledge Andrew's right to speak last, but he is conspicuously absent from the host of well-wishers who shake Andrew's hand as he comes out into the courtyard.

Julian Sands

Julian Sands had been Anne Rice's choice to play the vampire Lestat before Tom Cruise was cast, and he was the evil warlock intent on destroying the universe in *Warlock* (1989) and its sequel, *Warlock: The Armageddon*. He does seem capable of projecting a kind of coldness that suits him to these and the other horror films he had

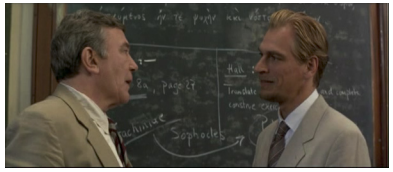
done, but he also had originally attracted notice as George Emerson in *A Room With A View* (1985). Even though he was only two or three years older than Ronald Howard had been when he played Gilbert in the Asquith film, Sands has none of the boyish earnestness of Howard. Harwood's script had made Gilbert an older character. He is 28-ish and already married with two children. More importantly he is being brought in as head of the language department.

Sands' Gilbert at first seems all business. He seems aware of his status in his dealings with Frank even to the point of being a bit brusque as he lets Frank know that he will be moving into the Crocker-Harris's house. His first real interaction with Andrew seems a little aggressively defensive as he justifies the need to modernize the language department at the school. He has, however, not been immune to the commanding presence with which Andrew enters the classroom and instinctively snapped to attention along with all the students. Sands gives one indication that Gilbert is not comfortable with the way in which Andrew seems to be berating a student when he critiques his reading of the Agamemnon, but for the most part we are barely aware of his presence during the class. When he rises somewhat self-consciously to leave after all the students have gone, the sense is not that Gilbert is judging Andrew for his abusiveness but that he feels he has been privy to something private or personal in Andrew's impassioned reading. It is almost an awkwardness at a public display of emotion which foreshadows the moment between Andrew and Taplow. It is only when Andrew brings up the subject of modern languages that Gilbert turns to defend himself.



The idea that this Gilbert would come into the empty classroom later because he has the jitters about teaching the Lower Fifth seems at odds with the way in which he has been presented. This is not a recent graduate who has only taught eleven-year-olds for a few months. He has presumably done well enough teaching elsewhere for six years to be offered the job of completely revamping the language department. We may have seen that he did not immediately intimidate students when he was visiting for a single class, but his manner seems to imply that given sufficient authority he will be able to hold his own.

Sands does well enough revealing a vulnerability in Gilbert, and he is helped by the fact that Harwood's script has reversed the order of things so that Andrew comes into the room to discover Gilbert there already rather than having Gilbert intrude on Andrew. Since he starts out the scene being startled by Andrew's entrance and feeling embarrassed about being in the classroom, it is easier to accept his "jitters" about teaching at the school. In any event the focus rapidly shifts when Andrew questions why he thinks Andrew might laugh at his nervousness. Once Gilbert lets slip the reference to "Hitler of the Lower Fifth," he is standing on com-



pletely different ground, and the reason for his being in the classroom are no longer of any consequence.

As he attempts to apologize, the balance in his relationship to Andrew changes. Andrew literally rises above Gilbert, and Sands is able to convey the embarrassment and sympathy with which Gilbert now views Andrew. Gilbert is able to respond with a little self-deprecating humor and, after Andrew leaves, Gilbert stands alone faced not so much with the difficulty of teaching 15-year-olds as the complexity of his feelings about Andrew.

In the broadest terms Gilbert's development follows the general direction established in the Asquith film. He goes from being someone at odds with Andrew to being a colleague, but Harwood completes this with the luncheon scene after Taplow's gift rather than with Andrew's farewell speech. Sands conveys a sense wanting to merit Andrew's respect as he translates the inscription and corrects Frank's rendition of it, and he is obviously gratified by Andrew's approval of his translation.

Ben Silverstone

The Browning Version was Ben Silverstone's first film as it was for the other students in the film. He was 14 at the time and a student at St

Paul's School, a prestigious boys school similar to the school in the film. Mike Figgis was friend of his family. He subsequently had a bit part in Adrian Lyne's version of *Lolita* (1997) and played the lead in *Get Real* (1998) before studying English at Trinity College, Cambridge.

I think it is safe to say that casting Silverstone as Taplow clinched the deal in terms of making Taplow a completely sympathetic character. Harwood's script has dispensed with any ambiguity about Taplow's motivation in giving Andrew the book and added elements to help insure the audience likes him. His visit to Frank's science classroom has been retained from the Asquith film but without his attempt to offer advice to Frank about how to do the experiment. Harwood makes the point of Taplow's interest in science with Frank's challenge to give the chemical formula for ethanol. We also see Taplow bearing up under the taunting to which Trubshaw subjects him and Taplow attempting to offer sympathetic support to Buller.

Silverstone seems to combine the right amounts of sensitivity and intellect with the requisite balance of self-confidence and vulnerability. Buller may have written a better translation of the poem, but Taplow seems set apart by his emotional maturity. His enthusiasm for the *Agamemnon* seems genuine, as does his admiration for the passion with which Andrew reads; and he is very affecting in his response to Andrew's display of emotion. The way in which we share his happiness at being able to switch to the science curriculum in the next term is very much a part of the emotional resolution of the film, and the sense that Andrew has once again been able to communicate his love of great literature to a student is crucial to the story.

The Production

According to one trade publication the film was shot in seven weeks with a budget of $10 million starting in July of 1993.[16] The credits indicate that it was shot entirely on location in and around Sherborne School and Milton Abbey School in Dorset. Sherborne was the school used for some of the exteriors in the Asquith film, but most of the exteriors in the Figgis film seem to be at Milton Abbey school.

16 Screen International Jun 18, 1993

The difference in the photographic styles of the two films is mainly an indication of how much the "idiom" of cinematography had changed over the course of forty years. The Figgis film is shot in color and in a 2.35:1 wide screen format with Panavision anamorphic lenses.[17] In general the photography is naturalistic and focused primarily on the faces of the characters involved, although there is a much greater effort to evoke the physical environment for the story than there is in the Asquith film. I think the sense of intimacy achieved by long lens close-ups reflects the way in which our eyes have been conditioned by viewing documentaries or other films that have relied increasingly on telephoto lenses to capture their subjects.[18]

17 All of Figgis's earlier films had been shot in the more conventional 1.85:1 widescreen format, and it seems a little odd that he would choose to shoot a relatively intimate character drama in the 2.35:1 scope format which had originally been associated with large scale epics. The proof is in the pudding, however, as he and cinematographer Jean-François Robin make excellent use of the format in the compositions for the film.

18 A telephoto lens can have overtones of spying, enabling the viewer feel both that he is examining the subject very closely and at the same time sufficiently far away not to be influencing it. It also can have enhance the illusion of reality because of its association with film of news events where the cameraman had to use a telephoto lens because he could not get close enough to use a normal one. More to the point, perhaps, a telephoto lens reduces the depth of field and contributes a feeling of insubstantiality to everything except the in-focus subject of the shot. Out of focus people or things moving through the foreground of a shot contribute a sense of fluidity and perhaps transience like a contemporary photographic equivalent of the floating world of Japanese woodblock prints.

The color resulting from the predominantly soft or back lighting feels natural and perhaps idyllic in the way we have learned to hope that our color snapshots may turn out. The camera is also freer to move than it was in 1951 and in particular an aerial and traveling shots of the taxicab in the opening sequence seem relatively normal in a film in 1994. This is not to say that they do not have an emotional impact or serve to draw the viewer into the film.

Physically the environment in which the story unfolds is a combination of idyllic natural greenery and romantically Gothic architecture. The opening shot of the film places Andrew within an arch of an obviously ancient building, and it is followed by moving camera shots in the lush green countryside surrounding the school. The school courtyards and exteriors convey the sense of tradition to which Andrew has been linked. The Crocker-Harris house and the village are so quintessentially English that they would risk being clichés if they were not so obviously real and photographed with such affection. The trade publication article about the film described it as a period piece, and Foster's van is about the only obviously contemporary thing in the film aside from some of the dialogue, the women's fashions and the cars parked beside the cricket field. The setting has been updated but in a way that seems to put it into an almost timelessly traditional moment.

There is one detail that always puzzled me before I began analyzing the film. The shot of

VICTORIA
WINE

Foster's van driving away from the school includes a loudspeaker on a pole in a way that seems deliberate and yet peculiar. It seems at first to be a somewhat arbitrary intrusion into the scene. There is, however, a line of dialogue in the opening scenes of the film in which Dr. Rafferty assigns Frank the responsibility for supervising the sound system being installed for the festivities. He says, "We'll need about twenty Tannoys…" before Laura's arrival distracts him.[19] The speaker then is associated with the sciences and with the modernization of the school. The fact that it sticks out like a sore thumb in the landscape is exactly the point.

Some of the interiors of the school are used to enhance the sense of tradition. The Old Hall through which Foster escorts Gilbert seems like a room in a museum, and there is a very deliberate use of a stain glass window in the chapel which emphasizes the medieval origins of the school.

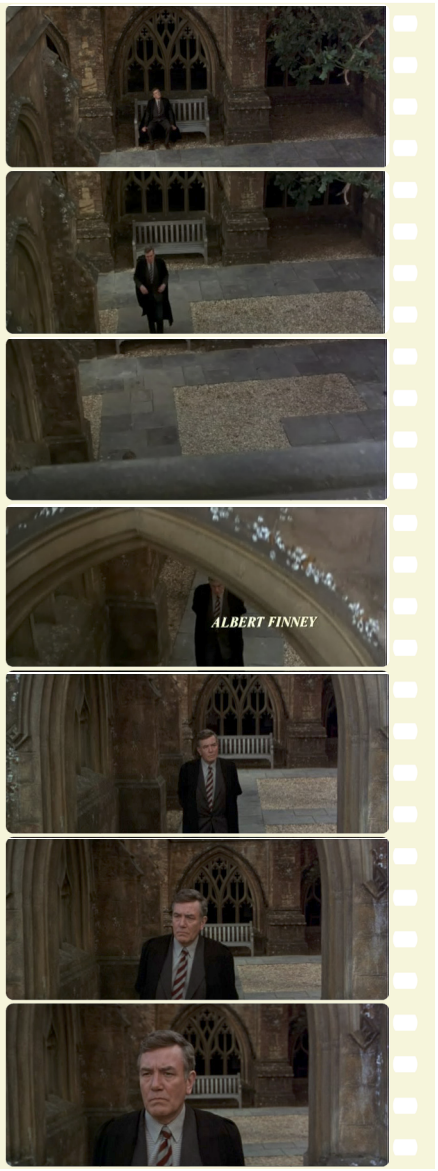
The playing fields and Andrew's garden are the two places where the idyllic greenery and the traditional world of the school converge.

In the Asquith film the camera moves mainly as a means of accommodating the blocking of the

19 Tannoy is a brand of speaker made in England. Harwood's script had him refer only to "loudspeakers", but presumably Figgis decided it would be more appropriate to have him refer to the speaker brand in the way someone who worked with the equipment might – even if it meant that the significance of the remark was lost on someone who was not an audiophile.

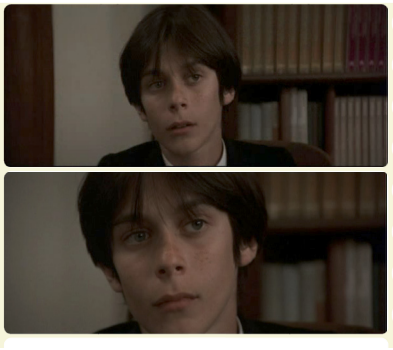
scene. There are some scenes in Figgis's film where the camera moves just to stay with the actors as it does for Asquith. For example both films have Andrew and Frobisher walking beside the cricket field as Frobisher broaches the subject either Andrew's pension or his farewell speech and the camera simply tracks with them to keep them framed in a medium shot. In Asquith's case, however, the walk is motivated by Frobisher's desire to speak to Andrew privately and they move away from the crowd. In Figgis's version Frobisher and Baxter walk with Andrew along the edge of the crowd not in an attempt to find privacy but simply to walk as they talk. Laura accompanies them attempting not to intrude on the conversation but in the end being pulled into it. With Figgis it is almost as though the actors move in order to justify moving the camera rather than vice versa. The moving camera gives an additional bit of momentum to the scene, carrying the audience along until the group stops in order for Frobisher to finally get his point across. After the scene everyone but Andrew heads back in the direction from which they have just come, and Andrew moves away to find some privacy.

The use of a moving camera to provide momentum for the audience's involvement is exemplified by the opening sequence of the film. There are two openings: a shot of Andrew which involves a crane move and the sequence of sweeping aerial and tracking shots as Gilbert and Frank converge on the school. The shot of Andrew starts with a relatively long shot of him sitting on bench in the



courtyard with a few students running past and then pulls back and up over an archway in a move which culminates in a close up of Andrew as he walks towards the camera. This is a prologue establishing Andrew as the central theme of the film. It discovers him in an environment and then moves in to focus on his face. The following shots of Gilbert and Frank approaching the school give the widest perspective of the environment in which the story is set and push the audience into the school. Flying over or moving through the countryside seems to convey some sense that the drama has import beyond the classrooms and campus of a school.

Camera movement is used in similar conventional manner in two shots when it moves in from a medium close-up to a tight close up first on Taplow as he listens to Andrew reading from the *Agamemnon* in the classroom and then on Andrew as he reflects on his marriage during the scene with Frank in the library. Moving in on a face in this way is a rhetorical device that intensifies the concentration of the persons feelings. It can be quite effective when it is used sparingly as it is in this film.



The flying camera at the beginning of the film is the most striking use of camera movement, but the most effective may be a pair of tracking shots in the marquee as Andrew goes to join the luncheon party and then as he exits after Laura's cruelty. The first is a wider angle tracking shot in which we see Andrew immersed in the celebration and interacting with Fletcher. It is a perfect expression of his expansive mood after Taplow's gift and the encounter with Trimmer and Newton. As he exits the camera tracks with him in a long-lens close-up that separates him from everything going on around him. The camera is unable to keep up with him and pans to follow him as withdraws from the crowd.

For the most part the film relies more on cutting than on camera movement to control the viewer's perspective on the story. There are almost three times as many cuts in the Figgis film than the Asquith film.[20] In this sense the point of view of the film is more fluid and conveys less of a sense of events staged for a camera than of the camera

20 2.85, but the film is only 87% as long.

capturing events that are relatively independent of it. This is probably an indication as much of the way in which the conventions of cinematic naturalism have evolved as it is of a unique style for this film. The compositions of the shots, however, are tightly controlled, and there is nothing haphazard about the photography even when it attempts to convey the impression of tracking an individual in a crowd.

A close look at the staging and shooting of some key scenes may suffice to convey the way in which the story is told visually. The easiest to start with is Taplow's extra lesson, which consists almost entirely of two people seated facing each other. Figgis has moved the scene to the garden, and he appears to have "covered" the scene in an absolutely conventional manner. There is a wide establishing shot in which the camera tilts down from the trees to reveal Andrew and Taplow sitting at a table as we hear Andrew say, "Begin, Taplow." The same wide angle is used at the end to show Taplow leaving. The bulk of the scene is constructed from pairs of complementary over-the-shoulder medium shots and close ups. There is one additional set up, a medium shot of Taplow for the moment when he stops to listen to Andrew's explanation of the Latin epigram from the morning's class.

Asquith shot this entire three-and-a-half-minute scene in a single set up with Andrew and Taplow seated side by side, although the camera does move to reframe them as Andrew leans forward and then back again. Figgis's 25-second longer version of the scene is constructed of 50 cuts. This obviously permits Figgis to exercise a much tighter control over the viewer's focus of attention. From a practical point of view it also makes it possible to shoot repeated takes of portions of the scene without having to do the entire scene each time and to use all the best bits rather than having to select only one take. The choice of which character to see and whether to use a close-up as opposed to a medium-shot at any given point in the scene is ideally dictated by the point of the scene and the way in which each moment contributes to the meaning.

The assumption generally is that a close-up is more emphatic than a medium-shot, that it intensifies the focus on the character. With a long lens close-up such as Figgis and Robin use, the shallower depth of field puts the background out of focus and tends to abstract the face from its en-

vironment. In this case the greenery of the grass and foliage becomes an abstract tone in the close-ups and, I believe, heightens the impact of the greenery motif in the film. Taplow is positioned so that the lawn behind him fills the frame completely while the green behind Andrew is hemmed in by large dark areas caused by tree trunks and shade. Regardless of whether this is a conscious stylistic choice or a happy accident, I do believe that the green tone becomes associated with youth and youthful enthusiasm or passion in a way that affects the viewer's response to the film.

The editing of this scene strikes me as a classic example of the kind of analytical thought informing conventional editing. The setting is established, and we see each of the characters in relation to their environment and each other. We see enough of Taplow as he translates to set up the moment when he introduces his own version of text, but the main point of the beginning of the scene is that Andrew knows the text by heart and could do this in his sleep. He in fact is leaning back with his eyes closed in a way that would seem to indicate he is asleep were it not for the fact that he speaks to correct Taplow. The first close-up comes when Andrew comments that "canst is more poetic." It emphasizes the fact that Andrew appears to be asleep even when he is speaking about poetry, and, in fact, he is metaphorically asleep. Taplow will arouse him from his slumber by taking liberties in his translation and reminding him of his own youth. In the Figgis version Taplow as the bearer of medicine has been replaced by

"Begin, Taplow."

"…we are surprised at…"

"We marvel at …"

"…we marvel at thy toungue…"

"…mmm"
"…how bold thou art…"

"…that thou can"…

"Canst is more poetic … canst."

"…canst utter such a boastful speech…"

"…mmmm…"

"…over the bloody corpse of the husband you just so foully murdered…"

"Taplow, I presume you're using a different text to mine…"

"No"
"That's strange I see no foully murdered…"

"…no bloody corpse, simply ep' andri, husband."

"Yes, sir."

Taplow as the disturber of sleep or reverie. (cf "Do I disturb you, sir" "Perhaps" and "I'm sorry to disturb you, sir, but I did want to see you." "Disturb me indeed.")

The next close-up, of course, is of Taplow as he summons the courage to add spice to his translation. The focus has shifted from the sleeping giant to the young man in his charge who is about to blossom. Then the focus shifts back to Andrew as he responds to Taplow's attempt to put life into the translation. There are five close-ups of Andrew intercut with medium shots of Taplow until regains the courage of his convictions. There is also one medium shot of Andrew as he says, "Why do you insist on inventing words that are simply not there?" This could be justified in any number of ways. The dynamic of the scene has reached a kind of standoff where Andrew has been aroused, but Taplow has not yet started to justify his translation. The scene hangs in the balance for a moment, and it makes sense to pull back from Andrew so that his close-up in next beat when Taplow's explanations begin to sink in will have renewed emphasis.

Once Andrew begins to recall his own translation, both he and Taplow are seen in close-ups. They are on a new kind of equal footing, and they are both abstracted from the immediate present. Taplow returns first in the medium shot where he starts to drink his lemonade, and for a moment the focus shifts to him and what he has been given. Andrew has again drifted off and is recalled

"Why do you insist on inventing words that are simply not there?"

"Go on, Taplow. Go on; I wish to understand."

"I think of it like this, sir. There she is, Clytemnestra…"

"…she really hates her husband, Agamemnon…"

"…He returns from winning the war, and what do she do?"

"She welcomes him back…"

"…and then murders him. She stabs him over and over and then makes…"

"I'm delighted in your interest in the more lurid aspects of dramaturgy…:

"…Taplow, but I still fail to understand …"

"…why you should wish to improve Aeschylus."

"Today in class, sir, for the first time I got a sense of the horror…"

"…it was so vivid…"

"…Why can't we put more life into the translation like you did? Why cant we use words like bloody…"

"…and corpse and murder?"
"mmmm…When I was a very young man…"

"…not much older than you are now, I wrote for my own pleasure…"

"…a translation of the Agamemnon, *a very free translation, I remember, in rhyming couplets…"*

"That must have been hard work."
"Yes it was, it was…"

"…very hard work, but I derived great pleasure from it because the play had excited and moved me as it did you…"

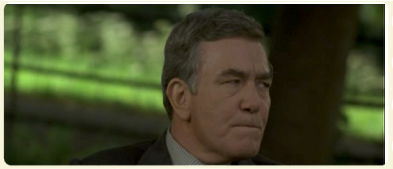
"…and I wanted to communicate…"

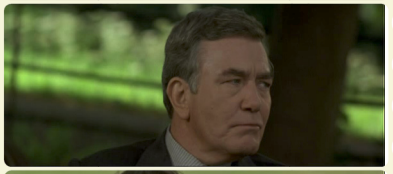
"… however imperfectly some of that emotion… a little like what happened in class today…"

"…My translation, I remember…"

"…thinking was very beautiful…almost more beautiful than the original…"
"Was it ever published?"
"I'm sorry?"
"Was it ever published?"

"Oh, no. No, it was never published."





"Shall I go on, sir?

"Ah, no, I fear we've run out of time."

"Uhm…may I go now, sir?"

"Yes."

"And Taplow, Scientia est celare scientiam. 'The art of learning…'

"… is to conceal learning. And I wouldn't try it…"

"…on any of your friends. It isn't particularly funny."

"I wouldn't know, sir."

only by Taplow's question about continuing the lesson. In the end, of course, the point of the scene is the impact of the moment on Andrew, and the scene fades out on the close-up of Andrew as he absorbs it.[21]

The other key scene between Andrew and Taplow when Taplow gives him the book is also mainly two static characters facing each other and is constructed almost entirely from a wide shot and two pairs of complementary medium-shots and close-ups. (There is one additional setup of a medium close-up on Taplow when he comments on the translation. It suggests that perhaps

---

21 There is one other aspect of this scene which is perhaps worth noting as an indication of the way in which film compresses time in a narrative. The cut from the interior of Andrew's house to the wide shot of the trees in the garden with the tilt down to reveal Andrew and Taplow seated at the table implies a jump ahead in time. At the very least Andrew and Taplow have had time to walk to the table, sit down and open their books to the passage which Taplow is to translate. Figgis and Harwood, however, have retained the line in which Andrew says, "Begin, Taplow" implying that we are seeing the beginning of their lesson as we did in the play and the Asquith film. The lesson proceeds in real time without any cutaways or dissolves to a point where Andrew says they have run out of time. At that point the lesson has lasted 3 minutes and 18 seconds. I doubt that any viewer would feel that there was anything unrealistic about this because time compression of this sort is a conventional type of poetic license in film. The initial cut does help, but it is perhaps a little strange that Andrew's initial line was not dropped so that the viewer would be encouraged to feel the lesson had already been going on for some time. There is also the possibility that one might interpret Andrew's early dismissal of Taplow as a gesture of sympathy occasioned by his reminiscence about his own youth.)

Silverstone's performance was covered with three different setups and that the use of this piece was dictated by his performance or something about the framing. In terms of its impact on the viewer it would seem to be essentially the same as the slightly wider angle.) The wide shot bookends the scene as before but with an additional use as Taplow starts to give Andrew the book, presumably to emphasize the relationship between the two and to in effect restart the scene.

The logic at work in the editing of this scene is similar to that during the lesson, and there is also a similar use of the greenery behind the characters. The main distinguishing feature of this scene is the wide shot beginning it, which tracks with Taplow as he walks past the scoreboard to where Andrew is standing on the hilltop. In the background we are able to see the other activities going on in addition to the cricket game, and we can see the way in which Taplow stands at a respectful distance from Andrew so that they have to reach out to each other in order to hand the book back and forth. The background activity is not visible in any of the other shots for the scene so that we are not distracted by it from the real action going on in the faces of Taplow and Andrew.

Taplow again disturbs Andrew's private reflections, and Andrew goes from impatience to being moved to tears by Taplow's gesture. This scene seems to be a condensation of the point of the entire movie as Andrew's sense of his own worth is in some way restored by the discovery that he is

"Sir?"

"Sir?"

"I'm sorry to disturb you, sir, but I did want to see you…"

"Disturb me, indeed. … Well?"

"Well, Taplow?"

"I thought this might interest you, sir…"

"…a verse translation of the Agamemnon*."*

"Good heavens…"

"The Browning version…"

"I've glanced through it; I don't think it's much good, but

"I agree the translation has its faults, but I think you'll enjoy it more…"

"…when you become more familiar with the meter that Robert Browning …"

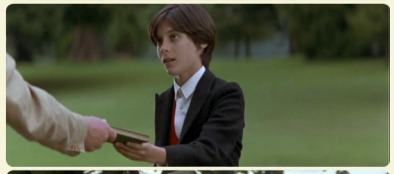
…employs. … Very interesting…""

"…Taplow."

"It's for you, sir."

"For me?"

"Yes, sir; I've written in it."



"Did you buy this?"
"Yessir, it's only secondhand."
"You shouldn't spend your pocket money in that way."
"That's all right; it wasn't very much."

The price isn't still inside, is it?"

"No, only what you wrote; nothing else."

"What's the matter, sir?"

"Have I got the accent wrong?"
"No, the perispomenon is perfectly correct.

"Forgive me, Taplow; I…I've been under rather a strain."

"Yes, sir. I understand, sir."

"Well…goodbye, sir… and the best of luck."

appreciated despite all the ways in which he has been rebuffed. This is, of course, a very different interpretation of the material than that of the original play.

A more interesting scene involving just two characters is the rendezvous between Laura and Frank at his flat. The blocking of this scene is organized around four things: the door, the window, the kitchen and the bed. Each of these elements represents a different perspective on their relationship. The scene begins with Laura opening the door and entering, just as the relationship obviously began with Laura's initiative. She is coming into

his life for her own reasons and is not entirely welcome. She closes the door to shut out the rest of the world as she says, "To hell with Gilbert," and she protects her pride by exiting through the door leaving Frank alone. The window evokes Frank's concerns about scandal and Laura's enjoyment of the scandalous. She forces him to join her in front of it, and he only responds to her after he has shut the blinds. The kitchen is opposed to the window and is the place where Frank is "more English than the English." It can be construed to represent a form of domesticity that the couple do not enjoy. Laura does not go into the kitchen but stays between the door and the bed while Frank fetches tea they never drink. The bed is obviously the keystone of their relationship, and Laura sits on it uninvited and begins undressing. Frank only sits with her for a moment and then withdraws when she lies back on the bed. She spends over a quarter of the scene lying alone on the bed.

The heart of the scene consists of the 1 minute 41 second cut during which Laura sits on the bed and then embraces Frank as he stands in front of her until he stops her from undressing and sits beside her. He then stands and exits frame as she flops back onto the bed as the camera continues to move in on her. The action and camera movement repeat the beginning of the scene by the window where Laura drew Frank close to embrace and kiss him as the camera moved in and then Frank pulled away at the sound of the tea kettle. Both shots convey the state of the relationship and the focus on what it means to Laura. The most strik-

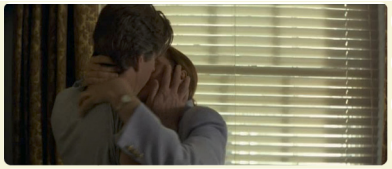
"Laura…"
"Were you expecting someone else?"
"I thought we agreed we wouldn't meet here."
"Who were you expecting?"

"Gilbert, the new guy."

"Laura, come away from the window, please."

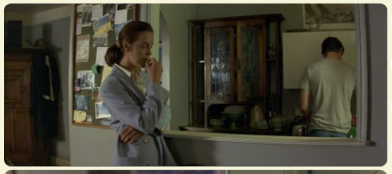
"Would you please come away from the window."

"Aren't you going to say hello?"
"Hello."



"I love you guilty… the puitan in you… I love fucking you…You talk when you make love…"
"The kettle's boiling."

"More apparently than we can say for you."

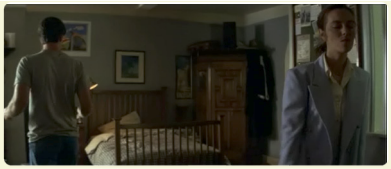


"Laura, I haven't got much time."
"No, I don't think I have either."

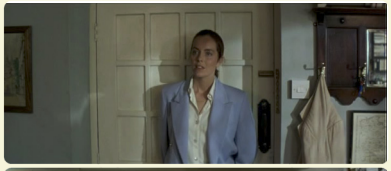
"Tea?"

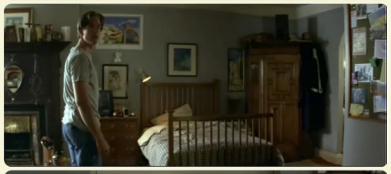
"Oh, Frank, you're more English than the English."

"If Gilbert does come let's just say you're here delivering a message from Andrew."



"To hell with Gilbert."

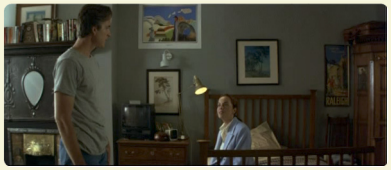




"I've got good news…"

"What?"
"Don't worry; I'm not pregnant."

"I had a letter from my mother. […],



"Just think, darling, a whole month… you will come won't you?…I need you; I need to be with you"

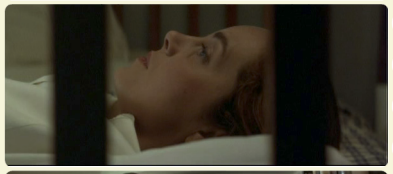
"You know, my father's not well…I may have to go back to the states…"

"You remind me of him"
"Of who?"
"Of whom…of whom… of Anderw of course. He didn't always used to be the Old Crock […] so idealistic and just as ungiving."

"What happened to him?"

"I did."

"Weren't you two ever happy together?"



"Can't remember … can't remember."

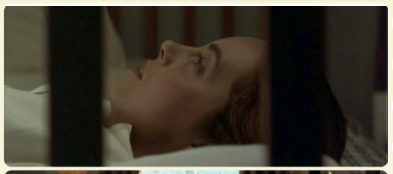
"Laura, I feel sorry for him."

"No you don;t; you feel guilty because you're screwing his wife…or to be more accurate…

"…because his wife is screwing you."

"I think we should tell him."

"Tell him what?"



"About us."

"What are you insane? That's the stupidist thing I've ever heard and what the hell would you want to tell him for, Laura!"

What are we talking about now… marriage…divorce?"

"I'm talking about us. I don't want us to become just good friends."

"Listen, Laura…"

"Dont! … Déjà vu…"

"I know exactly what you're going to say now. You're going to say you're not ready to settle down."

"Isn't that what you were going to say?"

ing shot in the scene is the extreme close up of Laura lying back on the bed and seen through the vertical pieces of the foot of the bed frame. She appears to be behind bars or boxed in by the bed. It is clearly not Frank's perspective on her and makes the viewer feel closer to her than Frank is.

The ease with which Figgis handles a scene involving more than two characters is best exemplified by the luncheon when Laura punctures An-

drew's pleasure at Talplow's gift. The scene has been moved into a public setting, and Laura wields her stiletto in front of four other people in addition to Frank. We are led into the scene with a 43 second tracking shot of Andrew making his way through the tent, and we never lose sight of the festivities surrounding them during the scene. Even in the tightest close-ups, other guests are visible in the background. The group is seated three on one side of the table and two on the other. Andrew takes a place at the head of the table rather than making his way to the empty place across from Laura. This enables Andrew to be the center of the composition when the whole group is seen and puts Laura in a position of the odd one out. Laura is also seated next to Frank so that the wider reverse angle on her is a two shot of her and Frank.

In one sense the other characters at the table function as the chorus witnessing Clytemnestra's murder of her husband, but each of them has a part to play in setting up the blow to Andrew. Frank has what are to me Modine's most natural moments in the film when he responds to the news of Taplow's gift with "Taplow! That's fantastic!" and "It's a lovely gift." He also attempts to function as a buffer between Laura and Frank and obviously senses trouble brewing before the others. The main use that is made of the others is to

"Andrew, have a seat."
"Oh, thank you."

"Taplow, that's fantastic."

"Hello, Andrew"

"So what was the present?"

"A translation of the Agamemnon *by Robert Browning."*
"Let me see."

"You're looking pleased with yourself…."

"…What have you been up to?"

"Oh, he's inscribed it."

"Best not to ask, Laura."
"Well, I'm looking please with reason, I think. I've just been given a present."

"What does it mean?"

)h? By whom?"

"Darling, what does it say?"

"Taplow."

"It's all Greek to me."

"Mr. Gilbert…"

"…can you enlighten us, please?"
"How marvelous. It's hexameter."

"…malthecose theos…"

"Yes, but what does it mean?"

"Well. I"m not familiar with the Browning version but…"

"…roughtly it translates as 'God from afar looks grciously upon a gentle master.'"

"Oh, how sweet!"

amplify Andrew's pleasure by passing the book around and commenting on it. Laura is the only one at the table who does not look at the book. Andrew clearly gets an extra boost from the fact that none of the guests except Gilbert can read the Greek inscription, and his expansive mood enables him to acknowledge Gilbert as a colleague. His agreement with Gilbert about the proper translation is in fact the resolution of Gilbert's role in the film, and it is managed in a casual manner that also contributes to the impact of Laura's attack.

Diana's role as both co-conspirator and competition for Laura is underscored in this scene. She is seated on the other side of Frank and immediately injects a note of wicked humor into the proceedings by responding that it is "Best not to ask" when Laura asks Andrew what he has been up to. As Andrew joined the party she was finishing an anecdote which involved her being stranded naked in a hotel corridor. She expresses genuine interest in Taplow's gift and reacts positively to the translation of his inscription ("How sweet!"). Her manner may seem superficial or playful as befits a festive luncheon, but she does appreciate the pleasure Andrew feels and provides a stark contrast to Laura. This contrast is emphasized by the close-ups of Diana as she looks at the book and notices the inscription. There is a cut from Diana to a corresponding close-up of Laura as the significance of the gift begins to brew in her mind. She starts the circulation of the book by taking it from Andrew and then handing it over to her husband rather than giving it back to Andrew. That

"And very apt."

"I can't imagine a boy giving me a present."
"Nor me."
It's a very wonderful thing to do, don't you think?"
"Yes", very much so."

"He bought it with his own pocket money.

"What was the inscription again… 'God from afar looks graciously upon a kind master'?"

"Perhaps not 'kind master' but…"

"…'gentle master'."

"Yes, I agree with Mr. Gilbert; I think 'gentle'…

"… is the better translation."

"All right.. … It's a lovely gift."

"I would rather have this present…"

she would immediately reach across to her husband underscores the distance between Andrew and Laura. Perhaps she knows full well that her husband will not be able to translate it, and she is teasing him affectionately. She is first to say, "Why cunning, Laura?" as though she expects a little juicy gossip or an amusing anecdote, but she is appalled by Laura's cruelty and serves as the focal point of the awkwardness that all the other guests at the table feel.

Rafferty's contribution to the scene is to welcome Andrew to the table, to admit that he cannot read Greek, to pass the book along to Gilbert and to confess that he cannot imagine a boy giving him a present. Of all in the group Rafferty comes closest to being Andrew's peer, but there is a polite distance between them that is never overcome by any direct interaction. There is no single shot of Rafferty in the scene. He is always seen in con-

"…than anything else I can think of."

"Cunning little brat."

"Why cunning. Laura?"

"Andrew, you don't have any wine. Can I give you some champagne?"

"Why cunning, Laura?"
"Because…"

"…yesterday I saw Taplow doing an impersonation…"

"…of you."

"Obviously he was afraid that I would tell you and that you would put him on Cromwells…"

"…or stop his switch to Frank's form or…"

"…some other Hitlerian torture."

"The book is clearly an insurance policty…

"…a sweetner … a bribe."

"I see."

"Laura, go and tell him it was a lie."
"Certainly not."

"It wasn't a lie."

"Then I'll tell him."

"I wouldn't do that if I were you. … He'll only hate you for your sympathy"

"Andrew doesn't need sympathy. … That's his strength."

junction with Gilbert or just in the wide shot of the whole group. When Diana hands him the book, his response is seen initially in the wide shot and then partially off screen in a shot of Andrew's reaction. That Rafferty would pass the book along to Gilbert rather than ask Andrew to translate the transcription is an indication of his alliance with the modernizing policies of the school as well as a simple gesture to include everyone in the response to Andrew's pleasure.

Gilbert's rather awkward reading of the Greek passage is a pale shadow compared to Andrew's impassioned reading from the play in class. His close up is reserved for the moment when he corrects Frank's recollection of the passage and earns Andrew's approval.

The real focus of the scene, of course, is the interaction between Laura and Andrew, and about a third of the scene at the table consists of close-ups of them. The climax as she smiles and twists the knife consists of just close ups of each culminating on Laura before it drops back to the wide shot to remind us of the context in which this is taking place and to see the awkwardness of the others as they witness it. As Andrew withdraws emotionally, he exits in a medium close-up in which he is abstracted from the environment. The scene ends on a close-up of Laura after she has justified to the remaining group her attempt to dissuade Frank for following Andrew.

There is a 13 minute sequence in Andrew's classroom which is really five scenes occurring in the same place. First Frobisher brings Gilbert into the class room and interacts with the students as he introduces Gilbert to them Then Gilbert is left alone with the students and is unable to restrain them. With Gilbert alone in the room there are two sub-scenes: one involving the desire of two students to start a magazine during the next term and another in which Taplow attempts to express his feelings about Andrew to some of the other students who basically attack him for feeling for being a "little arse-crawler."

Andrew's entrance into the classroom is virtually a scene in itself as it is the first time we see directly the way he inspires fear in his students. Even Gilbert snaps to attention and somewhat self-consciously introduces himself as a means of justifying his presence. The close shot in which Andrew walks up the aisle towards the camera and his desk is the only moment in the film in which he even remotely resembles "the Hitler of the Lower Fifth." As he walks he silently surveys the classroom with a stone face and an expression once could imagine on the face of a prison warden inspecting the inmates. His first communication with the class is a reprimand of Wilson for being late to Chapel, even though in this version of the story Andrew is not the one responsible for reporting Wilson's infraction. (Trubshaw has already recorded it and given him Cromwells.) The second order of business is to distribute the class's last assignment and to instruct them to do it over since

"Good morning, sir. I'm Gilbert."

"Good morning."

"Sir."

"These are your Latin verses. Only one boy's efforts, Buller's…'

"…had any merit, and that…"

"Wilson…"

"…somewhat doubtful."

"Sir?"

"The rest were…"

"Apparently you were late for chapel."

"…mainly abominable."

"Just a few seconds. I was in the library…"

"It seems to me that the best way to employ the first part of this period would be for all of you to atttempt the verse again."

"…where you can't hear the bell…"
"No doubt you will recount those excuses to your housemaster. I fear I'm not interested in them"

"And if you should find the disturbance from the…"

"…upper Fifth science too distracting…

"…you may console yourselves as…"

"…good classicists with the thought that, to amend an aphorism, scientia est celare scientiam.

the initial results were so awful. While this may seem sadistic to the students, it is actually an indication of the expectation of excellence which is part of the tradition of the institution, at least in Andrew's view.

The next scene is the interaction with Taplow when Taplow laughs at Andrew's epigram. Again the meaning of this scene has evolved significantly since the play in which Taplow reenacts it for Frank. In the play it sounds like a needless bit of humiliation that Andrew inflicts on a student. It is played that way in the Asquith film, but there is something about the way in which Finney plays the scene that gives it a slightly different edge. The way he responds to the idea that Taplow laughed out of politeness seems to indicate that he is caught off guard by Taplow's sympathy and is in fact genuinely "touched." There is a seed planted for the way Taplow will touch him more deeply later.

The final scene in the classroom is the "end of term treat" which culminates in Andrew's reading of the passage from the Agamemnon. This has already been cited as an addition designed to make Andrew more sympathetic. The main point is of course the passion with which Andrew reads, but the second point is seen in the faces of his students. For the most part they are uncomprehending. Initially Buller rolls his eyes at the prospect of this "treat". Laughton struggles with his reading and meets with little patience much less encouragement from Andrew. Gilbert

"Taplow?"

"Yessir?"

"You laughed at my little epigram."

"Yessir."

"I'm flattered at the advance your Latin has made that you should so readily understand what the rest of the class…"

"…did not.

"Perhaps you would be good enough to explain it to them so that they can share your pleasure … Oh, come along, Taplow…".

"…don't be so selfish that you keep a good joke to yourself. Tell the others."
"I didn't hear it properly, sir."
You didn't hear it?"

"Indeed…and why may I ask did you laugh. Why did you laugh at what you did not hear?"

"Politeness, sir."
I beg your pardon?"
"Politeness, sir."

"Toujours la politesse."

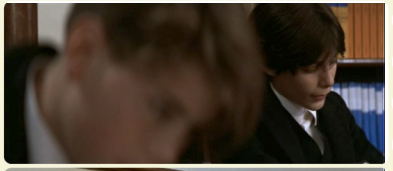
"I'm touched, Taplow, but if you really wish to show me politeness you will do so now…"

"…by translating verses less appalling than the ones I corrected this morning."

"Sit."

"Still feel…"

"…sorry for him?"



"Finish now."

"As this is the last time we shall meet as a class, it may not be amiss for me to say goodbye and wish you all the best…"

"…of good fortune And now the end of term treat.".

"We will read a scene from the Agamemnon *by Aeschylus."*

"Agamemnon *is perhaps…"*

"…hupsos kreisson…"

"…the greatest play ever written. The scene I have selected…"

"…êlthe, sun chronôi…"

"…starts with Clytemnestra standing over the bodies of Agamemnon, her husband, and…"

"…ge mên: hestêka…"

"…the prophetess, Cassandra, both of whom she's just murdered."

"hestêka…"

"Very well, Laughton begin."

"porsunôn, philois…"

"…hestêka"

"…dokousin einai, pêmonês…"

"hestêka d' enth' epais'…"

"…arkustat' an phraxeien…"

"…ep' exeirgasmenois"
"Forgive me for interrupting…"

"…but I have the impression you understand nothing…"

"…of what you're reading."

"No, sir, I…"

"Clytemnestra has just committed murder."

"She is describing her foul deed; she is unrepentant."

"Do you not think she would show some emotion?"

"Of course, sir; I was just…"

"I realize, Laughton, that you may not have met a wife…"

"…who has destroyed her husband; nor perhaps had Aeschylus…"

"…Nevertheless, he knew, alas, that such wives …"

"…do exist. … He used his imagination.,…"

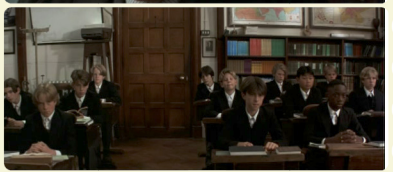
"…Laughton, … Imagination, a word I think …"

"…not in your vocabulary. For example…"

"…hestêka d' enth' epais' ep' exeirgasmenois…"

"…I stand upon mine act, yea where I struck. Do you not think in saying those words…"

"…she might reveal a flash of cruelty…"



"…and of pride? Hhmn? Defiant creature."

"… paiô de nin dis…"

"And then here…"

"I struck him twice…"

"… houtô d' epraxa,…"

"…and once and twice he groaned. He doubled up his limbs. kai peptôkoti tritên ependidômi, tou kata chthonos Dios nekrôn sôtêros…"

"… kai tad' ouk arnêsomai: hôs mête…"

"… euktaian charin.. And with that stroke committed him to Zeus that keeps the dead

"… pheugein mêt' amunesthai moron. And I confess it. I did use such craft he could not fly nor fend him against death."

"… houtô ton hautou thumon…"

"apeiron amphiblêstron, hôsper ichthuôn…"

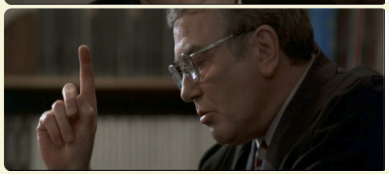
"… hormainei pesôn:…"

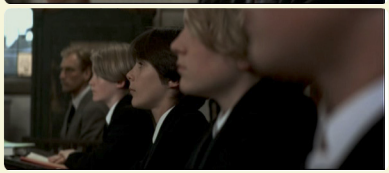
"… peristichizô. I caught him in a net as men catch fish… plouton heimatos kakon. … No room, no rathole…"

"… kakphusiôn oxeian haimatos sphagên ballei m' eremnêi psakadi…"

"…in his loopless robe … paiô de nin dis…"

"… phoinias drosou"





"Very well, you may leave."

"Goodbye sir…Goodbye, Mr. Crocker-Harris… Thank you very much, sir…"

"Goodbye, sir…"

can be seen presumably judging the harshness of Andrew's methods. Another student makes a face to Wilson as Andrew begins to comment on the action of the play, and Andrew's impassioned reading is met with blank stares all around except for Taplow. Perhaps the other students know they are in the presence of something out of the ordinary, but only Taplow seems to be getting it in any real way. As Andrew becomes swept up by the poetry he loses all sense of the students, and we see him in a close-up profile which seems to dissociate him from the class. In the end he stands before them reciting Greek without bothering to translate it, and the bell rings to bring everything crashing back down to earth.

The difference between the Figgis interpretation of *The Browning Version* and that of Asquith is probably best represented by the scene in Figgis's film in which Andrew tells Laura that he has had enough. It replaces the scene in Asquith's film during the fireworks at the Headmaster's house when Andrew tells Millie he will not be going to Bradford with her. In Asquith's film Andrew and Millie stand side by side on the terrace almost like statues. Much of the scene takes place in the dark with only the occasional burst of light from the fireworks illuminating their faces. They hardly look at each

other, and it is the last time in the film that they speak to each other.

Figgis and Harwood relocate the scene to the couple's bedroom while they are getting dressed for the evening. It is the most intimate scene in the film, and there is a gentleness or tenderness as Andrew announces the end of their marriage, which is completely different from the coldness and bitter irony of Asquith's film. It is filmed with a warmth and with an eye to the remnants of intimacy and affection which still connect Andrew and Laura.

"Let me do that."

"You left Taplow's present behind. I put it…"

"… in your study."
"Thank you."

"It wasn't a very good impersonation."

"I'm … I'm sorry."

"Laura…"

"…We…uh…"

"…we inhabit different worlds, you and I…"

"…We always have; we always will…"
"What are you saying?"

"I'm saying, 'No.' I'm saying, 'Enough.'"

"Do you still expect me to come to your prizegiving?"
"I … I don't think either of us…"

"We'd better not keep the headmaster waiting."

"…has the right any longer to expect anything of the other."

"Right. Well, I'll leave first thing tomorrow morning then."
"As you wish."

The Music

Figgis says he was fired as the composer for *The Browning Version*, but that he salvaged some of what he wrote for use in *Leaving Las Vegas*. It is hard for me to imagine an emotional or physical world more alien from that of *The Browning Version* than the world of *Leaving Las Vegas*, and I am not sure what this says about the art of film music. Aside from the songs by Sting, Don Henley and Michael McDonald the music for *Leaving Las Vegas* is mostly moody or bluesy jazz with what I might call a vaguely surreal use of voice and synthesizer. It is intriguing to try to imagine the kind of intensity such a score might give to moments in *The Browning Version*, but it is also easy to imagine why the producers thought a more conventional score might be better.

The composer who replaced Figgis on *The Browning Version* was Mark Isham, whose score for *A River Runs Through It* (1992) had been nominated for an Oscar. Isham's parents were both musician-teachers, and he is a classically trained musician who studied piano and violin before settling on the trumpet. He played in some San Francisco orchestras before getting involved first with rock and then with progressive jazz. He played synthesizer and trumpet with Van Morrison's band for four years, and in 1983 he recorded his first solo album, which has been described as "an experimental blend of modern jazz and electronic music." Two of his subsequent albums had been nominated for a Grammy and a third had won one. His first film score was for Carroll Ballard's 1982 film *Never Cry Wolf*, and he had scored 34 films by the time he worked on *The Browning Version*.

Isham composed a little over 30 minutes of orchestral music for the film, including the three minutes of the final cue that play over the end credits. It is performed by the London Metropolitan Orchestra conducted by Ken Kugler, and Isham plays the flugelhorn solos. In his newsletter for 1994 Isham describes the score as more orchestral that the others he had done, and he calls the music for the end credits "some of the best orchestral music" he had written. Perhaps more revealing is his description of the film as "about a man finding the courage to transcend all the things in his life that conspire against him." This seems to me to coincide with Figgis's interpretation of the material if one adds the idea that Taplow's gift helps Andrew regain his strength.

There are an additional 14 minutes of music in the film which are part of the content of the scenes such as the music the students are listening to in the dorm or the music played by the band on the cricket field. Surely the most striking of these is the Elgar "Ave Verum" performed by the choir at the evening concert. The film is almost bookended with sacred music starting with the hymn "Praise, My Soul, the King of Heaven" and culminating with the "Ave Verum". The hymn has associations with Devonshire where the movie was shot and is

typical of the sort of hymn that would be sung at a school like this.[22]

The music obviously contributes significantly to the emotional impact of the movie, and its use is a clear indication of the difference in style or meaning separating the two films of *The Browning Version*. Asquith was also a musician, an accomplished pianist who had youthful ambitions as a composer. *The Winslow Boy*, *The Woman In Question*, and *The Importance of Being Earnest*, movies he directed immediately before and after *The Browning Version*, all had scores, but he used no music in his film of *The Browning Version* except stock music over the opening credits and ending. This may, of course, have been a purely financial decision, but it does make a difference in the impact of the film.

I find it very difficult to verbalize the emotional impact of music. I am not enough of a musician to analyze Isham's score in technical terms, and I am not sure that doing so would really help clarify the way in which the music works in the film.

---

22 Henry Francis Lyte wrote "Praise, My Soul, The King of Heaven" for his congregation at Lower Brixham in Devon, England. Queen Elizabeth II chose this hymn to be sung as the processional at her wedding. In a posting on the internet Bloomfield alumna Holly Bunch wrote: "If my school ever had a school hymn it would have been Praise my soul the king of heaven… I don't think I've heard it since I left school but it conjures up images of teachers walking really slowly wearing robes (on prize day- not a regular occurrence…) and choir practices trying to teach the descant to clueless 4th years…"

There is one music cue in the film that works in a conventional manner, but which seems to me to be out of character with the rest of the score. This is the music used to highlight Trubshaw's discovery of the worms in his bed. The music sounds like something from a horror/suspense movie with perhaps a hint of a motif associated with students in other musical cues. The scene itself, of course, it similarly out of character with the rest of the movie and seems somewhat like a perfunctory obligatory payoff to the scenes involving Trubshaw. My initial reaction to the music for the scene when I listened to it closely was to wonder if the someone had felt the scene needed all the help it could get. The music builds tension for suspense and punches up the revelation of the worms in about as "literal" a way as music can.

Needless to say the rest of the score does not work in this manner. It serves to unlock emotional reserves, perhaps even to the point of risking sentimentality. Most of the cues ease in under the dialogue or sound effects in a way that catches the viewer unawares and sweeps him along with the emotional current already generated by the visual and dramatic elements of the scene. It becomes most noticeable in climactic moments when it comes into the foreground, but it never completely replaces the natural sound associated with the images.

Isham commented on the function of a film score in an interview with Christian DesJardins:

I've found over the years that sometimes characters can have themes, but I've not really found them that helpful to me when telling the story. I find that what the story is telling you is more important to identify thematically. Let's say you've got a story of a man and a woman, Sam and Grace, coming together and loving each other, then breaking apart, then coming back together again, and you have Sam's theme and Grace's theme, and when he's on the screen you play him and when she's on the screen you play her, and when they're together, you mix them both together. That's very cute, but it doesn't necessarily help you at all emotionally. What I would probably find more helpful is a theme for loneliness and a theme for the satisfaction of a marriage or a relationship and a theme that represents the fear of commitment or whatever it is that's going to happen in your story. One of those themes is going to supply the true emotions and the true goals and purposes of the story rather than just telling you she's off-camera, but he may be thinking about her, or that she is about to come to the door. You know what I mean? The pictures are already telling you that information, so the themes can be more about the bigger things – like honor or betrayal or love or trust – the various sorts of things that great storytelling wants to tell us about.[23]

23 DesJardins p.133f

While he may be using a bit of a straw man to make his point, it does help reveal how his score works. When I first started to think about the impact of the music, I felt that it occupied a space somewhere between a Puccini aria and contemporary show tunes primarily because of one motif picked up by the flugelhorn. When I began to listen more closely, it occurred to me that Isham may well have been taking his cues from the Elgar *Ave Verum*, and the more I thought about it, the more Elgar made sense as a frame of reference. Elgar, of course, has strong associations with British national pride and traditional "pomp and circumstance." He also has a sentimental strain in some of his work and made no distinction between his serious and his popular music. Isham's score uses soprano voices comparable to the voices in the boy's choir performing the *Ave Verum*, and there are tonalities and tempos comparable to those of sacred choral music in much of the score. The use of the *Ave Verum* is not without irony, but its presence and allusions to it in the score seem to me to add a note of seriousness to the whole affair. While there is no overtly religious theme in the story, there is an existential seriousness in Andrew's appraisal of his life and of the "noblest calling a man can follow." There are also themes associated with the school and with Andrew that have overtones of the kind of processionals or marches at which Elgar excelled. Despite the overuse of one of his *Pomp and Circumstance* marches, they still retain their sense of historical seriousness and inspiring social purpose.

One other the way in which I hear Isham's score is that someone listening to the score without knowing anything about the film might assume the music dealt with the seasons of spring and fall. This is probably because one of the motifs associated with Taplow reminds me vaguely of the opening of Copland's *Appalachian Spring*. I think it is reasonable to describe the motif in Isham's score in terms of burgeoning of youth in the same way I think Taplow is associated with the greenery of surrounding the school. Some of the motifs associated with Andrew have a melancholic elegiac quality that I think might conjure a sense of the coming of winter and death.

In the broadest, simplest terms I think Isham's score weaves together motifs which conjure youth, old age, tradition, progress, yearning, hope, despair, and loss in such a way as to provide a resolution which feels triumphant or celebratory despite overtones of sadness. This is also, of course, what I think the movie as a whole is "about."

The first music cue comes over the main title sequence in which Gilbert arrives at the school and Frank hurries to make it to the morning chapel. It does not begin right away but is set up by the first shot of Andrew sitting alone on the bench and then getting up to walk towards the camera (on his way to chapel). The first sounds in the film are the chapel bells ringing and some birds chirping. Three choirboys run past the bench where Andrew is sitting and then Andrew starts walking. We can hear his footsteps on the stone courtyard as the bells and birds continue. This is all perfectly naturalistic but it can also be described metaphorically. A bell tolls for Andrew as youth passes him by. He walks alone to meet his destiny which is then seen descending on the campus in the persons of Gilbert and Frank. The music starts quietly under Andrew and then takes over on the cut to the aerial shot of the cab bringing Gilbert to the school. The music is in a minor key and has foreboding or tragic overtones combined with an insistent tempo. The tonalities seems somewhat at odds with the verdant landscape surrounding the school, but the tempo works with the moving camera shots to pull us into the movie and to provide a sense of an impending collision of some sort. The cue modulates into a major key at the end as Gilbert is shown the historic hall on the way to chapel. A variation on the motifs of this cue are used under the scene in which Laura rides her bicycle into the village to see Frank.

The second music cue plays very quietly under the dialogue when Taplow approaches Andrew after chapel to ask if he has received his promotion. It introduces the motifs associated with the students and which I find reminiscent of Appalachian Spring in its combination of sustained tones with plucked strings. It has a tentative feel appropriate for Taplow's hesitancy in approaching Andrew or in attempting to get out of his extra work on the last day of term. It probably has less immediate impact on this scene than it does in setting up later scenes between Andrew and Taplow. The motif is reprised in the class Andrew enters and when

Andrew summons Taplow to the front of the class to explain why he laughed at the Latin epigram. Underneath Andrew's entrance the music has overtones of suspense and threat, but in the course of the scene with Taplow I believe it becomes associated more with the youth and vulnerability of the students.

One of the biggest music cues in the film comes as Andrew gets carried away in his reading of the Agamemnon for the class. This is a classic example of the use of music to bolster the emotional impact of a scene by sweeping the audience up in a way comparable to the way in which a character in the scene is swept up. It is also a nice example of the way in which music abstracts a naturalistic scene and provides a sense of the inner emotional or spiritual dimension of what can be seen or heard directly. It functions in the way a moving camera can function to provide the feeling that the viewer is being freed from literal reality. When the camera moves in on Taplow as he listens to Andrew read we are not simply being encouraged to imagine what is going on in Taplow's mind or heart. We are being transported with him. Andrew's reading takes on the force of an incantation as the music builds to a climax. The music in this cue has transformed the processional and choral associations into a martial spirit through the addition of snare drums and an increasingly march like tempo. There is a smell of victory in the air, but, of course, the whole thing is brought crashing back to earth by the ringing of the bell signaling the end of the period.

The cue that comes when Andrew is alone in the classroom and goes to the window to watch the students in the courtyard below is a reprise of elements from the music from the opening credits. It carries over into the shot of Frank walking to Andrew's house and helps convey the sense that everything in the day is converging inexorably towards Andrew's fate.

The music that plays beneath the final half of Taplow's private lesson as Andrew tells him about his own translation of the Agamemnon is a gentler version of themes from the cue for his reading in the classroom combined with the themes associated with Taplow. This is the moment in the film where the relationship between Taplow and Andrew seems to be transformed. Taplow has gained a new respect and sympathy for Andrew, and Andrew's recollection of his own youth has allowed his generosity and paternal affection for Taplow to blossom. There are none of the stern overtones of the earlier encounters.

The closest the score comes to sacred choral music is the music for the scene in which Taplow gives Andrew the book. This is clearly the pivotal moment in the story for Figgis, a moment when the repressed passion of Andrew's youth is fully retrieved, even if only temporarily, and a moment when he is validated in his vocation as a teacher. Once Andrew has understood that Taplow is giving him the book as a farewell gift and notices the inscription, the music begins playing quietly under the dialogue and the sound of Andrew's weeping.

The natural sounds never go away, but when Taplow takes his leave the music swells to something that is surely meant to have "heavenly" overtones with the soprano voices and the flugelhorn. Perhaps the nicest thing about this music cue is the decision to let it spill over the footage of the cricket match and the umpire's call for the tea break. One interpretation of this is that Andrew's emotional state is capable of infusing the entire world around him. At the very least it permits the film to cut away from Andrew and let the audience down gently. Exactly how Andrew returns to the world of the cricket match and tea is left to the viewer's imagination. We next see Andrew walking in front of the scoreboard just before he is accosted by Trimmer and Newton.

It is worth noting that the music for the scene in which Laura punctures Andrew's mood is the source music of the quintet playing a Gilbert and Sullivan medley for the luncheon. Andrew walks past the quintet as he makes his way to the table. The light festive music seems suited to his mood as he congratulates Fletcher and joins the others at the table with Laura. It is mostly buried in the ambient sounds of the luncheon as they talk, but there is just enough of a sense of it to let it become an ironic counterpoint which emphasizes the insidiousness of Laura's explanation.

After Frank leaves in pursuit of Andrew there is a seque to a musical cue beginning under Laura's comment about Andrew's "strength" and continuing under the shots of Frank looking for Andrew. This music functions again to lift the viewer out of the completely naturalistic scene into that slightly abstracted level which seems to provide more direct access to the characters inner lives.

The music cues during and after the scene between Frank and Andrew in the library help solidify the way in which this scene parallels the scene in which Taplow gives Andrew the book. In both cases Andrew has left the group because he wants to be alone to deal with a blow he has just received. Frank like Taplow pursues him and persists in disturbing him. Frank also offers Andrew something and Andrew responds, but of course what Frank offers is the revelation that his wife has been unfaithful and advice to make a new start for himself. Andrew responds initially by opening up to Frank but ultimately he rebuffs his offer to help by suggesting he not takes sides. The net effect of the scene is the complete antithesis of the scene with Taplow and the music here is elegiac or even tragic rather than uplifting.

There are two separate music cues for the scene in the library. The first, which plays under the dialogue between Frank and Andrew regarding his marriage, is unrelentingly somber and tragic although very subdued and may be a culmination of the thread of the score that started under the opening credits. The impending forces have fully collided with Andrew. He has been dealt every blow and even sees Taplow's gift as a blow. Rather than recalling his youthful literary ambitions and his sense of his vocation as a teacher, he

is moved to review the inherently doomed nature of his marriage. The blindness with which he entered into the relationship is now comparable to the supposed naiveté with which he received Taplow's gift. Even though Andrew describes his situation as "not very tragic" the music underscores the depth of his pain.

This first cue ends as Frank says "I'd like to help you" signaling an end to the first part of the scene. Andrew's response constitutes a clean break. Only after he has rebuffed Frank and is left alone is he able to allow the full emotional impact of the moment to engulf him. The second begins after Andrew replies and Frank starts to leave. It swells as we see Andrew alone and immediately pours over slow motion footage of the conclusion of the cricket game. It is built largely from a five note motif, which becomes associated with this relationship with Laura and which seems to express both a longing and a sense of loss. It will be taken up again in the music at the very end of the film where it is resolved in a bit more triumphant sounding way.

The slow motion footage of the end of the cricket game is the most abstracted visual sequence in the film and the natural sounds have reverberation added to them to achieve a similar level of abstraction. Perhaps more than any other time in the film the music at this point takes over and comes to the fore as the prism through which everything is viewed. What is conveyed is the extent to which Andrew is removed from the celebration going on around him. When he sees Laura and she starts to walk towards him in the beginning of a gesture of reconciliation, the camera rises above the crowd so that it can keep Andrew and Laura in view. The rising camera as opposed to a cut to a closer angle joins the music in transporting the viewer into the emotional realm in which Andrew now moves, and it does this without making the post-game celebration seem ironic. Life goes on, and the celebration is still valid even if we are reminded of how oblivious Frobisher can be; but there is also another reality at this moment which takes precedence in the story.

The music continues into the scene in the bedroom as Andrew and Laura are dressing for the evening concert. It ends as Laura continues her attempt to make up by saying, "It wasn't a very good impersonation." The moment when she actually says, "I'm sorry" as well as the following moment when Andrew says, "I'm saying, 'No'" have no music under them as though everything is now focused on the actual exchange expressed in the dialogue. The music has in effect been leading up to this moment and steps aside so as not to distract. Once Laura pulls away from Andrew to return to her mirror and put on her blouse, there is a new music cue which reprises the motif from the previous cue. It continues until Laura asks if he expects her to come to the prize giving ceremony. Andrew's response which defines the break in their relationship again plays without music.

There is evidence of some last minute changes in the score for scenes in the morning of the prize giving. Isham composed a cue entitled "Goodbye" which is 2:27 long on the CD for the score. In the cue sheets for the film as released only 0:08 of this cue is used and the music which actually accompanies the moment when Laura and Andrew say goodbye as Foster carries out her bags is a reprise of the music for the scene in which Frank looks for Andrew after the luncheon. (A cue called "Defiant Creature" which is 0:51 long.) It is probably pointless to speculate about what occasioned this change of plan. The full cue called "Goodbye" has a long slow build to a climax, which is fairly somber – I would say almost funereal. The "Defiant Creature" cue works well with the quiet awkwardness of the scene, and is also thematically more closely related to the other cue associated with Andrew and Laura. After Andrew leaves there is a brief cue, which sounds like it may be just the last chord of the "Goodbye" cue and which ends as Frobisher says "Ah, Andrew, there you are."

There are, of course, music cues for the prize giving ceremony. The first helps sustain the mood as we skim across the surface of the actual prize ceremony and cutaway to Laura leaving the house. The second begins as Andrew breaks away from his prepared remarks to make his spontaneous apology. The third swells with the applause at the end of his remarks and carries over to the scene in which he exits the hall and is greeted by his colleagues. It stops before Taplow comes up to say goodbye. The emotional function of these cues is fairly obvious, and they surely help distract from any questions about the logic of the action (Why is Andrew last to exit the hall when he seemed to be leaving at the end of his speech?) or believability of the reaction to the speech.

The final music cue starts just before Laura gives Andrew a kiss on the cheek and carries all the way through the end credits. It attempts to resolve things in an upbeat way while maintaining much of the elegiac tone. The soaring flugelhorn and soprano voices provide the uplift, but the theme and some of the harmonies recall the sense of loss and yearning. The mixed effect is, of course, much like the mixed effect of the movie as a whole.

Conclusion

The Browning Version was selected for competition at Cannes in 1994 when *Pulp Fiction* won the Palme D'Or. Its screenplay was nominated for a British Academy award, and the Boston Society of Film Critics gave Albert Finney their award for best actor. It was also selected for competition at Cameraimage, a Polish festival focusing exclusively on cinematography. It apparently only grossed $464,423 in its US theatrical release[24], and Figgis has described it as a film which he loves but which "got dumped. It got only a two-theater release."[25]

---

24 http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0109340/business

25 LA Times, Friday, July 25, 2003, p. E18

Figgis's *The Browning Version* is a movie that can always bring tears to my eyes. The simple fact that something can make me cry is hardly a reason to value it, and there is obviously something else that makes a five-handkerchief movie a memorable experience. I remember the second movie my son saw when he was probably three was a Lassie movie, and at one point, when Lassie was separated from her family and maybe even presumed dead, I looked over and realized my son was very upset. I immediately thought "Why am I subjecting him to this?" He was, of course, elated by the end when Lassie was reunited with her family and all was right with the world; but I took away a question, which I have never resolved to my complete satisfaction.

The core issue of course is sentimentality and its relationship to art or more importantly its function in the constitution of a healthy psyche. Needless to say as a kid I did not appreciate sappy, sentimental movies. I remember when I was probably six having to leave *The Wizard of Oz* when the Wicked Witch launched the flying monkeys, and my mother taking me across the street to another theater where we saw some romantic melodrama while the rest of the family stayed the course on the yellow brick road. I recall nothing about the movie I saw except a vague sense of a soft gray image of a car and a couple somewhere in the countryside. Eventually I learned to like being frightened by movies (or not being frightened when I was supposed to be), and I know in retrospect that like any child I responded to *Bambi* or *Pinocchio* because my emotions were played like a fiddle; but I do not recall consciously liking a movie because it tugged on my heartstrings until I was well into my twenties. I have a wonderful memory of watching *Random Harvest* on TV with my then future mother-in-law and how surprised she was that I could like such a sentimental movie. I don't know that it had moved me to tears, but I had clearly come to appreciate sentimentality.

The movies that made me want to make movies tended towards the cerebral or existential. I was moved by them, but not in a way that provoked tears. Bergman, Antonioni, Fellini, Godard, Truffaut, Kurosawa, or Satyajit Ray did not make tearjerkers. Their films may have been emotionally devastating at times; they might have left me drained and exhilarated at the same time; but they did not make me cry.

I am probably moved to tears fairly often by movies, but I have trouble recalling which ones did. I had to think for a while before I recalled how I wept both times I saw a Swedish film called *As It Is In Heaven*, which was nominated for Best Foreign Language Film in 2005. Normally I recall that I liked a film and perhaps that I found it "very powerful" but I would be hard pressed to say for sure whether it made me cry. I can guess whether a film might have made me cry. For instance I suspect there is a better chance that I cried during *Shadowlands* than during *The Remains of the Day*, to choose two films comparable to *The Browning Version*. Nonetheless I regard

The Remains of the Day as the best of the three and probably the most moving. It just does not happen to push the buttons that open my tear ducts.

At some point in my young adult life I realized I am a complete sucker for a reconciliation scene. I associate this realization with seeing a performance of *The Merchant of Venice* and being amazed by how moved I was at one point. It is no wonder to me, given the emotional realities of my childhood, that I should have a deep involvement with fantasies of reconciliation; but I do have some difficulty reconciling my sentimentality with what I feel are the "deeper" aspects of my sensibility. Developing a love for films enabled me to appreciate a wider range of films old and new, and I began to see value in movies that I might have earlier dismissed as manipulative and sentimental. I still knew, though, that sentimentality was suspect, and my attempts to draw the line separating art from sentimental trash have generally floundered.

Sentimentality connotes an imbalance between the heart and the head, a tendency for ones emotional responses to overwhelm more cerebral responses and cloud perception or judgment. In literature, drama or cinema sentimentality is associated with the use of narrative techniques or rhetorical devices for the sole purpose of eliciting an emotional response, which seems to be an end in itself. With comedy laughter seems to justify whatever means are used to elicit it. One view of entertainment holds that the same is true for emotion. Anything that provokes emotion is justified in direct proportion to the strength of the emotion, although some discretion must be exercised in the choice of emotion. The theoretical basis for this kind of aesthetic would seem to be the idea that most people lead such boring, depressing lives that they will buy a ticket in order to experience some kind of emotion. This is why sentimentality is associated with cynically manipulative narratives at least in the minds of those who feel the arts serve a higher purpose than a roller coaster.

When I start to analyze my own sentimentality I tend to recall three watershed moments associated with my work. The first was a moment when I was working on a montage of clips from Chaplin's films to be used on the Academy Awards. I was winding through a 16mm print of *City Lights* in search of a clip from the ending that was on the list of things I was supposed to use. I had never seen *City Lights*, and I was viewing it on a very small viewer at about two or three times normal speed. When I found and viewed the scene where the flower girl realizes who Charlie is tears welled up in my eyes. I was amazed by the power of Chaplin's film, and it seemed to me that he took sentimentality to the sublime in this scene.

I felt the same way about *Limelight* when I saw it, and the second moment I recall was also in an editing room when I was making a documentary on Chaplin's life. I cut to some home movies of Charlie and Oona with their infant children on a lawn after part of the scene from *Limelight* in

which the Claire Bloom character realizes she can walk again. There is an overwhelming music cue in the scene, which I let play over the home movies. The result to my mind was absolute magic, and I laughed out loud because I was so exhilarated to have hit on this moment. I knew that it would have a very powerful emotional impact on some viewers as it did on me, but I was also aware at the time of thrill of being able to make something that was going to affect others. I later bristled when I read one description of my documentary as "slick and manipulative" because I also felt it was operating on a deeper level, but I was gratified when someone who had been skeptical that a documentary about Chaplin could make them cry confessed that it had.

The third moment that comes to mind in connection with my own sentimentality is of a completely different sort. In my forties I received what I felt was a devastating blow in my career, and I recall doing three things in the aftermath. The first was to listen to one of the slow movements of a Mahler symphony and let it flush all the tears out of my system. The second was to look up and read Macbeth's soliloquy "Tomorrow and tomorrow and tomorrow…" and the third was to find and read T.S. Eliot's "Ash Wednesday." The point of this is that I turned to certain bits of artistic creation for some kind of catharsis or consolation in a moment of extreme emotion. This is the flip side of wanting art to provide or provoke emotion, and it seems to me to offer better access to what the point of art may be. It also connects with the desire that I have felt to create some kind of tangible expression of the amorphous feeling constituting what I felt was most "real" in my consciousness or experience.

This is not the place to develop or adopt a comprehensive theory of art, but I will say that I find the ideas developed by Susanne Langer in *Philosophy in a New Key, Feeling and Form, and Mind: An Essay on Human Feeling* to be the most promising starting point for such a theory. I suspect that if would be very difficult to formulate anything but the most general kind of theory that did justice to all the different ways in which movies work on viewers and all the reasons the experience of viewing movies is valued by viewers. Even more difficult is the task of justifying judgments about how or why one movie is better than another. I do think, however, that my response to Figgis's film stems from the fact that the film is a well-constructed analog of a type of experience that has profoundly colored or shaped my life. Identifying with Andrew Crocker-Harris is, of course, the key to a connection with the film, but it is developed and enhanced by visual, musical and conceptual themes woven together in the film.

Paradoxically the fact that I love Mike Figgis's *The Browning Version* does not mean that I can unhesitatingly declare it to be a "great" movie. I do not think it is on a par with *Contempt*, and I know perfectly well that it works for me in ways that it does not work for other people, many of whom share most of my taste in movies. This is

only to say that there is a very large personal component in my response to *The Browning Version*, ranging all the way from a mild case of anglophilia, especially with regard to English academic traditions, to a lifetime of frustration which expresses itself as a sense of failure.

My favorite critical comment on the film is Terrence Rafferty's New Yorker review in which he says:

> It would be easy to make fun of "The Browning Version," to ridicule both the movie's old-fashioned well-made-play construction – the hero's humiliations click into place with almost unseemly efficiency – and the nearly self- parodic Englishness of the conception: only a British playwright, one feels, would try to bring down the house with a ringing speech about failure. … But, outdated as the piece may seem, the new movie is strong and affecting – perhaps because neither the director nor the star has worked with this sort of material before, so neither has the luxury of treating "The Browning Version" as business as usual.[26]

Rafferty admires mainly Finney's performance, which he sees as uncharacteristically restrained and "all in his eyes." He seems to credit Figgis mainly with letting Finney perform and with using the camera in such as way as to catch "every flickering change in his expression." He concludes:

> The best thing about this performance is that Finney, by venturing outside his normal range as an artist, seems to transcend the rather narrow, fragile pathos of Rattigan's drama. This "Browning Version" isn't just an exercise in wistful resignation, a midlife elegy for dashed hopes. Finney's heroic acting proves that it's never too late to reinvent yourself.

Two things strike me about the difference between Rafferty's enthusiasm for the film and my own. First, it is very rare that I find an actor's performance the main reason I like a movie. I can appreciate a good performance, but if I really like a movie it is because a performance is part of a whole in some way. The thrill is not just the enjoyment of a virtuoso performance. One of the reasons I can sometimes enjoy seeing even mediocre movies repeatedly is often the pleasure of watching a performance, and there are times when I might say that the pleasure of seeing a particular performance is the only reason to watch a movie that I think is silly or otherwise unengaging. Nonetheless enjoying an actor's performance for its own sake is for me very different from responding to the film as whole. To some extent this may be because I am not all that attuned to the art of acting. Rafferty seems to be able to appreciate Finney's performance in a way that goes well beyond the kind of enjoyment I can get watching a certain shtick or even a finely observed creation of

---

26 New Yorker Oct 31, 1994

a character. It is as though for Rafferty the actor's performance is itself a work of art. The closest I can come to understanding this is a musical comparison. Maurice Andre could do things with a trumpet that completely transformed the pieces he was playing. The line separating the beauty of the performance from the beauty of the composition becomes blurred. Perhaps his artistry is fully revealing the beauty of the composition, in which case it is not the same as what Rafferty seems to be celebrating. The material from which Finney is creating his work is not the Rattigan drama or Harwood screenplay, it is his own life and career and persona. Rafferty may have just found a neat metaphor with which to wrap up his review by relating Finney's performance to the theme of the movie itself: Finney reinvented his acting persona in the way that Andrew-Crocker Harris attempts to reinvent himself in terms of his career and marriage. It may also be that there is a cultural dimension to movies that involves the iconographic status of actors to which I am relatively indifferent.

The second, and to my mind more important, difference in Rafferty's response to the movie is his assessment of the original material in terms of its "rather narrow, fragile pathos" or as "an exercise in wistful resignation, a midlife elegy for dashed hopes." I do not doubt for a minute that this may be an assessment shared by many others, but I personally do not think it does justice at least to the original play. Even if the earlier film took the material into this territory, I think perhaps Figgis deserves some credit for attempting to rescue it and take it somewhere else. Most of all, however, I feel that the original play was something much more substantial that this seems to suggest. There is no wistful resignation in the air as Andrew and Millie sit down to dinner at the end of the play. I am also hesitant to describe the play as elegiac, although I do not hesitate to describe one thematic element in Figgis's film or Isham's score as elegiac.

In Figgis's film the elegiac theme is resolved by or incorporated into a larger overriding theme to which Isham alludes with his "finding the courage to transcend." It is, as Rafferty implies, a theme of rebirth or reinvention. It is both a gift and a heroic reclaiming of self. It requires fortitude and inner strength, but it also requires openness to others despite the vulnerability that involves. Figgis seems to have moved the material away from its origins in Greek tragedy towards a Christian mythology in which it is possible to rise from the dead.

FRANK: A corpse can be revived.

ANDREW: I don't believe in miracles.

This theme is present in the play but Figgis brings it more to the fore.

Perhaps he just makes it more facile or sentimentalizes it. I am not sure how to evaluate this issue. I certainly respond to it emotionally rather than cerebrally, and I know that it is appealing to

deep-seated fantasies. It may be offering me encouragement, or it may just be allowing me to wallow in wish fulfillment. It may clarify my perspective on one aspect of my life by allowing me to feel it in ways I normally avoid or am unable to access.

Contempt

Moravia's Novel

Alberto Moravia was born Alberto Pincherle in Rome in 1907. His father, Carlo Pincherle, an architect and a painter, was Jewish; his mother Catholic. His aunt, Amelia Pincherle Rosselli, was a writer of plays and children's stories, and Alberto knew at a very early age that he wanted to be a writer.

> It was always my ambition to write. Just as certain religious figures are said to have had, from childhood, a religious vocation.[1]

He published his first novel, *Gli indifferenti* (*Time of Indifference*) at the age of 22 and later found that he had written an outline for it when he was 9.[2] Aside from the influence of relatives and the society in which he was raised, two things may have influenced his desire to write. One was simply that he was, as he put it, "oversensitive."

> I was a healthy baby, and my family was normal. I was the abnormal one, if anything. Abnormal because I was oversensitive. I don't believe everyone is sensitive in the same way. There are dull, stupid, insensitive children. There are others who are very sensitive, oversensitive. The oversensitive ones can become misfits, but they can also become artists.[3]
>
> I have an abnormal sensitivity, like all artists. This abnormal sensitivity would have overwhelmed me, driven me mad, in other words, if I hadn't had the ability to express it. The expression of sensitivity is extremely complex, because it isn't guided by reason, that faculty I love so much, because I don't possess much of it; but I have intuitive willpower. In fact, at heart I am not a rationalist; I am a person who suffers anguish, irreality, a sense of void. Or rather, it isn't exactly suffering: it would be more correct to say that there is never a moment when I don't feel within myself an attraction toward the extremes of imbalance.[4]

He was also ill in a way that confined him to bed and even separated him from his family for extended periods when he was young. At the age of 8 he developed a problem with his hip, which he describes as tuberculosis of the bone or coxitis. He was confined to bed for months at a time and the relapses became progressively worse until he was sent to a sanatorium for a year at the age of 16.

> [I]n the sanatorium I was always alone. One day I flung my breakfast tray on the floor. I was like a mad dog. The doctor, when he heard about it, said I was schizoid. In the end I somehow grew fond of the bed and the illness. Isn't that odd? Later, when I was cured and returned to Rome, every now and then I would go to bed. All this lasted two or three years, even longer. I remember one day I said to my father, "I'm not well, I feel the

1 Moravia *Life* 21

2 Moravia *Life* p. 21

3 Moravia *Life* 1

4 Moravia *Life* 126

> tuberculosis is coming back." I was homesick for the illness. I was psychologically ill for many years after I was healthy. I regained the mental health I had enjoyed before the illness only very late, and naturally it wasn't the same health, ingenuous and innocent: it was something less one-dimensional and more complicated.[5]

He later speculated that there was a psychosomatic component in his illness, but the suffering was real and the isolation associated with it must surely have contributed to his sensitivity as a writer. He also spent much of his time reading and attempting to write. The main influence on his writing and even his conception of himself was Dostoevsky.

> …Dostoyevsky was in a sense the creator of existentialism: he took the relationship between the individual and society, as it had been in Balzac, Flaubert, Dickens, Tolstoy, and so on, and replaced it with the relationship between the individual and himself. *Crime and Punishment* isn't the story of an ambitious man who fails, as in *Le rouge et le noir* of Stendhal; it's the story of a man who has killed and feels remorse, and remorse is entirely interior, between a man and his self. I was born to literature at that historical moment. Besides Dostoyevsky I was greatly influenced by the surrealists. I was very sensitive to the discoveries of the surrealists about dreams and the unconscious as sources of inspiration. In reality, my avant-garde was surrealism. And this explains why my novels, even today, are distinguished by an ambiguity: they are realistic, but at the same time symbolic. Somewhat like the surrealists. It's something I have in common with a whole generation, the generation of Buñuel,say, who was exactly my age. I pick Buñuel because he is the filmmaker with whom I feel the greatest affinity. [6]

When he was released from the sanatorium, he refused to return to school. This is not to say he was uneducated by any stretch of the imagination. He read voraciously all his life and was clearly an "intellectual" in the grand European tradition. His father supported him in his efforts to write and even put up the money to publish his first novel.

He changed his name to Alberto Moravia. After the Fascists enacted anti-Semetic laws, his mother had changed the children's name to Piccinini, the surname of her grandmother. The choice of Moravia for his pen name seems to have been inspired by the ancient Moravian origins of his mother's family.

Gli indifferenti was a huge critical success and is considered by many to be the first Existentialist novel. After an initial printing of 1000 copies sold out, the publisher printing another 4000, only to

5 Moravia *Life* p 22f

6 Moravia *Life* p 41f

have them confiscated by the government. This experience combined with Moravia's natural rejection of conformity and of his family's bourgeois values, shaped his Anti-Fascist political views.

The success of his first novel did not provide Moravia with financial independence, but it assured him of a career as a writer and gave him access to literary society in England and France as well as Italy. Moravia worked as a journalist, translator, and film critic and wrote 16 more novels as well as numerous short stories, essays, plays and screenplays.

He married Elsa Morante when he was 33. She was also a writer and the marriage lasted 22 years. Towards the end of the Second World War his political views resulted in an order for him to be arrested. He and Elsa spent nine months hiding in the mountains.

He was elected as a representative to the European Parliament in 1984, and he was always a public figure; but he did not think of his life in terms of public history:

> [T]o me years are not public, they're private. And in general my years are marked by the presence of a woman. The years of the war and the immediate postwar were characterized by the presence of Elsa Morante. When Elsa Morante went, Dacia Maraini arrived. When Dacia Maraini went, Carmen Liera arrived. These are my years. The fact that Mao assumes power in China, that the state of Israel is born, certainly interests me very much, but not as much as my private events. This is a general thing, it applies to everybody, absolutely everybody, because life is private, not public. We can't get away from this. Life is so private, in fact, that for politicians, who are public individuals, politics is a private fact.[7]

The focus of most of his writing is individual relationships, and he is often associated with a ruthless exploration of love, sex and alienation. Boredom or *ennui* is a recurring theme in Moravia's novels as well as in his descriptions of his own life:

> In reality the boredom described in the novel of the same name (*La noia),* like the indifference of *Gli indifferenti,* stood always to indicate that anguish of living that I am convinced is the foundation of the existentialist current to which I know I beliong and from which, I believe, the contemporary novel is to a great extent derived. Having said this, I would only add that boredom is not a new subject in modern literature from the nineteenth century to today. You have only to remember the famous pages of Schopenhauer, not to mention the "spleen" of the decadents. Perhaps there was something new to be found, as I felt I did in my novel – in discovering noia, ennui, boredom, also in language and therefore in the impossibility of establishing through lan-

7 Moravia *Life* p 204

> guaage, any relationship with reality. I owe this new aspsect in part to my reading at the time of the works of Wittgenstein, which however acted on my more as analogical stimuli than as a direct philosoophical influence.[8]

Ross and Freed view Moravia as an Existentialist on a par with Sartre, Camus and Kazantzakis and are able to see major existentialist themes running through all of his fiction, even though they felt he might balk at the label. They agree, of course, that he was first and foremost a storyteller.

Moravia also wrote for the theater and cinema, and he described his novels as "plays disguised as novels: few characters, unity of time and place, little analysis, much synthesis, that is to say, action."9 His novels may have a surreal mood infusing a completely realistic setting and story – perhaps like some of the cityscapes of de Chirico – but he was at heart a realistic storyteller. His writing strives for clarity and precision in the description of the action of the story.

His comments on the difference between a poet and a novelist are a good indication of how he viewed his writing:

> [T]he poet is concerned with himself, the novelist is concerned with others. Two truisms. Another truism is that poems are short and novels are long. Final truism: poems cannot be translated, novels can be. This implies how writing is fundamental in poetry, less important in the novel. I would say this: the writing of the novel can range from a maximum of personal language to a maximum of impersonality, but it must always be objective and communicative. The language of poetry, on the contrary, is very personal; it records all the shifts of the person's character, like a seismograph, and it is not necessarily communicative. Why, after all, is poetry often avant-garde, while the novel rarely is? Because the poet is not competing with reality. What do I mean? This: the poet's reality is himself, there is no other reality. This explains why every poet is in the avant-garde with respect to the poet that preceded him. For example, Baudelaire is avant-garde compared to Victor Hugo, but Rimbaud is avant-garde with respect to Baudelaire, and Mallarmé with respect to Rimbaud. In the case of novels, on the other hand, if you take a novelist like Tolstoy and you take me, the difference as far as reality is concerned is minimal; for Tolstoy a tree is a tree, as it is also for me. Thus Tolstoy can be translated, as I can be translated. Poetry cannot be translated; all those who translate poetry deceive themselves and are in error. Poetry can be recreated, true: a poet who translates another poet is in reality writing a new poem. In short, the writing of the novelist cannot help but take into account an objective reality that limits it and is reflected in it,

---

8 Moravia *Life* p. 232

9 Moravia *Life* p.34

> whereas the poet can ignore it. Furthermore, the novel is based less on its writing than on ghosts or structures that are not so much "written" as "presented" in the form of what Joyce call "epiphanies," apparitions. What, then, is the ghostly texture? It is situations and characters. Before he is "written," the character "appears," like a ghost, in fact. As for the situation, it is the relationship among the various ghosts.[10]

He elaborated on his notion of the epiphanies when asked to explain how his artistic process happened:

> I can tell you in two words. It doesn't proceed via the head; it occurs through successive illuminations. The artist is always assisted by a demon, and it is this demon that illuminates him. In short, everything I've written that is any good I received through illumination. It comes to me rather easily. I am illuminated. "I am illuminated by immensity," as Ungaretti's poem says. I am illuminated by the thing I am writing. Without illuminations, no writing, no books. Now, what is illumination? It's what Joyce called epiphany. Joyce was fond of this word "epiphany"; I prefer "illumination," which is Rimbaud's favorite term. What is illumination? I'll come to a perhaps even more interesting point, which is entirely mine, because no one else would say it. Illumination is this: a rational operation of dizzying speed. If you have a fan at home, and you turn it on, at a certain point you won't see the blades anymore, you'll see something like a blur. Now, illumination in reality is a fantastic acceleration of rationality. And this is so true that the critics, when they examine something really beautiful, have to dismantle and analyze piece by piece the dazzling and rational mechanism of illumination. If this weren't so, it wouldn't be possible to criticize a work of art.[11]

He viewed his writing as a kind of therapeutic self-examination. It was connected in his mind with his recovery from the illness of his childhood. When Elkann suggested to him that "the really great effort of your life was not writing but the mastering of yourself after the illness, in the sense of making yourself take a place in society," Moravia replied, "It wasn't just the mastering of myself, but also the recovery of health, which is the same thing. The recovery, I mean, of moral health. Because I had a psychosomatic illness; tuberculosis is a psychosomatic illness."[12] Elkann goes on to question whether Moravia every wanted to be psychoanalyzed to which Moravia replies:

> No. If anything I would say that I write books and my books are my dreams, but I possess the key to them. *Gli indifferenti,* for example, isn't a story about my family, it's a

10 Moravia *Life* p. 122f

11 Moravia *Life* p. 127

12 Moravia *Life* p. 128

kind of dream that reflects the intolerability of family life as I had experienced. It. The basic experience of the novelist is always autobiographical; the writer doesn't talk about things he doesn't know.[13]

Despite his bourgeois roots much of Moravia's fiction is concerned with the lower classes, and he was adamant about his own experiences with poverty:

> There is a legend current in Italy that I've always been well-off. It's not true: until the publication of *La romana* [in 1948] I was without possessions, absolutely, and after the war I came to know poverty in the real sense of the word. This was the situation; otherwise the *Raconti romani* and *La ciociara* would be incomprehensible, because they are descriptions of poor people, of poverty. I'm not a writer who writes only about the middle classes; I have known the working class intimately. I want this to be quite clear. I'm annoyed with Italian writers and critics who say I'm only a rich, prosperous bourgeois. Besides being false, this idea prevent an understanding of a part of my work that is totally concerned with the poor.[14]

The subject matter of *Il disprezzo (Contempt)* is directly related to two aspects of Moravia's own experience: his work as a screenwriter and his relationship with his wife. Obviously he was not Riccardo Molteni, the narrator of the novel; but he does know whereof he speaks when he explores the process of writing for films. Cinema was one of the loves of his childhood. "As a boy I would see even two movies a day. It's my favorite art, after literature and painting. Cinema and painting have a great influence in my fiction because I live very much through my eyes."[15]

In 1939 he worked with Visconti on the screenplay for *Ossesione*, but he said that only one word he contributed to the dialog ended up in the final script. From 1940 to 1945 worked as a screenwriter on a handful of films, some of which involved as many as five other writers. About the same time his novel, *La mascherata*, which was a satire on Fascism, had been confiscated by the government after its publication, and his experiences as a screenwriter were not altogether pleasant.

> *How did you find writing scripts?*
> Fine. But it had two annoying aspects. First of all, it wrecked your life. You would sit for hours and hours with the other writers, smoking, drinking coffee, now and then telling obscene or anti-Fascist jokes. A constant tug-of-war. Even now many do it, but the process has changed somewhat, it's become more rational. And second, I always had the sensation that I was giving something precious, for money, to someone who would exploit it for his

13 Moravia *Life* p. 128

14 Moravia *Life* p. 159

15 Moravia *Life* p. 149

> own ends. I've defined the scriptwriter as a kind of governess. He raises the children, then he's dismissed, and the child remains with its mother. The scriptwriter, that is, gives himself totally to the script, but the director's name is on the movie.[16]

After the war he says he only wrote two screenplays, but he seems to have been brought in as a writer from time to time on more films than he wanted to remember, including David Selznick's disastrous production of *Indiscretion of an American Wife* in 1952. Bertolucci even hired him to write dialog for the scene in *Last Tango In Paris* in which Jean-Pierre Leaud interviews Maria Schneider about marriage.

Il disprezzo was published in 1954 during what Tim Parks labels Moravia's "middle period." He wrote it after *Il conformista* (1951) and before *La ciociara* (1957), the novel based on his experiences while hiding in the mountains during the last months of the war. *La ciociara* (*Two Women*) was adapted as a film by Vittorio De Sica and starring Sophia Loren and Jean Paul Belmondo in 1960. *Il conformista* (*The Conformist*) was, of course, adapted by Bertolucci in 1970.

Moravia describes the origins of the *Il disprezzo* in terms of his relationship with Elsa:

Did you fall in love with Elsa immediately?

I was never *in love* with Elsa. I loved her, yes, but I never *man*aged to lose my head: I never fell, in other words. She always knew this, and it was perhaps also the chief reason for the difficulties of our life together. I wasn't in love, but I was fascinated by an extreme, heart-rending, passionate quality in her character. It was as if every day of her life were the last, just before her death. So, in an atmosphere of impassioned aggressiveness on her part and defensive affection on mine, we lived together for twenty-five years. You may ask: Why defensive? I will answer with a contradiction:

Because Elsa tried to annihilate me and, at the same time, through excess passion, she annihilated herself.

You told me you had written Ii disprezzo *in an excess of irritation with Elsa?*

Yes, there were days when I would have liked to kill her. Not just separate from her, which would have been a rational solution, but kill her, because our relationship was so close, so complex, and finally, so alive that crime seemed to me easier than separation.

Why did you want to kill her? What had happened?

Absolutely nothing new had happened, but at certain moments I couldn't stand it any longer.

You couldn't stand her character any longer?

She had been too cruel, practically sadistic. If you read carefully *La storia*, this cruelty

---

16 Moravia *Life* p. 150

Alberto Moravia with Elsa Morante at Capri in 1948.

> strangely combined with her creatural and pre-moral pity, will seem obvious to you. For that matter, pity and cruelty are only two aspects of a relationship with reality more physiological than intellectual. In any case, the idea of killing her was transferred almost immediately into a novel, *Il disprezzo*. In the first outline of this novel the protagonist, reacting against his wife's unjust attitude toward him, was to plot and carry out her murder. But this idea of a crime faded as the novel was written. The wife dies in an accident; the protagonist of the novel I actually wrote no longer has anything to do with the character I had thought of at the very beginning.[17]

In another context Moravia elaborated on the way in which is idea for a novel evolved as he wrote it:

> When I write, as I've said, I always start out from individual situations. For example, I write a story about a man who loves a woman, or doesn't love her. What he feels. This is an existential start. I start with existence; then, without willing it, going deeper into the story, I arrive at its meaning. In humbler terms we could say that I tell of an event in life and then, as I depict it, I arrive at the culture. Culture today means Freud, Marx, Nietzsche, perhaps Wittgenstein, perhaps Heidegger, and so on. But artists have always behaved like

17 Moravia *Life* p. 215

this: they told stories that in the end proved homologous with the culture of the time.[18]

So starting with his very personal reactions to some aspects of his relationship with his wife and to some aspects of his experience as a screenwriter, Moravia developed a story which acquired resonances beyond his own experiences. Looking back after he finished a novel he is able to view it as a critic and see the cultural themes that constitute its "meaning." He did not start out with abstract ideas he wanted to express, but his sensitivity and the scope of his education and intellect inevitably shaped the story to express a perspective on larger cultural or philosophical issues.

It is not too difficult in retrospect to imagine a process by which his imagination began with the agony he felt in his marriage and the frustrations he experienced as a screenwriter and found a way to tie them together in a story which also tapped into much wider concerns. The critical moment would be the realization that he could use the *Odyssey* to tie the two stories together and to provide a frame of reference for the underlying concerns. The simple device of having the narrator be a screenwriter hired to work on an adaptation of the *Odyssey* opens the door not only to a mythic framework for exploring the relationship between the screenwriter and his wife but also to a context for explicit discussion of cultural issues. It may have also provided a model for structuring the novel.

---

18 Moravia *Life* p. 232

Another literary reference which may have been in the back of Moravia's mind as he wrote *Il disprezzo* is Dostoevsky's *Notes From Underground*. Moravia said nothing to indicate that it was, but given the influence that Dosteovsky had on him it seems appropriate at least to regard Riccardo Molteni as a distant literary descendant of the narrator of *Notes From Underground*.

A claim might be made that there is only one character in *Il disprezzo*. Like "The Tell-Tale Heart," *Il disprezzo* is trapped inside the mind of its deluded and self-destructive narrator. There are other characters, of course; but everything we know about them is filtered through Molteni's somewhat suspect view of things.

The narrator is Riccardo Molteni, a 27-year-old film critic and an aspiring playwright who after two years of marriage takes work as a screenwriter in order to earn money to pay for a new apartment.

His wife, Emilia, is a beautiful woman who began working as a secretary at 16. She is from a "good" but impoverished family

Battista is a successful Italian film producer who hires Molteni first to work on a comedy and then to write an adaptation of the *Odyssey*.

Rheingold is an older German director whom Battista has engaged for the *Odyssey*.

Gino Pasetti is the director of the first film Molteni wrote for Battista and Luisa is his wife.

Other peripheral characters include a typist who worked briefly for Molteni, Emilia's mother, the Pasetti's daughter, a maid at Battista's villa in Capri, and an attendant at a boat rental concession at the marina.

The novel consists of 23 chapters. The first half of the story takes place in the fall in Rome and the second half in late spring in Capri (or on the way there from Rome). Both halves of the story begin with a car ride in which Emilia is persuaded to ride with Battista.

The novel can perhaps also be divided symmetrically in to three "acts." The first seven chapters deal with events leading up to the job as a writer on the *Odyssey*. The middle nine chapters develop the connections with the *Odyssey* and culminate in the moment when Molteni realizes Emila has locked him out of the bedroom. The final seven chapters chronicle the unraveling of everything leaving Molteni alone with his story to tell.

Chptr	Page	Description
1	3	"I'll follow in a taxi."
2	9	When and how relations began to deteriorte
3	15	Leasing the flat and becoming a Communist
4	25	Sleeping in the other room
5	37	Job of the script-writer
6	45	Lunch with Pasetti
7	59	Finding Emilia at home, lying to mother, call from Battista
8	73	Battista, Rheingold, Odyssey, Kissing the typist
9	97	Discussing Odyssey and typist with Emilia
10	111	Going out to dinner
11	125	Emilia leaving, plans for Capri
12	135	Driving to Naples with Rheingold, Emilia & Battista at beach
13	151	Battista's villa, "It's I who pay!"
14	159	On the terrace, Petrarch, Battista kisses Emilia
15	167	Dinner with Emilia & Battista, Battista's secret of success
16	175	Wants Emilia to decide, locked door
17	183	Breakfast with Rheingold, think it over
18	193	Walk, Emilia sunbathing, dream kiss
19	203	Debate with Rheingold in bar, Joyce, Dante, decision to quit
20	213	Emilia plans dinner, you don't behave like a man
21	225	Sleeping through dinner, sitting on terrace, sleeping medicine

Chptr	Page	Description
22	235	Note from Emilia, Piccola Marina, boat with Emilia, Grotto
23	245	Return to villa, news of accident, decision to write

The entire story is of course told in retrospect, but the initial portion also involves a movement back and forth in time. The story starts at the precise moment when Molteni met Battista and is given the opportunity to work as a screenwriter and then gradually fills in the background events leading up to this moment. As a result the exact timeline of the events recounted in the first half of the book is not immediately clear and can only be reconstructed in hindsight.

Very little is learned about Molteni's own background. We know nothing of his own family or even his education except that he sees himself as an intellectual destined to write for the theater. We only learn his age in chapter 15 and we don't even learn his name until chapter six. He does imply that he had other relationships with women before his marriage (No other woman he had slept with ever complained about his snoring.), but we learn nothing about them.

The selective revelation of background events is, of course, symptomatic of the distortions of Molteni's mind and of his attempts to justify himself in the telling of the story. Occasionally he lets things slip which reveal that previous descriptions of an event are not the whole story. One of the things that he reveals inadvertently is that this reticence regarding the full truth also seems to characterize his relationships with others. For example his wife did not know until after they were engaged that he could not afford any kind of home for them except a room in a lodging house.

The precise timeline of the events involved in his story is obviously less important than the way in which he reveals and comments on the events. It may be helpful, though, as a tool for evaluating some of the things he says.

Date or Time	Event
Unspecified	Riccardo and Emilia engaged
Shortly after engaged	Emilia weeps when he confesses her he cannot provide a home of their own
Unspecified	They marry and live in a furnished room in a lodging-house. He works as a film critic and tries to save money.
Two years after marriage	Riccardo purchases the lease on a flat in a new building using his savings and a loan
Unspecified	They inspect the unfurnished flat and make love on the floor
Unspecified	Riccardo joins the Communist party

Date or Time	Event
Couple of months after purchase	They move into the flat. She wants to sleep separately.
Next day (First Monday in October)	Meets Battista and offered screenwriting job
That evening	Emilia goes with Battista. Riccardo takes a cab and is late.
A few days later	They make love, but still sleep separately
Unclear	Dictating script to typist at home. Kisses her. Emilia sees.
Two months after signing to write first script.	Becomes disenchanted with screenwriting while writing a second script for another producer.
Unspecified	Battista mentions possible second, more important script before he has finished the first.
Unspecified	Finishes first script for Battista and has lunch with the Pasetti
That evening	Tests Emilia's story about lunch with her mother.
Next afternoon	Appointment with Battista. Meets Rheingold. Discuss Capri and Odyssey. Signs contract.

Date or Time	Event
That evening	Tells Emilia about Odyssey script. She says she does not love him any more. He insists on dining out. He drinks too much and makes a pass at her
Next Morning	She plans to move back to her mother's. He suggests she come to Capri. (Rheingold goes to Paris)
Ten days after meeting w Battista	Rheingold returns from Paris
Beginning of June	They leave for Capri. Riccardo rides with Rheingold. Emilia with Battista.
Same Day	Stop at beach. Lunch in Naples. Walk to Villa.
That evening	Riccardo on terrace sees Battista kiss Emilia. The three dine together. Emilia locks him out of her bedroom.
Next morning	Breakfast with Rheingold. Discuss Odyssey for an hour.
Later that morning	Riccardo walks along coast. Emilia sunbathing. He dreams of kiss. He tells her he saw Battista kiss her.

Date or Time	Event
Same day	Emilia and Riccardo have lunch together. Battista lunches with Rheingold.
After lunch	Emilia retires and Riccardo starts to doze off but jumps up to go tell Rheingold his decision not to write.
Half an hour later	Riccardo meets with Rheingold in the hotel bar. They argue. He recites Dante.
Same afternoon	Riccardo returns to villa. Looks around Emilia's room; hears her giving instructions to cook. He tells he his plan to leave in the morning; they argue. He says he will stay.
6:00 PM	Riccardo locks himself in his room and takes a nap.
~8:00 PM	Battista & Emilia go out to eat
9:00 PM	Riccardo wakes up, gets message from maid, eats alone at villa, sits on terrace, retreats to his room when he hears Emilia & Battista coming, takes sleeping pills and falls asleep.
Next morning	Emilia & Battista leave for Rome
Later that morning	Riccardo wakes up, finds letter, walks to piazza, reads newspaper
Midday	Takes bus to marina, rents boat, hallucinates afternoon with Emilia, rows into grotto, faints
Afternoon	Car accident in which Emilia dies
Afternoon	Riccardo returns to villa, receives telegram, goes to Naples, learns of Emilia's death.
Unspecified	Emilia's funeral
That evening	Riccardo returns to apartment
Next day	Returns to Capri
Unspecified	Visits beach below villa, decides to write the story.

Two things emerge from this attempt to unravel a consistent timeline for the events underlying the story. The first is the trivial issue of when Riccardo worked at his second screenwriting job for the other producer. The narrator makes it clear that the job Battista offers him on the first Monday in October is his first screenwriting job. He says that his disenchantment with screenwriting developed during his second job for a different

producer at a point two months after he signed the initial contract with Battista. So far as I can tell there may be a contradiction between the timeline of events associated with his two jobs for Battista and the description of his second job for another producer, unless he worked on both scripts simultaneously at some point. The completion of the first script with Pasetti is tied to the meeting with Battista and Rheingold the next afternoon. At the meeting it is agreed that they will all depart for Capri when Rheingold returns from Paris in ten days. By the time they depart for Capri it is June.

The other more significant thing that struck me as I unraveled the timeline for the story is the fact that Emilia announces she wants to sleep separately the day before Riccardo encourages her to ride with Battista after their initial dinner meeting. The attentive reader may well realize this immediately as he reads the fourth chapter, but I confess I did not. In any event the novel is set up to delay this realization as an indication of the narrator's own obtuseness about his marriage. The story starts with the description of the ride from the restaurant to Battista's house, and the narrator himself encourages the reader to see the event as having pivotal significance in the deterioration of his marriage. The reader in all likelihood will immediately sense that Riccardo's version of the events is suspect, but the first direction one is encouraged to explore is the possibility that Riccardo is offering his wife to Battista as a means of securing his own career advancement. This is made more explicit in the second half of the book in connection with Rheingold's interpretation of the Odyssey. If the reader began by knowing that Emilia had refused to sleep in the same bed as her husband the night before, it is very likely that one's initial reaction to Riccardo's description of the evening with Battista would be different. This is just one example of the quicksand of Riccardo's narration of the events of his life.

Obviously what matters most is Riccardo's experience of the events or his interpretation of them rather than some objective description; but part of what the reader is being asked to do is evaluate Riccardo's interpretation and to see how his interpretation is colored by his own demons.

The opening paragraph of the novel immediately sends up red flags. He begins by saying that during the first two years of his marriage his relations with his wife were perfect. I may be more skeptical than normal, but I am suspicious of anyone who starts by telling me his marriage is, or ever was, "perfect." He concludes the paragraph by saying, "This story sets out to relate how, while I continued to love her and not to judge her, Emilia, on the other hand, discovered, or thought she discovered, certain defects in me, and judged me and in consequence ceased to love me." Already the account reeks of self-justification and self-deception. My initial reaction was to laugh at the way he was giving himself away, and my first reading of the book found it darkly humorous because of this maddening characteristic of the narrator. On a second reading, however, the laughter

was dampened by having the witness again the excruciating way in which his obtuseness seems to destroy his wife's love for him.

He is clearly right that Emilia did love him, but came to despise him. At no point, however, does he ever develop a convincing explanation of how or why this happened. As a reader one may or may not feel that one understands Emilia, but one clearly sees that Riccardo does not. Their marriage may have been doomed from the start given what Riccardo gradually reveals about his attitude towards Emilia.

Some readers may react strongly to what can be perceived as "male chauvinism" in Riccardo. I personally do not think this is a helpful characterization of his attitude towards her and casting the relationship in terms of chauvinism typical of the Fifties runs the risk of missing the real point of the novel. Certainly Riccardo exhibits traits that warrant the label of male chauvinist, but ultimately I do not think the novel is about the need for feminist liberation. Some readers may interpret the novel as an indication that Moravia, himself, was chauvinistic or even misogynistic, but again I believe this misses the point. Aside from the obvious fact that Moravia ought not to be identified with the narrator of the novel, the real focus of the book is on the mind of Riccardo. The chauvinistic traits are symptomatic of a deeper issue in terms of how he interprets experience and relates to reality on the most basic level.

Riccardo professes unwavering love for Emilia and says that he does not judge her, but during the course of the story we see him almost strangle her in a fit of fury and contemplate killing her with a glass ashtray (109). He also describes her lack of education and sophistication condescendingly in a way that borders on contempt. He resents having to earn money to pay for the things he believes she needs to make her happy. He jumps to a conclusion that she is lying to him, and he does not hesitate to lie to her mother in order to test Emilia's veracity. He insists repeatedly that he only wants to hear the truth from her, but he cuts her off when she attempts to express something he fears. The most telling example of this is the moment when she agrees to accompany him to Capri under one condition, but he refuses violently to hear what that condition might be.

Riccardo's unwavering love for Emilia really seems to be more a desperate and even childish need to be loved by her. It is also clearly a sexual connection, the meaning of which may be ambiguous. The simplest explanation of their relationship may be that, for whatever reason, he found her sexually attractive (just as he found another typist sexually attractive) and she, for whatever reason, chose to devote herself to him. The combination of her devotion and the sexual attraction was potent enough for him to invest in her his need to be loved. This is certainly a volatile, but not uncommon, basis for a marriage.

I doubt that the reader is meant to understand fully why Emilia chose to devote herself to Riccardo. To cynically assume that she saw him as a meal ticket would be to take Riccardo's bait and fall into his own private hell. She may or may not have been attracted to him because she needed a provider to enable her to build her nest. This is certainly suggested by some of the behavior he attributes to her, but we have no reason to assume this is the whole truth. Whether Moravia believed one thing or the other about her may also be beside the point. All we have to go on is what Riccardo tells us about her.

What we have is a confession of an experience of a disastrous marriage. There are numerous clues indicating how unreliable the information may be, but there is not enough information to enable us to reconstruct an objectively verifiable version of the events. This is surely part of the point of the novel. It paints a picture of isolation and of a way it can be exacerbated by egotistical and willful behavior which is unconsciously motivated but cloaked in hyper-analytical, self-justifying thought. It presents self-consciousness as a kind of disease. Riccardo can not help himself. There are several moments when he has resolved to refrain from pushing Emilia only to blurt out the worst examples of his unrelenting questions and challenges designed to prove that what he fears most is in fact true.

Beneath Riccardo's need to be loved by Emilia there is an anxiety about his own identity, which seems to be fueled by self-loathing. His image of himself as "an intellectual, a man of culture, a writer for the theater" seems more of a desperate need for status than a genuine commitment. He claims he always had a great passion for "art" theater and was drawn to it by a natural vocation; but he never mentions any actual attempts to write for the theater. The main function of the self-image seems to be to bolster his own ego and to enable him to look down on his wife or on the commercial hacks he encounters in the film business. This is not to say he is not well-read or educated. He can recite Dante from memory and is familiar with Freud, Joyce and O'Neill as well as Homer and Petrarch.

His physical description of himself as "a young man whose thinness, short sight, nervousness, pallor and carelessness in dress all bore witness, in anticipation, of the literary glory for which I was destined" seems to read as a dead giveaway. And this is before the stress of his debt has caused him to alter his view of himself to that of "a poor devil who has been caught in a shabby, pathetic trap."[19]

Riccardo is probably a classic case study in "bad faith" as formulated by Sartre. He is completely at odds with the identity he has chosen or the identity he feels he has been given or forced into. He projects his anxiety onto the world at large, and ultimately the contempt Emilia ex-

19 Moravia p. 20

presses for him seems to be his own contempt for himself which he projects onto her and then pulls from her. The source of his investment in being loved by Emilia becomes apparent when he begins to realize that their sexual relationship is no longer what he had always thought it was:

> And now, as if my eyes had been at last opened to a fact which was clear and yet, till that moment, invisible, I was conscious that this communion might no longer exist between us, in fact, no longer did exist. And I, like a person who suddenly realizes he is hanging over an abyss, felt a kind of painful nausea at the thought that our intimacy had turned, for no reason at all, into estrangement, absence, separation.[20]

Later when Emilia tells him of her plan to leave him and return to her mother's, he gives another description of the terror induced by his condition:

> I do not remember at all what I did after she had spoken these words: or rather, I remember only a few sentences, a few movements. As though in the grip of some kind of delirium, I must have said and done things then of which I was not in the least conscious. I believe I went around and around the room with long strides, in my pajamas, my hair all untidy, at one moment beseeching Emilia not to leave me, at another, explaining my own position, and then simply addressing my remarks to the air, as if I had been alone. The *Odyssey* filmscript, the flat, the installments to be paid, my sacrificed theatrical ambitions, my love for Emilia, Battista, Rheingold, all the aspect of my life and all the people in it were jumbled up in my mouth, in a rapid, incoherent rush of words, like the little pieces of colored glass at the bottom of a kaleidoscope when a violent hand shakes it. But at the same time I felt that this kaleidoscope was nothing but a poor, illusory thing – simply, in fact, a few bits of colored glass with no order or design about them; and now the kaleidoscope was broken, and the pieces of glass lay scattered on the floor, under my eyes. I had at the same time a very precise feeling of abandonment and of fear of being abandoned, but beyond this feeling I could not go; it oppressed me and prevented me not merely from thinking, but almost from breathing. My whole self rebelled violently at the thought of the separation and of the loneliness that would follow; but I realized that, in spite of the sincerity of this feeling of rebellion, I was not speaking convincingly; on the contrary. And indeed every now and then there was a rent in the clouds of alarm and terror that enveloped me, and then I would see Emilia sitting on the divan, still in the same place, and calmly answering me: "Riccardo, do be sensible: it's the only thing for us to do now."[21]

20 Moravia p. 30

21 Moravia p. 128

In addition to being a wonderful example of the power of Moravia's prose, this passage sums up what has been building throughout the first half of the novel. Riccardo has, largely through inadvertent revelation, peeled away the layers of his self-deception so that we can see the isolated and desperate individual that he is. In the course of the events he has been describing, he accomplished the moral equivalent of this process. Despite his professed desires he did everything in his power to alienate Emilia in a way that forced him to confront his own need for validation through her love. The second half of the novel is an exploration of the meaning of this process. To the reader it seems clear at this point that the marriage is over.

There is another theme which has been developed during the first half of the novel which may be particularly relevant to Godard's interest in the novel. At one point Riccardo describes Emilia's willingness to make love with him as the willingness of a prostitute to accommodate her client.[22] He also describes his work as a screenwriter in terms which also conjure up the image of prostitution:

> Working together on a script means living together from morning to night, it means the marriage and fusion of one's own intelligence, one's own sensibility, one's own spirit, with those of the other collaborators; it means, in short, the creation, during the two or three months that the work lasts, of a fictitious, artificial intimacy whose only purpose is the making of the film, and thereby, in a last analysis (as I have already mentioned), the making of money. [23]

There can be little doubt that Moravia shared Riccardo's perspective on screenwriting. Riccardo's image of the screenwriter as the governess who raises children only to have them taken away is one Moravia himself used to describe his own feelings. One of the beauties of irony in a novel is that the author can have his cake and eat it too. The existential angst, terror of abandonment, violent frustration and even self-loathing that Riccardo experiences were obviously not unknown to Moravia, but clearly he is not to be identified with Riccardo. And Riccardo is not without some redeeming or even sympathetic qualities. His insights are often legitimate even though they may quickly get distorted by his desperation.

Riccardo himself connects the dissatisfaction in his work with the deterioration of his marriage. He says essentially that he would be happy to prostitute his talent if he felt that the money was providing him with the means to be happy with Emilia. In truth it seems that he resents having to prostitute himself to earn money to pay for an apartment. At the very least one can assume that given his image of himself as an artist and intellectual he would have eventually rebelled against

22 Moravia p. 35

23 Moravia p. 40f

the prostitution of his talent. He expresses ambivalence about his natural gift for solving the problems in a screenplay because he feels he is being exploited and carrying more than his fair share of the load in the writing process.

Riccardo also attributes his membership in the Communist party to the problems in his marriage. He maintains that it is only because he had to overextend himself financially in order to provide Emilia with "the home of her dreams"[24] that he let himself be persuaded by a friend to join the party. In a typical turn he uses his willingness to join a party as whip to flagellate himself so that he can preserve some remnant of his feeling of superiority. He had never joined a political party because he felt he could only do so if he were motivated by intellectual convictions, and he despises himself for letting his own personal financial condition dictate his political sympathies.

> "So I'm really just like everyone else," I thought furiously; "does it only need an empty purse to make me dream, like so many other people, of the rebirth of humanity?"…[O]nce again I had behaved, not like the young, unrecognized genius, but like the starving journalist or the scraggy employee into which I was so terrified that time would transform me.[25]

Initially the opportunity to write screenplays seems to offer a way out of his dilemma. He can write a few screenplays, pay off the lease on his apartment and then return to journalism and the theater. One suspects though that unless Riccardo can become an internationally celebrated playwright, he will always resent having to work for money. Having a wife who by his reckoning is eager to spend money only heightens his resentment at having to work for pay and provides him with a surrogate target for his resentment.

Embedded in this is an ironic commentary on Marxist activism which is difficult to untangle. The feeling that work is exploitation or prostitution is tied to a suspect project of elevating oneself above "everyone else." Dreams for the rebirth of humanity can only be valid if they are not determined by economic conditions. Envy of financial security and class privilege make the desire for social justice seem more like a selfish desire for revenge and self-aggrandizement. The garden behind the villa wall across the street from Riccardo's apartment is only something he can fantasize about walking in. The pride he takes in his small car as well as the humiliation he feels because his car is small seem to indicate the extent to which he has bought into a system he theoretically opposes.

Bourgeois values are primarily associated with home and family and an unselfconscious conformity. The Pasetti family functions in the story primarily as a foil for Riccardo's ambivalence

---

24 Moravia p. 21

25 Moravia p. 22f

about family life. He is contemptuous of Luisa's deference to her husband and seeming lack of any mind of her own, but he is also envious of the devotion that Gino enjoys. He may look down on the trendy way in which the Pasettis have furnished their home, but he took delight in Emilia's efforts to give their room in the lodging house the feel of a true home when he felt it was an indication of her devotion to him. The Pasettis' daughter is displayed almost like another piece of furniture in their home and underscores the way in which Riccardo seems to make no connection between his own marriage and any interest in procreation or even having a "home."

From what we learn of Riccardo in the first half of the novel it is not at all clear what the "rebirth of humanity" would mean to him except that it would enable him to feel loved and financially secure.

The second half of the novel expands the frame of reference for the story by introducing the natural world and an historical consciousness. The two are related by the idea that modern man has lost the ability to participate immediately in the natural world in the way that was possible for ancient civilizations. This theme becomes an analog of the deterioration of Riccardo's marriage and of the difference between his complicated, self-destructive self-consciousness and the implicit image of Emilia as a more instinctual, non-verbal being. There is something in their relationship which reminds me of a line of dialogue in Godard's *Pierrot Le Fou* when Anna Karina says to Belmondo, "You speak to me in words; I speak to you in feelings." The net result of this expansion of the story is that Riccardo's situation begins to read as a metaphor for modernity.

The discussions about the screenplay for the *Odyssey* serve several functions in the novel. They put Riccardo in the middle of a second conflict which becomes entangled with his conflict with Emilia. The triangle of Riccardo, Emilia and Battista is augmented by the triangle of Riccardo, Battista and Rheingold. Battista and Rheingold want to make very different movies, and Riccardo is expected to serve them both. Battista's interpretation of the relationship between Ulysses and Penelope is a direct parallel with Riccardo's relationship with Emilia. Riccardo's nostalgia for the world of Homer becomes associated with his longing to return to the "perfect" relationship with Emilia during the first two years of their marriage. His discussions with Rheingold provide an opportunity for the presentation of ideas about the modern man that give a metaphorical dimension to the psychological case study of Riccardo's marriage.

For Rheingold the *Odyssey* is a tale told by a blind man whose interpretation of the events in the story is not to be trusted. Homer talks about Ulysses' desire to return home and his love for his wife, while relating events that imply very different motives. The key to Rheingold's interpretation of the *Odyssey* is a psychological explanation of

why Ulysses had to slaughter Penelope's suitors rather than just show them the door. Riccardo applies Rheingold's interpretation to his own situation, casting himself as Ulysses and Battista as a suitor of his wife, concluding that his desire to avoid offending Battista is the root of Emilia's contempt for him. He also concludes that it may be possible for him to retrieve his manhood and her respect (and love) by taking a stand against Battista. When Rheingold explains that Penelope let Ulysses know that the only condition on which she could recover her love for him was to slay the suitors, one is reminded of how Riccardo cut off Emilia when she began to say that she would only accompany him to Capri under one condition.

It is easy to be seduced into concluding that Riccardo has finally hit upon the correct interpretation of the events he has been describing. Clearly Riccardo is maddeningly passive in the face of Battista's advances towards his wife and clearly his passivity contributes to Emilia's contempt for him. As she puts it, "[Y]ou're not a man, you don't behave like a man."[26] The way she looked at him each time he failed to insist that she ride with him certainly implies that she felt he was offering her to Battista or at the very least was too timid to refuse to let Battista take her. In this reading the point of the novel seems to be that Riccardo should have been more assertive and possessive.

There is, however, enough irony in the novel to undermine this reading or at least to complicate it. For one thing there is the question of whether it is at all possible for Riccardo to be anything other than the way he is. At the same moment Emilia says he is not a man, she says she despises him, "because you're made like that, and however hard you try, you can't change yourself."[27] Riccardo's attempts to rise to the occasion are always futile and ineffective. Perhaps it is because he is not "really" rising to the occasion but only making a test gesture to see if it gets the response he wants. Nonetheless he seems unable to be a "man."

Secondly as Rheingold points out, it is not possible for a modern man to be like an ancient Greek. He casts the difference in terms of "civilization."

> Ulysses in the *Odyssey* is, simply, civilized man, he represents civilization. Amongst all the other heroes who are, to be precise, non-civilized men, Ulysses is the only one who is civilized. And in what does Ulysses' civilized quality consist? It consists in not having prejudices, in always making use of reason, at all costs, even in questions as you say of decency, of dignity, of honor…in being intelligent, objective, I would almost say scientific.[28]

26 Moravia p. 220

27 Moravia p. 219

28 Moravia p. 190

His description of the "archaic, feudal, aristocratic" and traditional or barbaric culture represented by Penelope in terms of blood and honor conjures up enough associations with Nazi Fascism to make one cringe at the thought of what happens when "modern" man attempts to return to this way of life. He even makes an explicit reference to Hitler in explaining that civilization, "to all those who are not civilized, may appear – in fact often does appear – to be corruption, immorality, lack of principles, cynicism."[29]

He has turned the tables on Riccardo so swiftly that Riccardo, who had prided himself on his self-awareness and sophistication is now dizzyingly aligning himself with barbarism: "If by civilization you mean that a husband should give a helping hand to the man who is courting his wife, well, my dear Rheingold, in that case I am, and I feel, a barbarian."[30] Earlier in the discussion Riccardo had described Rheingold's interpretation of the *Odyssey* as one in which "everything was debased to the level of a modern play, full of moralizings and psychologizings."[31] The "man of the theater" is now using the idea of the modern theater as an indication of debasement.

Riccardo is making a desperate stand for Romanticism in the face of a sterile modern "scientific" approach. For Rheingold "everything depends on psychology; without psychology there is no character, without character there is no story."[32] Riccardo, who initially had wanted to be reassured by Rheingold's insistence that they were going to make a psychological film rather than a crass spectacle, now finds a psychological interpretation of the *Odyssey* repulsive.

The association of the *Odyssey* with Riccardo's marriage cuts both ways. Riccardo is repulsed by Rheingold's interpretation because he sees in it a judgment about his own behavior. On the other hand Riccardo's despair over the disintegration of his marriage is expressed in a way that seems to take on cultural, existential overtones: "I…was left with a feeling of astonishment and terror in face of the rupture – to me incomprehensible – that was preventing my dream from coming true."[33] Civilization seems to be a "rupture" in man's relationship with the world. Man dreams of existing in a way that may have been possible in the past but is no longer.

The alternatives for modern man besides Riccardo's delusional desperation seem to be Rheingold's sterile scientific inquiry and Battista's egomaniacal materialism. Battista is like a degraded caricature of an ancient hero, at least in Riccardo's eyes. While one may find his vitality more appealing than Riccardo, one cannot dismiss

29 Moravia p. 190

30 Moravia p. 191

31 Moravia p. 189

32 Moravia p. 185

33 Moravia p. 161

Riccardo's judgment of him as crass, materialistic, egotistical, manipulative and ultimately dangerous. Riccardo may destroy Emilia's love, but Battista's driving actually kills her. Just as Emila can be taken to represent the natural world, Battista can be seen as technological exploitation and Rheingold as soulless objectification.

Presumably for Rheingold the natural world, like ancient culture, is something to be dissected and analyzed:

> "We've now got to do with the *Odyssey* what O'Neill did not wish, or did not know how, to do with the Oresteia…that is, open it up, as a body is opened up on the dissecting table, examine its internal mechanism, take it to pieces and then put it together again according to our modern requirements.[34]

Riccardo at least is able to view nature as well as culture with a poetic or romantic appreciation:

> Farther off, the sea was in movement but there were no waves, and the green color changed into an almost violet blue, over which, driven by the wind, appearing and disappearing, white curls of foam ran swiftly. The same capricious, lively disorder reigned in the sky: there were white clouds traveling in all directions, vast blue spaces swept by radiant, blinding light; sea-birds turning and swooping and hovering, as though taking care to follow, with their flight, the gust and eddies of the wind.[35]

Whatever other judgments one may feel inclined to make about Riccardo, one must concede that he is able to see and feel the attraction of beauty. This is surely his most positive trait and one with which Moravia sympathizes completely. The problems arise with the dreams that are aroused by this beauty. The need to feel embraced and loved gives rise to a terror of rejection and separation which spawns self-deception and neurotic behavior. When Riccardo comes upon Emilia sunbathing on the beach, his perception of her and his arousal again take on a metaphorical resonance:

> All of a sudden I wondered what could be the source of this feeling in me, of this sense of largeness and power, so profound and so disturbing, and then I realized that it arose from the desire that had been re-awoken in me at this unexpected moment. It was a desire which, in its immediacy and urgency, was not so much physical as spiritual, a desire to be united with her, but not with her body, not inside her body; rather, through the medium of her body. I was hungry for her; yet the satisfaction of this hunger did not depend on me but only on her, on an act of consent on her part that would reach out to meet my hunger. And I felt that she refused me this consent, al-

34 Moravia p. 139

35 Moravia p. 143

> though, naked as she was, she appeared by an illusion of the eye to be offering herself to me.[36]

So strong is his desire for union that this "illusion of the eye" becomes a full-fledged hallucination or a dream so vivid he cannot tell when it began. With her lying next to him he dreams of kissing her and having her return the kiss. Later when he has found the letter telling him she is driving back to Rome with Battista, he succumbs to a sustained hallucination of her in the boat that he rents. Even after he has realized he was hallucinating, he continues to immerse himself in the memory of it: "believing in it and joyfully reliving it in my memory; and little did it matter to me that it was a hallucination, seeing that I was experiencing all the feelings with which one usually remembers a thing that has really happened."[37]

During one of the endless turns on the merry-go-round of his self-conscious ruminations Riccardo concludes:

> And, in order to have the Emilia I loved and to bring it about that she judged me for what I was, I should have to carry her away from the world in which she lived and introduce her into a world as simple as herself, as genuine as herself, a world in which money did not count and in which language had retained its integrity, a world – as Rheingold had pointed out to me – after which I could aspire, certainly, but which did not in fact exist.[38]

What would it mean for language to retain its integrity? On another round Riccardo had earlier concluded:

> It seemed to me, however, that, whether I was despicable or not – and I was convinced that I was not – I still retained my intelligence, a quality even Emilia recognized in me and which was my whole pride and justification. I was bound to think, whatever the object of my thought might be; it was my duty to exercise my intelligence fearlessly in the presence of any kind of mystery. If I abandoned the exercise of my intelligence, there was indeed nothing left to me but the disheartening sense of my own supposed, but unproved, despicableness.[39]

While this does not read as an example of language which has retained its integrity, it is perhaps a clear indication of the root problem and a possible solution: Thinking is not just a duty; it is an inevitable destiny. It is both the rupture with the world and the response to that rupture. It is literally what separates mankind from the "natural" world, and it is why he feels out of place in the world. Man's hope lies in the possibility of thinking "fearlessly" in the presence of mystery.

---

36 Moravia p. 198

37 Moravia p. 246

38 Moravia p. 232f

39 Moravia p. 229f

Clearly there was nothing "fearless" about the way in which Riccardo attempted to discover the reason for Emilia's contempt for him. Once he has accepted the fact that he has lost her forever, it seems that his attitude may have changed:

> I said to myself that Emilia was now, like Ulysses and Penelope, in those great sea spaces, and was fixed for eternity in the shape in which she had been clothed in life. It depended upon myself, not upon any dream or hallucination to find her again and to continue our earthly conversation with renewed serenity. Only in that way would she be delivered from me, would she be set free from my feelings, would she bend down over me like an image of consolation and beauty. And I decided to write down these memories, in the hope of succeeding in my intention.[40]

This is apparently the ultimate irony. No longer able to dream Riccardo must now resort to a forced march – a systematic revisiting of all the self-deception and agonizing questioning which destroyed the woman he loved – undertaken in the hope that he can feel her consoling presence in a way that he never could while she was alive.

At the same time, of course, the ending is a pointer to the meaning of Moravia's novel. Even when language cannot retain its integrity, a kind of clarity is still possible with irony. The image of Riccardo's delusional state can enable us to apprehend something Riccardo cannot describe.

---

40 Moravia p. 250f

Godard's Film

Jean-Luc Godard was born in Paris in 1930, the second of four children. His father was a doctor, and his mother was from a prominent family of Swiss bankers. They divorced when Jean-Luc was 18. During the war he went to school in Nyon, Switzerland, and became a Swiss citizen. After the war he returned to France, attending school in Paris and Grenoble before entering the Sorbonne in 1949. He apparently spent more time viewing and discussing movies than he did studying ethnology. Film clubs, which had started during the occupation as a means of seeing films not available commercially, had become the rage during the post-war years. American and British films from the war years were finally being seen, and the French Cinematheque under the direction of Henri Langlois provided a sweeping, if somewhat eccentric, overview of the history of the cinema. Godard became friends with François Truffaut, Jacques Rivette and Eric Rohmer and began writing film criticism.

Any approach to understanding a film by Godard has to begin by acknowledging the extent to which his misspent youth [1] was consumed by a passion for movies. It is also necessary to acknowledge the intellectual component of this passion. Godard has said that reading film criticism and theory was what originally turned him on to movies.[2] His passion was nurtured not just by the experience of larger than life images in the dark, but by a conviction that movies were an art form on a par with literature or painting and were in fact the preeminent art form of his times.

There were several intellectual streams which merged in the aftermath of the Second World War to create the whitewater turmoil on which Godard's enthusiasm for the cinema was borne. Marxism was of course alive and well. The communist party had been very active in the resistance in France and was a dominant influence in politics. Many artists and intellectuals were Marxists, and one of the ways in which the New Wave of French filmmakers rebelled was by not accepting the prevailing Marxist views on art and culture. Existentialism, primarily as espoused by Sartre, was the surely the most influential new philosophical movement in France. It penetrated all phases of culture with its ability to question any and every traditional idea and expanded the urgency of the resistance into an inescapable call for political engagement. Even though the Germans had been defeated, France remained at war for twenty years, first in Algeria and then in Indochina, and the French government was subject to periods of instability and repressiveness. There was also the legacy of Surrealism, which continued to pull the rug out from under traditional notions of art and culture. And finally there were the stirrings of Structuralism, which grew out of the

1 After Godard dropped out of university and his parents essentially disowned him, he often resorted to theft in order to fund his activities. He even stole valuable first editions of Valéry and a painting by Renoir that belonged to his grandfather.

2 Brody 6f

linguistic theories of Saussure and were being applied to anthropology by Claude Levi-Strauss.

Godard's early education had been typically French, and he grew up in an atmosphere that assumed the importance of literature and art. His maternal grandfather, Julien Monod, was a close friend of Paul Valéry and his literary executor after his death. Jean-Luc's older sister was an artist who became an art teacher. From an early age Godard had artistic ambitions, either as a writer or a painter. It was inevitable that if he fell in love with movies it would have to be as an art form worthy of all the philosophical or cultural scrutiny that could be brought to bear on it. He could not view movies without thinking about them and of course ultimately to think about movies was to imagine making them.

It is, I think, probably impossible for an American to grasp completely the way in which the young Godard saw movies. We certainly know what it is like for a filmmaker to devote his career to recreating the excitement he felt at the movies when he was an adolescent, but the excitement felt by Lucas or Spielberg or even Tarantino is obviously something very different from what moved Godard. Perhaps the closest American parallel are the seminal essays on film by Robert Warshow with their focus on "the actual, immediate experience of seeing and responding to the movies as most of us see them and respond to them."[3] I suspect, however, that there was enough of a difference in "who" was watching that it amounted to seeing something different when each viewed *The Best Years of Our Lives* or *Monsieur Verdoux*.

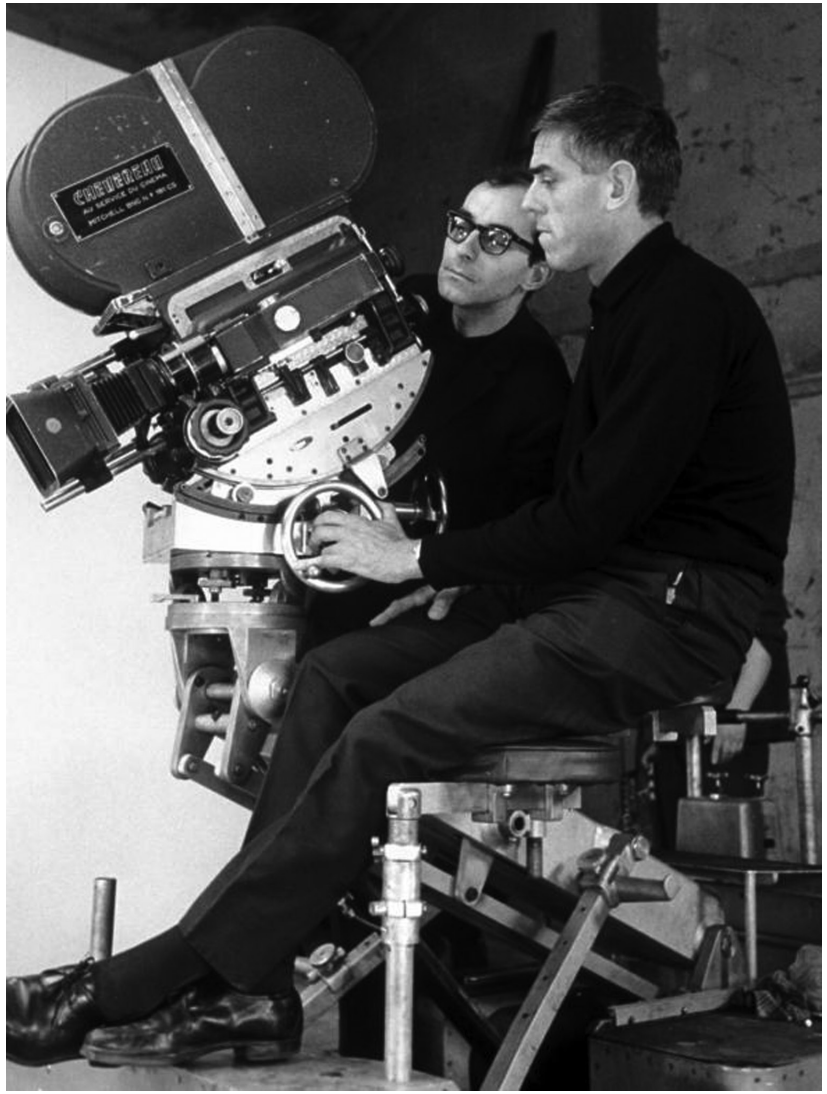
It is not hard to imagine a precocious French teenager in the late 40's being bowled over by the free wheeling energy or anarchy of some Hollywood movies or being completely seduced by the atmosphere and mannerisms of film noir. It is also possible to imagine how the flame of such an enthusiasm would respond to being doused with gallons of literary, philosophical and cultural ideas. Nonetheless it is impossible for me to imagine exactly what Godard saw when he watched *Johnny Guitar*. The best I can do is speculate that what Godard saw was not a film as it was intended to be seen by its makers but a film in a context that had multiple dimensions, including the history of cinema, various theories of cinema, other films by the same director, contemporary culture (both "high" and popular), the current political situation, the entire sweep of Western civilization and perhaps Godard's own ambitions.

In his look back at the cinephile culture of post-war Paris and how it nurtured Godard, Geoffrey Nowell-Smith offered the following description of Godard's early critical writings:

> Two obvious features mark Godard's criticism in the 50s. One is the incessant name dropping. He can hardly write a paragraph without referring to some extraneous poet,

3 Warshow p.xxv

Godard and Raoul Coutard during the filming of Pierrot le fou *in 1965.*



painter or playwright. This is on the one hand somewhat puerile. Rather than a proof of the depth of his reading, it tends to show up the superficial nature of his culture, which is that of a typical above-average French schoolboy studying for the fearsome Second Baccalaureate in order to get a place at the Sorbonne. On the other hand, it does have a purpose. References to poets, painters and playwrights function for Godard as ways of anchoring the cinema and giving it a place in the wider world of art. And references to Griffith, Murnau, Eisenstein and other founding fathers represent an attempt at a genealogy, tracing the broad trends back to some real or mythical origin. Given the random nature of his and his friends' viewing, dictated by erratic release patterns and the inspired but unpredictable programming of the Cinémathèque, this mapping of the history of the cinema is at times nothing short of heroic.

The second outstanding feature is a love of pun and paradox. This doesn't always come across well in English, though the translation by Tom Milne of Godard's critical writings in *Godard on Godard* is exceptionally good. A lot of the puns are merely jokey and can be exasperating in the same way as the name dropping. But their function is to create a kind of semiotic field in which disparate ideas are yoked together and unlikely similarities prospected, rather as James Joyce does in *Ulysses* or *Finnegans Wake*. The spirit is one of 'why not?' Since we don't know why the world is the way it is, why not imagine different ways in which the bits of it might connect? Neither art nor life appears to have any fixed rules, but patterns can be given to them by the imagination, out of which truth may emerge.[4]

4 Nowell-Smith

Nowell-Smith does concede that over the next decade Godard became a "very interesting writer…and as original a writer and thinker about cinema as he is a film-maker." I personally am inclined to give the young Godard the benefit of the doubt and to combat stereotyping with more stereotyping by suggesting that Nowell-Smith's judgment of Godard's early essays as "puerile" reflects a typically English disdain for (and fear of) intellectual passion. He does, however, put his finger on an issue which is relevant to Godard's films as well as his critical writings. "Name dropping" can be viewed as "puerile" or it can be interpreted as a form of shorthand for fleshing out the meaning of what is being said.

Godard's films like his criticism are filled with literary, artistic and philosophical references made in a variety of ways. They are also filled with very personal or autobiographical references. The issue is whether a viewer needs to get all the references in order to comprehend the film – whether they are essential to its meaning or supplemental footnotes elaborating on or amplifying the meaning. A viewer approaching a Godard film with a traditional Hollywood aesthetic may dismiss references of this sort as self-indulgent and extraneous, but at some point he clearly is going to miss the intent of the film. This is one of the reasons so many have judged Godard's films to be simply "bad" movies.

For my own part I confess I have not been able to resolve this issue. For example, the central characters in *Bande á part* are named Franz, Arthur and Odile. Apparently "Franz" and "Arthur" are references to Franz Kafka and Arthur Rimbaud, two of Godard's favorite writers. Odile's full name in the film is Odile Monod, which happens to be Godard's mother's maiden name, as well as the name of a character in a novel by Raymond Queneau. Would knowing this have affected the way I experienced the movie when I saw it? How much would I have to know about Godard's mother or about Queneau and his novel in order to get the reference? What exactly is the relevance of Rimbaud or Kafka to this movie?

Viewing a film by Godard is a complex experience. When I saw *Bande á part* 40 years ago, the projector lamp went out in the middle of the film. The projectionist did not notice right away, and the audience was treated to perhaps 30 seconds of dark screen accompanied by the sound track from the movie. This may have been the first Godard film I had ever seen, but I was already sufficiently exhilarated by the freedom of his style that I assumed the black screen was simply another stylistic device. Only when the projectionist stopped the projector, and the house lights came up while he replaced the bulb; did I realize I had read something into the experience that Godard had not intended. I am not going to venture a guess about whether he would have approved of my reading.

Richard Brody may go overboard in his interest in the references in Godard's films. His explication of Godard's use of the Mozart clarinet

concerto in a scene in *Breathless* is indicative of his take on Godard:

> The poplular and commercial recognition of *Breathless,* and the intriguing stories surrounding its production, created a demand for Godard's presence in interviews. He was interviewed in *Le Monde* and in *Arts* as the time of he film's release, as well as in Swiss journals shortly thereafter. These interviews were themselves a sort of virtuoso performance in which the director both illustrated and extended the methods of his film into the press. In *Le Monde*, Godard explained how he had worked:
>
> > Based on this theme by Truffaut, I told the story of an American woman and a Frenchman. Things can't work out between them because he thinks about death and she doesn't. I said to myself that if I didn't add this idea to the screnplay the film would not be interesting. For a long time the boy has been obsessed by death, he has forebodings. That's the reason why I shot that scene of the accident where he sees a guy die in the street. I quoted that sentence from Lenin, "We are all dead people on leave," and I chose the Clarinet Concerto that Mozart wrote shortly before dying.
>
> In fact, Michel sees a "guy" (played by Jacques Rivette) lying dead in the street after a motor scooter accident (reminiscent of Godard's mother's death) and walks on impassively, but remarks to Patricia later that day, "I saw a guy die." The next day, in bed with Patricia, he tells her: "Do you think of death, sometimes? I think about it endlessly." Thus the "subject" of the film is indeed stated as baldly as possible – a boy who thinks about death – but the cultural artifacts that reinforce the subject and weave it into the fabric of the film are present as a sort of code, and Godard made use of the press to publish the decoder.
>
> Godard's proposed interpretive method – and its difficult subtleties – did not go unnoticed. After seeing the film and reading the interviews, André Bessèges wrote in *France Catholique*:
>
> > They are show a "guy dying in the street," they are made to hear the clarinet concerto that Mozart wrote just before dying. The auteur assures us that it is to make us understand that his hero is obsessed with death. But one must have, to say the least, an acute sense of symbols, and also be an alert connoisseur of music, to catch onto those intentionss.
>
> "To catch onto those intentions" required an initiation, an engagement on the part of the viewer. It also required the active role of the press in transmitting Godard's remarks in the context of reports on the celebrity's life.[5]

Later Brody says of a song that Godard had originally thought about using in *Pierrot le fou*:

---

5 74f

> …Godard, finding the allusion to his private life too direct, supressed the song from the film, and yet leaves in the film just enough of it for those in the know to know that Godard too was in the know.[6]

As is probably apparent by now I am old fashioned enough to still subscribe to an aesthetics which regards the work of art as an free standing object offering the viewer a portal to a world other than his own. Obviously the significance of any element in a work of art is a function of the cultural tradition in which it is produced, but excessive concern with references (either in the creation or the appreciation of a work) seems to me to be misguided. If Paul Schrader uses Mozart's clarinet concerto in *American Gigolo,* I think it is sufficient to focus on the immediate impact of the music with some sense of the cultural tradition it represents without having to wonder if its use is also a reference to *Breathless* and an obsession with death. Brody seems to regard Godard's "work" as a cultural phenomenon in which the film is only one element and which is ultimately about Godard. It is the creation of Godard in both senses. He is the creator, and he is created by or through the work. I think this is why "reflexivity" becomes such an important category in his evaluation of the films. I find something off-putting about this way of viewing a film and about the image of Jean-Luc Godard that it implies.

---

6 Brody 651

Even when I do not "get" a Godard film, I invariably sense an incredible intensity and passion informing it. This is why I am inclined to believe that he was a passionate and precocious student and that the "name dropping" in his early writing is not just "puerile." I know how to take Godard with a grain of salt, but I am never going to pretend that I see what he is doing well enough to dismiss it. To my mind he suffers the fate of all thinkers and writers who take themselves so seriously that they must re-invent language to express themselves. Even at their most obscure or infuriating they are entitled to respect because their commitment and passion shines through the clouds. One of the great virtues of *Contempt* is the fact that Godard made it when he was poised on the cusp of the wave. It is largely considered an atypical film because it has so many traditional elements which make it "accessible," and yet it is also filled with the kind of references and concerns which make his other films "inaccessible."

Godard's fondness for word play and puns apparently stems from his early childhood, when it was probably regarded both as a sign of a precocious intellect and as an annoying eccentricity. Nowell-Smith is generous in his attempt to fathom this compulsion, and I believe there is merit in his interpretation. It is as though all of experience has to be interrelated and any means for making connections is valid. There is, perhaps, an underlying desperation in this stemming from a need to feel that one's self is a unified field. Part of Godard's precociousness was surely a sense of the ex-

tent to which the content of his consciousness and the nature of his experience were determined by the culture in which he was trying to individualize or differentiate himself. The most obvious component of this is the effect of advertising on desire, but it applies equally to all other aspects of culture. The distinction between the "authentic" individual and the alienated, "other-directed," anonymous "one" was a common theme in existentialism and in sociology as well as Marxist critiques.

I am not sure what the cinematic equivalent of a pun would be, but many viewers see a witty playfulness in Godard's films. I think I see the same thing, but the term "witty playfulness" does not connote the kind of passion and even romantic yearning I sense behind it. I get an exhilarating sense of liberation, but it seems to me to be reaching for some form of transcendence other than an Olympian amusement or detachment which is able to play contentedly. Clearly Godard suffers from an hyperactive intellect. In a slightly different configuration that kind of wiring in the brain produces the entertainment offered by Robin Williams or the exhilarating depth charges of Norman O. Brown. In Godard's case it seems symptomatic of a mind burning racing fuel in an attempt to gain the upper hand on chaos.

One of Godard's earliest published pieces was a brief comparison of two short films, a documentary on the sculpture of Calder and a short film called, *L'Histoire d'Agnès* which used paintings by Henri Goetz:

> A young boy gazes at the sea, flowers and sand. Then he enters Calder's studio like Ali Baba discovering the thieves' treasure-trove. Childhood is the open sesame to the bouquet of mobiles.
>
> Burgess Meredith's film[7] not only bears the prestige of the most beautiful of beauties, but in passing defines the cinema, which consists simply of putting things in front of the camera. At the cinema we do not think, we are thought. A poet calls this the things' view of it. Not man's view of things, but the view of things themselves. Works of Calder is a propaganda film on behalf of objects. (Few films come so close to this view as the comedies of Preston Sturges.)
>
> Roger Livet's effort is a failure in so far as it betrays the paintings of Goetz, and in so far as these objects are merely the expression of Agnès's imagination (she being unable to communicate with her mathematician). This supposed objectivity is pure artifice, and it is no accident that it bears the taint of third-rate literature (that of Sartre). The cinema represents reality. But if reality were so beautiful (and bore as pretty a name as Agnes), there would be no cinema.[8]

Other than learning that Godard liked the film about Calder but not the other, what exactly

7 The documentary was actually directed by Herbert Matter, although it was produced and narrated by Meredith

8 Godard p.19

does the reader get from this review? Somehow the film on Calder "defines the cinema." Godard sees even a short documentary on Calder's mobiles as an example of self-defining modern art. The definition he extracts from it is typically and perversely reductionist: cinema consists of putting things in front of a camera or cinema represents reality. At the same time apparently cinema exists because reality is not beautiful enough.

Godard explicates his definition of cinema with a statement that Brody sees as axiomatic for all of Godard's work: "At the cinema we do not think, we are thought." The actual French for this was apparently "Au cinéma, nous ne pensons pas, nous sommes pensés." In other words "thought" in this case is a passive verb and not a noun.

For those who have trouble grasping the sense of this, Godard offers a reference to a poet and what Milne translates (with some discomfort) as "the things view of it." Milne explains that this is a reference to the collection of prose poems by Francis Ponge entitled *Le parti pris des choses*. This title is itself a play on the expression "parti pris," (literally parti = decision or side, pris = taken) which can mean prejudice, bias, foregone conclusion or prepossession. One English translation of the work renders the title as *Taking the Side of Things* while another simply resorts to calling it *The Nature of Things*. Milne suggests "The Things View of It" as a rough translation of the title so that Godard is using the title of the volume of prose poems. "View" seems to involve a visual metaphor, which may be lacking in the French. Another commentator says it could be translated as "On the Side of Things" or "The Bias of Things." The best I can make of all this is that Ponge's project sounds like a literary first cousin of the rallying cry of phenomenology: "To the things themselves!" and I gather some have seen Ponge's prose poems as an exercise in pure phenomenology, an attempt to break way from all preconceptions and describe or articulate an object without any reference to human interests.

Once Godard has clarified things with this reference, it is a short trip via the unique circuits in his brain to the films of Preston Sturges. I, myself, managed to miss that turn. Brody makes a valiant effort to interpret "At the cinema, we do not think, we are thought":

> This observation was less an avowal of passivity than of the will to self-transformation through movies. It indicates Godard's consuming submission to cinema and the extent to which he experienced it as a personal epiphany, indeed a transfiguration. Godard had reached the essence of the experience at once, and conveyed it in an unabashed confession. In a single aphorism, he broke down the barriers of aesthetic distance and contemplation that separate the cinema, its viewers, and its makers. At the earliest stage of his work,

> Godard's existence and that of the cinema were already fused.[9]

Brody's response of some of Godard's films leaves me with the feeling that he is more interested in his own ideas about Godard than he is in Godard's movies, and I confess I think he has been swept up in his own rhetoric a bit in this attempt to make sense of how "we are thought." Not that I have a more cogent interpretation to offer. I do think that Godard is grappling with the sense that the experience of being absorbed in a movie is analogous to the way in which ones subjectivity or identity is formed by the culture into which one is born. One of the emerging debates of his time was the challenge presented to Sartrean existentialism with its radical notions of individual freedom and choice by the structuralism emerging from the anthropology of Claude Levi-Strauss.

The initial sense I get reading the criticism Godard wrote is that of eavesdropping on one side of a conversation between fanatics who share a vast frame of reference and have seen every movie made by man. These fanatics clearly love movies. The term "cinephile" sounds much too academic or esoteric to convey the overwhelming enthusiasm and passion with which these people view and talk about movies. Even when Godard's mind seems to be running ahead via all manner of short circuits so that what he says makes absolutely no sense to the uninitiated reader, there is still the undeniable impression of an unbounded love for cinema. It is not, however, an unconditional love for all movies. Godard makes no bones about it when he feels a movie fails to realize the potential of "cinema." Although like most of the New Wave critics he tended to write only about films he liked and simply ignore the unworthy releases, he could be quite harsh when he felt the need to comment on someone's lapses:

> Jules Dassin wasn't at all bad when he was shooting semi-documentary style among the Italian fruit-workers of San Francisco, in the old wooden subway of New York, or on the dreamy docks of that charming city which, as Sacha Guitry said, the English insist on calling London. But one day, alas, our Jules began to take himself seriously and came to France with a martyr's passport. At the time, *Rififi* fooled some people. Today it can't hold a candle to *Touchez pas au Grisbi,* which paved the way for it, let alone *Bob le flambeur,* which it paved the way for. The rest is an old, old story. If Billy Graham were a film-maker, he would doubtless be called Jules Dassin. Letting our apprentice philosopher preach from European studios is rather like letting a fairground strong-man think he is capable of explaining Aristotle. [10]

9 Brody p.3

10 Godard p.127

His review of *Woman in a Dressing Gown* directed by J. Lee Thompson's sees it as epitomizing the incompetence of British films:

> So lunatic is the direction that the insipidity – Mr. Thompson's only original touch – is at least rather different from the sort which has characterized Her Gracious Majesty's films since the departure of the film-maker who knew too much, the man of The Thirty Nine Steps. Actually, the way in which J. Lee Thomson seasons his revolting stew should be called pretentious rather than lunatic. It is putting it mildly to say that his style is as maddening as his heroine's behaviour. From beginning to end the film is an incredible debauch of camera movements as complex as they are silly and meaningless, and of cuts and changes in rhythm on cupboards closing and doors opening such as even Bardem.[11] would be ashamed of nowadays. But tact never bothers J. Lee Thompson. Impossible as it may seem, in *Woman in a Dressing-gown* he yields even further than Juan Antonio to the temptations of the sort of virtuosity one finds in France nowadays only among ex-pupils of I.D.H.E.C. making their debut on television. In other words, multiply the ugliness of *Death of a Cyclist* by the unfunniness of *Passport to Pimlico*, raise to the power of the worst of bad taste from Carol Reed or David Lean, and you will get *Woman in a Dressing-gown*.[12]

I recall thinking *Passport to Pimlico* was delightful, and I was unaware that Carol Reed and David Lean were prone to lapses in taste. Godard's passionately held opinions can be intimidating, but the more I read his criticism, the more I am struck by how impossible it is for him, despite all his verbal dexterity, to communicate exactly what it is that excites him so as he watches a film. Consider some excerpts from his response to *A Time to Love and a Time to Die,* directed by Douglas Sirk, which reads almost like self-parody*:*

> So you can see that I am going to write a madly enthusiastic review of Douglas Sirk's latest film, simply because it set my cheeks afire. And enthusiastic I shall be. In the first place I shall refer constantly to everything Radiquet's novel[13] makes me think of, to Griffith's *True-Heart Susie,* because I think one should mention Griffith in all articles about the cinema: everyone agrees, but everyone forgets nonetheless. Griffith, therefore, and André Bazin too, for the same reasons; and now that is done. I can get back to my

11 Juan Antonio Bardem, a prominent Spanish writer and director, was the uncle of the actor Javier Bardem. His film, *Death of a Cyclist*, was the first film produced by Georges de Beauregard.

12 Godard p.86

13 Raymond Radiquet wrote the novel *Le Diable au corps* from which Claude Autant-Lara made his film *Devil in the Flesh* (1947). Godard's review begins by contrasting Sirk's film with Autant-Lara's film and the novel on which it was based.

> comparisons for *A Time to Love and a Time to Die*. […]
>
> This, anyhow, is what enchants me about Sirk: this delirious mixture of medieval and modern, sentimentality and subtlety, tame compositions and frenzied CinemaScope. Obviously one must talk about all this as Aragon talks about Elsa's eyes, raving a little, a lot, passionately, no matter, the only logic which concerns Sirk is delerium.

He does not say anything more about Griffith or Bazin in this review. He does comment on the themes of the narrative, but his real focus seems to be on the visual style, particularly the camera movement:

> It is fashionable to say that the wide screen is all window-dressing. Personally, my answer to all those René's who can't see clearly[14] is a polite 'My eye!' One need only have seen the last two Sirk films to be finally convinced that CinemaScope adds as much again to the normal format. One should add here that our old film-maker has regained his young legs and beats the young at their own game, panning happily all round, tracking back or forwards likewise. And the astonishingly beautiful thing about these camera movements, which tear away like racing-cars and where the blurring is masked by the speed with which they are executed, is that they give the impression of having been done by hand instead of with a crane, rather as if the mercurial brushwork of a Fragonard were the work of a complex machine. Conclusion: those who have not seen or loved Liselotte Pulver running along the bank of the Rhine or Danube or something, suddenly bending to pass under a barrier, then straightening up hop! with a thrust of the haunches – those who have not seen Douglas Sirk's big Mitchell camera bend at the same moment, the hop! straighten up with the same supple movement of the thighs, well, they haven't seen anything, or else they don't know beauty when they see it.[15]

Godard's paean to Nicholas Ray's *Bitter Victory* leaves no doubt about his enthusiasm but may not make it obvious to the reader why he is so enthusiastic:

> Magnificently edited, *Bitter Victory,* is exceptionally well acted by Curt Jurgens and Richard Burton. With *Ét Dieu…créa la femme*, this makes twice one can believe in a character created by Jurgens. As for Richard Burton, who has acquitted himself well enough in all his previous films, good or bad, when directed by Nicholas Ray he is absolutely sensational. A kind of Wilhelm Meister 1958? No matter. It would mean little enough to say that *Bitter Victory* is the most Goethian of films. What is the point of redoing Goethe, or

14 This is a punning reference to Rene Clair

15 Godard p. 139

of doing anything again – *Don Quixote* or *Bouvard et Pécuchet, J'accuse* or *Voyage au bout de la nuit* – since it has already been done. What is love, fear, contempt, danger, adventure, despair, bitterness, victory? What does it matter compared to the stars?

Never before have the characters in a film seemed so close and yet so far away. Faced by the deserted streets of Benghazi or the sand-dunes, we suddenly think for the space of a second of something else – the snack-bars on the Champs-Elysées, a girl one liked, everything and anything, lies, the treachery of women, the shallowness of men, playing the slot-machines. For *Bitter Victory* is not a reflection of life, it is life itself turned into film, seen from behind the mirror where the cinema intercepts it. It is at once the more direct and the most secret of films, the most subtle and the crudest. It is not cinema, it is more than cinema.

How can one talk of such a film? What is the point of saying that the meeting between Richard Burton and Ruth Roman while Curt Jurgens watches is edited with fantastic brio? Maybe this was a scene during which we had closed our eyes. For *Bitter Victory*, like the sun makes you close your eyes. Truth is blinding.[16]

Bitter Victory was at the top of Godard's list of the Ten Best Films of 1957, a typical selection of films which reveal the eclecticism of his taste and his admiration for so many Hollywood films that seem the complete opposite of the films he went on to make:

1) *Bitter Victory* (Nicholas Ray)
2) *The Wrong Man* (Alfred Hitchcock)
3) *Will Success Spoil Rock Hunter*? (Frank Tashlin)
4) *Hollywood or Bust* (Frank Tashlin)
5) *Les Trois font la paire* (Sacha Guitry)
6) *A King in New York* (Charlie Chaplin)
7) *Beyond a Reasonable Doubt* (Fritz Lang)
8) *The Criminal Life of Archibaldo de la Cruz* (Luis Bunuel)
9) *Sawdust and Tinsel* (Ingmar Bergman)
10) *Saint Joan* (Otto Preminger)[17]

Another of his favorite works by Frank Tashlin is *The Girl Can't Help It,* which he was confident would come to be seen "as a fountain of youth from which the cinema…has drawn fresh inspiration."[18] Most Americans probably consider that movie's only redeeming features Jayne Mansfield's figure and performances by Little Richard, Fats Domino, Eddie Cochran, Gene Vincent, and The Platters. French critics are notorious for their ability to see virtues in Hollywood films which most Americans regard as silly entertainment, and Godard was right there at the head of the

16 Godard p.65f

17 Godard p.66

18 Godard p.58

pack. At the same time, of course, he was championing Bergman and Mizoguchi.

Andre Bazin was a film theorist and critic who functioned as a kind of father figure for the New Wave. One of his most influential essays, "The Ontology of the Photographic Image" focused on the fact that a photographic image, unlike a painted image, implies by its very nature the reality of its subject matter. The logic of this led Bazin to a theoretical preference for long takes, deep focus and camera movement as opposed to the conventional method for constructing a scene from shorter takes and various angles. It is difficult to do justice to the sophistication of Bazin's analysis of "the language of cinema" especially since digital image manipulation has fundamentally altered the nature of the "photographic" image we see on a movie screen. Perhaps the best sample of his theoretical writing is the following from "The Evolution of Film Language." After describing the way Orson Welles and William Wyler use deep focus and giving a fairly detailed analysis of a scene in *The Best Years of Our Lives*, Bazin attempts to summarize his idea of the importance of composition in depth:

> The modern director, in using the sequence-shot with composition in depth, is not rejecting editing – how could he do so without reverting to a kind of rudimentary gibberish? He is integrating it into his visual style. The narrative of Welles and Wyler is no less explicit than that of John Ford, but it has the advantage of not having to forfeit the special effects that can be obtained from the unity of the image in time and space. It matters a great deal (at least in a work that has some style) whether an event is analysed fragment by fragment or shown in its physical unity. It would of course be absurd to deny the marked progress in film language that has been brought about by the use of editing, but it has been gained at the expense of other qualities that are no less specifically cinematic.
>
> The is why composition in depth is not just another cameraman's device like the use of filters or a certain type of lighting; it is a vital contribution to direction: a dialectical advance in the history of film language.
>
> And this advance is not merely a formal one. Composition in depth, well used, is not just a more economic, subtle, and simple way of heightening an event; it affects not only the structure of film language but also the intellectual relationship between the spectator and the image, thus actually modifying the meaning of the film.
>
> It would be beyond the scope of this article to analyse the psychological repercussions of this relationship, let alone its aesthetic consequences, but perhaps it will suffice to make the following general remarks:
>
> 1. Composition in depth means that the spectator's relationship with the image is nearer to that which he has to reality. It is then true to say that quite independently of

the actual content of the image its structure is more realistic.

2. Consequently, composition in depth demands a more active mental attitude on the part of the spectator and even a positive contribution to the direction. Whereas with analytical editing he has only to follow his guide and let his attention focus on whatever the director has chosen for him to see, a certain minimum of personal choice is required here. The fact that the image has a meaning depends partly on his attention and will.

3. From the preceding propositions, which are of a psychological nature, there follows a third one which might be defined as metaphysical.

By analysing reality, the very nature of editng assumes the dramatic event to have a unity of meaning. Another analytical process might be possible, but the result would be a different film. In short, the nature and essence of editing is such that it stands in the way of the expression of ambiguity. And it was precisely this that was proved by Kuleshov's *reductio ad absurdum:* each time, an exact meaning was given to the face whose ambiguity made possible these three alternately exclusive interpretations.[19]

Composition in depth, on the other hand, brings ambiguity back into the structure of the image; this is not automatic (Wyler's films are hardly ambiguous at all), but it is certainly a possibility. That is why it is no exaggeration to say that *Citizen Kane* is conceived entirely in terms of composition in depth. One's uncertainty about the spiritual key or interpretation of the film hangs on the very composition of the image.[20]

In retrospect some of Bazin's theory may seem arbitrary, but the importance of his writing is still obvious. He set the stage for a new level of awareness in criticism and filmmaking by delineating issues of style and content and by attempting to articulate the essence of cinema as an art form unlike any other. It is easy to see why Jean Renoir said of him, "He made us feel that our trade was a noble one much in the same way that the saints of old persuaded the slave of the value of his humanity."[21] Even when his protégés took exception to his theories, as Godard did, it was within the context of a discourse he had established and with the shared conviction that the cinema was an art form whose potential was only beginning to be realized.

The critics in *Cahiers du Cinéma* are most famous, of course, for having formulated the "auteur" theory of film making or film criticsm. In

19 Lev Kuleshov was the Russian filmmaker and theorist who assembled the classic exercise in montage theory in which the same shot of an actor was cut together with a variety of images to demonstrate how the viewer's interpretation of the expression on the actor's face depending on the context in which it was viewed.

20 Graham 46f Hugh Gray's translation of this essay is included in *What is Cinema* by Bazin

21 Bazin p. vi

the attempt to elevate all film to the status of "art" or perhaps in an attempt to obliterate the distincion between "pop culture" and "high culture," the *Cahiers* critics insisted that the director's vision informing a film is the thing that makes it art and that the way in which the director actually made the film was more significant than the subject matter or even the script for the film. The films that were taken seriously in France at the time tended to be very polished productions based on literary works, the meaning of which could be analyzed in social or political terms. The *Cahiers* critics rebelled against this point of view, partially just because they were rebellious teenagers, but also because it excluded films they loved. Sometimes I get the impression that they simply loved Hollywood movies in the same way as most people but lived in a world in which it was not acceptable to love pop culture without an intellectual justification for doing so. Even though Bazin disagreed with some of their theory and felt a need to rein in the virulence of their rebellion, he obviously admired their passion and their commitment to film as an art form worthy of sophisticated analysis.

One way in which Godard disagreed with Bazin was an insistence that the classic method of constructing a scene from different angles was just as valid as a style of filmmaking as the approach Bazin advocated. He argued that the choice of style or technique should be a creative choice based on the content or meaning of the scene rather than an abstract theory or absolute rules.

> If direction is a look, montage is a heartbeat. To foresee is the characteristic of both: but what one seeks to foresee in space, the other seeks in time. Suppose you notice a young girl in the street who attracts you. You hesitate to follow her. A quarter of a second. How to convey this hesitation? *Mise en scène* will answer the question 'How shall I approach her?' But in order to render explicit the other question, 'Am I going to love her?', you are forced to bestow importance on the quarter of a second during which the two questions are born. It may be, therefore, that it will be for the montage rather than the *mise en scène* to express both exactly and clearly the life of an idea or its sudden emergence in the course of the story. When? Without playing on words, each time the situation requires it, each time within a shot when a shock effect demands to take the place of an arabesque, each time between one scene and another when the inner continuity of the film enjoins with a change of shot the superimposition of the description of a character on that of the plot. This example shows that talking of *mise en scène* automatically implies montage. When montage effects surpass those of *mise en scène* in efficacity, the beauty of the latter is doubled, the unforeseen unveiling secrets by its charm in an operation analogous to using unknown quantities in mathematics.[22]

22 Godard p. 59

Godard's analysis of Roger Vadim's direction of *Sait-on jamais?* reads like a classic lecture for Filmmaking 101:

> Unlike so many beginners with five years of Cinématheque viewing behind them, Vadim does not say to himself, 'I'm going to move the camera thus, and frame the characters so. Now, what are they going to do and say?' Instead, more sensibly, he reasons this way: Michel pulls the curtain and hides Sophie as she lies on the bed, increasing his pleasure at knowing she is there by his displeasure at being unable to see her. How to film this scene? Nothing easier. A shot of Michel pulling the curtain: Sophie can no longer be seen. Change of shot with the camera now in Sophie's place, no longer able to see Michel. Michel opens the curtain. They are together again. It is easy to see from this example that once the characters' motivations are clearly established, *mise en scène* becomes a simple matter of logic. Vadim will become a great director because his scenes are never occasioned by a purely abstract or theoretical idea for a shot; rather is the idea of the scene, in other words the dramatic idea, which occasions the idea of a sh*ot*.

Two masters of the "classical" style of directing that Godard celebrated were Howard Hawks and Alfred Hitchcock, and he and some of his colleagues became known as "Hitchcocko-Hawksians." One of his earliest reviews was a piece on Hitchcock's *Strangers on a Train* at a point where Hitchcock had only a handful of ardent admirers in France. Again I think it tells the reader more about how Godard viewed films than it does about why the film is so worthy of admiration:

> Here is the subject of *Strangers on a Train*: a young tennis champion, already well known, in love with a Senator's daughter and wanting a divorce, meets a stranger on a train who offers to get rid of his wife – she refuses to divorce him – on condition that the tennis champion does away with his hated father. As soon as the tennis-player leaves the train he forgets his strange companion. But the latter, believing himself pledged, strangles the more than flighty wife and insists that the tennis-player fulfil his side of the bargain he believes was made in the train. Now free, but terrified by the stranger's audacity, the tennis-player eventually manages to convince the police of his innoncence and marries the girl he loves.
>
> This subject owes so little to anecdote or the picturesque, but is instead imbued with such lofty ambition, that probably only the cinema could handle it with so much dignity. I know no other recent film, in fact, which better conveys the condition of modern man, who must escape his fate without the help of the gods. Probably, too, the cinema is particularly suited to recording the drama, to make the best not so much of the myth of the death of God (with which the contemporary novel, alas, is by no means backward in taking liberties, as witness Graham Greene) as the baleful

quality it suggests. However, it was necessary that in the sign – in other words, that which indicates something in whose place it appears; in this case, a conflict of wills – the *mise en scene* should respect the arabesque which underlines its effect, and like Dreyer and Gance, should use it with delicate virtuosity; for it cannot shock through mere empty exaggeration. The significant and the signified are here set so high (if the idea is involved in the form, it becomes more incisive, but is also imprisoned like water in ice) that in the exploits of this criminal, Hitchcock's art cannot but show us the promethean image of his murderous little hand, the terror in face of unbearable brilliance of the fire it steals.

(Let me make myself plain: it is not in terms of liberty and destiny that cinematographic *mise en scene* is measured, but in the ability of genius to batten on objects with constant invention, to take nature as a model, to be infallibly driven to embellish things which are insufficient – for instance, to give a late afternoon that Sunday air of lassitude and well-being. Its goal is not to express but to represent. In order that the great effort at representation engulfed in the Baroque should continue, it was necessary to achieve an inseparability of camera, director and cameraman in relation to the scene represented; and so the problem was not – contrary to André Malraux – in the way one shot succeeded another, but in the movement of the actor within the frame.)[23]

As much as I love movies I have to confess I was never able to worship at the altar of Hitchcock. To my mind his movies are certainly well made; but they always seem like manipulative thrillers, and even at their most blatantly symbolic they never achieve for me the kind of metaphorical resonance that enables movies to illuminate the human condition or touch me deeply. I can see existential profundities in the way Laurel and Hardy attempt to deliver a piano or Buster Keaton copes with recalcitrant reality, but it would never occur to me to think about *Strangers on a Train* in terms of the "condition of modern man." Apparently Hitchcock was broadcasting on a frequency to which I am not attuned and for which reception is much better in France. In any case Godard seems to have viewed all films as works of modern art to be appreciated in terms of technique and cultural context rather than simply enjoyed as entertainment.

Another way Godard expanded on Bazin's theories was in his ideas about the "reality" which is captured by the photographic image in a film. What is real is not just simple physicality but all the layers of meaning that objects and people have. The images on the screen are not just characters in a setting; they are actors or even "stars" in "sets" or real locations which have significance be-

---

23 Godard p. 23f

yond the story. Every viewer of a film knows this, but in Godard there seems to be a Brechtian desire to deal with this explicitly as part of what the film is "about." There is also an appreciation for "real" or spontaneous reactions by the actors rather than "acting," and yet at the same time there is an appreciation of the iconic status of "stars" and a sense of the extent to which a character in one movie may be playing a composite of characters in other movies just as individual in "real life" may adopt an identity based on cultural icons. It is as though reality itself is composed of "images" – so much so that eventually Godard seems to have concluded that the history of the 20th century and the history of the cinema are virtually the same thing

There is, it seems to me, a tension in Godard's thought and work, at least in the earlier work with which I am more familiar, between the exhilaration he experienced watching movies and a suspicion of the way in which the audience at a movie is "hypnotized" by the images on the screen. An interpretation of Plato's myth of the cave in terms of contemporary Marxist critiques of culture and the need for art to evoke critical thinking rather than just emotional catharsis in some way undermines his innocent love of movies and forces him to seek a new definition of cinema.

By the time he was 35 Godard felt his attitude towards the cinema had evolved enough for him to look back on its origins.

> I knew nothing of life, and it's the cinema that made me discover life...with people, men, women, houses, cars, work, workers. I discovered it as if I were in Plato's cave and then there was a little window in it and a film being projected. So one day I said: "Look, there is life; so I'm going to do cinema too in order to discover life." Now, I have the impression of having passed to the other side of the window, and to be looking and filming behind the screen. At the time of *Breathless*, I had the sense, basically, of being in front of the screen, and now I have the sense of being behind it, of seeing life more head-on.[24]

Sometimes I have the impression that once Godard saw that "reality" consisted of projected images, once he got "behind the screen", he found himself in a house of mirrors from which the only exit was political action. The point here, however, is that during the early years of his career he was making movies about movies because movies were both the ultimate metaphor for reality and very much a part of the reality in which he lived. *Contempt* is, among other things, literally a movie about making a movie.

Regardless of what one makes of Godard's critical writings or what connections one sees between his theories about film and the movies he made, one thing is undeniable: in his youth Godard was incredibly hip. Even if he did not re-

---

24 Brody p. 208

ally read all the books he alluded to or quoted as some have suggested, he was obviously tuned in to the intellectual currents swirling around him just as he was unbelievably tuned into fashion and seemingly every aspect of pop culture. If he issued scathing critiques of consumerism, he was able to do so because he knew the allure of a red Alfa Romeo. It is as though the tensions within him made him a lightning rod for all the currents in the air around him. He combined a solid bourgeois upbringing with the life of a rebellious outsider and petty thief. He was an incurable romantic and an alienated existentialist. He was a modernist with a passionate nostalgia for a lost world of meaning and beauty. He had a politically conservative streak in his youth but did not hesitate to challenge the repressive policies of the government. He knew how the system worked. He was hyper-aware and hyper-aware of being aware.

The years that Godard spent writing criticism with his friends were, of course, the gestation period of the French New Wave. Michel Marie has done an admirable job of pinning down the meaning of "New Wave" and chronicling its history, but in the simplest terms its emergence can be tied to the release in 1959 of two films by Claude Chabrol (*Le Beau Serge* and *Les Cousins*) and one by François Truffaut (*The 400 Blows*). Godard made three short films between 1957 and 1959, and then made *Breathless*, which was released in 1960. For all of these directors, making films was the natural progression from writing criticism just as writing criticism had been the natural outcome from viewing films.

> As a critic, I thought of myself as a filmmaker. Today I still think of myself as a critic, and in a sense I am, more than ever before. Instead of writing criticism, I make a film, but the critical dimension is subsumed. I think of myself as an essayist, producing essays in novel form or novels in essay form: only instead of writing, I film them. Were the cinema to disappear, I would simply accept the inevitable and turn to television; were television to disappear, I would revert to pencil and paper. For there is a clear continuity between all forms of expression. It's all one. The important thing is to approach it from the side that suits you best.[25]

This is from an interview with Godard by *Cahiers du Cinema* published in December 1962 when he had made four films. Of all his interviews this seems to have caught him at a moment when he was most inclined to be straightforward and open about his attitudes. Normally I would also advise anyone to take what Godard says in an interview with a grain of salt. Some have suggested that the interview was a genre of fiction at which Godard excelled, and any attempt to formulate a coherent philosophy of life or theory of film or political position from a collection of Godard's interviews will surely end in frustration.

---

25 Godard p. 171

He worked for two years in the publicity department of Twentieth Century-Fox, and he clearly understood the value of creating and maintaining a public persona even if it entailed always wearing sunglasses when he was on camera and often coming up with the deliberately perverse responses to questions. His description of shooting *Breathless*, however, seems to provide as clear an indication as anything of what he was doing when he started making films.

> Our first films were all *films du cinéphile* – the work of film enthusiasts. One can make use of what one has already seen in the cinema to make deliberate references. This was true of me in particular. I thought in terms of purely cinematographic attitudes. For some shots I referred to scenes I remembered from Perminger, Cukor, etc. And the character played by Jean Seberg was a continuation of her role in *Bonjour Tristesse*. I could have taken the last shot of Preminger's film and started after dissolving to a title, 'Three Years Later'. This is much the same sort of thing as my taste for quotation, which I still retain. Why should we be reproached for it? People in life quote as they please, so we have the right to quote as we please. Therefore I show people quoting, merely making sure that they quote what pleases me. In the notes I make of anything that might be of use for a film, I will add a quote from Dostoievsky if I like it. Why not? If you want to say something, there is only one solution: say it.
>
> Moreover, *A Bout de Souffle* was the sort of film where anything goes: that was what it was all about. Anything people did could be integrated in the film. As a matter of fact, this was my starting point. I said to myself: we have already had Bresson, we have just had *Hiroshima*, a certain kind of cinema has just drawn to a close, maybe ended, so let's add the finishing touch, let's show that anything goes. What I wanted was to take a conventional story and remake, but differently, everything the cinema had done. I also wanted to give the feeling that the techniques of film-making had just been discovered or experienced for the first time. The iris-in showed that one could return to cinema's sources; the dissolve appeared, just once, as though it had just been invented. If I used no other processes, this was in reaction against a certain kind of film-making; but it should not be made a rule. There are films in which they are necessary; and sometimes they should be used more frequently. There is a story about Decoin going to see his editor at Billancourt and saying: 'I have just seen *A Bout de Souffle*; from now on continuity shots are out.'
>
> If we used a hand-held camera, it was simply for speed. I couldn't afford to use the usual equipment, which would have added three weeks to the schedule. But this shouldn't be made a rule either; the method of shooting should match the subject.[26]

26 Godard p. 173

Breathless was of course both a commercial and a critical success. It established Godard at the cutting edge of the New Wave, and he proceeded to make 15 more features in the next nine years, each one seemingly completely different from the one that had preceded it. *Contempt (Le Mépris*) in 1963 was his sixth film.

Godard's first published article, a piece on Joseph Mankiewicz in the June 1950 issue of *La Gazette du Cinema*, which he founded with Rohmer and Rivette, contains three references to Alberto Moravia:

> In France we have not yet seen *The Late George Appleby* or *Escape*. But after *Somewhere in the Night*, the recent release in Paris of *The Ghost and Mrs. Muir, A Letter to Three Wives*, and *House of Strangers* suffices to establish Joseph Mankiewicz as one of the most brilliant American directors. I have no hesitation in placing him on the same level of importance as that held by Alberto Moravia in European literature.
>
> It is no accident, moreover, that this 'house of strangers' should house Italians. There is more than analogy here, even on the level of plot, *with Conjugal Love* and *Ambitions Deceived*.[27] [Two novels by Moravia] One can feel the same breath, the same infiltration of that magical sensibility which Jean Grenier called 'mediterranean.' [28]
>
> *With House of Strangers*, Mankiewicz's garden fills with brutal strangers who force him to a strict narrative objectivity. Unlike Moravia's characters for whom success is always sealed by deception, Mankiewicz's characters are ambitious people who, through deception, end up by succeeding, and lovers who through divorce end up by marrying.[29]
>
> Mankiewicz's marital chronicles offer romantic perspectives which are the exact opposite of Moravia's. But their characters reveal the same lack of 'grip on life,' and one has the same sense of 'expected surprise' (Colette Audry). Whereas with Moravia the success of the work depends on the failure of the characters, with Mankiewicz like acts on like, and the final success of the hero is attended by that of the film.[30]

Godard's ten best list for 1958 was topped by Mankiewicz's *The Quiet American* staring Michael Redgrave, Audie Murphy and Georgia Moll, an Italian actress playing the Vietnamese mistress

27 Two novels by Moravia

28 Godard p.13

29 Godard p.14

30 Godard p. 15

of the English reporter (Redgrave).[31] While his review ultimately concludes that the film "has everything – brilliant actors, sparkling dialogue – but no cinema,"[32] it includes a prescient comment on the dialogue:

> Each character, each line of dialogue is of a poetic subtlety rare on the screen. Each sequence is of such dramatic ingenuity (cf. the marriage proposal) that one wonders how the distributor, if he is honest, will go about dubbing a film whose main feature is a constant play on words and the difference between languages.[33]

The casting of Georgia Moll in *Contempt* as the translator, Francesca is obviously connected to this association with *The Quiet American*. Ironically both the Italian distributor and an American distributor of *Contempt* insisted on dubbing the dialogue into a single language, even though it made nonsense out of the role of Francesca.

The producer of *Breathless* and of most of Godard's early films as well as the films of many other New Wave directors was Georges de Beauregard. Beauregard was ten years older than Godard, and he began his career as an exporter of French films in Spain. In 1956 he produced the first two films by the Spanish director Juan Antonio Bardem, and then he returned to France where he teamed up with Joseph Kessel to produce *Devil's Pass*, the first film shot by Raoul Coutard. When he was looking for a distributor for *Devil's Pass* in 1958, Beauregard screened it for some people at Twentieth Century-Fox in Paris, including Godard whom Claude Chabrol had brought in to take over the publicity department when he left to start making films. Godard apparently told Beauregard in no uncertain terms that he thought his film was awful, but it was the beginning of a real friendship. The success of Breathless enabled Beauregard to produce an amazing string of New Wave classics directed by Jacques Demy, Jacques Rozier, Claude Chabrol, Jean-Pierre Melville, Agnés Varda, Pierre Schoendoerffer, Jacuques Rivette, and Eric Rohmer as well as Godard. His partner in several of these productions including Godard's *Une Femme est une Femme* (*A Woman is a Woman*) in 1961 and *Les Carabiniers* in 1963 was Carlo Ponti.

Carlo Ponti was born in 1912, studied law at the University of Milan, and began producing films in 1941. From 1950 to 1957 he teamed up with Dino De Laurentis to produce some of the best films of the post-war era in Italy, including *La Strada* in 1954. They also produced numerous pot-boilers including an adaptation of the *Odyssey* in 1955 starring Kirk Douglas. In 1954 they produced an adaptation of Moravia's novel *La romana* (*The Woman of Rome*) starring Gina Lollobrigida. In 1957 Ponti married Sophia Loren, and one of his first American productions after he

31 Godard p. 104

32 Godard 84

33 Godard p. 83

parted company with De Laurentis was *The Black Orchid* with Loren and Anthony Quinn. In 1960 he produced (apparently with some uncredited assistance from Joe Levine) another adaptation of a Moravia novel, *La Ciociara* (*Two Women*) directed by Vittoria De Sica and starring Sophia Loren and Jean-Paul Belmondo.

Ponti acquired the rights to *Il disprezzo* shortly after it was published in Italy in 1954. Obviously Moravia knew Ponti, and he may very well have known that Ponti was preparing a production of the *Odyssey* while he writing *Il disprezzo.* Certainly Ponti is a likely a candidate as a model for Battista. A French translation of *Il disprezzo* was published in 1955, and it is reasonable to assume that Godard read the novel well before there was any discussion of his directing a movie based on it. There are interviews in which Godard talked about the novel. One was an interview by Yvonne Baby for *Le Monde* coinciding with the premiere of the film on December 20, 1963, in which he said, "I had read the book a long time ago. I liked the subject very much and as I had to make a film for Carlo Ponti, I proposed doing an adaptation of *Le Mépris* and following it chapter by chapter. He said yes, then no – out of fear– and when I suggested casting Kim Novak and Frank Sinatra, he refused. He preferred Sophia Loren and Marcello Mastroianni."[34]

During the filming in June of 1963 Godard was interviewed by Robert F. Hawkins for an article in the *New York Times*:

> During a brief luncheon break, which he spent nervously puffing on a miniature pale brown cigar, Godard unburdened himself of a few thoughts on his film and films in general. Straight off, he admitted tampering somewhat with Moravia's novel. "But with full permission," the director – a Moravia admirer from way back – quickly added.
>
> "Moravia never tries to influence a director in his work," he declared. "Instead, he rightly feels that the printed page and film are two completely different means of expression, each valid until itself. The director is given full responsibility." (Moravia himself has said: "One cannot ask a film director to respect a book – even one's own; but one can ask him to make a good film.")
>
> Godard's principal changes have been to telescope the action into a few days and to make the writer a stronger more positive character than he was in the book. "In the novel, Godard explained, "he was silly and soft. I've made him more American – something like a Humphrey Bogart type, " the director added. He is a great admirer of American films.[35]

In his interview by Jean-André Fieschi for the August 1963 issue of *Cahiers du Cinema about*

34 Marie *Le Mépris* p. 17

35 N.Y.Tmes 6/16/63

Contempt Godard presents a slightly different version of his attitude towards the book. Since this is his most sustained published commentary on the film, it is worth quoting at length, even though some of it may need to be read with skepticism.

> Moravia's novel is a nice, vulgar one for a train journey, full of classical, old fashioned sentiments in spite of the modernity of the situations. But it is with this kind of novel that one can often make the best films.
>
> I have stuck to the main theme, simply altering a few details, on the principle that something filmed is automatically different from something written, and therefore original. There was no need to try to make it different, to adapt it to the screen. All I had to do was film it as it is: just film what was written, apart from a few details, for if the cinema were not first and foremost film, it wouldn't exist. Méliès is the greatest, but without Lumière he would have languished in obscurity.
>
> Apart from a few details. For instance, the transformation of the hero who, in passing from book to screen, moves from false adventure to real, from Antonioni inertia to *Laramiesque* dignity. For instance also, the nationality of the characters: Brigitte Bardot is no longer called Emilia but Camille, and as you will see she trifles none the less with Musset. Each of the characters, moreover, speaks his own language which, as in *The Quiet American*, contributes to the feeling of people lost in a strange country. In another town, wrote Rimbaud; two weeks, adds Minnelli, several tones lower. Here, though, two days only: an afternoon in Rome, a morning on Capri. Rome is the modern world, the West; Capri, the ancient world, nature before civilization and its neuroses. *Le Mépris,* in other words, might have been called *In Search of Homer,* but it means lost time trying to discover the language of Proust beneath that of Moravia, and anyway that isn't the point.
>
> The point of *Le Mépris* is that these are people who look at each other and judge each other, and then are in turn looked at and judged by the cinema – represented by Fritz Lang, who plays himself, or in effect the conscience of the film, its honesty. (I filmed the scenes of the *Odyssey* which he was supposed to be directing in *Le Mépris*, but as I play the role of his assistant, Lang will say that these are scenes made by his second unit.)
>
> When I think about it, Le Mépris seems to me, beyond its psychological study of a woman who despises her husband, the story of castaways of the Western world, survivors of the shipwreck of modernity who, like the heroes of Verne and Stevenson, one day reach a mysterious deserted island, whose mystery is the inexorable lack of mystery, of truth that is to say. Whereas the *Odyssey* of Ulysses was a physical phenomenon, I filmed a spiritual odyssey: the eye of the camera watching these characters in search of Homer replaces that of the gods watching over Ulysses and his companions.

> A simple film without mystery, an Aristotelean film, stripped of appearances, *Le Mépris* proves in 149 shots that in the cinema as in life there is no secret, nothing to elucidate, merely the need to live – and to make films.[36]

Milne provides several footnotes to his translation of this to clarify some of the wordplay which does not survive the trip across the ocean. Saying that Méliès would have languished in obscurity without Lumière is a bit wittier in a language where lumière means light. Laramiesque is coined to refer to *The Man From Laramie,* a western by Anthony Mann about a stranger who comes to town seeking revenge on the gun runners he holds responsible for his brother's death. The reference to Musset involves a connection to one of his plays literally entitled "One does not trifle with love" in which the central character is named Camille. The connection between Rimbaud and Vincent Minnelli results from the French translation of the title of Minnelli's film *Two Weeks in Another Town* as *Quinze Jours Ailleurs*. Unfortunately Milne assumes everyone will be familiar with the connection between Rimbaud and the word ailleurs (elsewhere). I am not. The title *In Search of Homer* in French was *A la recherche d'Homère* and is an allusion to Proust's *A la recherche du temps perdu* as is the phrase *"lost time"*. Had I not seen *Contempt* I might be inclined to join Nowell-Smith in his evaluation of Godard's namedropping and wordplay.

---

36 Godard p. 200f

Moravia has provided his perspective on Godard in his conversations with Alain Elkann:

> As I said before, I consider the writer and the director as two distinct artists, unrelated to each other. In the case of *Il disprezzo* no connection is possible thanks to the indisputable originality of Godard. If he had been less original, perhaps he would have been faithful; but he was very original and therefore completely unfaithful. Godard said once that *Il Disprezzo* was a novel to read en chemin de fer. This rather disagreeable definition indicaates the typical attitude of directors who make use of a novel as if it were a fait divers.
>
> *You don't consider* Il disprezzo *a novel to be read on the train?*
>
> Absolutely not. I consider it one of my best novels, because it is at once deeply felt and completely invented, which I consider the best combination for writing a good novel.
>
> *How did you get on with Godard?*
>
> I didn't. Godard is a man of genius who has revolutionized cinema, but he is a person with whom it is difficult, or rather virtually impossible, to communicate. I have written critical articles on almost all the films of Godard, but on the very day I first met him, in a Roman hotel, I gave up any idea of getting to know him. Curiously, the extremely literary character of Godard's films, a cineast's literature, that is, prevented me from explaining

myself to him, the few times we met. I think it's easier to get along with less literary directors.

Were you fascinated by Godard?

By his film expression, yes. By his literature, no so much.[37]

It is very difficult for me to imagine Kim Novak and Frank Sinatra playing Emilia and Riccardo Molteni. Godard said that it was Novak's performance in *Vertigo* (1958) that made him want her to play the wife in *Contempt*.[38] Kim Novak, had also been in *The Man with the Golden Arm* (1955) with Frank Sinatra, but there is no indication that this had any bearing on Godard's choice of Sinatra as the screenwriter. I am not really familiar with Sinatra's portrayal of a failed writer in *Some Came Running,* but I have enough trouble buying him as a medical student in *Not as a Stranger.* I can't imagine him as an intellectual screenwriter reciting Dante from memory and debating the meaning of the *Odyssey.* I think it is safe to say *Contempt* would have been a very different movie with Novak and Sinatra. If I had been Ponti, I probably would have passed as well. The casting of Sophia Loren and Marcello Mastroianni makes sense to me, and I have to hand it to Godard for sticking to his guns rather than accepting the opportunity to make the movie with them. According to Brody there was a point at which Moravia sought to have Godard replaced by Truffaut as director of *Contempt*, and Truffaut refused to have anything to do with it out of loyalty to Godard.[39] I have found no more information about this incident, but I wonder if Moravia might not have sought to intervene when he learned that Godard wanted to cast Novak and Sinatra and refused to make the film with Loren and Mastroianni.

After Godard and Ponti reached a stalemate regarding casting, the project languished until Brigitte Bardot let it be known that she was interested in the role and in working with Godard. Bardot was, of course, a huge international star at this point and perhaps the most photographed woman in the world. Her involvement enabled Ponti and Beauregard to enlist financial support from Joseph E. Levine. Joe Levine was an American producer and distributor of the old showman school who had hit it big with his participation in the American distribution of *Two Women,* for which Sophia Loren won an Oscar. He was persuaded that Bardot's participation would insure that *Contempt* would be a "commercial" film. The budget for the film was to be $1,000,000 of which $500,000 went to Bardot.[40] Most of the New Wave films prior to this had budgets in the $50,000 to $100,000 range, and the news that Godard was going to do a "big budget" international film in color and Cinemascope with Brigitte Bardot caused something of a stir, but it should be remembered

37 Moravia & Elkann 216f

38 Interviews p. 44 (Youngblood)

39 Brody p. 371

40 Marie, *New Wave* p. 57

that Godard shared with some of the other New Wave critic/filmmakers a dream of doing a large Hollywood style production. He had also already made a scope picture in color shot in a studio no less *(Une Femme est une femme* 1961). The difference now of course was a star of the magnitude of Bardot. When Michel Piccoli and Jack Palance were added the amount left over for the actual production was perhaps twice what Godard was accustomed to working with.

In addition to Moravia's novel there is another source, at least in terms of inspiration, for Godard's film: Roberto Rossellini's 1954 film *Viaggio in Italia (Voyage to Italy)* in which George Sanders and Ingrid Berman play a couple whose marriage is brought to the brink of a divorce during a trip to Italy. Michel Marie even says that the film, which was released the year Moravia began writing *Il disprezzo* and which he surely saw, was an influence on the novel. He further relates the truly bizarre coincidence uncovered by Jean-Michel Gardair. The screenwriter for *Viaggio in Italia*, Vitaliano Brancati, told Moravia that he saw his own story in Moravia's novel. He himself was an aspiring playwright who took screenwriting jobs in order to buy a house that his wife wanted and that once he did his wife left him.[41]

It may be a bit of a stretch to suggest that Moravia was influenced by Rossellini's movie, but there is no doubt that Godard was. *Voyage to Italy* is the movie on the marquee at the Silver Cine where singer performs and a poster for the film figures prominently in the background of the shot when everyone exits the theater. His admiration for the film is clear in this reference to it in a piece for *Cahiers du Cinéma* in 1958:

> There are five or six films in the history of the cinema, which one wants to review simply by saying, 'It is the most beautiful of films.' Because there can be no higher praise. Why say more, in effect, abut *Tabu*, *Voyage to Italy*, or *Le Carrosse d'or*? Like the starfish that opens and closes, they can reveal or conceal the secret of a world of which they are the sole repository and also the fascinating reflection. Truth is their truth. They secrete it deep within themselves, and yet with each shot the screen in rent to scatter it to the winds. To say of them, 'It is the most beautiful of films', is to say everything. Why? Because it just is. Only the cinema can permit this sort of childish reasoning without pretending shame. Why? Because it is the cinema. And because the cinema is sufficient unto itself.[42]

The most obvious influence is in the shots of the statues, which are part of the dailies for the film of the *Odyssey* Fritz Lang is directing. There is a sequence in *Viaggio in Italia* in which Ingrid Bergman's character visits the Naples National Archeological Museum. The focus of her visit is

41 Marie p. 26

42 Godard p. 75f

the sculpture and, as her guide drones on in the background, there is a series of carefully composed moving camera close-ups of some of the statues. Discovering this reference in the course of my research was both a revelation and a disappointment. I had always marveled at the audacity and strange beauty of the shots of the statues in *Contempt*. When I saw that the script made only a passing reference to statues and monuments in its description of the dailies for *The Odyssey*, I was even more impressed by the audacity of the conception. Learning that the inspiration came from Rossellini's film altered my perception of the shots. I can easily imagine Godard's mind at work, thinking about how to stylize the scenes for the *Odyssey* so that they create an analogy about the relationship of movies to life; and I can all too easily imagine how his mind leapt to the statues shot by Rossellini and realized that they offered the perfect solution. I still admire the ability to see the potential of the shots in the new context, but the choice seems a bit less audacious when it is viewed as an homage to Rossellini. This is a case in my mind where making a reference reduces the impact of what is being said rather than enhancing it. Some of the mystery has evaporated.

There are other less obvious ways in which *Voyage to Italy* influenced Godard in making *Contempt*. It is not surprising that he would think of Rossellini's film as he started to work on a film about a couple whose relationship is disintegrating while they are in Italy, and Rossellini was an inspiration to all the French New Wave filmmakers in his use of documentary style photography, his staging of scenes in sustained takes and his political commitments. One of the most striking scenes in *Voyage to Italy* is constructed from what appears to be documentary footage of excavation work at Pompei. The couple visits the site with a friend and witness workers using a technique to restore the forms of people who were completely encased in lava. It seems clear that the documentary footage and the footage of the actors were shot on separate occasions as though the existence of the documentary footage was the inspiration for the scene. The climax of the film in which the couple are caught up in a religious procession as much the same feel, and the sequence in which Ingrid Bergman takes a cab to the museum is edited with documentary footage of street scenes she sees. There are descriptions in the script for *Contempt* of sequences in which Paul takes a taxi or in which Paul and Camille take the bus through Rome, and there is some indication that the idea was to film the passengers' point of view of ancient statues and monuments of Rome. (The address given in the script for Prokosch's villa in Rome is on the Appian Way.)

The first thing that must be acknowledged in considering how Godard adapted Moravia's novel is the fact that the basic conception of the novel as a completely subjective narrative is not something easily translated into cinema. A case can be made for the possibility of a first-person voice

Sample frames from the museum sequence in Viaggio in Italia. *In most of these shots the camera is moving towards, around or across the statues. Roberto Rossellini had a tremendous influence on all of the New Wave directors, and Colin MacCabe goes so far as to say that* Contempt *may be viewed as a remake of Viaggio in Italia.*

Shots from the film within the film, Lang's adaptation of the Odyssey. *The shots of Minerva and Neptune are reprised as punctuation in* Contempt.

in cinematic grammar,[43] but clearly Godard did not attempt to make the entire film a presentation inside the mind of Paul, the name he has given the character represented in the book by the narrator, Riccardo Molteni. If anything his visual style is designed to heighten the viewer's awareness of the camera as an observer of the characters in the story. Paul may be in virtually every scene in the movie except for the title sequence and the depiction of the fatal car accident, but the film is not solely from his point of view.

As indicated in the interview quoted above Godard viewed the core of the book as a combination of a psychological study of a relationship and a metaphor for what he calls "the shipwreck of modernity." Telling the story of a deterioration of a marriage is obviously something for which traditional film grammar is well suited. Depicting the shipwreck of modernity on a theater screen is a different matter.

The Script

There are two versions of the script for *Contempt* in the archives at USC. I gather there are two other versions extant as well. The scripts at USC are part of the Fritz Lang material and have Lang's handwritten notes on them. One script is 104 pages and is a mimeograph copy. The other is 69 pages and most of it appears to be a carbon of a typed copy. The 104-page script is surely the

43 See for example, *Mindscreen: Bergman, Godard, and First-Person Film* by Bruce F. Kawin

earlier version, since the first 30 pages of it are descriptive material of a type normally found in a preliminary treatment. It says the film will consist of about 15 sequences. There are 7 sequences which contain dialogue, and the last 6 sequences are simply described in the sketchiest form. The 69-page script appears to be the shooting script since it contains dialogue for all the scenes and corresponds more closely to the film as it was shot. My guess is that the 104 page mimeographed script is what Godard provided to the producers to satisfy their demands for a screenplay before the money was committed. It was written after the casting of Bardot, Piccoli, Lang, Palance and Moll. (Each is referenced in the sections describing the characters.)

Godard was notorious for writing the scripts for his films as he shot them and for giving his producers whatever he thought would satisfy them without worrying about its relationship to what he would eventually shoot. *Contempt*, however, was a different game because of the involvement of Bardot and the amount of money at stake. It was also an adaptation of a well-known novel by one of the most prestigious writers in Italy, and part of the treatment is devoted to a discussion of how the novel will be adapted. The descriptions of the film in the 104-page script are probably an accurate indication of what Godard had in mind when he started the production. He did say, though, afterwards that the film he had in mind at the outset and the film he actually made were two different things:

> When I first made *Contempt* I had a certain movie in mind and tried to make it. But *Contempt* came out completely different than I intended, and I forgot the kind of film I had wanted to make in the first place. Then when I saw *Red Desert* at the Venice Film Festival, I said to myself: this is the kind of movie I wanted to make of *Contempt*.[44]

The treatment begins with a description of the principal characters. It then has a brief comment on the settings, the photography, the direction and the ways in which the novel has been altered.

Camille is described as a French woman about 27 or 28 who has moved to Rome as a result of her marriage. She is said to have met her husband while on vacation in Rome. Even though Bardot will play the role the treatment says her hair should be brown or a dark auburn like Carmen. She is said to resemble Eve in the painting by Piero della Francesca, a fact which was probably as helpful to Joe Levine as it is to me. I can find no indication of which painting by Piero della Francesca features Eve.

His psychological description of her may be more to the point although I am not sure my translation does it justice:

> In general she is solemn, serious, very reserved, even withdrawn sometimes, with childlike or innocent sudden changes of mood.

---

44 *Interviews* Youngblood p. 46

The cinema could not be satisfied with metaphors, but it would know that Camille would be represented by a big flower, simple, with plain dark petals and in the middle of them a little bright petal shocking in its aggressiveness inside the pure and serene overall effect.

Calm like an ocean of oil most of the time, absent even, Camille all of a sudden becomes ill-tempered by inexplicable nervous twitches.

One wonders during the film what Camille is thinking and when she abandons her kind of passive torpor and acts, it is always unpredictable and inexplicable like a car driving in a straight line which suddenly goes off the road and crashes into a tree.

In fact Camille only acts three or four times in the film. And her actions provoke the three or four real reversals in the film, at the same time constitute its driving force.

As opposed to her husband who always acts after a complicated process of reasoning, Camille acts "non-psychologically" so to speak, by instinct, a sort of vital instinct like a plant needs water to stay alive.

The drama between her and Paul, her husband, stems from the fact that she exists on a purely vegetative level while he lives on an animal level.

If others question her, as Paul does, she never questions herself. She lives from feelings pure and simple, and it does not occur to her to analyze them. Once contempt for Paul has taken hold of her, it will never leave, because this contempt, once again, is not a psychological feeling born of thought but a physical feeling like cold or heat, nothing more, and against which the wind and tide can change nothing. This is why, in fact, *Contempt* is a tragedy.

Paul is described as about 35, a little unsympathetic but with the appeal of a movie gangster. His unpleasantness conceals a tormented soul and a dreamer. Godard describes Paul and Camille's marriage something in which each is going upstream or a circuit which has both direct current and alternating current simulatneously.

In the first treatement Paul's work in film prior to the job with Prokosch is said to have been limited to dialogue translation or narrations for industrial films. He hopes that the money from Prokosch will enable him to devote himself to writing for the theater, but he worries that may not have it in him. He wants to prove himself to Camille although Camille has given no indication that he needs to prove anything to her. His ego and his anxiety lead him to push ahead even when he knows he is wrong rather than admit his mistakes and to argue a view he does not really believe just for the sake of asserting himself. Paul is forever asking question that do not need to be asked. One example given is that if Camille said she was tired and wanted to go home, Paul would ask why she is tired rather than just agreeing that they should go home.

The contrast between Fritz Lang and Paul is described in terms of the opposition of truth versus falsehood, wisdom versus confusion, and "a certain Greek smile based on intelligence and irony" versus "an uncertain modern smile based on illusion and contempt."

Godard, of course, says that Paul must almost always wear a hat like Dean Martin in *Some Came Running*, and he attempts to sum up his description of Paul with the following: "One could say also, in trying to explain Paul, that he is a character from *Marienbad* who wants to play the role of a character in *Rio Bravo*." Michel Piccoli said in an interview in 1970 that when he read this sentence in the treatment he understood immediately, and there was no need for Godard to say anything more about the character.[45]

Jeremy Prokosch is described as about 37 and born in Tulsa. His great-grandfather is said to have ridden with Quantrill's Raiders during the Civil war, and he carries with him always a photo of his mother who, not surprisingly, resembles Ava Gardner in *Showboat*. His tastes are a mixed bag, but Godard lets us know that they are more sophisticated than one might expect and helpfully cites two examples: Prokosch likes *Mardi*, a little known novel by Herman Melville, and the films of Gordon Scott, which I have been unable to identify.

45 Marie p. 74

Godard says that like most producers he is motivated by ego or pride rather than an interest in movies. The source of his money is a divorce settlement with the wealthy heiress he had married, a fact that he likes to brag about without giving any details.

He behaves like the producer in *The Barefoot Contessa* but is a bit more colorful and sarcastic in his verbal abuse. He likes to humiliate and insult his employees and friends and acts like a little roman emperor all the time with his entourage.

The first thing the treatment tells us about the character of Fritz Lang to be played by Fritz Lang is that "the creator of Mabuse may be accompanied by his little dog, Douchenka." Godard tells of the meeting between Lang and Goebbels, which will be mentioned in the dialogue in the film, and he compares Lang today with a wise old Indian chief who has achieved serenity and left the ways of war to the young and the wild poets. The lucidity and serenity with which he views the world will make him "the conscience of the film, the moral hyphen which connects the *Odyssey* of Ulysses with that of Camille and Paul."

Lang represents the humility and kindness Godard says is characteristic of a great director in contrast to the pride which characterizes a big producer.

Francesca Vanini is described as a 25 or 26 year old Italian woman with black hair and slightly Eurasian features, lively and pretty. Her role

as the translator is explained. (The screenplays are written almost entirely in French except for occasional phrases or quotations, so Francesca's dialogue is often indicated indirectly or explained as a translation of someone else's remarks.) She is described as Prokosch's press secretary and personal assistant, but we are also told that she is more his slave than his secretary and that Prokosch rescued her from a German concentration camp at the end of the war and does not hesitate to remind her of this fact. There is a suggestion that the relationship between Francesca and Prokosch is a kind of inverse of the relationship between Paul and Camille.

Secondly the treatment describes briefly the locations or settings for the film, all of which are to be real locations rather than studio sets. Most importantly the Villa de Malaparte has already been set as the location for the scenes on Capri. Curzio Malaparte's villa was designed by Adalberto Libera in 1938, and Malaparte had willed it to the government of the China for use as a retreat for writers. He had died in 1957, but the villa was still vacant because the family was contesting the will. The production managed to secure the use of it for a few days.

In the treatment Godard describes its location on the rocky cliffs overlooking the ocean in terms of the realm of Poseidon, who alone among the gods did not like or protect Ulysses. He says the second half of the film set on Capri will have a color scheme dominated by the blue of the ocean, the red of the villa and the yellow of the sun and compares it to the colors found on ancient statues.

The studio in the film is that of Titanus, which was in fact slated to be demolished soon after the scenes were shot there. Prokosch's villa in Rome is the villa rented by the production for Bardot and used to house the crew when Bardot decided to stay in a more centrally located apartment instead. The apartment of Paul and Camille was a new apartment which had not been sold yet.

The section in the treatment describing the settings for the film concludes by saying that they will convey a sense of another world beside the modern one of Camille, Paul and Prokosch.

The third topic addressed briefly in the first part of the treatment is the photography, which will be like newsreels shot in color and scope. Godard said he intended to use no lights or reflectors outside and only the miminum number of flood lamps required to expose the film in the interiors. The use of reflectors or lights to provide fill light on actors or parts of the scene when shooting outdoors in daylight was a conventional technique in feature films in Europe as well as Hollywood. It was justified by a desire to avoid harsh shadows which were considered unattractive or unnatural in terms of a subjective idea of how things appear in daylight since the eye adjusts more gracefully to

extreme contrast between light and dark than film can. Compared to documentary photography, however, the result is unnatural and glamorized. For the same reason Godard insists that there will be very little make up used on the actors.

Godard mentions also the use of high-speed color films to facilitate shooting some interiors as well as scenes to be shot at night or twilight even if it alters the color somewhat.

The scenes for the film within the film which Fritz Lang is directing are to be shot so that they look very different from the rest of the film. The color is to be brighter, more vivid or saturated and with higher contrast. He compares the difference in the two photographic styles to the effect of a painting by Matisse or Braque in the middle of a composition by Fragonard or a shot by Eisenstein in a film by Jean Rouch. In addition the actors in the film within the film will be heavily made up.

Godard is obviously hoping that a difference in light can become a metaphor for the difference between the ancient world of Ulysses and the modern world of Paul and Camille. The ancient world is filled with a bright clear light while light in the modern world is soft, diffuse and dull by comparison.

The remaining two sections of the introduction to the treatment deal with the directing style to be employed and the changes that have been made in adapting the Moravia novel. He mentions the compression of the time frame of the story and his intention to use fewer, but much longer scenes to tell the story. He also says that the film will be about both Camille and Paul rather than exclusively about Paul and that the choice of shots will be determined by the selection of which point of view is appropriate at each point in the story. In addition to the focus on Paul and Camille, the character of Lang will provide an exterior or objective point of view. He indicates that the direction will create a certain tension between empathizing with one character or the other and observing objectively. The method to achieve this will be primarily using conventional reverse angles for scenes involving Paul and Camille while using long shots composed in depth for the other characters. He summarizes his approach as making an Antonioni film in the style of Hitchcock or Hawks.

Godard also emphasizes the fact that his adaptation has made the film for which Paul is being hired one that is already in production where the producer is unhappy with the results. This is part of what enables him to compress the time frame of the story but it also appeals to him for other reasons, since Paul is put in the position of re-writing the script for a film being made by a genuine "auteur" director. It permits him to make a film about making a film and include not only scenes of the crew at work but also some of the footage that has been shot. It offers him a visual basis for contrasting both the ancient world with the modern and the world as presented by cinema with the world in which the characters actually live.

The main thing that emerges from reading the introductory portion of Godard's treatment for *Contempt* is the schematic approach he is taking in adapting the novel. His focus is on several things in addition to the characters and their "story" or the psychology of their behavior and the consequences of their actions. There is first of all the parallel of this story with the *Odyssey* and the fundamental contrast between the ancient world of Homer or Ulysses and the modern world. Secondly there are the realities of making films and the difference between reality as presented by cinema and reality as it is experienced every day. There is a comparison between filmmakers and gods. In the context of *Contempt* the council of the gods at the beginning of the Odyssey becomes a script conference in which writer, director and producer debate the fate of the mortals they are creating and observing with the camera. (The scene of the council of the gods is a scene Lang says he wants to shoot.) Godard describes Prokosch as a "demi-god" who is attempting to create men in his own image. Everything about the film is conceived with an eye towards weaving together all these elements. The relationship between Paul and Camille is defined not only by the relationship between Ulysses and Penelope but also by the relationship between Prokosch and Francesca as well as Paul and Francesca. The contrast between Rome and Capri is viewed in terms of the contrast between modernity and the antiquity. The current state of the cinema is contrasted with its classical heritage. In the first scene of the script the studio is described almost as a ruin; the stages are deserted and sets half-demolished.

The character of Francesca is also used to introduce a theme of language and communication, which is connected not only to the misunderstandings between Paul and Camille but also to Paul's identity as a writer, the cinema as a language and the numerous references to poetry.

The 104 page treatment/screenplay is clearly a work in progress. Commentators like to quote the parenthetical passage in the description of the long scene at the apartment as an indication of how Godard worked:

> (This sequence will be about 25 or 30 minutes long. It is difficult to say exactly what will happen and in what order it will take place.
>
> In effect unlike directors who receive Oscars in Hollywood, I am completely incapable of imagining beforehand the staging of actors on the set, even if they are already cast, of describing the staging on paper and then during the shooting laboriously reproducing on film exactly what was written on paper.
>
> It is essential for me, dear Producers, to be aware of the actors knocking up against a chair in order for me to get the idea of having them sit, to walk in front of a window to have the idea of them looking through it, to have a glass of water before it occurs to me to have them say, "I'm thristy" etc...

> On the whole, if you wish, dear Producers, if you give me a sheet of paper, a bath tub and Brigitte Bardo, I would write nothing for you of this star except that she took a bath, period, that's all. But I would not be able to describe for you in advance the way in which she stepped into the tub nor the colors of the towel in which she wrapped herself. I could only describe them for you after having found them, i.e. after having shot them.
>
> Briefly, you know perfectly well, dear Producers, that I have an awful need for the presence of the characters in the setting in order to imagine all the details of this Sequence 5, that I can describe for you now only the broad strokes, since you know as well as I, an uninterrupted sequence of twenty minutes comes together only thanks to details which make the characters live; and details of this sort are not invented a priori on paper, or at least, almost never.)

This plea is, I am afraid, a little disingenuous even for Godard, who was famous for feeding actors dialogue as a scene was shot or scribbling it on a napkin for them right before the camera rolled. Sequence 5 in the 69 page version of the script contains almost all the dialogue for the scene and maps out the staging sufficiently for preliminary production purposes. It obviously changed as it was shot, but it is a great deal more fleshed out than the broad strokes Godard was able to put in the script for the producers. I suspect that he simply had not been able to think it through yet when he had to deliver some kind of script to the producers. He is smart enough, however, to conjure up for them an image of Brigitte Bardot taking a bath, perhaps suspecting that this will more than satisfy their need to know what the long scene in the apartment will entail.

The reference to Hollywood directors who win Oscars is a telling bit of irony and ambiguity. Godard knew perfectly well that his idols Fritz Lang and Alfred Hitchcock were obsessed with working out everything on paper before starting to shoot a scene. The remark can be taken straight as an apology for his inability to work this way, but there is also perhaps a hint of self-justifying dismissiveness in the implication that big Hollywood directors are too abstracted to be creative when they shoot.

There are a few significant differences between the 104 page treatment/screenplay and the 69-page screenplay which may be worth noting, but for the most part the 69-page script simply continues what was started in the 104-page version. (There are apparently two other versions of the script extant as well, but I have not seen them and am assuming they are earlier versions than either of these since these were versions given to Lang. Michel Marie lists four scripts, the first two being treatments of only a dozen pages or so. He seems, however, to regard the 69 page script as less developed than the 104 page version.) The script is not formatted in the conventional Hollywood format, and it occasionally indicates dia-

logue indirectly rather than directly. It makes occasional references to how things will be shot, but most of it is simply general descriptions of the action and the settings with reasonably complete dialogue.

The screenplay is divided into 13 sequences, the second of which is a transition sequence that was either not shot or eliminated during the editing:

1) Studio
2) Paul takes taxi
3) Prokosch Roman villa
4) Paul & Camille return home
5) Apartment
6) Taxi ride
7) Cinema audition
8) Capri shoot
9) Paul and Lang walk to villa
10) Camille and Prokosch Paul resigns
11) Camille sunbathing Paul dreams, finds letter
12) Accident
13) Ending

This structure corresponds to the structure of the finished film except for the prologue which was added later and for the elimination of the sequence in which Paul takes a taxi from the studio to Prokosch's Roman villa. It also does not indicate the flashbacks and the use of the shots of statues for punctuation.

In the script Sequence 4 consists simply of Paul and Camille on the bus returning home and sequence five begins as they walk from the bus stop to their apartment. In the film it is replaced by a shot of the statue of Minerva.

In terms of the story of Paul and Camille (Riccardo and Emilia) *Contempt* can be viewed as a classic problem in adapting a novel for the screen; and Godard's solution, while bold, is fairly conventional. He had originally claimed that the novel would be the screenplay, that he would literal film it as written. He condenses the timespan and thins out the list of characters. He adds the character of Francesca for purposes of his own and lets her assume the function of the typist with whom Molteni flirted. With the exception occasional bits of cinematic punctuation, the story is presented in a completely linear manner and encompasses two or three days – one in Rome, then one on Capri with an unspecified jump between and a second day on Capri for the final scene. More than one day may have passed between the two days on Capri.

In addition to the prologue under the opening credit sequence, there are four other bits of punctuation which do not fit into the above time line:

1) A reprise of the shot of Neptune at 0:24:18 between the departure from the studio and Paul's arrival at Prokosch's villa in Rome.

Underlying Story Timeline

Screen Time	Story Time	Scene
0:02:10	Day 1 Morning	Bedroom (Not in screenplay)
0:05:26	Day 1 Mid-afternoon	Ext Studio: Paul meets Francesca and Prokosch
0:10:38	Immediately after above	Screening Room: Viewing Dailies with Lang, Paul accepts check
0:20:58	Immediately after above (~4:00 PM)	Ext Studio: Camille meets Prokosch and Lang , Leave to have drink at Prokosch's
0:24:36	Half hour later	Ext. Prokosch Villa: Paul arrives late, explains
0:29:25	Immediately after	Int. Prokosch Villa: Paul flirts with Francesca
0:32:09	Immediately after	Ext. Prokosch Villa: Paul and Camille leave to go home
0:36:21	Probably half hour later	Ext. Street Paul and Camille walk to their apartment (from bus stop?)
0:37:14	Immediately after	Int. Apartment. Paul & Camille bathe and argue and leave
1:08:10	Immediately after	Ext. Street: Paul runs after Camille to get into cab with her
1:09:01	Day 1 Evening	Ext & Int. Theater: Paul, Camille, Prokosch, Lang and Francesca watch singer who will play Nausicaa
1:15:28	Day 2 (unspecified jump in time)	Ext. Capri: Location filming. Camille returns to villa in boat with Prokosch
1:20:58	Late afternoon	Ext. Capri: Paul and Lang walk back to villa discussing Odyssey
1:22:55	Few minutes later	Ext. & Int. Villa: Paul reacts to seeing Camille kiss Prokosch, explains his decision not to write script
1:29:54	Few minutes later	Ext Villa & Capri: Paul pursues Camille, dozes off as she swims
1:36:44	Perhaps an hour later	Ext. Capri: Paul wakes to find note
1:37:08	Unspecified (may be simultaneous with above)	Ext. Highway: Camille and Prokosch stop for gas, have accident
1:39:43	Day 3 (Maybe the very next day)	Paul says farewell to Francesca and Lang. Crew continues filming.

2) A montage of flashbacks of Paul and Camille at 0:27:04 when Camille is reacting to Paul's late arrival at Prokosch's villa.

3) A reprise of the shot of Minerva at 0:36:00 between the departure from Prokosch's villa and their arrival in the neighborhood of their apartment.

4) The montage during the argument at the apartment at 0:56:15.

5) A reprise of the shot of Neptune at 1:19:27 after Camille leaves in the boat with Prokosch.

Obviously for this kind of condensation of the timespan of the story to work, the viewer needs some sense of the context for the events being witnessed. This is achieved mainly through the dialogue between Paul and Camille. For example, she makes references to the time before Paul became involved in screenwriting and was just writing detective novels. She expresses surprise when she sees his Communist party membership card. The argument between them is filled with enough references to the decision to buy the apartment to enable one to feel that what has erupted is something that had been brewing for some time.

Insuring that the backstory was appropriately fleshed out was surely one of the things motivat-

ing changes between the script and the dialogue as shot. For example in the finished film Paul makes a reference to how Camille has changed her appraisal of Prokosch since the previous Monday. This line is not in the script. The dialogue in the script also contains no references to Paul's previous screenwriting experience. The treatment had explicitly said his experience was very meager. In the finished film the dialogue refers to his script for a successful sword and sandal epic as well as a film directed by Nicholas Ray for which he wrote either the script or the detective novel from which it was adapted.

Most of the changes in the characters as well as storyline are based on something other than the need to condense the story into a movie. To some extent it is possible to view *Contempt* as a classic example of making virtue of necessity in film production. Bardot was cast in order to permit the film to be made, and Godard chose to make the ensemble of characters even more international than they are in the book. The Italian screenwriter and his wife become French, and the producer becomes American. This enabled Godard to develop a theme of language and communication by having everyone speak his native tongue and by introducing the character of Francesca as a translator. A perfectly realistic situation in which people have difficulty communicating provides an immediate metaphor for a larger cultural issue. The only slightly loose thread in this fabric is the presence of Camille's mother in Rome. It is really unclear how long Paul has been working in Italy, but it is certainly possible to imagine reasons why Camille's mother might also be in Rome. In any event it seems natural enough for Camille's mother to be a background character and her role is incidental enough that a viewer will most likely accept it without question.

The master stroke in the condensation of the time line of the story is the use of the argument in the apartment. The dynamic which Moravia developed through the first half of the novel is presented through a continuous scene which occupies the entire middle third of the film. Although it has stylistic touches which give it a self-conscious edge, it is for the most part an astutely observed, realistic slice of life which feels like the tip of an iceberg. We are able to witness the ebb and flow of affection and resentment which seems both petty and portentous. We sense moments where everything seems to hang in the balance, and one character or the other acts in a way that may destroy all hope of reconciliation. Each character is both sympathetic and infuriating.

The physical action of the scene is completely mundane except for the fact that Paul takes a pistol with him at the end of the scene. Paul and Camille come into the apartment. She goes into the kitchen to get a coke, and he reviews a page of a manuscript before he starts to undress so that he can take a bath. She looks at the book Prokosch gave Paul and then goes to the bedroom to put on a wig. He finishes undressing and start the water for his bath. She looks at the manuscript page and

then looks at herself in the mirror before showing him the wig while he is in the tub. She sets places at the table, and he comes out of the bath with a towel wrapped around him. She comes back from the bedroom with a towel wrapped around her. He slaps Camille. They kiss. She separates herself from him and goes into the bathroom where she lights a cigareet. He follows her. They go into the bedroom where he starts to dress and she removes the wig. She goes to take a bath and he answers the telephone. She comes into the bedroom to talk on the phone. He tries to listen from the hall and then re-enters the bedroom. She kicks him. She takes the sheets and blanket out to the couch in the living room. She gets the pillow. They argue on the couch. She goes back to her bath. He looks at the book from Prokosch. He takes the sheets and blanket back into the bedroom. He goes to talk to her in the bathroom where she reads passages from a book to him. She gets out of the tub and goes to get dressed. He finishes getting dressed. She lies naked on the couch. She goes to the bedroom to get dressed while he goes to his study to work on the manuscript page at his typewriter. She comes in and kisses him. She answers the phone while looking at the book again and then gives the phone to Paul. She starts removing the place settings from the table. She takes some dishes into the kitchen and drops them as she tries to put them on the counter. She goes into Paul's study and comes out reading the page of manuscript, which she crumples up and throws on the floor. Paul grabs her arm in an effort to make her stop and talk to him. She pulls away from him. They sit to talk. She puts on her sweater to get ready to go. He grabs her. She hits him to get away from him and starts to leave. He goes to get a pistol from behind some books and follows her.

Although the two telephone calls play a role in the structure of the scene, clearly its spine is the dialogue and the ebb and flow of the emotions expressed. Most of the action and probably 80% or 90% of the dialogue is contained in the 69-page script. The dialogue is completely naturalistic except for the interior monologues and probably the greatest difficulty for the translator is the amount of slang and profanity for which there may not be a direct English equivalent. For example the subtitles translate "con" as "jerk," a rendering that conveys the sense perhaps but certainly not the force of the vulgarity. Also in the story Camille tells the subtitles translate "l'ane Martin" as Martin's Ass. It seems to me that "the jackass Martin" may be a more suitable translation. Apparently in French Martin is a name often associated with a fool, and the "ane" means both donkey literally and fool figuratively.

The flashbacks and the interior monologues associated with them are not contained in the script, but there is an indication of dialogue in which each character would express directly what he or she is feeling. The example given in the script is the description of how Paul is aware of the changes in the symmetry of Camille's features when she is forced to make a decision. This is a passage straight from Moravia's novel which ends

up in the film as a passage that Paul types for his own novel.

Similarly there is a description of Camille in the script which becomes a line of dialogue for Paul. It says "She looks at him, as though to calculate from his expression what attitude would be appropriate to take." When he says the line, he gestures ironically in a way that seems to indicate he is reading it from his own manuscript page.

Two other significant changes in the dialogue between the script and the final scene are connected to the addition of the two books from which Paul and Camille read. The first is the coffee table book of erotic Roman art from which Paul reads a passage about a kind of erotic beauty contest. (The book appears to be *Roma Amor: Essay on Erotic Elements in Etruscan and Roman Art* by Jean Marcadé published in Geneva by Nagel in 1961.) The second is a monograph on Fritz Lang by Luc Moullet, which had just been published and from which Camille reads passages about the Greek conception of the world and about how murder is never a solution.

It is perhaps worth emphasizing that the reference to Dean Martin in *Some Came Running* and the story Camille tells about Martin and the flying carpet are both in the script exactly as they are in the finished film. One film reference that was dropped concerns Jean Renoir and his film *Eléna et les hommes*. When Camille asks Paul why he has to take ideas from other movies rather than thinking up his own, he responds by justifying it by saying it is no different from taking ideas from life and by citing Renoir's remark that plagiarists should be decorated. She responds by dismissing Renoir and saying she did not like *Eléna et les hommes* at all. Paul says the film is sublime and adds that Ingrid Bergman was also great in Rosellini's films. Godard's own opinion of *Eléna et les hommes* was expressed in am article about Renoir for *Cahiers du Cinéma* in 1957:

> To say that Renoir is the most intelligent of directors comes to the same thing as saying that he is French to his fingertips. And if *Eléna et les hommes* is 'the' French film *par excellence*, it is because it is the most intelligent of films. Art and theory of art, at one and the same time; beauty and the secret of beauty; cinema and apologia for cinema.

Since this mini-homage to Renoir comes at a climactic moment in the conflict between Paul and Camille, Godard probably concluded it would be too much of a distraction from the emotional momentum of the scene. Rather than justify lifting ideas from other movies Paul simply responds emotionally to the hostility expressed by Camille as she crumples up the page of his manuscript and tosses it on the floor (a bit of action that was not in the script).

The rest of the dialogue changes from the script are normal types of tweaking that occur at the last minute or even as a scene is rehearsed.

One of the first is Camille's response to the question of what they have to eat. The script does not specify what Paul asks about. The line is incomplete ("Do we still have any...?") Her response is simply "I believe so; I haven't looked." In other words it is completely throw-away dialogue indicating a conventional household arrangement regarding meals. In the finished film Paul seems to just be asking if there are any string beans left over as though he would like to have them, but Camille responds defensively or aggresively saying it is just too bad if he doesn't like them. The point of this is presumably to adjust the balance between Camille and Paul's behavior and to indicate that something Camille is upset at the very outset of the scene.

Another more significant change occurs towards the end of the scene when Camille challenges the idea that she is motivated simply by a desire to hold on to the apartment. The exchange in which she claims she said how much she liked the apartment only to make Paul happy has been added. Also the exchange about whether she has lied and the line in which she says, "What's the use of knowing the truth?"

The initial point here is that this scene was every bit as scripted as most scenes for movies are. Godard, in fact, bristled when it was suggested that he improvised or let actors improvise when he shot a film. Later in his career he may have had very different ideas about the ideal form of collaboration in filmmaking or the conventional master-servant relationship between a director and his cast or crew, but in 1962 Godard had this to say about his reputation for improvisation:

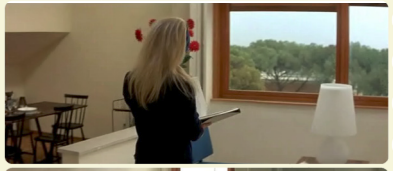
> I improvise, certainly, but with material which goes a long way back. Over the years you accumulate things and then suddenly you use them in what you're doing. My first shorts were prepared very carefully and shot very quickly. *A Bout de Souffle* began this way. I had written the first scene (Jean Seberg on the Champs-Elysées), and for the rest I had a pile of notes for each scene. I said to myself, this is terrible. I stopped everything. Then I thought: in a single day, if one knows how to go about it, one should be able to complete a dozen takes. Only instead of planning ahead, I shall invent at the last minute. If you know where you're going it ought to be possible. This isn't improvisation but last-minute focusing. Obviously, you must have an over-all plan and stick to it; you can modify up to a point, but when shooting begins it should change as little as possible, otherwise it's catastrophic.
>
> I read in *Sight and Sound* that I improvised Actors' Studio fashion, with actors to whom one says, 'You are so-and-so; take it from there.' But Belmondo never invented his own dialogue. It was written. But the actors didn't learn it: the film was shot silent, and I cued the lines.[46]

---

46 Godard 172f

The scene in the apartment is just under 25 minutes long and consists of 43 shots, six of which are over a minute long. Except for the flashbacks and perhaps one cut, it plays as continuous time. The cut in question is one from Paul typing to Camille talking to Prokosch on the phone. There may or may not be a slight jump in time here. Camille has been off camera long enough for her to have answered the phone, but the shot of Paul at work ends with a move into the print of a theater on the wall behind him, a bit of visual punctuation that could be read as an indication of a break in temporal continuity.

There are several critcal moments in the scene which are either climaxes in the tension between the couple or moments of seeming stasis or equilibrium. The first is the moment when Camille shows Paul the wig she has bought. There have been small ripples of tension during the first part of the scene (Camille's impatience regarding the curtains, the potential conflict over who will bathe first, her response about the leftover beans and the way in which she puts the book of erotic art down on the coffee table in front of Paul) but the first real clue that something is wrong occurs when Paul presses Camille for an answer about whether she wants to go to Capri. Her initial response ("I'm not saying no, but I'm not saying yes either.") seems to be addressed more to herself than to Paul, and there is no indication he hears it. Her claim that only Paul was invited seems to be an attempt to evade the issue. The way in which Bardot reacts and the use of the music cue at this



"I bought something today. You'll tell me what you think."

2

"What thing?"

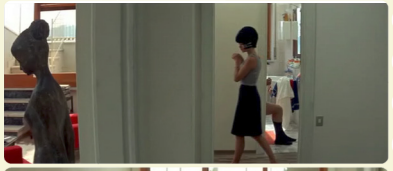
"What thing?"

"Don't look yet."
"You want to go to Capri?"

"Camille?"
"What?"
"You want us to go to Capri?"

"I won't say no, but I won't say yes either."
"It would be a vacation."
"Besides he didn't invite me."

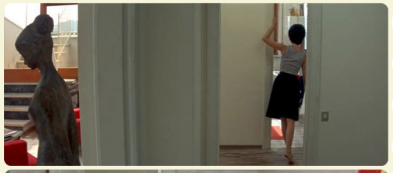
3



"What?"
"He invited you. Not me."

"Where'd we put the mirror?"

"Not at all. We were both invited."



"Look."

"Doesn't it suit me?"
"No, I prefer you as a blonde."
"And I prefer you without a hat and cigar."

4

"It's just to look like Dean Martin in Some Came Running*."*
"What a laugh."
"What is?"

moment both imply that a raw nerve has been touched. This is the point at which Camille looks at herself in the mirror and then goes to show Paul the wig.

Paul seems to respond honestly without any thought of what may be at stake for Camille. Camille reacts with mild hostility which seems to indicate she is disappointed and hurt by the fact that Paul does not like her in the wig. There is a sense of something playful and even affectionate in her desire to wear the wig for Paul, and he seems completely oblivious to this as well as any vulnerability she may feel regarding the idea of going to Capri with Prokosch.

Camille uses Paul's infatuation with the image of a movie tough guy to mock him with the story about Martin and how his mind prevented him from making his magic carpet fly. This makes Paul start questioning her about her mood and her behavior, and their interaction rapidly spirals downward to the second critical moment when Paul slaps Camille.

When Camille tells the story and Paul says he does not get what it has to do with him, Camille laughs and says, "Exactly what I was saying." There is a sense that she feels she has restored the balance by proving at least to her own satisfaction that Paul is a bit clueless, and she seems willing to drop both the point of her story and the hurt of his rejection of her in the wig. Paul persists in saying he doesn't get the point of her story, but she

"You may want to look like Dean Martin, but it's more like Martin's Ass."
"Who's that?"
"Never read the adventures of Martin's Ass?"

"One day he goes to Baghdad to buy a flying carpet.

"He finds this really pretty one…"

5

"…so he sits on it, but it doesn't fly."

"…The merchant says: 'Not surprising.'…Are you listening?"

"'Not surprising. If you want it to fly, you mustn't think of an ass.'"

"So Martin says: 'Okay. I won't think of an ass.'"

"But automatically he thinks of one, so the carpet doesn't fly."

"What's that got to do with me?"

"Exactly what I was saying."

"Well. I don't get it."

"That's enough. Are you finished?"

"No need to change the water. I didn't use soap."

"You've been acting weird today. What's wrong?"
"Nothing at all. I knew you's say that.""

"There is something. Is it that girl?"
"It's nothing. I tell you. I simply said you were an ass."

"Not the same sound all over."

"Why don't you want us to go to Capri?"

"Because you're an ass."

"You frighten me, Paul. It's not the first time."
"Why didn't you answer instead of standing there? Why'd I marry a 28-year -old typist?"
"It's true. I'm sorry."

"So am I."

says “Enough” and occupies herself with setting the table in an attempt to move on. Unfortunately Paul is unwilling to let go of his obsession with the seeming change in her behavior, and he persists in questioning her about it and about why she does not want to go to Capri. Clearly Paul is making matters worse, probing a wound for reasons he does not really understand; and she responds predictably by mocking his inability to understand and to let things go.

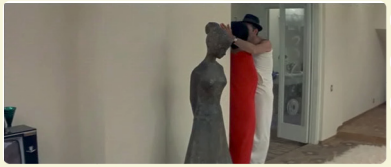
A large part of the underlying dynamic of the relationship has been revealed by this interaction. The depth of Paul’s frustrations is exposed by the fact that he can erupt so violently and so suddenly. One senses immediately that what happened with Prokosch is simply one more instance of something that has been fermenting in the basement for a long time. Camille’s response includes the comment that this is not the first time that he has frightened her. Her vents more of his frustration verbally, and she makes the gesture of acknowledging some degree of validity to his complaints and apologizing. This immediately brings Paul back and he apologizes as well. They kiss and it seems as though the conflict has dissipated.

One of the things Paul expresses as he vents his frustration is the very revealing question of why he married a “28-year-old typist.” This little piece of “backstory” reveals a great deal more about Paul than it does about Camille. On some level he does not regard her as his equal or even as a suitable mate. This is obviously an expression of his insecurity about his own identity, which needs to be bolstered by some sense of superiority based on his intellectuality. It is, of course, this very intellectuality, the need to “understand”, that causes him to provoke and alienate Camille with his ceaseless questioning. He is completely oblivious to the fact that this questioning is driven by his own sense of guilt and inadequacy. He cannot let go because he is in the grip of something he does not comprehend.

Camille does understand in some intuitive way, and she realizes it is up to her to make the carpet fly. She can do this by telling Paul he is right, by apologizing and by kissing him. She is not ready, however, to completely forget that he has just hit her, and she pulls away from him. She offers an explanation of why she does not want to go to Capri, and, if only Paul could accept it, things might settle down. Needless to say he persists with his questions. He says he wants her to come to Capri with him because he does not want to go alone, but he seems to connect her agreeing to go to Capri with getting an answer to his questions about what has changed and why they are “fighting over nothing.”

As Paul keeps pushing her with questions, she pulls back more and more. When she says she does not like Prokosch, Paul asks if he did something to her. He is clearly circling the issue of his having sent her ahead with Prokosch while he followed in a taxi, but he never actually confronts it. It seems reasonable to assume that on some level

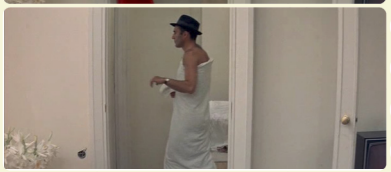
7



8

"Go to Capri if you want. I don't feel like it."

"Beside, I don't like that Jeremy Prokosch. I told you."



"Why?"

9

"He do something to you?"
"Absolutely not."

"Why the thoughtful air?"
"Maybe because I'm thinking of something. That surprise you?"
"No, why."
"An idea."
"Come with me. I don't want to go alone."

"You've been acting funny since we met that guy."

"No, I'm not funny. … I wonder why you say that."
"Just because. We were fine this morning.

"And now we're fighting over nothing. … What's going on, sweetie?"

"I want to have fun. Nothing's going on, Paul."

"I'm afraid I'll get bored there. …I'm not going. I'm not going."

I'm not going….I'm not going.¬"

"…I'm not going. "

10

11

12

13

he feels guilty about having "offered" Camille to Prokosch, but he is refusing to admit even to himself that he did anything wrong.

When Camille asks if Paul is surprised that she might be thinking, we get a glimpse of her perspective on Paul's feelings about her as just a typist. After Paul has said she has been acting funny, Bardot glares at him in a way that makes it clear that Camille is not just a "simple" person. She may not "think" like Paul, but she is at least as self-aware as he is and responds in complex ways.

Some critics seem to feel there is a misogynist streak in Godard and his films. I confess this strikes me as an amazingly obtuse misreading of the way in which he regards and presents women, at least based on the films with which I am familiar. One scholar says

> What governs Godard's vision of relationships between the sexes is not so much misogyny as a fear of women, and of their supposedly instinctive understanding, and through this knowledge, control of sexual and emotional commerce. In *Le Mépris* Godard presents Camille as the controlling force in a doomed relationship, and Paul as a confused, conflicted pawn in the game, unable to shape or influence his desitny which is about to engulf them both. Most of all Paul lacks knowledge of self, an appreciation of his true motives for his actions.[47]

47 Dixon p. 45

This still seems to me to miss the point although much of it is apt. First of all I do not see that Camille is any more in control of anything than Paul, and Paul is not a pawn of anything except his own unconcious desires. More importantly I do not see how the film expresses a fear of women. I see more adoration than fear, but the remarkable thing to me about *Contempt* is its ability to present both sides of the marriage with equal force. She may be bitchy at times just as he can be an asshole, but ultimately I sympathize with both.

An interpretation of the nature of their relationship and of its meaning in the context of the film is something that will only develop as every aspect of the film is examined, but I shall say up front that I tend to view Camille as a force of nature and that Paul's inability to relate to her is analogous in some way with modern man's inability to establish a harmonious and satisfying relationship with the natural world. What I see in Godard is a romantic streak, and one aspect of it is a passionate desire to love and be loved by a woman. Brody tends to interpret everything in the film in terms of Godard's relationship with his wife, Anna Karina, citing details or lines of dialogue in the scene in the apartment which are taken directly from his life with Karina. While it is obvious that much of the material in the film is taken from Godard's personal life, I do not think that he was attempting, as Brody says of an earlier film, "to make home movies in the guise of a

fictional feature film, and to make a feature film that would fulfill the intimate function of a home movie."[48]

There is a wonderful moment in the scene after Camille has tried to explain twice that she does not want to go to Capri because she thinks she will be bored when she says "I'm not going" and repeats it seven more times as she walks back to the bedroom. This seems perfect to me, but I find it almost impossible to articulate why or to analyze exactly what she is doing. I came across one analysis of the scene which described this moment as childish or childlike, but that hardly seems to do the moment justice. A child might obstinately keep repeating a refusal to do something, but it would more likely be an aggressively self-assertive "tantrum." Camille's behavior seems self-absorbed. It is a performance for Paul to some extent, just as the later recitation of profanities and obscenities is a performance for him; but it is also a kind of natural bubbling of her self. She has pulled back into herself in the face of Paul's relentless probing. She is speaking to him, but refusing to speak to him on his terms. By making herself present to him in this way she is emphasizing how inaccessible she is to him. It is somehow both consciously deliberate and unconsciously instinctive.

For once Paul seems to realize that further probing is futile, and he changes the subject to

48 Brody p. 111

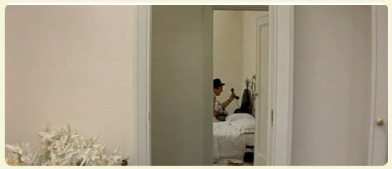
comment on the house being built across the street. (This line was not in the script. It is a detail taken from Moravia, but it is not developed. In the novel the house across the street is a villa with a walled garden from which Ricardo feels excluded. It is not clear why Paul dislikes the house being built across the street. Presumably he considers it ostentatious or in bad taste in some other way.) Camille has no interest in the house across the street, but she accepts Paul's retreat and offers him some very sound advice: "Now, it you love me, shut up." This seems to me to be another point in the scene where everyting hangs in the balance. All Paul has to do is shut-up and let the storm abate.

Needless to say he cannot let go and feels a need to assert his "right" as a husband to know "why his wife is sulking." He also mentions Francesca again as the probable cause. The subtitles render Camille's response as "Drop dead!" but, since the phrase she uses is derived from the French word for "shit", it is probably safe to assume that the response is a bit more vulgar and forceful than "Drop dead."

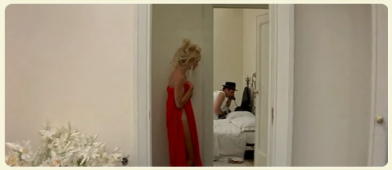
At this point the first telephone call intervenes. Paul anwsers the call from Camille's mother and procedes to reveal another underlying thread in the conflict. He does not trust her. His fear that she does not love him involves also the suspicion that she may be lying to him to cover up an infidelity. Nothing in the film up to this point has prepared us for this. Camille immediately understands why Paul lied to her mother. She kicks him and threatens him with divorce if he "starts that again." The implication is clearly that their relationship has been plagued by unfounded jealousy and fear on Paul's part.

Camille announces her intention to sleep on the couch and Paul begins another round of frutiless questions and challenges. He apologizes for having lied to her mother, and Camille agrees that is why she was upset. She says she is no longer upset, even though she continues to make her bed on the couch. Paul sits on the couch with her caressing her leg, and Camille comments on how things were better before he got involved with movie people. She seems sincere, and they are physically closer again. She sits up so that they are sitting side by side, and it seems again as though things may be settling down.

What disturbs the peace this time is the Communist party membership card which has fallen out of Paul's pocket. In the Moravia novel Ricardo's decision to joing the Communist party is tangled up with a variety of threads of self-loathing and insecurity in him. It is presented to some extent as a result of marital stress rather than a cause of it. In the film Paul is obviously defensive about having joined the party, and he starts to get violent in his attempts to take back the card from Camille. One assumes that Camille would think joining the communist party is simply a stupid career move. The fight over the card ends with mutual accusations and separation, although they

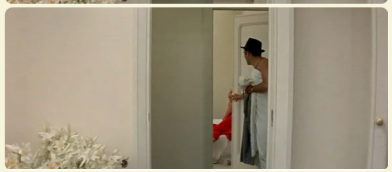


"No, Camille isn't here...."



"I thought you'd lunched out and gone shopping....."

"...She just walked in the door! Your mom."



"I'll call you tommorrow."

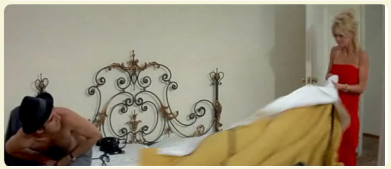
15

"You're out of your mind, old man!"

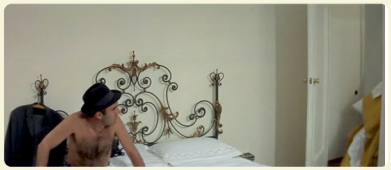
"Why tell Mom I was out?"
"I don't know why."
"I know."

"To find out if we really went out to lunch. and if I wasn't lying earlier."
"That's it."
"Try that again and I'll divorce you."

"Get up!"
"What are you doing?"



"I'm sleeping on the couch."
"When, tonight?"
"Everynight, starting tonight."



16

both say they don't want to argue. Camille leaves the room and Paul starts perusing the book of erotic art. He announces that he does not want to go to Capri.

When they seem completely separated and Paul is distracted by the book, Camille calls to him from the other room: "Paul, come here." He just says "What?" the first time she calls to him and continues to announce that he is not going to take the job with Prokosch. Camiile calls to him again, and he seems to ignore her. It is unclear whether Camille has gone back to the bathroom to resume her bath or whether she is in the bedroom, but the way she calls to him suggests that she wants him to come to her so that they can make love. This is, of course, the supreme missed opportunity which condemns Paul to his fate. It is highlighted ironically by the fact that Paul is distracted by the book of erotic art.

In the script Camille is taking a bath when this exchanage takes place. He goes into the bathroom to tell her he does not want to go to Capri and is not going to take the job. He then goes to his study to work at his typewriter. She calls him, and he goes back into the bathroom where she asks him why he does not want to work on the film. I am convinced that the meaning of this moment changed substantially during the filming, partially in order to use the book of erotic art and perhaps because Godard realized that giving Camille's call sexual overtones added another dimension to the scene.

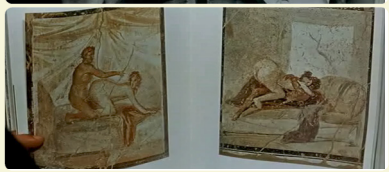
"Don't be angry. I just can't sleep with the window open."

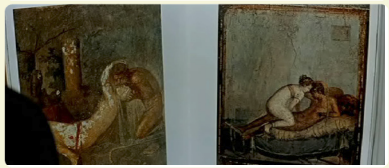
"We'll close the window."
You always say you can't breathe. No, we'll speep apart. Thousands of couples do it. They still get along fine."
"What did I do wrong? Tell me. I'm sorry I said you were out. Is that it? Forgive me."
"Let me by."

"Is that why you're in a bad mood?"
"Yes, but I'm not anymore."

"T'll be just fine here."
"I really wonder what I did."

"You're so mean all of a sudden!"
"Me? I'm the same as always. You're the one who's changed. Ever since you've been with movie people. You used to write crime novels. We didnt" have much money, but everything was fine."
"What's this?"
"Give me that."
"Partito Comunisto Italiano. You never said you joined."
"That was two months agon in Paris."





"Give me that."
"Let go! You'll bruise me."

"Don't talk to me like that!"
"And don't you either!"

"I'm working for you. This place is for you, not just for me!"
"Pkeae, Paul, I don't want o argue."
Cut #

17

"I don't want to go to Capri, either."
"Why not? Don't be stupid. Go…. Paul, come here."

18

"What?…"

"No, I've lost interest. Tell Prokosch when he calls. I won't talk to him."

"Paul, come here."

"Why won't you do t he script now?"

"i'd have done it out of love for you."

"But you don't love me anymore."
"That's news!"
"I hosted a skin contest […]

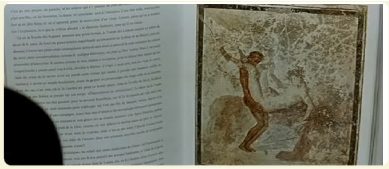
"We'll just mortgage the flat when we run out of money."
"Something makes you think I've stopped loving you?"
"Yes."

"What?"
"Everything."
"But what, for instance?"

"First tell me if it's true."

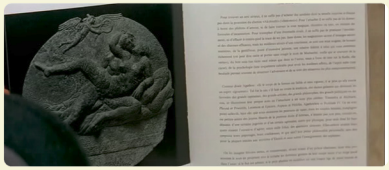
"No, you tell me first."
"What makes me think you've stopped loving me?"

"The way you've begun to talk to me."



19

20



21

"You weren't like that this morning."

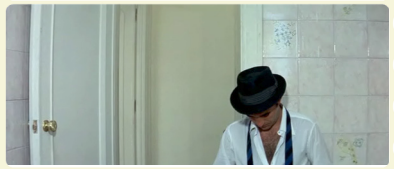
"Or yesterday. It's the way you look at me, too."

"The problem, in my opinion, is our conception of the world. […]"
"Why'd you say it was the open window? There's something else."
"I think so. 'Man can rebel […]"

Look, Camille…"
"I'm telling you. I give you my word. I can't sleep wiht the window open. I need peace and quiet and darkness. I swear it's true."

"And you move around too much. You keep waking me. I want to sleep alone from now on."

"You don't want to make love?"



"Listen to the jerk."

"Is that amocking smile or a tender smile?"

"A tender smile."

"So, answer me!"
"If it were true, I'd tell you. A woman call always find an excuse not to make love."

"But you're really a jerk."
"Vulgar language doesn't suit you."
"It doesn't suit me?"

"Listen to this…

"Asshole. Cunt. Shit. Christ Almighty. Craphole.Son of a bitch. Goddamn.

"So, still think it doesn't suit me?"

24

"Why don't you want to make love anymore?

"All right. Let's do it, but fast."

Given the fact that Paul reads a passage from the book out loud and over 30 seconds of screen time are devoted to pages in the book, it is safe to assume that Godard assigns more meaning to the moment than simply an ironic comment on Paul's obliviousness. At this point I can only suggest that it has to do with the function of imagery in modern society. There is obviously the implication that the voyeurism involved in a fascination with pornography introduces a breach in actual sexual intimacy, but I think the metaphor is intended to extend beyond sexual relationships. This may be an example of how Godard's films do require a shared frame of reference in order to be properly interpreted and fully appreciated. Here I would imagine the frames of reference that need to be explored are Semiotics and Structural Marxism, neither of which is my strong suit.

At this point Paul has made it clear that the only reason he would take the job would be for Camille. As he insisted earlier all the work he does is for her; the apartment is for her. Since he is now convinced she no longer loves him, he has no interest in the job. The subject now shifts to why he think she no longer loves him, and procedes with all the fruitlessness as the previous discussions. Camille hides behind the book on Lang; she smiles mockingly and mocks his inability to assess her mood; she recites a litany of profanities; and finally she offers to make love on the couch provided they do it quickly.

Each round of the fight seems to dig the hole deeper and Camille's sarcastic offer to make love precipitates the sequence of flashbacks with interior monologues from each. Portions of the monologues are taken almost verbatim from Moravia, except that in the novel they are all thought by Ricardo.

Camille (Film)	*Riccardo (Novel)*
We used to live in a cloud of unconsciousness, in delicious complicity. Things happened with a sudden, wild, enchanted recklessness. I'd end up in Paul's arms hardly aware of what had happened.	Formerly everything, on the contrary, had happened in a cloud of inspired haste, of intoxicated unconsciousness, of ravished complicity.…Everything had always run its course in a mood of swift, feverish, enchanted absorption, and I had always come to myself again in Emilia's arms almost without being able to recollect how it had all happened… [p.34]
I've noticed that the more we doubt, the more we cling to a false lucidity in the hope of rationalizing what feelings have made murky.	I have noticed that the more doubtful one feels the more one clings to a false lucidity of mind, as though hoping to clarify by reason that which is darkened and obscured by feeling. [p.76]

"I'd been thinking Camille could leave me. I thought of it as a possible disaster. Now the disaster had happened."

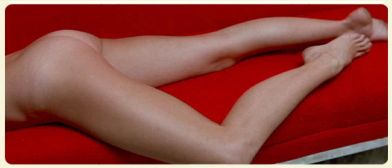
"We used to live in a cloud of unawareness…."

"…in delicious complicity. Things happened with a sudden, wild, enchanated recklessness."

"I'd end up in Paul's arms, hardly aware of what had happened.

"This recklessness was now absent in Camille, and thus in me. Coule I now, prey to my excited senses, observe her coldly, as she could undoubtedly observe me?

"I deliberately made that remark with a secret feeling of revenge." "She seemed aware that a lie could settle things. For a while, at least. She was clearely tempted to lie. But on second thought, she decided not to." "Paul hurt me so much. It was my turn now by referring to what I'd seen without being really specific.



31

"At heart, I was wrong. She wasn't unfaithful, or she only seemed to be. …"

32

"…The truth remained to be proven despite appearances."

33

"I've noticed that the more we doubt. the more we cling to a false lucidity…"

34

"…in the hope of rationalizing what feelings have made murky."

"I thought Camille could leave me. […]"
"We used to live in a cloud of unawareness […]"

35

"Don't be like that."

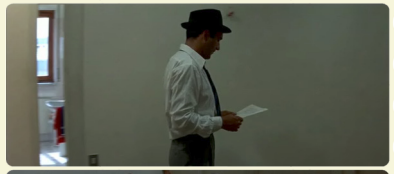
"Don't be like what?"
"You know very well."

"It's your fault!"

They separate again and Paul returns to his typewriter. One again Camille makes a gesture of reconiliation by coming to Paul kissing him and saying that she loves him as she always. She questions him about what he would do if he really believed she did not love him, but she insists that she does and tells him to kiss her. At this point the second telephone call intervenes.

It is possible to interpret Camille's gesture of reconciliation as manipulative and motivated by something other than love; but this would, I think, be as much a mistake for the viewer as it is for Paul when he interprets it this way later in the scene. Camille does say that she does not want to lose the apartment. She also says, however, that Paul should not take the job if he does not want to do it, and I think it is clear that Camille wants to hold onto Paul more than the apartment. To view Camille in terms of "control of sexual and emotional commerce" in the relationship seems to me to overlook the one thing that explains all of her behavior: her love for Paul. Her love is certainly not without needs, and it obviously requires a kind of nourishment in order to flourish; but it is her ability to love in this way, as well as her sexual beauty, that makes Camille's character so attractive. The main alteration that Godard has made in adapting the novel is designed to allow him to express his adoration for a woman. The flash cuts used with the interior monologues include not just Playboy-like poses of Bardot but a shot in which Camille is seen running through an appealing landscape as though she is headed towards a pas-

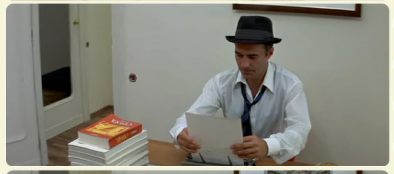
"You seem to be …"



"…searching my expression to decide…"

"…the appropriate attitude to take with me."

"The private plane awaited in the blue sky. …Rex remembered something about Paula…"



"Her harmonious features…now indecisive, seemed contorted now. Rex knew this trait of hers, for it seemed that whenever Paula had to make a decision that went against her nature

"What's got into you, Paul? I love you exactly as before.

sionate rendezvous with Paul. This image is reinforced in the monologue by a nostalgia for the kind of sexual abondonement she had experienced.

The call from Prokosch, which comes right at the moment when Paul and Camille are about to kiss, is obviously emblematic of the effect Paul's work in films has had on their relationship. Camille answers the phone and attempts to chat with Prokosch briefly even though they do not speak each other's language. She inquires about whether it would be possible to swim on Capri as though she is sincerely trying to decide whether to go with Paul. Paul's conversation with Prokosch takes place off screen, so the focus of attention is on what Camille thinks of Paul's dealings with Prokosch. The first indication we have of her attitude is that she removes the setting from the table indicating that she no longer intends to fix dinner for Paul. Then she becomes overtly hostile as they talk about whether to have dinner after watching a movie. She goes into the study, pulls the page of Paul's manuscript out of the typewriter (off camera), reads it and then crumples it up and tosses it on the floor as she accuses Paul of stealing ideas rather than using his own. Presumably the passage she is reading is the one Paul has just written about the way in which Paula's features alter whenever she must make a decision.

On the surface the logic of Paul's interpretation of her behavior seems sound. He has not refused to work for Prokosch. They will be able to keep the apartment. Camille, therefore, has

"What would do if I stopped loving you?"
"I already told you."
"I forgot what you said."

"I wouldn't do the script and we'd sell the flat."
"But I love you. I find all this so idiotic."

"When Prokosch calls, tell him you'll go to Capri.

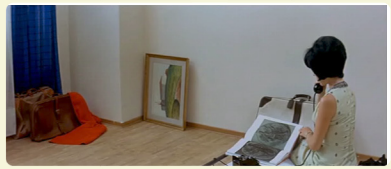
"What about you?"
"I love you. Don't make me repeat it. I want to keep the flat. If you don't want to do the script, don't do it. If you think I've stopped loving you, you're wrong. Kiss me."

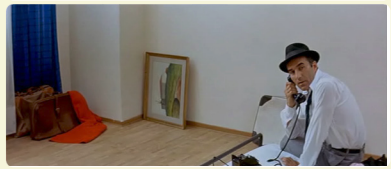
"We were just talking about you. About your movie....Yes, The Odyssey. *...About that guy who travels. In Capri can we go swimming? ... I don't know".*

"Here's Paul. I'll put him on."

"Hello, M. Prokosch..."

37





38

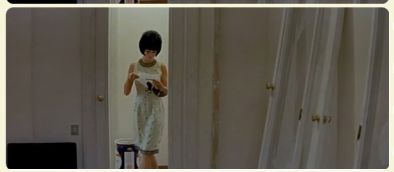
"We eating out?"
"I don't feel like going down for groceries."

"Fine. We're supposed to meet Prokosch and Lang at a movie theater…."

"They want to see a singer in the stage show. We can eat after."

"It'll be late if there's a movie first."

"It might give me some ideas."



"Why not look for ideas in your head, instead of stealing them?"

"What's got into you?"

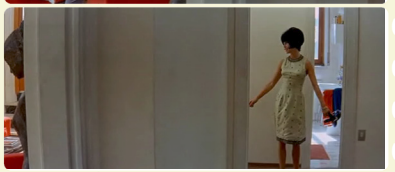
"Camille…"

"Let'sget going!"

"I knew it."
"What?"

"Since I said yes to Prokosch, so long tenderness!"

"Right, no more caresses."



"What was the phone call about?"
"Our going to Capri."
"What did you say?"

"That it was up to you."
"Are you nuts?"

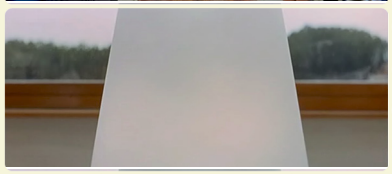
"You know that it's up to you, not me!"

"The come to Capri."
"No."
"Is there something between you and Prokosch?"
"You're pathetic."

"I have to talk to you."
"You said we were going to the movies."
"Listen, I have to talk to you."

"All right, I'm listening."

39



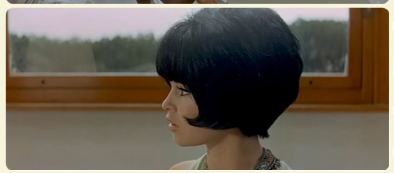
"I have…"

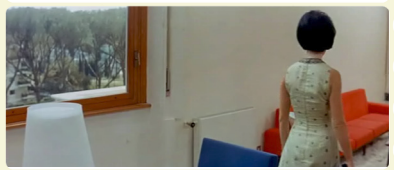
"…to talk to you."

Earlier, before the phone rang, I said I didn't want to take this job if I couldn't be sure of your love. You said you loved me and that I should take it."
"Yes…"
"I'm sure you lied."

achieved what she wanted and reverts to her "real" feelings towards him. The problem, of course, is that the logic assumes its own conclusion: that Camille is being cynically manipulative or as Paul says "operating from self-interest." What it ignores is the possibility that Camille's behavior is more complicated or that there is still a lingering wound that has not healed completely.

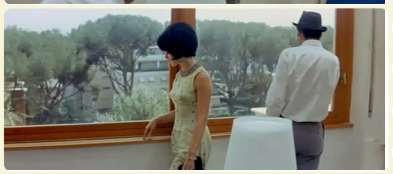
What Camille's behavior reveals is that Paul is not able to look beyond the immediate present and treat her with the tenderness that she requires. He is able neither to forget nor forgive. This is not to suggest that she is deliberately testing him. It is simply to point out that the storm is not over, and he is unable to respond in any way other than to exacerbate it. He again questions whether Prokosch came on to her and insists that they sit down so that he can talk to her. "Talking to her" consists of accusing her of lying about her feelings for him and of cynically manipulating him for selfish material reasons. Needless to say she does not resond positively to this line of conversation and refuses to play along. He pushes to the point where she finally agrees that she no longer loves him and even agrees that it is because he gave Francesca a pat on the rear. He keeps pushing for some other explanation and finally explodes from frustration when she refuses to talk to him the way he wants. She fights back when he grabs her and then leaves, saying she despises him and is disgusted when he touches her.

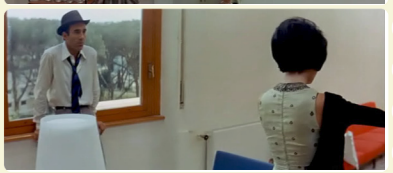




"Why? I don't know. Out of pity, self-interest…"
"What self-interest?"
"To hold on to this flat."
"How can you know what I think? In fact I couldn't care less. Sell the flat, see if I care."
"Earlier you said it was better than a hotel."
"Not at all. I said that to make you happy."
"That's beside the point. I want to know why you lied."
"Who said I lied? Stop it!"
"You did. I can tell you've stopped loving me."
"What's the use of knowing the truth?"
"See? You admit I'm right. "
I don't admit a thing. Leave me alone. It's true. I don't love you anymore. There's nothing to explain. I don't love you."
"Why? Yesterday you still loved me."
"Yes, very much. Now, it's over."
"There must be a reason."
"There must be."
"What is it?"
"I don't know. All I know is I don't love you anymore."
"Since we were at Prokosch's? When you saw me pat Francesca Vanini's behind?"
"Let's say it was that. Now it's over. Let's not talk about it."
"Something happened today. …"

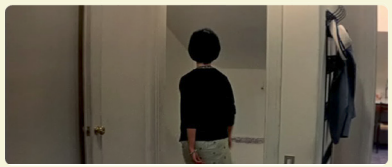
"It changed your mind about me, …"
"…hence your love for me."
"You're crazy, but you're smart."
"Then it's true."
"I didn't say that.
"I said you're bright."
"Was it something I said or did today that you took the wrong way?"
"Maybe."
"Don't talk to me that way! I forbid you!"





"Camille!"

41 *"Camille…"*



42 *"I despise you! …*

"…That's why the love's gone. I despise you. …

43 *"… And you disgust me when you touch me."*

Camille's behavior stems from a variety of desires and needs. One key element is relfected in the way she seems unable to respect Paul if he is abandoning his own convictions or desires in an effort to placate her. This is I think rooted in the vulnerability that comes from the kind of devotion to him involved in her love. She needs for him to be "a man." She expresses this more directly later on Capri, but there are two moments in the apartment which point clearly to this need. First of all she asks him to repeat what he would do if it were true that she no longer loved him. She tells him not to take the job if he doesn't want to, but that he is mistaken if he thinks she does not love him. She wants him to decide about the job independently of any consideration about her. Also when Paul tells her he told Prokosch that it was up to Camille whether they would go to Capri, she reacts by saying "Are you nuts? You know that it's up to you, not me!"

On Capri after Paul has told Prokosch that he does not want to work on the screenplay, he and Camille reprise their argument on the roof of the villa:

CAMILLE: I don't understand; you always told me that you loved this script. Now you tell the producer that you are only doing it for the money and that your ambition is to write for the theater. He's no fool. He's going to think about it, and the next time he won't ask for you. It's funny that you don't understand

something so simple....Besides I'm sure you're going to write it all the same.

PAUL: No.

CAMILLE: Yes, you'll see. I know you. I know you.

PAUL: If I do it, it's for you, to pay for the apartment. Anyway, I have an idea. You decide whether or not I should do the screenplay. If you say No, we'll leave.

CAMILLE: You're very cunning.

PAUL: No, why?

CAMILLE: If later you regret it, you could always say it was my fault.

PAUL: Not at all since I'm the one asking you.

CAMILLE: You really want me to tell you what to do?

PAUL: Yes.

CAMILLE: Write the script. You signed a contract and this is tiresome.

A bit later Camille pushes back harder when Paul persists: "Only five minutes ago you saw me kiss this guy and you were ready to change your mind anyway." She had deliberately let Prokosch kiss her when she knew Paul could see and returned the kiss just to make sure the point was made. One suspects she is more interested in provoking Paul than she is in becoming involved with Prokosch.

There is no single, tidy explanation of Camille's contempt for Paul. To say, as one critic has, that Godard presents Camille as a "treacherous enigma" strikes me as a cop out, although I confess my initial reaction to her behavior was close to this. She may resemble a force of nature, but natural phenomena are not enigmatic; they are just extremely complex. Many critics assume that Godard, like Brecht, had no interest in psychological explanations of the behavior of characters in his films, citing his refusal to ever explain to an actor why he asked them to do something or what the character's motivation was. Nonetheless Godard's directing technique was aimed at getting an emotional honesty in the behavior captured by the camera, and in *Contempt*, at least on some level, he was dealing with the disintegration of a marrige and the factors contributing to it.

Camille herself agrees when Paul insists that there must be a reason why she no longer loves him. She cannot articulate it and has no interest in trying to do so for his benefit. She later says she would die before she would tell him why she despises him. Explanations cannot change the facts. It does not matter if one knows "the truth", once love has died. Part of what she despises is Paul's obtuseness and his relentless demands that she explain herself.

Before the scene in the apartment we have seen Paul send Camille ahead with Prokosch while he goes to find a taxi to follow them, and we have seen Paul give Francesca a pat on the rear after attempting to commiserate with her. Paul was clearly self-conscious about the delay caused by the accident in the taxi, but we have no reason not to believe his story. He never seems to connect his abandonment of Camille to Prokosch with the change in her mood, although his self-consciousness after his arrival seems to indicate he an awareness of guilt on some level. He does question whether Prokosch did something to her while she was alone with him, but this is not really an admission that he betrayed her by telling her to go with Prokosch. She rejects vehemently any suggestion that something happened between her and Prokosch before Paul arrived. Aside from the fact that she is insulted by the suggestion that she would allow anything to happen, she surely knows that Paul is looking to shift the focus from his own behavior onto that of Prokosch. The issue is not what happened with Prokoswch or whether an accident was really the cause of his delay, but why he had allowed her to go with Prokosch in the first place.

Paul prefers to think that Camille is upset by his apparent flirtation with Francesca. No doubt he is attracted by Francesca and was in fact flirting with her, but Camille's initial reaction to the suggestion that she is jealous because of his attentions to Francesca reveals that she did not assign it any real importance. (The reaction is purely in Bardot's performance, the surprised look when Paul suggests that his flirtation with Francesca is the real problem. This is in the script. It describes Paul looking attentively at Camille while he suggests that the problem is that he gave Francesca a pat on the rear and then says "he has the impression that this explanation appears absurd to her.")

In Paul's defense I think it would be unfair to claim simply that he is too caught up in his own needs to be able to love her. His love for her is real, even if he is subject to insecurities and paranoid fantasies. Moravia's novel is much harsher in its perspective on Ricardo than the film is on Paul. Godard identifes too much with the kind of love Paul feels for Camille to make him as self-destructively blind as Moravia makes Ricardo.

The problem may be that Paul is in an untenable situation. He wants to provide for Camille and to make her happy, but in order to do that he feels he is betraying his own nature. The film preserves Moravia's image of the screenwriter as prostitute and the ironic suggestion that the prostitute is pimping his own wife in order to promote his career. It also preserves some of the suggestion that Paul's intelectual ambitions may be a bit suspect. What he writes in not serious theater or even criticism but crime novels.

Perhaps Paul's real mistake is in underestimating or misunderstanding the way in which Camille loves him. His desire to make her happy is,

to some extent, a desire to hold onto her, to insure that she will love him; but to her there is probably something insulting in the idea that he must buy her love by providing a nicely furnished apartment. On the other hand a desire to provide a nice home for her is surely a normal expression of love. The problem is that he seems to resent having to do so. The apartment is for her and not for them as a couple. It is a price he feels he has to pay.

It is difficult to explain definitively why Paul allows Prokosch to take Camille while he takes a taxi. Part of is is simple obliviousness; Paul really does not have any concept of what is at stake because he is blind to what Prokosch is or the threat that he represents. Probably he is deliberately shutting his eyes and pretending that the offer of a ride is a simple matter of logistics. He clearly does not want to alienate his new employer, and he can tell himself that it is easier and more pleasant for Camille to ride with Prokosch than to find a taxi with him.

The audience can certainly see that Prokosch is a predator who would like to have Camille. We have also seen that Camille is susceptible to the attraction of his power and wealth. While filming the scene in which Camille meets Prokosch, Godard added a touch which was not in the script. After she has also met Lang and chatted briefly about his films, she moves away from Paul and Lang to Prokosch's car and walks around it dragging her hand along the body of the car. She also seems to be basking in Prokosch's obvious attraction to her, even though he had been rude when she was introduced to him earlier. Paul may be sufficiently engaged with Lang not to notice what Camille is doing. When Prokosch invites her to his place for a drink, she calls for Paul. She even says she will go in a taxi with Paul after Prokosch has offered her a ride, but Paul encourages her to go with Prokosch.

The Characters and the Cast

Paul

As has been indicated Paul Javal is conceived somewhat differently from Riccardo Molteni in the novel. He is a writer of crime novels rather than a journalist and film critic, although Paul is a film buff in a way we have no reason to associate with Molteni. He is being hired to do a script rewrite because he wrote a script for a successful, if silly sounding, movie (*Toto Against Hercules*). Apparently one of his crime novels has also been turned into a movie directed by Nicholas Ray which is currently playing as well. The implication is that he is a bit more successful and established as a writer than Molteni. Like Molteni he has joined the Communist Party, and he cites a desire to write for the theater as the reason he does not want to work on the script for the *Odyssey*. His interest in the theater comes even more out of

Dean Martin as Bamma Dillert in
Some Came Running.

the blue than Molteni's. Before he tells Prokosch that he no longer wants to write the screenplay, the only connection between Paul and the theater comes when the camera lingers on a framed print of a depiction of what appears to be an 18th or 19th century theater hanging on the apartment wall behind his writing desk.

There is no clear indication of how long he has been married, when or why he moved to Rome nor where he lived before buying the still unfinished apartment. He does mention that he joined the communist party in Paris two months before.

The casting of Michel Piccoli alters the conception of the character perhaps even more than the details in the script. The main effect is that the character of Paul is more substantial and sympathetic than the character of Riccardo. He shares some of Riccardo's obtuseness, and there are indications that he his capable of violence similar to the way Riccardo loses control of himself, but it would be difficult to view Piccoli the way one can imagine Riccardo. When he takes a gun out from behind the books, he is playing the role of a character in a movie in a way that seems completely out of character for what we have seen of him so far; but it is a sign that the violence we have just witnessed between him and Camille may run deeper than we want to believe.

There are images in the film which suggest to me that the character of Paul is a composition of Riccardo Molteni, Alberto Moravia, Jean Luc Godard, Humpher Bogart and Jean Paul Belmondo all filtered through Michel Piccoli. There is one shot of him when he has fallen asleep leaning against the rock with his hat pulled down over his eyes where he resembles the images of Belmondo in some of Godard's other films. Unlike Molteni, Paul is a snappy dresser, and the hat which he wears so much of the time gives him a romantic (cinematic) image. He says is mimicking Dean Martin in *Some Came Running*, but he has a kind of natural French elegance.[49] The hat also conceals the receding hairline which is another part of the image he projects.

---

49 Martin's character in the film was a gambler who never took off his hat because he thought it was bad luck. Martin's hat is more of a 19th century river-boat gambler's style of hat rather than the more contemporary fedora Paul wears. The reference to *Some Came Running* is probably meant to extend well beyond the hat. There are numerous connections or parallels that could be drawn between the film and Godard's approach to *Contempt*. While I can see why many people consider *Some Came Running* a masterpiece, it is not my kind of movie, and I doubt that examining its connections to *Contempt* would increase my admiration or appreciation for Godard's film.

Piccoli is obviously more believable as an intellectual than Belmondo could ever be. When he recites the passage from Dante in the screening room, there can be no doubt that he feels it deeply and appreciates it. The context is sufficiently different from the moment in the novel when Molteni recites the same passage that there is nothing at all suspect about Paul's familiarity with and love of the text. It may be a stretch to say that Michel Piccoli is playing Alberto Moravia in any way, but the way he initially relates to Fritz Lang gives the impression that he may be an intellectual and writer in a way more similar to Moravia than to Molteni or Godard himself.

Clearly he is an alter ego for Godard in some way. The hat alone is a dead give away. He is a cinephile with a kind of academic intellectuality, and the dynamic of his relationship with his wife is obviously derived partially from Godard's own experience.

The biggest difference between Paul and Riccardo, of course, is the way in which Paul seems to survive the tragedy. The novel ends with Riccardo hallucinating a vision of his wife and deciding to write his story as a way of keeping alive a relationship with the woman he has destroyed. In other words he seems to have withdrawn completely into his own delusional reality. Paul, on the other hand, in the final scene of the film appears collected and resigned, if not actually at peace. He is dressed elegantly and is able to share a warm farewell with Lang even if Francesca seems to snub him. When he tells Lang he intends to return to Rome and "finish writing his play," there is almost a sense that his integrity has been restored, that Camille's death has freed him from the conflicts that prevented him from pursuing his true callling. How much irony one sees in this will depend of course on ones own values and priorities. The sincerity with which he and Lang speak to each other about going on with their work would seem to confirm that Paul has indeed found firmer ground to stand on without necessarily diminishing the magnitude of the tragedy. All of this should probably be evaluated within the context of the overall impact of the ending of the film which will be examined later.

Anna Karina
in Vivre sa vie

Camille

The character of Camille is a composite of Emilia from the novel, Godard's ex-wife Anna Karina and Brigitte Bardot (or perhaps the pop culture persona of Brigitte Bardot). Many people, including Jerry Prokosch, have difficulty accepting Bardot as a typist. I can imagine the same difficulty might have presented itself with Sophia Loren in the role, but clearly Bardot gives the character a specificity and complexity which is not apparent in the character of Emilia in the novel. This is mostly due, of course, to the fact that the novel takes place entirely inside Molteni's head, and Emilia is as enigmatic to the reader as she is to him. As Godard described in the treatment the movie tells the story as much from Camille's point of view as from Paul's and even allows her to explain herself directly in a voice over.

Camille is also probably more attracted to Prokosch than Emilia was to Battista. Apparently even before Camille was introduced to him, she had been impressed by whatever she knew or saw of him. When she says Prokosch is crazy as they leave his place in Rome, Paul says "You change your mind quickly. Monday you thought he was terrific." She may have simply been enthusiastic about what Prokosch could mean for Paul's career, but she does seem drawn to him as he sits in his Alfa Romeo.

When Francesca arrives at Prokosch's Roman villa on her bicycle shortly after Paul arrives, it is clear that Camille wonders if there might be something between Paul and Francesca. This may be a projection of her hurt at having been "given" to Prokosch. Even though she sees Paul being affectionate with Francesca later, it is clear during the argument at the apartment that his flirtation with Francesca is not really the problem.

In the taxi even after the argument in the apartment ended so violently Camille says, "Forget what I said, Paul. Act as though nothing happened." This exchange is not in the script, which simply says that the taxi ride takes them past ancient monuments on the

way to the cinema. Camille says this coldly, but it still seems as though she is telling him he can redeem himself and that their love can be restored.

Outside the theater after the others have left, there seems to be a degree of intimacy and awkward tenderness between Paul and Camille. Paul puts his arm around her and gives her a gentle kiss.

Paul: Don't come if you don't want to. I'm not forcing you.

Camille: It's not you that's forcing me. It's life.

She says this with a resigned sadness as though she feels her fate is out of her hands and that she cannot prevent whatever is going to happen to their marriage.

The moment on Capri when Prokosch offers her a ride back to the villa in the boat is the equivalent of the moment when Battista asks Emilia to ride with him during the drive to Capri. Paul's willingness to let her go seems to be the last straw.

When Paul returns to the villa, Camille makes sure that he sees her kissing Prokosch.

Molteni saw Battista kiss Emilia on the shoulder and Emilia was aware that he had seen it, but Emilia was clearly uncomfortable with Battista's advances. She indicates in her letter later that she might have trouble resisting him if he pursued her in Rome, but she is not as aggressive with him as Camille is with Prokosch. Obviously Camille kisses Prokosch in order to provoke Paul.

Even when it seems clear on Capri that the damage is irreparable, she is able to smile at Paul in a way the expresses an affectionate understanding of him as she says, "I know you" just as she was able to smile when she asked him what story

he was going to make up about why he was so late arriving at Prokosch's Roman villa.

Prokosch

It was inevitable that Godard would make the producer an American. To make a film about filmmaking without including Hollywood would be unthinkable, and Prokosch is an extreme representation of one type of Hollywood producer. Even though Lang considers him a dictator rather than a producer and compares him unfavorably to Samuel Goldwyn, Prokosch represents many aspects of the movie business that Goldwyn embodied. Battista is also a producer in the same vein, although being Italian he is able to cast his manipulative comments in terms of art and culture rather than just pulling out his check book whenever he hears the word culture. Battista is also playing on a smaller stage, despite the fact that Italian films were gaining world wide recognition.

There is some evidence that Palance disliked working on *Contempt*. It is easy to imagine that he would not have enjoyed Godard, and some accounts say he became so frustrated and annoyed with Godard's working methods that he ceased speaking directly to him and behaved more or less like the character he was playing. Godard may well have deliberately

provoked him to be able to capture this aspect of Palance's personality on camera, but Palance does seem to have enjoyed skewering the type of people he was accustomed to working for.

Godard presents him with a great deal more irony (and less sarcasm and skepticism) than Moravia applied to Battista, but there is clearly an appreciation of the power and sexual energy that he embodies. Prokosch has the best entrance of any character in the film. He is a preposterous figure, but he is also mythic. He emerges from the stage door above Paul and Francesca as a Greek king or god emerging from a palace or temple. He is bigger than life and believes he is a god. His sense of the larger than life characters, the "real human beings" and the "real human emotions" associated with movies (and movie production?)

is ludicrous and yet in some way admirable. The younger Godard was not the only one swept up by the power of movies, and the aura of this power clings to their creators. It is but a small step from Prokosch declaiming at the portals of his palace to the response of Samuel Fuller in *Pierrot le fou* when he is asked what the cinema is: "A film is like a battleground – love, hate, action, violence, death – in one word, emotions."

In the script as the lights come up in the screening room, Prokosch rips the screen off the wall and tramples it with his feet as he roars, "There's what I think of your cinema!" Presumably this proved impractical, and Godard had to settle for Prokosch kicking the cans of film and throwing one like a discus. He also directs his anger more specifically as the scenes which Lang has shot rather than at film or the cinema in general. While Prokosch's tantrums and abusive behavior may seem like ridiculous caricatures, they do capture the essence of a kind of behavior. The image of Francesca bending over so that Prokosch can sign a check on her back would surely still elicit nods of recognition from legions of "personal assistants" to outrageous agents, producers and studio executives in Hollywood. Prokosch is rude and abusive to everyone because of the confidence he has in his own power over them. That power is largely a matter of money, but it is also a matter of

the force of his personality and the energy which he exudes. The director will accept abuse from his producer because the producer enables him to work at his craft or create his art. There are limits, though, as when Lang refuses to let Prokosch take his copy of the script. Despite the imbalance in power there is a symbiotic relationship in which the producer needs the director as well.

Prokosch is clearly not an educated or cultured man despite he pretensions. ("Because the *Odyssey* needs a German director; anybody knows that a German, Schliemann, discovered Troy.") His fondness for quoting words of wisom from a little book that he carries is a travesty of the absorption of a literary heritage as represented by the quotations in Lang's conversation. He is dismissive of Lang's analysis of the *Odyssey*, and, like so many people associated with the distribution and exhibition of "art" films in the Fifties, he associates "art" with nudity and sexual content in films. Good movies

Fritz, that's wonderful for you and me, but do you think the public is going to understand that?

are ones that win public approval, i.e. make money, and he takes pride in making good movies. He has hired Paul because he wrote a movie which is a box office success.

Like Battista Prokosch is also an astute observer of people. He clearly sees something is going on between Paul and Camille even without understanding French and appears to be assessing it in terms of his own interest in Camille. His confidence that she will be attracted to him is part of the attraction she feels and is the inverse of Paul's fear that Camille will not love him, which drives her to despise him. Only at the very end of the film when Prokosch asks Camille what she thinks of him does he reveal any degree of uncertainty or hint of vulnerability.

Fritz Lang

In retrospect it seems equally inevitable that Godard would cast Fritz Lang as the German director, but according to Lang's biographer Godard's first choice for the role was Jean Cocteau. The idea apparently was to cast "someone of international distinction whose real-life identity would force audiences to think about an artist forced to prostitute himself."[50] Cocteau was ill and declined the offer. Lang was in need of money and thoroughly enjoyed the experience of working on the movie, even if he had his doubts about the way Godard filmed some of the scenes. The notes on his copy of the script indicate that he did not hesitate to make suggestions about what his character would do or say, but I doubt that he improvised on camera in the way he may have implied in an interview.

Fritz Lang began his career as a director in Germany in 1919. He adapted two films from the Niebelungen epic, made the futuristic *Metropolis* and *M*, the film that launched Peter Lorre, as well as 13 other films before he fled the Nazis and settled in Hollywood. He made 25 films in Hollywood including several westerns and hard-boiled

50 McGilligan 449

crime movies and is regarded as one of the fathers of Film Noir. Admirers of his earlier expressionistic German films tended to dismiss his Hollywood genre movies as the evidence of his talent having been swallowed by the industry, but critics at *Cahiers du Cinéma* championed his Hollywood films.

Casting Lang caused a fundamental shift in the underlying structure of the story. Godard admired Fritz Lang immensely; and Lang respected Godard, both as a critic and a filmmaker. Prokosch may be a pretender to the throne, but Lang is as close as the human race gets to divinity in Godard's eyes. Rather than being a soulless Germanic pedant with Nazi overtones like Rheingold, Lang is the moral center of the film. He speaks all the languages; he is a true intellectual and a committed artist; and he is extremely civil, sympathetic and generous. He accepts the realities of the film business with grace and perseveres despite all obstacles. Typically he expresses his resignation with a quote from a poem by Brecht, permitting Godard to have dialogue in which someone explains to a character played by Brigitte Bardot (known in France as "B.B.") that the "poor B.B." to whom Lang has referred is Bertolt Brecht.

Lang's interactions with Francesca and Camille are the exact opposite of those of Prokosch. With Francesca he shares an interest in Hölderlin's poetry. He has no problem asking her what the Italian word for "strange" is and insists on letting her and the editor go ahead of him as they exit the theater. With Camille he is appreciative, but honest when she expresses admiration for one of his films, *Rancho Notorious*. He says he prefers *M*, and I'll leave it to Andrew Sarris to fill you in on the implications for French cinephiles of a preference for *M* over *Rancho Notorious*. Lang accepts Paul even though he is being hired to undermine Lang's work. When Paul picks up the quote from Dante and continues the recitation during the screening, it seems as though he and Lang are kindred spriits.

In the debates about the script Lang is given the position which Molteni defended in the novel. He insists on preserving the spirit of the Greek epic and not modernizing it with a psychological interpretation. Prokosch suggests the theory that

Penelope had been unfaithful, and Paul comes up with a psychological interpretation that even Camille knows he does not believe. Paul's ability to find a psychological explanation for the reason it took Ulysses so long to return home seems to be another indication of how he has compromised his integrity in order to make money. It is also, of course, a projection of his anxieties about his own marriage. Lang is willing to hear Paul's ideas and to consider them, but he is not persuaded.

In *Contempt* Lang is, of course, an endangered species. He represents the Golden Age of Cinema whose funeral we are watching.

Francesca

Francesca is the translator, the submissive mistress of Prokosch and the competition to Camille for Paul attentions. Francesca Vanini is the name of a character Moll played in Shirley Clarke's 1962 film *The Connection*, another film partially about the making of a film. *Vanina Vanini* is also the name of the title character in a film adapted by Rosselini in 1961 from a story of a tragic romance by Stendhal.

The character of Francesca replaces the secretary in Moravia's novel with whom Riccardo flirted, but her primary function in the film is to enable all the parties to communicate with one another.

While perhaps not as sexy or volatile as Camille, she is certainly attractive, and is far more accomplished. She is able to translate difficult poetry as well as ordinary conversation, and she is well read enough to recognize a verse of Hölderlin. Her role as translator goes beyond the merely technical. She is also a mediator who is selective about what and how she translates in the interactions between Paul and Prokosch. She even speaks for Prokosch and explains his position to Paul towards the end of the long scene in the villa on Capri.

Her relationship with Prokosch apparently involves physical as well as psychological abuse, but she appears to be devoted to him nonetheless. The film really gives no indication of why she puts up with the abuse from Prokosch. There

is no reference to the sort of background information described in the treatment. What we see is an extremely competent assistant who is treated with complete disdain. As Paul and Camille are leaving Prokosch's Roman villa, Camille says she saw Prokosch kick Francesca. Later on Capri she seems to hold his hand and lean on him with genuine affection. All we can assume is some sort of sick dependence which Prokosch is able to cultivate and exploit. It is a relationship which the viewer can "compare and contrast" with that of Paul and Camille.

Francesca has her pride as well as vulnerability, as is obvious in the scene when Paul discovers her crying and she rebuffs his initial attempt to comfort her. She probably knows that his interest

is not purely solicitous, but she does lighten up a bit after he makes an attempt to amuse her. He of course responds by confirming any suspicions she may have had about the nature of his interest.

Later on Capri Francesca hands Paul his pistol which she found in the boat. In the script Lang returns the pistol to Paul saying that it fell out of his pocket as he was tying his shoe. The handwritten notes on Lang's script question whether he

is returning a loaded revolver to Paul, and one can imagine a discussion with Godard which resuslted in having Francesca return the gun and added the line in which Lang says, "Children ought not to play with firearms." This follows shortly after Paul has said that Ulysses must murder the suitors in order to regain Penelope's love and Lang has replied, "Death is no resolution." It also follows immediately after Paul has seen Camille kissing Prokosch. Francesca is presumably unaware of any of this. She hands the gun to Paul with an almost playful gesture as though she is exposing silliness on his part.

Francesca remains neutral at first during Paul's rant to Prokosch about money and why he does not want to work on the film. She is sitting on the couch holding Prokosch's hand. When Paul concludes by saying Lang is correct and one should either make Homer's *Odyssey* or not do it at all, Francesca seems to take more than the normal initiative in explaining Prokosch's position:

Camille: Mr. Prokosch has already told you, you are wrong; you aspire to a world like Homer's, you wish that it existed, but unfortunately it does not.

Paul: Why not? It does.

Camille: Perhaps you are right, but when it comes to making a film, dreams do not suffice.

This dialogue is exactly as scripted, but in the script Prokosch is described as whispering something to Francesca before she makes this last remark. In the film he has already walked over to the window and turned his back on the discussion, and she seems to offer this comment on her own in an attempt to mediate. My guess is that Godard decided that this final remark was too significant to originate with Prokosch. One also feels that the observation about Homer's world is more likely to originate with Francesca than Prokosch. All he knows is that he does not like what Lang is giving him and he wants to present the story in sexual/romantic terms he understands.

Godard

Godard himself plays the role of the assistant director for Lang. I am not inclined to read too much into this fact other than the obvious. There is a tradition of directors making cameo appearances in their own films (especially Hitchcock), and Godard liked the ironic touch of directing Lang in a movie in which he is Lang's understudy.

The Singer

The singer who is being cast as Nausicaa plays primarily a symbolic role in the story. Her performance in front of a blank movie screen is a comment on the current state of the cinema. Her wardrobe and appearance conjure up connections with Francesca and Camille, and her dancing seems to be a trivialized and commercial sexuality in comparison to the images of Camille.

The Film Within the Film

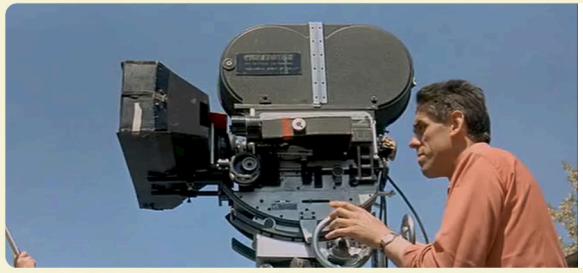
The production of the *Odyssey* is obviously a major component in the story and structure of *Contempt*. It provides the occasion for commenting on the state of the cinema, film production techniques, working relationships in a film production and the meaning of the story being told in *Contempt*. It is also a Brechtian stylistic device which helps keep the audience aware that they are watching a movie.

The shot for the credit sequence exists in a limbo between *Contempt* and Lang's *Odyssey*. It depicts the crew shooting a shot, but the subject of the shot is Francesca walking and reading a book. The dolly track in the shot appears to be the track used for the long tracking shot in which Paul arrives and the studio, is greeted by Francesca and meets Prokosch. Francesca is dressed in the same skirt and sweater and is still holding the book when she meets Paul. Originally this shot would have followed immediately after the credit sequence, and I confess I am a little surprised that Godard did not let the prologue play before the credits so the entrance into the main body of the film would still be the cut from a shot of the crew to the first shot of the film proper.

The fact that the credits are presented in a voice-over rather than as titles to be read originally seemed to me to announce immediately that the conventions of movie making are up for grabs. Thanks to Michel Marie I now know that using voice-over for credits is an hommage to Orson Welles, who was the first to do so in *The Magnificent Ambersons* (1942). At the end of the shot Coutard pans and tilts the camera so that it seems to be pointed directly at the audience watching the movie, and we get a mission statement with a reference to Andre Bazin: " 'The cinema,' said Andre Bazin, 'substitutes for our gaze a world in harmony with our desires.' *Contempt* is the story of that world."[51]

---

51 Apparently this quotation is wrongly attributed to Bazin and in fact comes from an article "Sur un art ignoré" by French film critic and playwright Michel Mourlet in Cahiers



TECHNICOLOR

The cinema is an invention without a future.

Given the tone with which the credits are recited, the deliberate pace of the shot and the somber music accompanying it, there can be little doubt of the seriousness of the intent. The meaning of it, however, is another matter. It is clearly on one level a celebration of film production technique. Watching Coutard check the light with his viewing filter and then spin the wheels on the gear head will stir the soul of anyone who has ever been truly fascinated with film production. Even the dolly grip and the cable guy may seem endowed with a kind of ceremonial significance. As the shot concludes Coutard and his camera rise above the viewer, and then the camera pans and tilts, almost concealing Coutard. Marie, I think justifiably, compares this final composition to the shots later in the film of the statues of the gods.[52] The difference is that here it is a camera observing us mortals rather than a god. As Godard put it, "the eye of the camera watching these characters in search of Homer replaces that of the gods watching over Ulysses and his companions." The gods, however, took an interest and could intervene in human affairs, while the camera simply records what it sees.

---

du cinéma, no. 98 see http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/André_Bazin

52 Marie p.88

The "characters in search of Homer" presumably are not just the filmmakers, but also the husband who is attempting to find his way back to a world in which his wife loved him, a world like which Homer's no longer exists because it has been destroyed. If, as Francesca explains, dreams are not enough for making films, what has become of the cinema which presents us with a world in harmony with our desires? The studio has been sold to make way for a five-and-ten-cent store.

I confess I have some difficulty untangling the ambiguities in all this. First of all dreams do not suffice for making movies in Prokosch's view because movies require money and an ability to tell a story that will make money at the box office. Presumably Homer's story is too old fashioned or too simplistic. Modern audiences need a modern story. Prokosch has hired Paul to fix the script, to add "not just sex... but more."

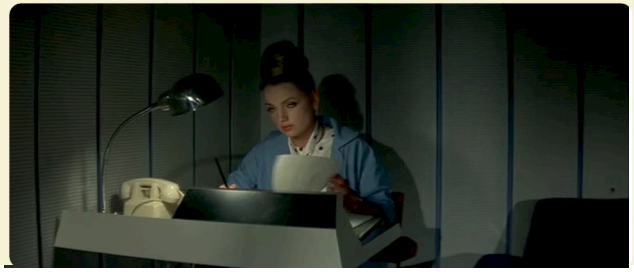
In Lang's view it is possible to capture the world of Homer on film. He thinks it is stupid to change Ulysses from a simple, clever and robust man into a modern neurotic. The story as he sees it is "the fight of the individual against the circumstances, the eternal problem of the old Greeks.... a fight against the gods, the fight of Prometheus and Ulysses." He intends to shoot a scene in which the gods discuss the fate of Ulysses as well as the scenes of physical action involving his struggle to get back home.

The one workman near the entrance to the screening room is the only sign of life at the studio, much of which seems rundown or overgrown.

If Prokosch has had to sell the studio, it is presumably because the movies he is making are not profitable enough. At the time the cinema was still reeling from the impact of television, and the big studio production seemed to many to be a doomed form of filmmaking. The New Wave itself was shooting on the streets and in apartments often with small crews and minimal equipment. But there is an aesthetic issue as well. If the essence of photography is the representation of reality, there is something self-contradictory about its use as part of a "dream factory". Lurking beneath the surface of *Contempt* is sense that movies are no longer a viable form of art or communication.

Beneath the screen in the screening room is an ironic quote from one of the inventors of the cinema: "The cinema is an invention without a future. – Louis Lumiere" The irony for Godard is that after almost 75 years of cinema the truth of Lumiere's opinion is finally being revealed. Lang thinks the CinemaScope format is only suitable for snakes and funerals. With Prokosch's production we may be watching the cinema's funeral presided over by a snake.

If *Contempt* is telling the story of the world of cinema, it is doing so in two senses. It is telling a story of characters in search of a world more in harmony with their dreams, and it is telling the story of the world in which cinema is produced. They are the same in many ways. The world of film production ("capitalist film" as Godard would



later label it) is not conducive to the expression of artistic visions nor is it conducive to working in a way that does not involve prostitution. (Lumière's status in the history of motion pictures is partially due to the fact that he and his brother were the first people to project a movie for a paying audience of more than one person.)

At the same time *Contempt* is celebrating the world of filmmaking. There is an almost fetishistic fascination with filmmaking technology evident in the shots of the camera, dolly, reflectors, lighting equipment, sound recording gear and the projector. We watch uncut dailies. We see the clapsticks or the inverted slate as well as patches for color control. We hear the assistant director's voice over a bullhorn. We see the assistant director moving cast into place and clearing the camera sight line of onlookers. We see the director tell the editor which take he prefers. The most intense moment of this aside from the opening credits shot is the cut to the projection booth window where we see the projectionist check focus and then watch the dailies. From the point of view of the "story" there is no need for this cut, not to mention the time devoted to it and the music accompanying it. From the point of view of anyone who has wanted to make films the image has a strange fascination which totally justifies its length and the music, and it is not just its association with Plato's myth of the cave.

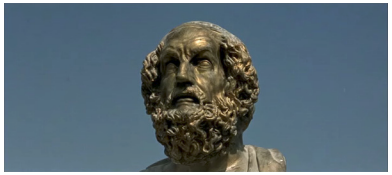
The scene in the screening room establishes the relationships between the people involved

in the production of the *Odyssey*. As is obvious in the composition of the wide shot of the group, the director is the central figure. His position is defined by his opening explanation of the footage they are viewing: "Each picture should have a definite point of view." The relationship between the director and the writer is cordial and respectful. When Paul later attempts to argue for a modern interpretation of the the *Odyssey*, Lang remains polite even though he thinks the ideas are stupid, and he debates the ideas without a conflict with the person presenting them. The director's relationship with the producer is one of conflict based on different understandings of what filmmaking is about. Lang's perspective is obvious as soon as he says to Prokosch, "I don't know if you are able to understand it. I certainly hope you can." Prokosch responds to Lang's abstract explanation of the point of view of the movie with a dismissive "Oh, please!"

Prokosch's own conception of the relationships has already been made clear in his previous conversations about why he is hiring Paul, but he underlines his view of his role by saying "Gods, I like them very much. I know exactly how they feel." The movie is his creation even if he needs mere mortals to implement his desires. He intervenes as necessary. Lang, of course, takes the opposite perspective, reminding Prokosch that the gods have not created men, but men have created the gods. It is the creative talent making the films that gives the producer his role.

We see Lang making decisions about the footage and communicating them to the editor. We see Prokosch throwing a tantrum and disrupting the orderly process of the screening. Even after Prokosch is dead, Lang is somehow able to continue making the film and is committed to finishing it.

The scene in the screening room also helps to establish thematic connection between the *Odyssey* and *Contempt*. On the simplest level Paul is Ulysses, Camille is Penelope, Lang seems to be Zeus, and Prokosch is both Neptune and one of the suitors, perhaps Antinous, the most arrogant and obnoxious suitor who is shot through the neck with an arrow. There are limits to how far one can push these correlations. Paul is hardly the resourceful and clever voyager who returns home triumphantly with the aid of the gods. If anything he is an ironic inverse, whose mind leads him astray and whose "guile" destroys the love his wife feels for him. The image of Homer is an image of



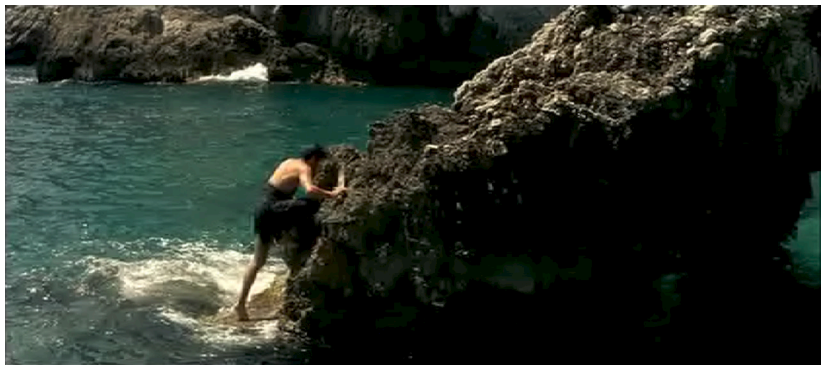
a blind writer, but the film does not develop this as an image of Paul in the way Moravia's novel does. Lang does not get involved in Paul's marriage and even refrains from getting involved in Paul's dealings with Prokosch about the script. He does seem to view events with an Olympian detachment.

I am tempted to suggest that Camille may also be viewed as an ironic version of Athena or Minerva. Paul looks to her to make the decision about what he should do. She actually gives him good advice at times (e.g. "Now, if you love me , shut up.") which he ignores or is unable to follow. She clearly has a "reasonable" perspective on the significance of this writing job for his career, and she knows what would be required to repair the breach in their marriage.

If the story is that of "the fight of the individual against the circumstances" and the hero is Paul, the circumstances are the way in which the film business works and the inherent conflicts in his marriage.

If, on the other hand, the "story" of the film is a commentary on the cultural or existential dilemma of modern man, the connecting links are provided by the quotations cited during the screening. Lang and Paul first quote Dante's *Inferno*, reciting lines from the 26th canto in which Ulysses relates to Dante (via Virgil's translation) the story of his final voyage and death at sea. This last voyage was prophesied in the *Odyssey*, but Dante's version of it is original. Ulysses and his crew sail through the gates of Hercules at Gibraltar beyond the boundaries of the known world and into the southern hemisphere. Just as they come within sight of the mount of Purgatory, a storm destroys there ship and they are engulfed by the ocean.

Neptune, whom Lang has described as "the mortal enemy of Ulysses, is the god of the water and the sea. The quotation from Dante becomes linked both with the image of Neptune which is used as punctuation later and with the scene in the dailies of Ulysses climbing out of the water onto a rocky coast. Dante's verses link Ulysses doomed voyage with the idea that men "were not born to live as brutes, but to follow virtue and knowledge." What Godard refers to as the "shipwreck of modernity" is suggested by the metaphor of a voyage which must be undertaken but which



is doomed. The history or progress of Western civilization is an inevitable search for knowledge which leads to an undermining of the bedrock on which the civilization has been built. The foundations of the culture have been shattered and man is at risk of drowning.

The second quote cited by Lang consists of the concluding lines of "The Poet's Vocation" by Hölderlin ("Dichterberuf" 1801) The same lines are cited by Heidegger in an essay on Hölderlin's poem "The Homecoming." Heidegger's essay was initially a lecture given in 1943 and then published along with another essay in 1944 under the title *Elucidations of Hölderlin.* A French translation of this work was published in 1962, and I suspect that Godard's interest in Hölderlin stems from Heidegger's interest in Hölderlin. Heidegger's reading of Hölderlin would have been very much in the air Godard breathed during the year before the production of *Contempt*.

The point of the quote is that man somehow derives aid or help from "the absence" of God. Lang comments on how Hölderlin revised the original line, "so long as God is not absent," first to "so long as God is close to us" before settling on the final version refering to God as absent. This is not the place to dive into Hölderlin, much less Heidegger's reading of Hölderin, and I think it is safe to assume that Godard himself did not delve too deeply into either; but the fact remains that there is something about the idea of living with the absence of God that resonated with Godard. A sense of absence is a sense of loss and suggests a yearning or a nostalgia for another possible way of living. *Contempt* is certainly infused with some kind of sense of loss and nostalgia, whether it be for uncomplicated sexual love or a more harmonius relationship with the natural world or even just the possibility of making films, as Paul says to Prokosch, like Griffith or Chaplin in the early days of United Artists.

After the audition at the theater Lang explains his perspective on the *Odyssey*:

LANG: Homer's world is a real world. And the poet belonged to a civilization that grew in harmony, not in opposition, with nature. And the beauty of The Odyssey lies precisely in this belief in reality as it is.

PAUL: Thus in a reality as it appears objectively.

LANG: Exactly and in a form that cannot be broken down and is what it is. Take it or leave it.

As Francesca says later for Prokosch this world no longer exists.

The movement of the film to Capri is also a movement from a modern city to an almost primeval natural setting surrounded by the sea. It

is virtually an attempt to move back in time. The villa resembles an ancient temple or fortress dominating the cliffs and sea below it. Lang and Paul walk through a dense green forest on their way to the villa. There is a long shot of Paul standing on top of one of the cliffs in which he is wearing a white suit and his hat and looks distinctly out of place in the spectacular landscape. Bardot swims nude in the ocean just as the siren does in Lang's film.

The transition to Capri is handled with a hard cut from the darkness outside the theater to a close-up of Camille/Bardot in bright sun with the ocean in the background. The next cut is to the camera crew moving the camera into position for what would seem to be the previous or following shot of Bardot. The temporary disorientation caused by these cuts is obviously a deliberate device to keep the audience aware of the narrative conventions of movies.

We see three different types of shots for Lang's film of the Odyssey: the shots of statues, close-ups of actors, which are so abstract or stylized that they could be camera tests rather than shots for the actual film, and more naturalistic scenes with or without actors. The highly stylized shots of the statues or the actors generate an analogy that encourages the audience to think about the degree of "realism" in *Contempt* itself. The pan across the ocean to the cliffs which is seen in dailies is a shot that could easily have been used for *Contempt*. The final shot in *Contempt* is virtually identical with the shot that Lang's crew is shooting in the last scene.

Lang describes the shot as the moment when Ulysses first sees his homeland after twenty years. Godard's camera moves in and over so that it seems to be seeing exactly what Lang's camera is photographing. Instead of a pan across the ocean to reveal cliffs of a coastline as we saw in dailies, the final shot in *Contempt* appears to me to be a vast expanse of ocean with no land in sight. It is

accommpanied by a voice over a bullhorn saying "Silence...", and I have always interpreted the shot as the final irony in the metaphor for the modern condition. There is no homeland, and there is only silence commanded by a human voice distorted by technology.

The script describes the ending as follows:

> Paul has come to bring news of Prokosch's death to Lang who is filming. He asks him what he plans to do.
>
> Lang says he will take advantage of it to finish the film in the way he had always wanted. He points out the ocean and quotes these lines of the poet:
>
> Oh! récompense, après une pensée
> Qu'un long regard sur le calme des Dieux!

These lines are from Paul Valéry's poem "Le cimetière marin" ("The Graveyard By The Sea") and are rendered by C. Day Lewis as

When thought has had its hour, oh how rewarding
Are the long vistas of celestial calm!"[53]

53 unix.cc.wmich.edu/~cooneys/poems/fr/valery.day-lewis.html When he was young, Godard was required to recite this poem for his grandparents every year on their wedding anniversary. (Brody p.5)

The intention of the script is clearly different from my interpretation of the ending of the film. The earlier treatment described the final sequence somewhat differently:

> Paul learns of the death of Camille and Jeremy Prokosch. He goes in turn to inform Lang, who is setting up a shot.
>
> Lang says it is necessary to finish the film and the last shot shows the gaze of Ulysses, his point-of-view of the refound country.[54]

Michel Marie's description of the final shot in the film as a panoramic shot merging with the look of Ulysses "to frame the ocean and the sky, empty and blue"[55] seems to indicate that I am not the only one who does not see the homeland on the horizon. I can only guess that ultimately Godard decided to have the final shot of the film reflect his own point of view rather than that of either Ulysses or Lang.

54 I am actually uncertain of the translation of the description of the shot "le dernier plan montre le regard d'Ulysse, plan-regard qui correspond à la paix retrouvée." "Plan-regard" is not the normal term for a point of view shot, but this seems to me to be the sense of the phrase, unless the shot is a close-up of Ulysses as he looks at his homeland. In the film Lang describes the shot as "Le premier regard d'Ulysse quand il revoit sa patrie" implying that the shot of the ocean is from Ulysses's point of view

55 Marie p. 36

The Production

Contempt was shot in 32 days between April 28 to June 7, 1963. It premiered on December 20, 1963. The scene in the apartment was shot in five very intense days. The fact that Bardot was involved meant that the production attracted paparazzi and media attention. There are two documentaries about aspects of the production made by Jacques Rozier included with the Criterion DVD release, and there was a fair amount of gossip generated during the filming and after the release. I do not have the impression that tensions among cast and crew were all that different from any other film Godard directed in his early years though the presence of a major star and a Hollywood actor obviously had an impact. While some of the stories may be amusing (e.g. Godard had to walk on his hands to persuade Bardot to alter her hairstyle.), most of them have little or no bearing on the finished film, how it works or what it means.

The production was different for Godard however since he had an American producer as well as the French and Italian ones. Apparently Levine expected daily progress reports from the production concerning the amount of pages shot in the way that was common with American productions. Godard was notorious for the free form nature of his shooting schedule, and he may have had some difficulty adapting to Levine's demands as well as to the expectations of a union crew which involved both Italians and French crew members.

When the film was first edited and being prepared for the Venice film festival, Joe Levine refused to accept it and shell out the final installment of his share of the financing because there was not enough nudity with Bardot. He demanded that nude scenes be added at the beginning, the middle and the end. Needless to say Godard was not initially receptive to Levine's input, particularly since Bardot's character is dead at the end of the film. Godard offered to take his name off the film so the producers could do whatever they wanted with it. After a month of rather public negotiations during which the producers threatened to re-edit the film, Godard agreed to shoot three additional scenes to enable Beauregard and Ponti to collect from Levine. Brody relates the juiciest version of this whole story and says that, when Godard agreed to shoot additional scenes, he insisted on $20,000 build a set duplicating exactly the apartment in Rome where the scenes between Bardot and Piccoli had been filmed. Godard expected that the demand would discourage them from requiring the new scenes, but the producers agreed. Brody also says that Bardot required the use of a body double for some shots, but concedes that Godard did not really confirm this. When the new scenes were shot, Coutard was no longer available Alain Levent was the cameraman.

The first new scene is the prologue with Bardot and Piccoli in bed. The second was a series of shots for the flashback montage which includes a "centerfold" shot of Bardot on the white rug. The third was a scene in a bedroom of the villa on Ca-

pri, which was not used in the final version of the film. It had Bardot nude on the bed as the Jack Palance character put on his clothes, and presumably would have been inserted between the scene where Paul sees Camille kiss Prokosch and the scene in the main room of the villa when Paul announces his decision not to work on the movie.[56]

Joe Levine was not the only person who felt the additional scenes improved the film, and even Godard said that he liked them and would have fought to keep them in the film if censors had objected to them.[57] The prologue was a direct response to Levine's request that there be a love scene with Bardot nude at the beginning of the film. It is as though Godard said, "You want a nude Bardot scene? I'll give you a nude Bardot scene!" and proceeded to comply with the letter of the law without violating the spirit of the film or his own sensibility. The scene is stylized by the use of a color effect which makes it appear as though much of the scene was shot through either a red or a blue filter. (This effect could have been added in the printing of the scene in the lab and at least one version of the film distributed on tape in the US attempted to remove it.) The entire scene is a single three-minute-fifteen-second shot. It starts with a wide shot of the Camille and Paul on the bed, moves into a closer shot of them, and then the camera moves down and back up Bardot's

56 Marie *Le Mépris* 19f

57 French Television Interview on DVD]

"I don't know. Maybe I'll go to Mom's. I don't know what I'll do later."
"Come pick me up if you want Around 4 o'clock. At Cinecittà. I have to see that American."
"Maybe I will. See my feet in the mirror?"
"Yes."
"Think they're pretty?"
"Yes. Very."
"You like my ankles?"
"Yes."
"And my kneess, too?"
"Yes, I really like your knees." And my thighs?"
"Your thighs, too."
"See my behind in the mirror?"
"Yes"
"Do you think I have a cute ass?"
"Yes, really."
"Shall I get on my knees?"
"No need to."
"And my breasts. You like them?"
"Yes, tremendously."
"Gently, Paul. Not so hard."
"Sorry."
"Which do you like better, my breasts or my mipples?: […]

"The you love me totally."
"Yes. I love you totally, tenderly, tragically."
"Me too, Paul."

body. The first section of the scene is red until the camera begins moving down Bardot's body and the filter effect is removed. Once the camera is back close on Camille and Paul's faces, the scene is filtered blue. Viewed in the context of the dispute over the film, the scene seems almost in your face as though Godard is thumbing his nose at the producers. He teases them by partially obscuring the nude Bardot with a heavy red filter and then as the camera starts moving down her body, the filter is removed as though all the lights came on in order for Joe Levine to get his fill of Bardot's backside.

For a normal viewer of the film, however, the scene is striking in a very different way. Some commentators describe the scene in terms of a red, white and blue color scheme that is a reference to the colors of the French flag and a nod to the fact that Bardot was a national treasure. This particular reading would never have occurred to me unassisted, and I confess I find it a bit forced. Certainly the entire film is conceived in terms of bold primary colors and retrospectively the color cast for the opening may seem appropriate, but the immediate impact of the use of the filters is surely something else. My own response may be idiosyncratic, but it is not surprisingly what interests me most.

Coming after the voice-over credits and the shot of the camera pointing directly at the audience, the cut to a scene in a bedroom looking as though it were shot through a red filter, first of all, confirms once again that I the viewer am in the hands of a filmmaker who feels free from the normal conventions of filmmaking. He is using the resources of the medium in his own way. There is secondly the association of red light with a bordello which surely plays a role in a response to this image. Needless to say the dialogue as well as the discrete framing and the fact that Piccoli is fully dressed undercut this association. There is a kind of shock when the red filter effect is removed for no readily apparent reason other than the viewer's interest in seeing Bardot's body more clearly. I think the shock is related to a (male) viewer's realization of his own "prurient" interest in the scene and serves as a reminder of the extent to which films rely on sexual images for their appeal. When the blue filter is introduced, there is an exponential increase in the sense of stylistic freedom and self-consciousness. The net effect is the sort of exhiliration that I often feel with Godard's stylistic touches even when they seem completely arbitrary to me. Godard himself said of it in one interview:

> The fact of the nudity doesn't go against the film, which is not erotic; quite the contrary. That Bardot should be shown at the beginning of the story was possible, even normal, since at that point it was she who undressed. She was not yet Camille, the touching, intelligent, sincere wife of the screenwriter Paul Javal, who at some point says – and it was a complete coincidence – "In life you see women dressed; but in the cinema you see them nude." In other conditions I would have refused to shoot

> this scene, but here, I shot is in a certain color, I lit it with red and blue so that it became something else, so that it had an aspect more unreal and more profound, more serious than simply Brigitte Bardot on a bed. I wanted to transfigure it since the cinema ought to transfigure reality.[58]

The dialogue is a distillation of an important aspect of Paul and Camille's marriage and foreshadows the story of its dissolution. It begins with an exchange that makes it clear that this is just another ordinary day in the life of a couple. She's not sure what her plans are for the day; he suggests she come pick him up at the studio at four o'clock. Then Camille begins asking Paul if he likes/loves various parts of her body. Needless to say Paul likes all aspects of Bardot's body, and Camille then draws the conclusion that he loves her completely. In other words we have begun the movie with a question about what it means to love a woman and whether a person is more than the sum total of all his or her body parts.

Paul agrees that he loves her totally: "Yes, I love you totally, tenderly, tragically." She responds, "Me too, Paul." We have no idea why their love is tragic, but we can certainly feel from the music over the last part of this scene as well as the music over the opening credits that we are about to watch a tragedy.

There are other minor points suggested by the dialogue in this scene. Obviously Camille needs to feel she is loved, and she reveals some degree of insecurity. She also reveals that she must be handled gently when she says, "Gently, Paul; not so hard" as he starts to pull her closer and kiss her. She is, however, anxious to offer herself to Paul at least visually by offering to sit up on her knees so that he can see her better. It is perhaps significant that she is concerned purely with her visible aspect and that she asks if he can see her in the mirror. In terms of the metaphorical resonances of their relationship it may be worth noting that the human mind as the "mirror of nature" is a traditional metaphor in Western philosophy and part of what 20th century European philosophy has sought is a way to rid itself of visual metaphors at the foundation of its conception of reality. This theme of voyeurism is reprised as Paul looks at the book of erotic art.

It would be a mistake to assume that this opening scene is intended to be critical of Camille in any way or to force a feminist reading onto it in terms of the way Camille conceives herself as a sexual object. I think Godard and the film love Camille/Bardot as totally as Paul does. If there is a tragic dimension to that love, it is not her fault.

The second nude scene Levine demanded was a sex scene between Paul and Camille in the middle of the film. Brody cites an interview in which Godard commented on his reaction to this request:

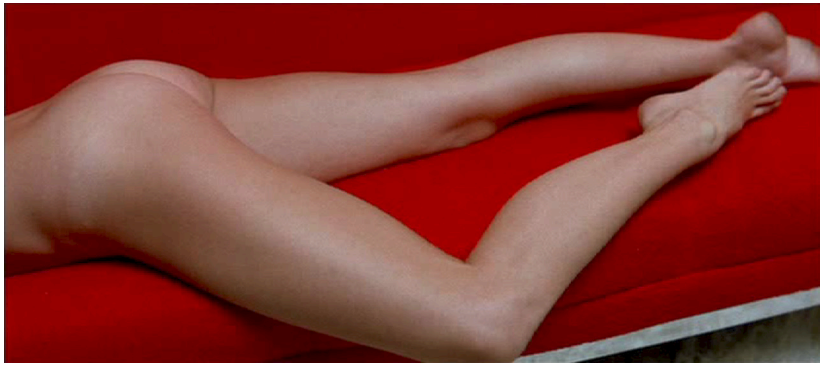
---

58 Marie 20

> As for the Piccoli-Bardot scene in the middle of the film, it appeared to me almost impossibly absurd, because *Contempt* is precisely the story of a woman who detaches herself from her husband and refuses to sleep with him in the conjugal bed! So I refused to do this scene, but I said to them: "You've given me an idea; I'm going to do something the opposite of what you want which will please you nonetheless."[59]

The solution may have been even more inspired than the stylization of the prologue. Godard already had a nude shot of Bardot in the middle of the film: the moment in the argument where she lies down on the couch and sarcastically agrees to make love. The shot was a wide shot in which Bardot's body is partially obscured by the couch, and it is only a matter of seconds before Paul covers her back up with her towel. This is also the point in the argument where Godard

59 Brocy p. 169



intended to have the characters express their feelings directly. He might well have originally imagined having the actors directly address the camera as they do in some of his other films. The idea he hit upon was to use subjective flashbacks along with interior voice-overs. He was able to shoot what amounted to a cinematic Playmate spread of Camille, combining posed nudity with glimpses from her everyday life. There are 10 cuts in the montage. Six are presumably from new shots or outtakes. Four are from other scenes in the film, including a flash forward to a scene on the roof of the villa on Capri. All of it reads as Paul's memories/fantasies about the way things used to be with Camille. Levine got his fullscreen CinemaScope nude shots of Bardot on a fur rug; the average viewer got an overwhelming sense of the sexual longing and loss scrambling Paul's brain.

I suspect that the decision to include the flashback montage in the middle of the argument had a ripple effect on the editing of the film and led to the decision to include two other subjective montages: one consisting of six cuts when Camille sees Francesca arrive after Paul at Prokosch's Roman villa, and the other with five cuts after Paul goes inside to wash his hands. Both are presented as Camille's memories/fantasies so there is more or less a balance between the Paul and Camille in terms of the number of cuts in the montages allo-

The first montage of flashbacks comes when Camille sees Francesca arrive later then Paul. It includes four shots which appear to be pickups specifically for use in the montage. The other three cuts are associated with Camille's response to Prokosch's invitation to come with him in the car and Paul's encouragement of her to do so.

The second montage comes after Paul goes inside to wash his hands. It also focuses mainly on the fact that Paul sent her ahead with Prokosch, but it includes a cut of the moment when Paul met Francesca at the studio. While this is a moment in which Camille was not literally present, it nonetheless functions as an indication of the turmoil in her mind, perhaps by suggesting that she is imagining the moment when Paul and Francesca met and by strenghthening the connection between Paul and Francesca and the fact that Paul offered her to Prokosch.

cated to each. The fact that the subjective montages associated with Camille come before the montage in the argument scene helps set up the later montage. The flashcuts associated with Camille's may catch the viewer a little by surprise, but it is perfectly clear how they are intended to be viewed. They are more momentary associations which indicate some of the turmoil going on beneath Camille's contained surface and do not carry the weight of the montage in the middle of the argument.

The Visual Style

Lang's *Odyssey* is being filmed in Scope as is *Contempt*. Paul expresses enthusiasm for the wide screen format, and Lang says it is suitable only for snakes and funerals. Godard himself preferred the 2.35: 1 Scope aspect ratio to the conventional 1.66:1 ratio which had replaced the traditional 1.33:1 aspect ratio in Europe after the introduction of television.

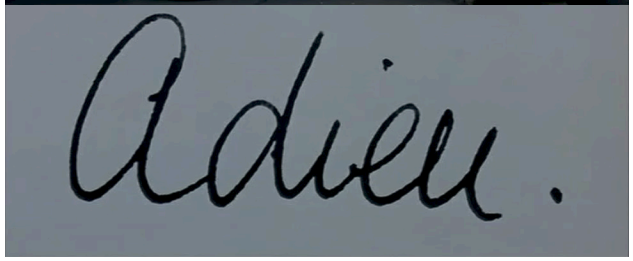
> With *Une Femme est une Femme*, I also discovered 'Scope. I think it is the normal ratio, and 1:33 an arbitrary one. This is why I like 1:33 – because it is arbitrary. 'Scope, on the other hand, is a ratio in which you can shoot anything. 1:33 isn't, but is extraordinary. 1:66 is worthless. I don't like the intermediate ratios. I thought of using 'Scope for *Vivre sa Vie*, but didn't because it is too emotional. 1:33 is harder, more severe. I'm sorry, though, that I didn't use 'Scope for *A Bout de Souufle*.[60]

In the interview on the DVD for Contempt Raoul Coutard describes how Godard had wanted to shoot the film with a Techniscope camera. Techniscope was a new process at the time based on a movement in the camera which pulled down two perforations rather than four for each frame. It permitted a film to be shot with a 2.35:1 aspect ratio without the use of anamorphic lenses and had the advantage of requiring half as much raw stock for photography. Avoiding anamorphic lenses eliminated the distortion at the edges of the frame which were characteristic of the early Cinemascope lenses. It also permitted a much greater depth of field for a given amount of light, although it tended to make the film grain more apparent because of the smaller area the image occupied on the film. Coutard remarks that Godard always loved new technology, but it is also clear that Techniscope would have been well suited to the style in which he shot *Contempt*. Unfortunately there was no Techniscope camera available when they needed to shoot, so the film was shot with anamorphic lenses. The lenses used were Franscope lenses and included anamorphic zoom lens. Franscope was an improvement over the original CinemaScope system. Both employed a separate anamorphic lens in front of the normal camera lens. With the original CinemaScope system each lens had to be focused separately. Franscope de-

60 Godard 183

signed the anamorphic element for a specific lens which was set at its hyperfocal distance so that the camera operator only had to focus the anamorphic element. Franscope also introduced one of the first anamporphic zoom lenses, but shooting a zoom with a camera like that used on Contempt was awkward because it was not a reflex camera and the operator's viewfinder did not show the effect of the zoom.

Despite Lang's objections to the scope format as suitable only for snakes or funerals, Godard and Coutard make it seem like the natural format for a film.


Adieu.

Coutard also makes it clear that the film was designed from the very beginning around the use of saturated, primary colors. Originally it was intended to be printed with the Technicolor dye-imbibition process in order to get the most vivid, saturated colors; but the producers decided the film did not warrant making the 100 prints required for a minimum Technicolor order.[61]

The frequent use of vivid primary colors is probably the most striking thing about *Contempt* visually. It almost seems on some abstract level to be a Mondrian painting. It is difficult to pinpoint the emotional impact of the use of color or the way it augments the narrative dimension of the film. The dominant color is surely red, but the use of yellow, blue and white contribute to create a sense of a palette of predominantly saturated primary colors. The main function of these colors aside from the association of red with sexual passion, I believe, is to set up a contrast between the contemporary human world and the natural world. The natural world is primarly greenery, rocky cliffs, ocean and sky. The blue of the sky and ocean is intense, but it does not have the purity or saturation of the artificial colors in the furniture in the screening room or the villa on Capri.

There is also a contrast between the vivid colors in a movie and color in the natural world suggested by the shots of Ulysses, Penelope and Antinous in the dailies. The original treatment had called for an even more striking contrast between the photography of the *Odyssey* and that of the film itself:

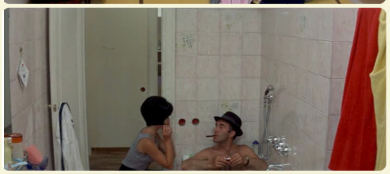
> The scenes of the *Odyssey* itself, that is the scenes shot by Fritz Lang as his character, will not be shot in the same way as the film itself.
>
> The colors will be more brilliant, more violent, more vivid, more contrasty, more schematic.. One could say that the effect will be of a painting by Matisse or Braque in the middle of a composition by Fragonard or a shot by Eisenstein in a film by Rouch.

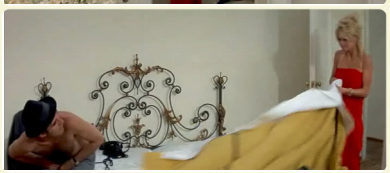
The treatment had described the photography of the film itself in terms of newsreels shot in color and obviously the conception of the photography evolved before the film was shot.

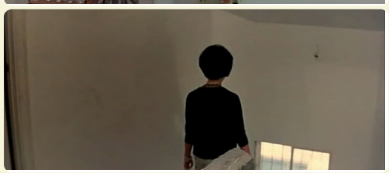
I doubt that it is possible to "interpret" consistently the use of color in *Contempt* schematically in terms of thematic elements or narrative motifs.

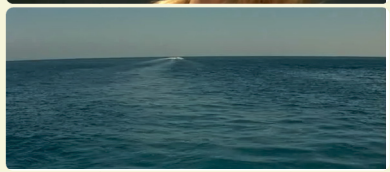
---

61 Coutard tells an ironic story about the color in the dailies made by a lab in Rome. They were not able to print them onto Eastman Kodak print stock and the Italian print film they used had flat, desaturated colors in comparison to Eastman Kodak print film. At first Godard and Coutard were appalled by the look of the film, but the lab was able to assure them that a Technicolor print would have the look they wanted and Coutard manged to get some Kodak print stock so that the first few days could be printed onto it. Godard and Coutard were sufficiently reassured that they went ahead viewing dailes printed on the Italian stock. By the time the film was edited and first printed on Kodak print stock, they were so accustomed to the look of the Italian print that they hated the bright saturated colors in the Kodak print. Eventually they became accustomed to it, though, and realized it was the look they had always wanted for the film









Red is initially the color of Prokosch's Alfa Romeo, and blue is the color of the furniture in the screening room. The editor taking notes wears a blue lab coat, and Lang wears a dark blue suit. Camille is also wearing premonimantly blue when she arrives at the studio. Francesca wears a mustard or gold sweater until she changes into a red sweater as Paul starts to flirt with her. There is a bright red love seat next to Paul and Camille as he tries to amuse her. Later Francesca changes into a pale blue blouse and white skirt. At Capri she wears a bright yellow robe.

Camille wears a red towel for much of the scene in the apartment and the red furniture is surely the dominant color in the scene. Camille changes into a green dress with a black sweater and a black wig by the end of the scene. At Capri she wears a gray skirt with a pastel pink and gray blouse or a bright yellow robe. There appears to be a slight discontinuity in that the robe next to her on the deck while she is sunbathing is red, but the robe she has on after she stands up off-camera is yellow like the one worn by Francesca. By the end of the film Prokosch has changed out of his gray suit into a bright red sweater. The railing next to the service station appears to have been painted red to match the car; and of course, the blood on Camille after the accident is bright red.

Beyond this I am inclined to let the colors speak for themselves.

Although the film is entirely shot on actual locations, it is clear that choice and redecoration of the locations was driven by formal or stylistic concerns similar to those behind the color scheme. Since "homecoming" may be regarded as one of the themes in the film, it may be worth taking a brief look at the three homes in the film: Paul and Camille's apartment, Prokosch's Roman villa and the villa on Capri.

Paul and Camille's apartment is unfinished and still partially unfurnished, but it is by no means a sterile, inhospitable environment one might expect from some descriptions of Godard's films.

> Godard's world is a very special one: it is urban, transient, grey. In his films the country is simply a space you have to go through to get to another city. The one important exception to this rule is the idyll on the island of Porquerolles in *Pierrot le Fou*, but of course it is just that – an idyll, and one which, given his other films, one knew to be doomed. And so it was.
>
> His city is Paris, and it is the Paris of hotel rooms, chambres de bonnes, and, above all, cafés, with their pin-ball machines and the endless conversations nursing the lait chaud against the inevitable moment when one has to go out on the streets or back to the dreary hotel room. So one drinks, and eats, and talks; one stands at the bar or sits down at a table. No one in his films has a flat, a home. Or if

> they do, they have either just moved in or are just about to move out. In *Contempt* the Roman flat of Camille and Paul has got barely a few sticks of furniture, no curtains, no carpets.... [62]

Roud either considered *Contempt* a very atypical work or he viewed it through the lens of his need to write a coherent narrative about Godard's oeuvre. Not only does he completely ignore the Romantic image of the natural world in *Contempt*, but I believe he misreads the presentation of the apartment. I realize that most commentators want to see the apartment as a sterile enviornment, but it has never affected me in that way.

Both Paul and Camille express pleasure at the sight of their apartment, and its exterior is photographed in a way to make it about as attractive as a high rise apartment can be. There is also a modulation in the music when they look up a the apartment that seems to imply a positive reaction. Paul mentions a "horror" being built across the street, and the implication is that he genuinely likes their own apartment. It is furnished with a spare, modern aesthetic, but there is art included in the décor; and the dining area, kitchen and bath all seem comfortably domestic in a mid-century modern style. The floors are not all unfinished. In fact the living room floor seems to be a fairly nice parquet floor, and it has a white shag rug under the sitting area. There are what appear

The neighborhood does seem to have gone downhill a little by they time they leave after the argument.

62 Roud p. 16

to be fresh cut flowers in two vases in opposite corners. There are in fact curtains hanging in the bedroom. There is plenty of light in the apartment thanks to the large windows, one of which has a view overlooking trees in something like a park. There is a balcony off the living room. The bathroom is spacious and modern. Paul has a separate study where he can write. There is also another room with a large ladder in it that may be a second bedroom. Other than the fact that it is an apartment in a large building, whether one finds it appealing or sterile is surely a matter of taste.

The only negative association with the apartment is the money required to pay for it. The fact that it is unfinished is a reference to the money, but it also has connotations of nest building in process which do not necessarily seem negative. Clearly the apartment is associated with the love that Paul and Camille have for each other, and the unfinished aspect of the apartment may be connected to the way in which that love is in jeopardy.

Prokosch's Roman villa on the Appian Way was originally rented by the production for Bardot to stay in. When she decided to stay in a more centrally located apartment instead the villa was used to house the crew and serve as Prokosch's home. It seems to have a history, but the kitschy décor seems to reveal an inauthentic relationship to history. The past is being used, perhaps even abused, much in the way Prokosch envisions using Roman erotic art to add spice to his film of the Odyssey.

Much of the scene at the villa takes place outside in the garden. The move from the studio to the Roman villa anticipates the move from Rome to Capri. The garden is a tamed version of the natural world which is much more hospitable than the cliffs of Capri, but it is also the place where the conflict between Camille and Paul emerges. It is perhaps an ironic Garden of Eden.

As a place in the story the villa is associated with Prokosch's predatory interest in Camille, his abuse of Francesca, Paul's betrayal of Camille and Camille's pain and anger. The only one who seems comfortable there is Prokosch, and it seems more a lair or den than a home. As Paul and Camille leave the iron gate closes behind them and Camille reacts to seeing Prokosch kick Francesca. The walled villa seems almost like a prison in which Prokosch is holding Francesca hostage.

The villa on Capri seems more like a fortress or a temple than a home. The sparse interior seems colder than Paul and Camille's apartment, due largely to the predominance of blue in the sparse furniture. There is an iron gate on the door which suggests a prison. The steps leading up to the roof conjure up associations with steps to a sacrificial site in a Mayan complex. There can be no question that the location and design of this villa is inspired and inspiring, but in the context

of the film it has a decidedly inhuman aspect. It seems to stand in defiance of nature. If it is a reference to the past, it is a past within which the characters are imprisoned and being prepared for sacrifice.

The Use of Camera

After the use of color the most striking thing about the visual style of Contempt is surely the way in which Godard stages the scenes for a moving camera rather than relying on editing. There are 12 shots in the film which are over two minutes long and another 16 which are over one minute. The entire film consists of only 177 cuts including the title cards.[63]

The most famous use of the moving camera is the scene in which the camera moves back and forth past the lamp for close-ups of Paul and Camille during the argument in the apartment. This is a obvious example of the way in which Godard knows rules are meant to be broken. Conventional rules for film directing would insist that time spent on the lamp between the two of them was irrelevant and that one should cut back and forth between the two close-ups. Godard knew that the time spent on the lamp would not only increase the sense of the separation of the lovers but would also permit the lamp to take on some kind of symbolic value. Paul arbitrarily switches the lamp on and off during their "talk" just as Camille had switched a wall lamp on and off as she spoke to Paul on her way to the powder room in Prokosch's villa. According to Coutard the moves in this shot were not planned specifically before the camera rolled, and Godard initiated each move by tapping the dolly grip on the shoulder as they shot. I think this is another instance in which a slightly arbitrary feel to a stylistic

63 Just for the sake of comparison Figgis' version of *The Browning Version* has 1120 cuts and Asquith's version has 390

touch enhances a sense of the reality of what one is watching. Godard obviously knew what he was interested in seeing as the scene unfolded, but the shot also has a life of its own.

Much of the use of moving camera, however, is relatively conventional, and *Contempt* is a case study in elegant and efficient choreography of actors and camera. In many instances the movement of the camera and of the actors in and out of the frame is so natural that one may not even be aware of it. The viewer is simply swept along.

The first example of this are the two long tracking shot at the studio when Paul arrives and Francesca takes him to meet Prokosch. The first is one minute forty-seven seconds long; the second two minutes twenty-five seconds. Both involve what I estimate to be well over 100 feet of dolly track. The track for first shot is the track seen in the credit shot, but the camera is going the opposite direction in the credit shot. The second shot is essentially an extension of the first so that the beginning of the track has been moved to a point beyond the end for the first shot. The transition between the two is a cut with a pan on Paul's movements so that the second shot is a reverse angle and tracks from right to left rather than left to right. The transition also corresponds to the point in the scene where Prokosch actually begins to speak to Paul rather than simply declaiming and ignoring him. Francesca had led Paul and the camera in the first shot. Now Prokosch takes

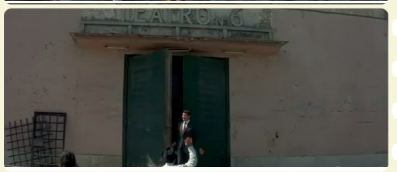
"Hello. How are you?"
"Fine , thanks."

"Say, what's going on here? The place is empty."
"Jerry fired nearly everybody. Italian cinema is in trouble."
"Where is he?"
"Over there."
"Where?"

"Jerry? … Jerry!"

"Jerry!"

"Jerry!"



"Only yesterday, there were kings here. Kings and queens, liars and lovers…"

"…all kinds of real human beings, and all the real human emotions."

"Yesterday I sold this land…"

"…and now they're going to build a five and ten cent store, a prux-unique' …"

"…on this, my last kingdom."

"It's the end of the cinema."

"I don't think cinema will ever die.."

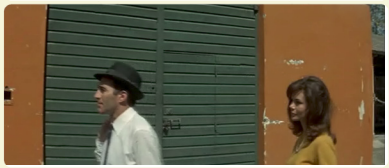
"They tell me that you wrote that wonderful successful motion picture Toto Against Hercules*."*

"Yes."

"It's doing good business in New York."

"Fair to middling."

"Oh you don't have to be modest with me; I don't believe in modesty."



"…I believe in pride. I believe in the pride in making good films."

"So you know the Odyssey*?"*

"Your film with Fritz Lang?"
"No! …"

"…I've already lost the studio; now I'm going to lose my shirt because of him. …"

"Why did you hire him?"
"Because the Odyssey needs a German director. Anybody knows that a German, Schliemann, discovered Troy."

"So what must I do?"

"I want you to write some new scenes for the Odyssey…not just sex, but more…more.

"Producers are all the same. They never know what they want."

"To know that one does not know is the gift of the superior spirit. Not ot know and to think that one does know…"

"…is a mistake. To know that this is a mistake keeps one from making it."

"I have the knowledge here."
"I don't believe Lang will accept it."
"This is my money…"
"In '33 Goebbels asked Lang to head the German film industry and that very night Lang left Germany."

"But this is not '33; this is '63. And he will direct whatever was written, just as I know that you are going to write it."
"Why?"

"I will tell you in the projection room."

"Come. It's this way."

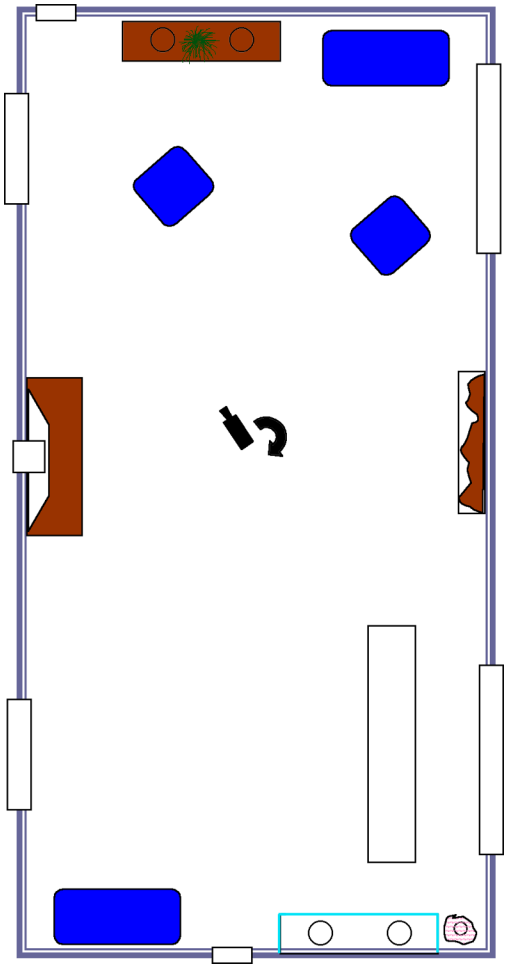
over and leads the way until he gets into his car to drive to the screening room.

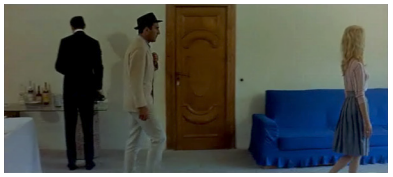
The two shots are also good examples of the way in which Godard and Coutard compose the scope frame. The first shot frames Paul and Francesca comfortably in a full figure shot that enables the camera to reveal the deserted studio around them. It then tilts up to frame for Prokosch's entrance as he comes out of the huge doors to the stage onto the loading dock above Francesca and Paul. The loading dock becomes his stage from which he announces the demise of the studio, and we see only the heads of his audience in the bottom of the frame. Prokosch is able to move back and forth within the frame above Paul and Francesca.

The second shot is composed more tightly but the frame still permits the characters to occupy different positions relative to each other. The initial pan enables a kind of complementary medium shot of Paul and reverse angle on Prokosch achieved by movement of the camera and the actors rather than cutting.

The longest continuous shot in the movie is the 4-minute-and-21-second scene in the villa at Capri after Paul has seen Camille kiss Prokosch. It takes place in the grand salon of the villa which is 60 feet long and 30 feet wide with four large windows offering a panoramic view of the ocean and the island. There is a large hearth with crystal panes at the back permitting one to see the ocean through the fireplace on one side of the room between two windows and a large piece of bas relief between the windows on the wall opposite it. There are couches at each end of the room.

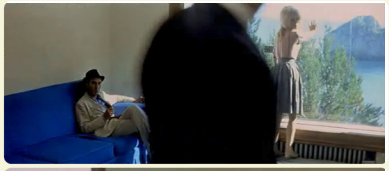
During the course of one shot the viewer sees all four walls of the room as the camera pans perhaps 300 degrees and dollies slightly following the action around the room. Except for the moment when Prokosch invites Camille to see the view through the fireplace, the camera is following Paul as he enters and paces around the room. It is, of course, mainly Paul's scene as he rants about the effect of money on people's lives and his own ambitions to write for the theater. All the main characters are involved in the scene plus a servant who is putting out china and silver for a buffet. Paul and Lang enter at one end where they have come up the stairs from the entrance. The are presumably followed shortly by Francesca who came into the house with them but whom we do not see entering the room. Soon after Lang has taken a seat and Paul starts pacing, Camille and Prokosch enter through a door at the opposite end of the room. Lang and Francesca remain seated throughout the discussion until they finally get up to leave the room. Most of the "action" consists of either Paul or Prokosch moving to and from the couch and various windows. Paul manages to separate Camille from Prokosch and she is the first to leave. Prokosch leaves summoning Lang to follow him and Francesca exits just ahead of Lang.





"Paul, what will you have to drink?"
"I was there, outside. … Nothing."

"Camille, come here I want to show you something."



"Look how beautiful, the sea, the trees, the rocks, the boats…"

"I've decided not to write the script you want."
"Why?

"May I be frank?"
"Ah, Paul, you can always be frank with me."

"I'm a playwright. I'm not a screenwriter. …"

"Even if it's a fine script…I'm being frank, …"

"…I'd do it only for the money!"

"That's why I'm in a bad mood."

"We all have an ideal. Mine's writing plays. I can't. Why? In today's world, we have to accept what others want."

"Why does money matter so much in what we do, …"

"…in what we are, in what we become? Even in our relationships with those we love. …"

"He is right. Either you do Homer's Odyssey or you don't do it at all."

Mr. Prokosch already said it: You're wrong.

"You aspire to a world like Homer's You want it to exist, but unfortunately it doesn't."

"Why not? It does!"
"No!"

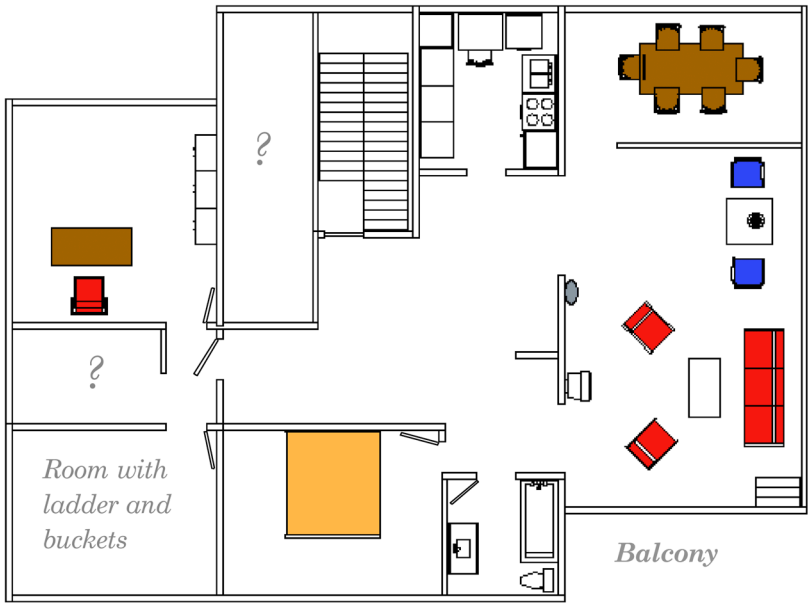
"You may be right, but when it comes to making movies dreams aren't enough."

"When do we eat?"
"In an hour."
"I'm going for a walk."

"Mr. Lang…"
"Mr. Prokosch wants to speak with you."
"Where're my shoes!"

"Is that an order or a request?"
"A request."

"One must suffer."



The size and arrangement of the room permits Godard to capture what amount to several small separate scenes in one continuous take. The choreography of the shot consists mainly of Paul trying to put himself next to Camille or between Camille and Prokosch and then wandering off to isolate himself from everyone. Each time when Paul moves closer to her, Camille eventually moves away from him. She moves first to an empty corner of the room. Paul pursues her, and she accepts Prokosch's invitation to look at the view through the fireplace. Paul sits down between them, and she gets up to go sit on the couch across from where Lang is seated. When Paul finally settles on the window ledge close to Camille's end of the couch, she asks how soon they will eat and exits saying she is going for a walk.

The hallways and smaller rooms of the apartment offer a completely different challenge or opportunity. Normally the scope format might not seem well suited to filming an argument between two people in the relatively confined space of an actual apartment, but the flooplan of the apartment seems almost as though it were designed for Godard to shoot in, so well does he use the space. Often the camera is positioned in the central hallway so that it can see Paul and Camille moving between the kitchen, dining area, living room, bathroom and hallway to Paul's study by simply panning around with only the minimum amount of dolly movement. Only eight of the 31 shots in the apartment actually involve a dolly move and two of these are the short shots of Camille and

Paul as they start to leave the apartment. Even though the camera is often completely static there is never any sense that it is restricted even when the actors exit frame or are obscured by a hallway wall as they move about.

The first shot in the sequence is a one-minute-fifty-second dolly shot which manages gradually to reveal most of the apartment. Paul and Camille enter, and she goes into the kitchen while goes first to the living room and then to his study (both times exiting frame). When he returns to the living room and Camille brings the book in to put on the coffee table, the camera follows her so that we get to see both the small table with the lamp on it and the couch in the main area of the living room. The camera then moves laterally so that we can see her going towards the bedroom (exiting frame) and Paul standing in the hall as he follows her.

The boldest shot is actually a completely static frame which is held for 2 minutes and 3 seconds while Camille starts to take a bath (off screen) and Paul answers the phone when her mother calls. The camera is in the living room looking through

The first shot in the apartment reveals the kitchen, the dining area, the hallway to Paul's study, the living room, and the bathroom.

It also introduces the metal sculpture of the girl who is a virtual third party in the procedings, a metal shell of a woman, a passive observer caught in the middle, perhaps a young goddess unable to intervene.

a doorway to one of the hallways and at the door to the bedroom across the hall. Much of the action takes in the bedroom and is visible only through two doorways. At one point for almost 6 seconds neither character is visible but we know what is going on. We can also imagine Joe Levine wondering why we don't see Bardot getting into the tub after she has thrown her towel to Piccoli.

Perhaps the most striking single compostion in the sequence is one in which the apartment is clearly coming between Camille and Paul.

Another striking moment is the way Godard shoots the couple kissing after Paul has slapped Camille. Godard uses closeups rather sparingly in *Contempt*. This adds to the impact of the closeup of Camille reacting to the slap and then turning towards Paul as they apologize to each other. Paul enters the frame and just as he is about to kiss her Godard cuts away to a shot of their feet and legs from the knees down. Camille raises one of her feet between Paul's legs and it is up to the viewer to imagine the kiss. Godard only cuts back to a full figure shot as Camille pulls away and extricates herself from Paul's arms.

Later in Paul's study Camille leans over to give Paul a kiss, but they are interrupted by the sound of the phone ringing when Prokosch calls.[64]

---

64 The only time in the movie when we actually see Camille and Paul kiss each other is when she arrives at the studio and they embrace right after Prokosch drives between them. She gives him a peck on the cheek earlier in his study

The lights go down in the theater as Prokosch asks Camille why she isn't saying anything.

Contempt is, at least to my eye, filled with one striking shot after the other. In almost every frame the composition, color, and movement combine in varying degrees with a metaphorical dimension of the image to engage the viewer. There is also in many images a degree of self-consciousness, which is both witty and dead serious and which makes the viewer's engagement with the images and the story more complex. We may be watching a tragic and pathetic collapse of a marriage as well as a funeral for traditional filmmaking or even for the whole of Western culture, but the experience is somehow exhilarating because of the way the movie looks.

I am convinced this shot is designed to make a location shot look like a process shot.

and he gives her a gentle kiss on the side of her head outside the movie theater.

Bardo as Anna Karina, Piccoli as Dean Martin

In 1963 few films dared to shoot night-for-night in color and let an international star be engulfed in darkness.

French critics are wont to see all kinds of significance in the decision of whether to use cuts or a moving camera, and Godard himself is notorious for having said, "A tracking shot is a moral act." In 1968 when someone asked him to elaborate on that and to comment on the tracking shots in *Contempt*, he said:

> Well, it's not only a joke, but it's about people who separate style and content. We of the *Cahiers du Cinéma* never thought like that. We always thought style and content are one. That's why we say technique has to do with morals, because when style and content are one you can't say artificial things.[65]

I have to confess I don't find that very helpful, however noble and irrefutable it may be. The only kind of work I can imagine in which style and content are completely merged is an abstract painting, a piece of music and perhaps a poem. I do understand that the meaning of Moravia's novel is completely dependent upon the rhetorical means by which he puts the reader inside Molteni's mind, and in fairness to Godard (who was being interviewed in English in this case) I can see that ultimately the "content" of a work is its "meaning". Nonetheless I am inclined to view the shooting style of *Contempt* primarily as a rhetorical device. There is too much narrative content in the film for it to be viewed purely in formalist terms.

65 Interviews - Youngblood p. 46

I love the effect of a moving camera when it is properly used, and I get very annoyed by senseless arbitrary camera movement. Aside from *Last Year At Marienbad*, the film in which I love the camera movements the most is *The Conformist*. *The Conformist* is for me an operatic film, and the moving camera sings arias which I dare not attempt to analyze. The moving camera in *Contempt* seems to me to be a different kind of rhetoric. Strangely enough the camera move that I probably find the most affecting is also probably the most conventional. It is the move in to a close-up of Paul as he views the dailes and recites the lines from Dante. This is exactly the same convention that Figgis employed for the move in on Andrew as he began to explain his marriage, although the moment in *Contempt* is a great deal more powerful. In this case the camera move towards a character provides both a sense that one is entering the inner reality of that character and a sense that ones moorings have been severed to allow an ascent into a transcendent realm. The moves on the statues in the dailies are also strangely affecting,[66] largely because of the music but also because of the compositions of the shots.

Most of the camera movments in *Contempt*, though, seem to me to be a beautifully elegant way of advancing and enhancing the narrative. The tracking shots of Paul, Francesca and Prokosch

66 The shot of Neptune semms to be a zoom rather than a dolly and the movement of the head of Athena is caused by rotating the statue not moving the camera.

provide an energy which pulls the viewer into the film as well as enabling us to see the environment and to watch the dynamics of the relationships being established through body language and choreography. The tracking shots in the apartment pull us into a private world and let it unfold. They also make us feel we are literally tracking these two creatures in order to observe their behavior in their natural habitat. More than the movement of the camera, I think the length of the shots contributes to an enhanced sense of reality, and in this case I think Godard is validating some aspects of Bazin's insights.

Godard's comments on "point-of-view" in *mise-en-scène* make more sense to me than his descriptions of camera movement. As his treatment indicated he approached the shooting of *Contempt* in terms of whose point of view was the determining factor at each point. Obviously he is not talking about point of view in the literal sense it has in filmmaking where the camera sees only what the character would see. He is talking about the focus of interest, a point of view more like that of a written narrative in which things are experienced or interpreted as the character would have felt them. The extreme close-up of Camille after she has been slapped, for example, is her point of view on the scene. I doubt that the film can retrospectively be broken down schematically in terms of which point of view is predominant in each scene, but I do think Godard approached the staging and direction with this kind of schema in the back of his mind. I also think he felt free to use whatever

type of shot or scene construction seemed to work best for each moment in the film. The sequence in the apartment may be constructed primarily of long takes many of which have camera movement, but there are also conventional complementary reverse angle medium shots used in the bathroom just as they are used for the scene on the roof of the villa on Capri.

The Use of Music

By far the most powerful aspect of *Contempt* is Georges Delerue's score. Marie describes it as Brahmsian and majesterial. To my ear it conjures up some of the Romantic interpretations of Baroque music which were popular during the Fifties, and I would be inclined to label it elegiac.[67]

Delerue was born in 1925 and studied under Darius Milhaud. He first attracted the attention of filmgoers with a waltz he composed for a scene in *Hiroshima mon Amour* and had his first major success with his score for *Shoot the Piano Player*. He has said of his score for *Contempt*:

> There were two schools at the time of the Nouvelle Vague, a tendency to write music that was extremely close to the action and another that encouraged detachment, keeping a distance with regard to the image. I preferred the second direction.[68]

Given how pervasive the music seems to be, it is surprising to discover that Delerue actually composed only 14 minutes of music for the film. There are 6 tracks on the CD representing the entire score as composed:

1.	Overture	1:51
2.	Camille	2:28
3.	Credits	2:08
4.	Capri	1:44
5.	Paul	2:01
6.	The Rupture at Prokosch's	2:55

"Overture" is used only once over the scene in which Paul and Lang walk back to the villa along the wooded path and discuss the Odyssey.

"Camille" is used once in its entirety over the scene in which Paul and Camille return to their apartment from Prokosch's Roman villa. The first part of it is also used in two other cues.

"Credits" is used first in its entirety over the credit sequence and then portions of it are used in nine other cues.

"Capri" is used 14 times. There is a 13 second intro to it which is never used, but the remaining

---

67 Camille's theme reminds me of the adagio movement in Albinoni's Concerto in D minor Opus 9 No. 2 in which a simple melody line soars above a repetitive figure in the strings

68 Liner notes for *Le Mépris* George Delerue. Universal CD 013 477-2

1:33 is used in four places and other sections of it are used in ten more cues.

"Paul" is used once in its entirety for the scene in which Paul goes to find a taxi and arrives late at Prokosch's Roman villa. Portions of it are used in four other places.

Only the first 1:16 of "The Rupture at Prokosch's" is used over the scene in which we first see the Villa on Capri and Camille is on the roof. The remaining 1:39, which includes a very nice interlude featuring the flute and clarinet, is never used.

Some variation of the famous Camille's theme is used in "Capri", "Paul" and "The Rupture at Prokosch's" as well as "Camille". "Capri" is identical to the first part of "Camille" except for the 13 second intro, which is never used, and the ending. The first portion of "The Rupture at Prokosch's" is also virtually identical with the first part of "Camille". There is a section in "Paul" which is a slight variation on Camille's theme, differing mainly in terms of its tonality which seems to have more minor overtones. What this means is that a virtually identical musical theme is used 18 times in the course of the movie. Needless to say the theme, which already involves repetitions of motifs in itself, begins to take on an obssessive or haunting quality as it is repeated 18 times.

The pasage used over the shot of Neptune in the dailies screening is not to be found on the CD, and there are some other bridges or endings in a few cues that I can not find as well. The final chords used over the very ending of the film are also not in the music for the CD. I suspect these passages were recorded as bits to be used in editing but were too short to warrant putting them on the CD.[69]

I have found no detailed description of how Godard worked with composers, but it is clear that he felt free to use the recorded music however he felt worked. I suspect perhaps the fact that only 14 minutes of music were recorded may have been due to a budget limitation, and Godard hit on the repetitive, obsessive way of using the music while the film was being edited.

One clue to Godard's approach to the music may be inferred from the sound editing in the audition scene in the theater. There is dialogue which occurs while the woman is singing. Rather than mix the dialogue and the music in the conventional manner, Godard simply lets the music drop out completely during the dialogue. The result is "unrealistic" and seems at first to be a surprisingly primitive way of editing the sound. It is the sort of thing an editor used to do temporarily when it was not feasible to mix the dialogue and the music in the editing room. Godard like any other director or film editor would have been

---

69 The liner notes say nothing about such pieces but there is a section on the website for Delerue in which Stéphane Lerouge talks about the difficulties involved in assembling all the material for the CD reissues of Delerue's work because of the condition of some of the tapes

Music Cues

Start	Scene	Length	Composition
0:00:08	MainTitle	2:06	Credits: (enitre)
0:02:41	Prologue Red	1:33	Capri: 0:13 - 1:46 (end)
0:04:24	Prologue White	0:30	Paul: 0:12 - 0:42
0:04:54	Prologue Blue & Cut	0:32	Paul: 0:22 to 0:32 + Credits: 0:11 to ~0:33
0:11:17	Dailies Ulysses	1:06	Paul 0:00 - 0:34 + Missing Cue
0:12:24	Dailies Neptune	0:18	Missing Cue #1
0:15:29	Dailies Dante	1:16	Credits: 0:11-1:28
0:21:08	Camille Arrives at Studio	0:45	Camille: 0:00 - 0:45
0:23:53	Paul Takes Taxi	1:59	Paul: 0:00 - 2:00 (entire cue)
0:26:40	Camille in Garden Montage1	1:34	Capri: 0:13 - 1:46
0:29:07	Why do you ask that? Montage 2	0:30	Capri: 1:14 - 1:46
0:34:53	Going Home	2:25	Camille: 0:00 - 2:31 (entire cue)
0:39:23	Wig (Capri vacation)	0:46	Capri: 1:00 - 1:46 (last 46 seconds)
0:43:01	Kiss	0:45	Capri: 1:00 - 1:46 (end)
0:44:30	I'm not going	1:33	Capri 0:13 - 1:46 (end)
0:55:28	But fast (Montage 3)	1:34	Capri: 0:13 - 1:46 (end)
0:57:14	My turn now (Montage 3)	1:32	Capri: 0:13 - 1:46 (end)
0:59:40	What would you do	0:44	Capri: 1:10 - 1:46 (end)
1:01:23	Talking of you	0:44	Capri: 1:10 - 1:46 (end)
1:07:33	I despise you	1:23	Paul 0:00 - 0:40 + Credits: 0:11- 1:10 ?? (slightly different ending)
1:13:56	Nothing to say	1:30	Capri 0:13 - 1:46 (end)
1:17:55	Boat to villa	0:45	Capri: 1:10 - 1:46 (end)
1:19:01	Ocean & Path to Villa	1:50	Overture (entire cue)
1:22:15	Villa on cliff	1:16	Rupture 0:00 -1:16 (first part)
1:24:47	Paul reacts to kiss	0:10	Credits: 0:00 - 0:10
1:25:29	Main Room	0:27	Credits: 0:11 - 0:38
1:26:25	Fireplace	0:18	Credits: 0:46 - 1:04
1:26:59	Money	0:35	Credits: 1:28 - 2:03 (ending except for final chord)
1:29:08	Going for walk	0:42	Credits: 1:28 - 2:10
1:33:53	You're the reason	0:46	Capri: 0:59 - 1:45 (ending)
1:35:23	Swim	1:16	Capri: 0:13 - 1:29
1:39:12	Accident & Goodbye	1:25	Camille: 0:00 - 0:55 + Bridge + Credits: 0:11 - 0:46
1:42:28	Silence	0:23	Missing Cue #2

accustomed to hearing a track like this, but few others would have the nerve to use it as a stylistic device in a finished film. In the context of a Godard movie it is another way of keeping the audience aware of the artifice involved in what they are viewing.

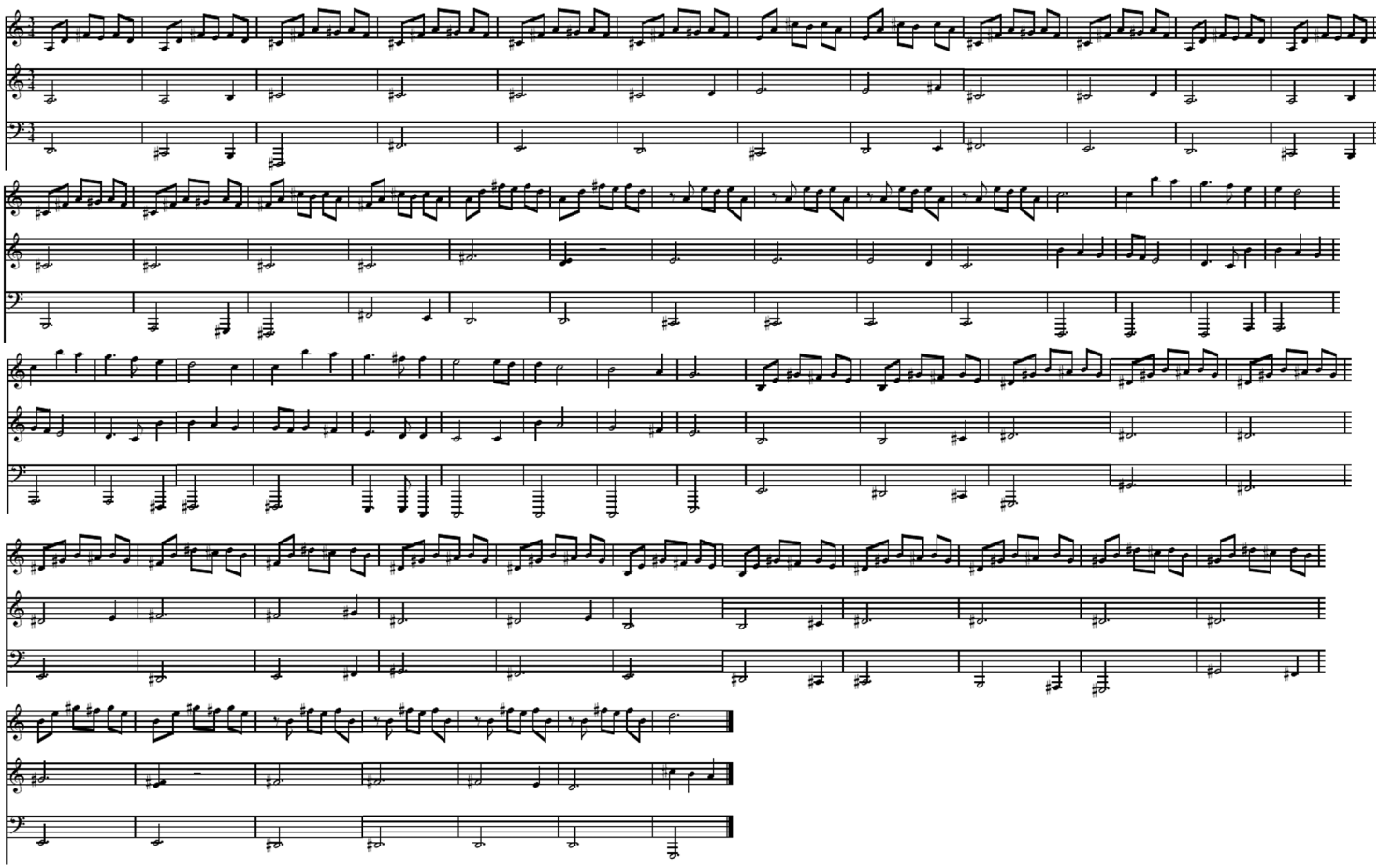
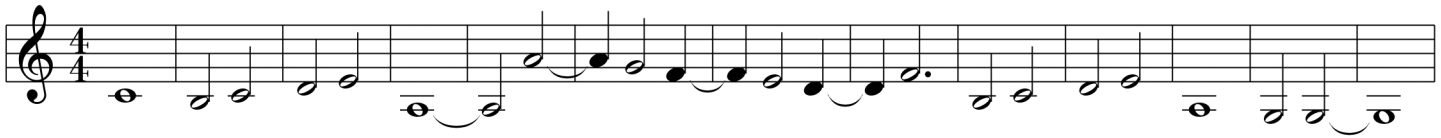
Many of the music cues in the film function in a similar way. There is something surprising about the way they start and end abruptly in the course of a scene, or so at least it seems on first viewing. In analyzing the music cues it became apparent to me that the timing of many of the cues is determined by the placement of the ending of the cue. The music cue is "backed in" from a point where it makes some kind of sense for it to end. This also seems to be why the version of Camille's theme in the cue called "Capri" is used so many times. It has a natural ending at a point where "Camille" modulates into a different motif.

"Credits" contains the second most distinctive musical elements after Camille's theme. Two minor chords over the the main title cards clearly announce the tenor of the musical world of the film and the anticipation of a tragic and romantic story. They are reprised over the shot of Paul descending the steps to the roof after he has seen Camille kissing Prokosch.

For the the shot of the crew with the verbal credits the composition continues with a musical theme, which consists of a simple slow melody line of 19 notes over a kind of almost subliminal walking bass. The passage is used in five other places in the film. Only three of these other instances allow the passage to resolve into the final chord, a fact which I cite because I find the resolution of this motif mysteriously powerful, and I suspect that Godard did as well. The orchestration seems to be purely strings and involves a lush sounding use of the lower register of the violin. The resolution at the end, which I assume involves a modulation to a different key, is one of those musical moments in which I feel the ground shift beneath me. The three instances in which the passage resolves are during the dailies sequence as Paul is reciting the lines from Dante, over the shot of Camille during the taxi ride after the argument and over the shot in which Paul walks up the stairs and across the roof to say goodbye to Lang at the end of the film.

Camille's theme seems to me to combine a romantic yearning with a melancholy. It is used primarily to convey a sense of Camille's inner state even when she is angry at Paul and to convey Paul's sense of loss. The fact that it is so all pervasive makes it's frame of reference encompass the film as a whole, and it obsessive and unrelenting presence opens up a kind of emotional force field within which the film exists. It creates a kind of stasis in which the film seems to be a product of the tension between romantic nostalgia and ironic modernism.

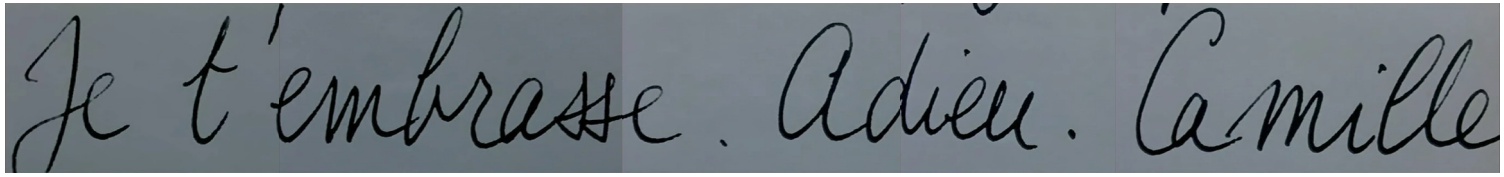
Given the gravitas which Delerue's score adds to the film, it is amazing to me that the Italian

Camille's Theme

Motif from Credits cue

distributor insisted on rescoring the movie completely with a score by Piero Piccioni. Piccioni was a popular and versatile composer of scores for numerous Italian and American films and was particularly known for his light jazz or pop scores. His score for *Il disprezzo* consists of 53 minutes of music in 19 different pieces, most of which are jazz with a heavy use of Hammond organ.[70] I have no idea what his score would do to the movie, and I am not at all sure I want to know. There is apparently an Italian DVD of the film with his score. The original Italian distributor also dubbed the film completely into Italian and may have re-edited it as well. Godard was able to have his name removed from the Italian version although it is on the Italian DVD release.

Quotations, Text and The Theme of Language

Godard uses literal quotations throughout the film, and he includes comments on his own use of quotations, most notably the parody of having Prokosch read "wisdom" from a pocket-sized book. Moravia also used literary references in the novel, including the passage from Dante describing the death of Ulysses. Godard uses a virtual quote from *Il disprezzo* when he has Paul typing a passage for one of his novels about how "Rex" noticed the way in which "Paula's" face contorted when she became perplexed. Godard adds his own literal

70 It can be found on the internet at http://www.moviegrooves.com/shop/ildisprezzo.htm



quotes from Andre Bazin, Lumière, Lang, Hölderlin, and the classical author describing the beauty contest in the book on Roman erotic art.

The backgrounds in two sequences in *Contempt* are also filled with movie posters, providing yet another way of using text to make references in the film. Outside the studio screening room are posters for *Psycho* (Hitchcock), *Hatari* (Hawks), *Vanina Vanini* (Rossellini), and the Italian release of Godard's own *Vivre sa vie* (*Questa è la mia vita*). The posters on the wall at the theater include an Italian poster for *Time Without Pity* (Losey – *L'alibi dell'ultima ora*), *Hatari*, and three others I am unable to identify. In the lobby of the theater is a poster for *Viaggio in Italia* as well as one for another movie. Godard obviously chose posters which had significance for him personally, but I don't think too much need be made of the particular choices.

Just as Moravia related the dissolution of Riccardo and Emilia's marriage to the rupture in the relationship between man and nature which characterizes modern civilization, Godard is attempting to relate it to a question of how language provides the bond for civilization and can connect man to the divine. In addition to using an international production in which the principals speak four different languages as a metaphor for the Babel of modern civilization, Godard is attempting to ask how the "absence of god" has affected

language. The key metaphor for this is the letter which Camille leaves for Paul to find when he wakes up. Paul has lost Camille even more permanently than he can know. He has only a text which we pan across so that each word fills the theater screen. A handwritten letter is in some way an intimate connection with its author. Sometimes one feels reading a letter that one has even more direct access to the interior life of another than one may have in conversation. And yet a letter is an artifact, something that remains after the other is gone. Modern man is buried under texts which both give him access to the past and make him aware of what he has lost. Only Godard could use this as the subject for a Cinemascope production in color starring Brigitte Bardot.

Both Moravia and Godard have created works about "the modern condition." Moravia's ironic existentialism is much harsher than Godard's vision, although it is also funny in a way that the movie never is. While Moravia has fleeting moments of a romantic appreciation for the beauty of the natural world, he is nowhere near the romantic that Godard is. Moravia's work has a cool detachment in comparison to Godard's agonizing passion.

The End of Cinema

PROKOSCH: And now they are going to build a five and ten cent store, a Prix Unique, on this…on this, my last kingdom. I fear it's the end of motion pictures.

FRANCESCA: C'est le fin du cinéma. (It's the end of cinema.)

PAUL: Je crois que le cinéma existera toujours. (I don't think the cinema will ever die.)

The predominant mood of *Contempt* is a sense of loss. The contempt that Camille feels for Paul is possible only after love. The film moves from a foreboding intimation of the end of love to complete and utter loss. Paul may or may not ever realize the part he has played in his own fate, but he must carry on. Lang also continues by filming the moment when Ulysses first sees his homeland again, but we are left with silence and a vast expanse of sea with no home in sight. The past is gone.

Part of what Godard feels has been lost is the possibility of making meaningful films in the traditional way. The cinema as we have known it is irrelevant to the point of being dead. What exactly is the meaning of this? Obviously filmmakers the world over have continued to make movies, most of which are completely traditional. Godard, himself, went on to make 40 or 50 more films, none of which are "traditional" except for the fact that he has established his own tradition. His 2001 film *Éloge de l'amour* (*In Prais of Love*) was the Swiss submission to the Academy for the foreign language film award. Cinema in the sense of large moving images projected on a screen for an audience is clearly still alive and Jean-Luc Godard is still making films.

A lot of people feel that old-fashioned Hollywood movies are an obsolete form of entertainment offering sentimental perspectives on life that can have a perverse affect on people's ability to live life to its fullest. Plenty of people also still love to watch "old movies" on television. Many can appreciate the artistry involved in the production of "classics." Some people who feel that conventional movies have fallen prey to the superficial values of consumerism or are even part of a repressive power structure nonetheless still feel films are able to function as art which increases genuine awareness, broadens horizons, undermines repression or celebrates individuality.

News of the death of cinema may have been greatly exaggerated, especially since the cinema is for Godard simply the ultimate form of thought and that is why he cannot live without making films.

Sources

Aeschylus, *Agamemnon.* Edited and Translated by Herbert Weir Smyth. http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/cgi-bin/ptext?doc=Perseus:text:1999.01.0004:line=1372

Alberto Moravia. Dir. By Nico Di Biase. France 3/ADR Productions/ INA: 1998 West Long Branch, NJ: Kultur Video, 2001.

"*The Browning Version: Music from the Original Motion Picture Soundtrack*" Composed and Produced by Mark Isham CD from Milan Entertainment BMG 73138 35680-2 1994

"*The Browning Versison*" Directed by Anthony Asquith Criterion Collection DVD

"*The Browning Version*" Directed by Mike Figgis. Paramount Pictures DVD, 1994/2003

Bazin, Andre. *What is Cinema?* Trans. by Hugh Gray. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967.

Brody, Richard. *Everything Is Cinema: The Working Life of Jean-Luc Godard.* New York: Henry Hold, 2008.

Dixon. Wheeler Winston. *The Films of Jean-Luc Godard.* Albany: State University of New York Press, 1997.

DuPont Show of the Month: The Browning Version. Produced by David Susskind, Directed by John Frankenheimer, adapted by Jacqueline Babbin, Audrey Gellen. CBS April 23, 1959

Godard, Jean-Luc. *Godard On Godard* edited by Tom Milne. New York: Viking Press.1972.

Godard, Jean-Luc. *Jean-Luc Godard: Interviews. Edited* by David Sterritt. Jackson, Miss: University Press of Mississippi, 1998.

Graham, Peter, editor and translator. *The New Wave: Critical Landmarks.* New York: Doubleday, 1968.

Hill, Holly. "Rattigan's Renaissance." *Contermporary Review*, January 1982

Hilton, James. *Goodbye, Mr. Chips..* New York: Bantam Books , 1962.

Internet Movie Database http://www.imdb.com

Kawin, Bruce F. *Mindscreen Bergman, Godard, and First-person Film.* Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978.

King, Susan. "Some hve reservations about ths dark'Hotel'. *Los Angeles Times*, July 25, 2003 p. E18

"Le Mépris". Dir. By Jean-Luc Godard. The Criterion Collection: StudioCanal Image / Compagnia Cinmatographica Champion S.p.a.: 1963/2002.

Lerouge, Stéphane. "Georges Delerue, the Sixties" Liner notes for "*Le Mépris*" CD from 06 031 477-2

MacCabe, Colin. *Godard: A Portrait of the Artist at Seventy.* New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2003.

Mander, Raymond. *Theatrical Companaion to Coward* with an appreciation of Coward's

work in the theatre by Terence Rattigan. London: Rockliff, 1957.
Marie, Michel. *Le Mépris*.. Paris: Editions Nathan, 1990.
Marie, Michel.*The Frnech New Wave*.. Trans. by Richard Neupert Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 1997.
McGilligan, Patrick. *Fritz Lang: The Nature of the Beast*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1997.
Minney, R. J. "*Puffin" Asquith: A Biography of the Hon. Anthony Asquith, Aesthere, Aristocrat, Prime Minister's Son and Film Maker*. London: Frewin, 1973.
Mitchell, Sean. "Isham's Blues". *Los Angeles Magazine* October 1995 p. 74
Moravia, Alberto and Alain Elkann. *Life of Moravia*. Trans. by William Weaver. South Royalton, VT: Steerforth Press, 2000.
Moravia, Alberto. *Contempt*. Trans. by Angus Davidson New York: New York Review Books, 1999.
New Statesman and Nation March 14, 1950, April 15 1950.
Nowell-Smith, Geoffrey. "What was it about post-war Paris that produced Godard, Cahiers and the New Wave?" http://www.bfi.org.uk/sightandsound/2001_06/godard.html.
Rafferty, Terrence. "The Current Cinema" *The New Yorker* October 31, 1994 p.105
Rattigan, Terence. The *Collected Plays: Volume One*. London: Hamish Hamilton, 1953.
Rattigan, Terence. *The Collected Plays: Volume Two* London: Hamish Hamilton, 1953.
Rattigan, Terence. "The Browning Version" directed by Stephen Porter. Rajon Productions. New York: Caedmon Audio, 1983
Rattigan, Terence. *The Browning Version: A Play in One Act. London*: Samuel French, 1949.
Ross, Jean and Donald Freed. *The Existentialism of Alberto Moravia*. Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press. 1972.
Roud, Richard. *Godard*. New York: Doubleday, 1968.
Rusinko, Susan. *Terence Rattigan*. Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1983.
Simon, John. "Rattigan Talks to John Simon" *Theatre Arts*, April 1962
Taylor, John Russel. *The Rise and Fall of the Well-made Play*. New York: Hill and Wang, 1967.
Wansell, Geoffrey. *Terence Rattigan: A Biography*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1997.
Wikipdeia. http://en.wikipedia.org